

# Proposal to retract and replace ASGC's informal neutrality policy vis-à-vis the Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC-UAW)

## Background

To date, the ASGC (formerly GSAC) has maintained a neutrality policy vis-à-vis the Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC-UAW) – a policy that was informally adopted by GSAC's Steering Committee in October 2014. On August 23, 2016, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) [restored the right to collective bargaining for research and teaching assistants at private universities](#). Four months later, in December 2016, Columbia graduate workers [voted 72% to 28% to form a union](#) affiliated with the United Auto Workers Local 2110, which already represents a number of workers on campus. The NLRB [certified that vote](#) in December 2017, recognizing the GWC-UAW as the exclusive collective-bargaining unit for Columbia grad workers.

Despite the NLRB decisions and the clear democratic majority in favor of unionization, the university continues to refuse to bargain with the GWC. In other words, the university is breaking the law.

On January 30, 2018, Provost John Coatsworth released an email explaining the administration's decision not to bargain with the GWC-UAW. In that email, Coatsworth misrepresented the nature of GSAC's relationship with the university. In response, GSAC issued a [statement](#) correcting Coatsworth's error: "although we have been able to address many student concerns in the past via our productive working relationship with the GSAS Office of the Dean, GSAC does not have the power to negotiate for more favorable working conditions through collective bargaining."

The neutrality policy made sense before the NLRB decisions and the unionization vote. The situation is different now. Going forward, to prevent any further misrepresentations and to affirm our commitment to the democratic process, we believe it is necessary for ASGC to:

- Clarify its role as a "bridge between our constituents and the Columbia administration, specifically the GSAS administration"; explain how that role differs from that of the union
- Affirm ASGC's support for the GWC as the only body on campus that has power to negotiate for more favorable working conditions through collective bargaining

## Proposal

The ASGC serves as a bridge between our constituents and the Columbia administration, specifically the GSAS administration. Historically we have been able to address many student concerns via our productive working relationship with the GSAS Office of the Dean. We do not, however, have the power to negotiate for more favorable working conditions through collective bargaining. Such a body does exist: the Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC-UAW).

In December 2016, Columbia graduate workers voted 72% to 28% to form a union affiliated with the United Auto Workers Local 2110, which already represents a number of workers on campus. This vote was conducted after the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)'s August 2016 decision to restore the right to collective bargaining for research and teaching assistants at private universities. The NLRB [certified that vote](#) in December 2017, recognizing the GWC-UAW as the exclusive collective-bargaining unit for Columbia graduate workers. Since then, the university has refused to bargain with the GWC-UAW in clear contravention of democratic principles and existing law. The ASGC therefore retracts its neutrality policy and affirms its support for the GWC-UAW's efforts to fulfill its democratic mandate to engage in collective bargaining on behalf of Columbia graduate workers.