

Boston University Graduate Workers Union: membership and dues FAQ

>>> Sign your membership card here: <https://www.seiu509.org/join/joinhighered/> <<<

Am I a member of the bargaining unit?

As long as you are a graduate student who receives compensation from BU in exchange for performing any teaching- or research-related duties, we believe you should be a member of our bargaining unit regardless of how your service status is classified.

We know it is in BU's interest to cut out as many grads from the bargaining unit as possible both to save itself more money and to weaken the union. To date, BU has failed to (intentionally or not) provide a full list of graduate students who they consider to be in our bargaining unit. And this is why we are reaching out to make sure that you receive the pay and benefits that you are entitled to under our contract.

Of course, BU will try to put up a fight as it's in their interest to do so. Whether we succeed depends on whether we can gather a good number of people in your position so that you and your co-workers can make a strong case together for your own inclusion. Gathering co-workers and fighting together is your best shot to be covered by the contract because BU for sure won't do it out of the goodness of their heart

Why should I sign a card if I don't yet know whether I'm in-unit?

If you sign the card and for whatever reason, you end up being excluded from the bargaining unit, you will not have to pay dues. However, signing a card can support the argument that people in your job position are invested in being included as a part of the bargaining unit even if BU is arguing for your exclusion.

Our goal now is to connect as many people in your position as possible so you and your co-workers can collectively decide how you want to proceed and fight for your own inclusion. This is a crucial data point for organizing and make sure that more grad workers are covered by the contract in the future!

Do I have to sign a union card to get the raise/benefits?

As a grad student worker at BU working in research or teaching, you are party to the union contract that was just signed by the university. This means that you will get the benefits of the contract, such as raises, commuter benefits, and so on. Under our agreement with BU, you have the option of either signing a union card and paying union dues, or paying agency fees. I/we will explain that in more detail in a minute, but essentially, those who sign union cards are entitled to voting in contracts and in union elections. People who choose to pay agency fees do not receive the same rights, but are still party to the contract raises.

What are union dues? Will I have to pay them as a member?

Yes – union members pay union dues. Union dues are regular contributions we make to fund the important functions of our union, like enforcing our contract, representing graduate workers who have workplace issues and negotiating new contracts. Graduate workers who join the union will begin paying dues at a rate of 1.5% of our gross pay. However, your raise and benefits should outweigh the costs. If you have any concerns about paying union dues, please talk to us.

What are agency fees? How does that process differ from paying dues?

If you choose not to be a member, then you must pay agency fees in lieu of dues. Just like dues, these fees are used to cover the cost of contract enforcement and future negotiations. But if you choose to pay agency fees, you will not gain the rights of union membership - including, but not limited to, participation in contract votes and union leadership elections.

The agency fee is currently 1.17% of our gross pay. It changes annually because it's based on a formula on what percentage of dues revenue goes to negotiations and contract enforcement. Graduate workers who opt for the agency fee should request an agency fee form from Jeff Uehlinger, our SEIU 509 internal organizer at juehlinger@seiu509.org

If a bargaining unit member does not sign a membership card and refuses to pay agency fee, one week of their pay will be docked per year as a penalty.

If I sign a card, can the department/my supervisor retaliate against me?

Retaliation against your membership is straightforwardly illegal and a violation of the contract per the non-discrimination article. If they do, you have the ability to take legal action. If you suspect that any member of the university management including your faculty is retaliating against any grads based on union activities, please let us know so we can strategize together with your coworkers on how to respond, including using legal weapons to protect your rights. Only we have the power to protect each other and we cannot go about this alone.

Sign your membership card here: <https://www.seiu509.org/join/joinhighered/>