

Colleagues,

At today's [April 12, 2022] Bloomington Faculty Council meeting, I discussed several important issues related to the current state of graduate education, specifically related to the interest on the part of some of our SAAs to be represented by a labor union. I am writing to share these comments with you and the entire faculty in support of open and continual dialogue.

From my very first week at IU Bloomington, I've engaged directly with graduate students to hear about their educational experiences. More than 15 meetings between school/college deans and their students have already taken place this semester. Vice President and Dean of the University Graduate School James Wimbush, Vice Provost for Graduate Education David Daleke, and I have attended many of these meetings. Every two weeks, Vice Provost Daleke also meets with representatives of the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) to ensure that our students' needs are being heard and acted upon.

As a result of our recent discussions, we have made significant improvements on several issues that our graduate students have told us are vitally important to them:

- Enacting a higher salary minimum rate for our Student Academic Appointees,
- Raising campus-wide stipends by 5%, and
- Extending tuition waivers for classes taken outside the paying unit for all classes officially approved for the students' program of study.

This is the beginning of an ongoing commitment to identify and enact opportunities to improve the services to and support for our graduate students.

As many of you may be aware, some student academic appointees (SAAs) have stated that they wish to be represented by a labor union. This request has been reviewed and responded to by two former Provosts, [John Applegate](#) and [Lauren Robel](#). The rationale for this decision is carefully articulated in their responses. Federal and Indiana law creates no obligation for Indiana University to recognize or bargain with a graduate student union.

As I have said repeatedly, I do not believe that we need a union to improve graduate education and I will not re-visit this decision. We will, however, continue to work with students to ensure that we offer high quality academic programs and support to each of our 10,000 graduate and professional students.

Despite these efforts, I have heard from a number of you that you may have students who are considering participation in a "Strike Pledge" which calls to "cancel all classes and sections that they teach...to not enter grades into Canvas...to refuse to proctor exams...to stop all non-research work for Indiana University." This proposed work stoppage is a disappointing development that has the potential to cause harm to the academic progress of undergraduate students, including their ability to graduate on time. A strike by these SAAs will place additional burdens on other graduate students, faculty, and staff who will have to complete any unfulfilled duties. Consider just one example: delays in submitting grades—even by a few days—may

especially impact our 6,000+ low-income students who depend on Federal Pell Grants for enrollment. The students who are on the margins often bear the greatest burden of such a work stoppage. This is unacceptable and does not reflect the academic community we all strive to create at IU.

You may have been asked to remain neutral or to not penalize individuals who stop performing their agreed upon duties. Although we may sympathize with the spirit of these actions, or, we may agree that there are remaining underlying substantive issues that need to be addressed, we cannot stay neutral in this moment. The impact of a work stoppage will have substantive impacts on others to whom we also have obligations. As such, you and your departmental colleagues should develop contingency plans in anticipation of a work stoppage.

It's important to note that the [Student Academic Appointees Guide](#) outlines the consequences for SAAs who do not fulfill the terms of their SAA agreements. These consequences may include, as stated in the Guide:

- Suspension from work
- Termination of appointment, including loss of stipend, tuition remission, health insurance, and other SAA-provided benefits

The Guide further states that Reappointment of Student Academic Appointees is contingent upon, "...satisfactory discharge of duties in previous appointments." Participation in a work stoppage will be in violation of this expectation, and therefore, will result in non-reappointment to future Student Academic Appointments.

A work stoppage during the 2022 spring semester will have no bearing on an SAA's enrollment status as a student, and IU will ensure that SAA-provided housing and SAA-provided health insurance continue during any suspension from work.

I understand that some of you may have questions regarding the impact of strike participation on our international students. In general, participation in a strike would have no impact on their visa status. That status is dictated not by university policy but by federal law, and is dependent primarily upon enrollment in a full-time course of study. For most students, that is unrelated to their Student Academic Appointments. In situations where an international student's academic appointment accounts for a portion of the academic credit they are earning, they should ensure that any possible suspension, termination, or non-reappointment would not cause them to fall below full-time enrollment.

You may have additional questions that this [FAQ](#) will help answer. I hope that our SAAs will consider the impact of this proposed work stoppage on their students and colleagues. We all share a responsibility to ensure the teaching and research missions of the university continue, and we need to work together now and in the future to enhance the successes of all students, faculty, and staff.

Sincerely, Rahul Shrivastav