



April 6, 2017

On April 3, Eric Barron sent a letter to the Penn State Community expressing some serious concerns about proposed unionization efforts on campus. He treated his community to an eloquent and articulate rehashing of the Union Buster's greatest hits. As the representatives of Florida State University – Graduate Assistants United, we thought it was important that we send out a letter of our own.

With all due respect to President Barron, we have to call foul on his disingenuous claims about unions impeding the academic and mentoring relationships between graduate assistants and faculty. How do we know this? Because Eric Barron was President of FSU when our union achieved some of its biggest successes. Shockingly, our University flourished at the same time. Either the relationships at Penn State are far more fragile than the ones at FSU, or these claims were designed to spread misinformation for the benefit of Penn State's administration.

Let's break it down. The graduate assistants at FSU first formed their union in 2008. By 2009, we had our first contract in place. We established a minimum stipend, the right to academic freedom, a guaranteed subsidy for health insurance (rather than the random lottery that existed before), and a long list of other essential rights and protections that were governed by a legally enforceable contract. To be clear, none of these existed before.

President Barron insists that a union serves "the interests of a collective whole and the union itself, rather than individual students" and that he doesn't believe this is in the best interest of Penn State's graduate students. We'd like to ask President Barron which benefits FSU GAU won that he doesn't think students needed. Was it in the best interests of individual GAs to cross their fingers and hope they received a partial subsidy for their health insurance? Was it in their best interest to be banned from taking a second job at the whim of their departments? How were individual students expected to overcome these obstacles when the University had no obligation to even consider their concerns?

GAU believes these students are much better served by having a group of representatives who can meet the administration on equal ground and work for fair treatment through a legally binding contract. President Barron's language might lead one to believe that a union looks out for its own interests at the expense of its members. He knows better, as do we. Unions *are* their members. A GA union is organized and led *by* graduate assistants. We are the ones who determine the policies for which we advocate. If individual students want to change the way the union functions, all they have to do is get involved. Unions are, by their very

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