



**UNITED FACULTY OF FLORIDA – FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY – GRADUATE ASSISTANTS
UNITED**

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nature, democratic. And we can guarantee that the voice of an individual GA speaks much louder and is heard much more clearly by their union colleagues than by university administrators.

We encourage you to check out some of the resources Penn State provides about unions. This article, for instance, cites empirical evidence that shows student-faculty relationships actually *improve* on campuses with graduate assistant unions

(<http://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2016/09/implications-graduate-student-unionization>).

Actually, the article pretty clearly debunks all of President Barron's claims. It also addresses a role that President Barron conspicuously leaves out of his description of graduate assistants.

He writes, "We view our graduate students as students first and foremost. They are our mentees, future scholars and, potentially, our future colleagues." What about laborers? What about present colleagues? It's fine to place a high value on the academic goals of graduate students, but not at the expense of erasing the work they perform in the present.

Graduate assistants teach classes, grade exams, run labs, perform experiments, operate machinery, care for animals, counsel patients, organize data, answer phones, update websites, and mentor undergraduates. In other words, we *work*. We put in long hours, many times teaching the same classes as tenured faculty, and performing the research that brings in grant money. Our labor cannot be erased by saying we're also students, just like our need for an effective voice in workplace negotiations cannot be erased by a specious claim that the University is not our employer.

We want to believe that President Barron wrote his letter with the best of intentions, but that's a pretty tall order. When he met with our team for a consultation, he saw firsthand how productive a professional collaboration between the University and a graduate assistant union can be. During his presidency, GAU grew by leaps and bounds, improving the working conditions of thousands of graduate assistants. During that same period, FSU's reputation rose even higher, eventually propelling it to "preeminent status" within the state of Florida. That doesn't sound like a university suffering from poor academic and mentoring relationships to us. That sounds like a prime example of how unionization can make universities better places to work and learn.

If President Barron wants to stop Penn State's graduate assistants from unionizing, he's going to have to do better than that. His own history working with FSU GAU makes that clear.

In solidarity,

United Faculty of Florida – Florida State University – Graduate Assistants United

**Affiliated with the Florida Education Association, the National Education Association,
the American Federation of Teachers, and the AFL-CIO**