



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE

College of Arts and Sciences
Bloomington

March 28, 2022

Dear Provost Shrivastav:

In fall 2021, a coalition of graduate students from Indiana University-Bloomington petitioned campus administration seeking recognition as a collective bargaining unit to be represented by United Electrical Workers. This petition was supported unanimously by the IU Graduate and Professional Student Government body (60 votes in favor, one abstention). We, the faculty of the Spanish & Portuguese department, write to express our strong support for this petition, and to call upon campus administration to adopt a collaborative, good-faith approach to addressing the concerns that are at its heart. We urge the College and University to meet and discuss the needs of graduate students with their union representatives and come to mutually agreeable permanent solutions. The best approach to find an agreement is to provide a safe space for an open dialogue.

Indiana University cannot continue to fulfill its mission as a public research university without our graduate colleagues. In the College of Arts & Sciences, Student Academic Appointees (SAAs) perform a vital role in carrying out the teaching missions of various departments while at the same time contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields through doctoral research. The dual nature of their work, as both instructors and as researchers, means that the role performed by SAAs could not be replaced by lecturers or some other category without Indiana University incurring irreparable damage to its reputation as a world-class research university.

The questions of fees and stipends that the IU Graduate and Professional Student Government body are currently raising are also critical to the standing, reputation, and future of the University itself. In comparison with other Big Ten schools, IU Bloomington's low graduate stipends are having, and will continue to have, a significant negative impact on graduate recruitment. A commitment to a living wage for Graduate Students is in the best interests of Indiana University. While the university classifies graduate student instructors as "academic appointees" rather than "employees," the reality is that graduate students depend on their stipends to support themselves—and in many cases, to support their families as well—while pursuing their advanced degrees. Additionally, SAAs in our department have a central role as instructors of record, taking full responsibility of their courses. In this light, we fully support their efforts to secure changes to the stipend and student fee structures.

We respectfully request that the Provost, as leader of the Bloomington campus, move to deescalate what has become a tense standoff that has the potential to create long-term damage to the university. We also ask that the Provost take meaningful measures to demonstrate that the university administration recognizes and values the unique and indispensable role that graduate students play in our university, and that the administration is prepared to listen to and address the concerns articulated by students and their union representatives. The goal moving forward must be to create a campus that recognizes with its actions the vital role played by graduate students in its research and teaching missions.

Respectfully submitted by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese faculty