

naturejobs

**JOBS OF
THE WEEK**

Graduate students at several US universities and colleges are trying to form unions, with mixed success. According to the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions, students already have collective-bargaining rights at more than 20 US schools (see *Nature* **428**, 965; 2004). But is unionizing a good idea? Certainly, teaching and research assistants deserve a say in their pay, work benefits and conditions. But should students engage in collective bargaining and risk potentially unproductive clashes with administrators?

Students at the University of Maryland in College Park are the latest to campaign for worker rights. A state legislator named Jamie Raskin has introduced a bill that would allow graduate students and adjunct professors to unionize at state-funded universities. He is quoted in *The Washington Post* as saying that graduate students are treated like “migrant workers”. Union proponents say that students who work for professors or teach undergraduates should have a seat at the bargaining table and a say in their working conditions.

A spokesperson from the university counters that students are just that, students, not employees. Perhaps this is an overly rigid stance, meant to save the university money and time at the negotiating table. But unions are not necessarily a positive step for students. The employer–employee relationship differs from that of the teacher–student. The former can be adversarial, and counter to the aims of a graduate student. US students have their hands full just being students, with degrees that can take 6–8 years to complete. They might not have the time or the patience to deal with lawyers and salary disputes that could, after a long struggle, net only minor gains.

Yet in the times of tight budgets and large labs, graduate students have the right to make sure they’re not merely cheap labour helping their professor to get tenure, publications or increasingly rare grant money. And graduate student unions can be good for the university — prospective students might see unionization as a positive attribute. But, considering the pitfalls, students should be careful not to focus too much on being employees — the primary aim should be a degree, not a union card.

Gene Russo, acting editor of *Naturejobs*

CONTACTS

Acting Editor: Gene Russo

European Head Office, London
The Macmillan Building,
4 Crinan Street, London N1 9XW, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7843 4961
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

European Sales Manager:
Andy Douglas (4975)
e-mail: a.douglas@nature.com
Business Development Manager:
Amelie Pequignot (4974)
e-mail: a.pequignot@nature.com
Natureevents:

Claudia Paulsen Young (+44 (0) 20 7014 4015)
e-mail: c.paulsenyoung@nature.com
France/Switzerland/Belgium:
Muriel Lestringuez (4994)
Southwest UK/RoW: Nils Moeller (4953)

Scandinavia/Spain/Portugal/Italy:

Evelina Rubio-Hakansson (4973)
Northeast UK/Ireland:
Matthew Ward (+44 (0) 20 7014 4059)
North Germany/The Netherlands:
Reya Silao (4970)
South Germany/Austria:
Hildi Rowland (+44 (0) 20 7014 4084)

Advertising Production Manager:

Stephen Russell
To send materials use London address above.
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7843 4816
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7843 4996
e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

Naturejobs web development: Tom Hancock
Naturejobs online production: Dennis Chu

US Head Office, New York
75 Varick Street, 9th Floor,
New York, NY 10013-1917
Tel: +1 800 989 7718

Fax: +1 800 989 7103
e-mail: naturejobs@natureny.com

US Sales Manager: Peter Bless

India
Vikas Chawla (+91 1242881057)
e-mail: v.chawla@nature.com

Japan Head Office, Tokyo
Chiyoda Building, 2-37 Ichigayatamachi,
Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0843
Tel: +81 3 3267 8751
Fax: +81 3 3267 8746

Asia-Pacific Sales Manager:
Ayako Watanabe (+81 3 3267 8765)
e-mail: a.watanabe@natureasia.com
**Business Development Manager, Greater
China/Singapore:**
Gloria To (+852 2811 7191)
e-mail: g.to@natureasia.com