

FAQ submitted by Bonnie Brownlee, Program Chair, Emeriti House
responses from Rebecca L. Spang, Secretary of the Bloomington Faculty (2021-2022)

What's at issue?

- graduate students want to unionize
- the Provost says unionization is not the best or most effective way to address problems faced by graduate-student workers (low stipends, high fees, poor job prospects)
- in mid-April, the union organizers called for a strike vote and the membership voted to strike for union recognition
- Vice-Provost Eliza Pavalko then [wrote](#) to Deans, department chairs, etc. saying graduate students certainly have the right to protest or demonstrate (covered by the First Amendment), but those appointed as SAA's also have to fulfil their job duties and failure to do so could mean they would not be appointed as SAA's in future semesters
- The Provost [wrote](#) to all faculty, stressing his commitment to graduate students, outlining steps he had already taken to improve working conditions (including raising stipends and guaranteeing that graduate students could take courses all across campus without cost), but also saying "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 SAA Guide 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."
- many faculty members were concerned/alarmed by the tone of the messages from the Provost and the VPFAA, which they described as "threatening... coercive... retaliatory"

Who are the players?

- Rahul Shrivastav (IU PhD, Speech and Hearing Sciences)—appointed as Provost in late December, assumed duties February 15. He previously worked with President Whitten at Michigan State (where she was a dean; he, a department chair) and at the University of Georgia (where she was provost and he, the Vice-President for Instruction)
- the Board of Trustees and President Whitten—have been largely silent, but only they can recognize a union
- Valentina Luketa (PhD candidate in Anthropology) has led the unionization movement and was the GPSG (Graduate and Professional Student Government)'s elected president for 2021-2022; the IGWC (Indiana Graduate Workers Coalition) now dominates the GPSG
- Ben Robinson (Associate Professor and Chair of Germanic Studies, President of the local AAUP chapter)—vocal supporter of unionization, one of the organizers of the informal April 26 "faculty Town Hall" and of the petition that led to the full faculty meeting;
- undergraduate students in courses taught by SAAs—some missed three weeks of material, others had their Week 12 grade reported as their final grade, some were glad to have a shortened semester. Some signed a statement in support of the striking SAAs and unionization; some parents have complained.

- graduate students who are not SAAs (they may have hourly jobs on campus, but they do not have “funding packages” or tuition remission)—are not so much “players” as they are a population that has lost representation since the GPSG has become so committed to the unionization cause and the positions of the IGWC

What does each side want (are there just two sides?)

- the IGWC-UE wants recognition as a union chapter
- College faculty have been concerned for a decade (or more) that SAA stipends are among the lowest in the Big Ten (only Nebraska’s are lower), while teaching loads and fees are high
- the Provost wants improved conditions for SAAs; he is appointing a Task Force (to be chaired by David Daleke, full membership will be announced on Monday, May 16) and hopes to take specific action by the end of the summer; he does not want another strike or unionization. He has not explained his opposition to the union in any detail but he does cite John Applegate’s [memo of Feb. 1, 2022](#)

What happened to call for the May 9 all-faculty meeting?

Under the terms of the Faculty Constitution, an all-faculty meeting can be convened in several ways, including by “petition to the Bloomington Faculty President of 50 faculty members” (a provision last updated in 1974). Concerned that striking graduate students might be denied future teaching/grading appointments, feeling that they needed to support students in some way, and aghast at the tone of communication from “central administration,” Bloomington members of the Graduate Faculty Council (led by Diane Henshel, O’Neill SPEA, and Margaret Graves, Art History) and of the AAUP (led by Ben Robinson and Israel Herrera) hosted an “all faculty Town Hall” on April 26. Discussion at this meeting turned on “What can faculty do?” with possible options including a faculty walkout/grading strike, a “No Confidence” vote (in the Provost or the President), and petitioning for a meeting of the full faculty. A petition was drafted and presented to Faculty President Marietta Simpson (Distinguished Rudy Professor of Voice, Jacobs School of Music) on April 28. At the time, the petition had been signed by 142 members of the faculty.

What happened at the May 9 meeting?

The meeting was attended by 700+ faculty members (approximately 25% of the voting faculty; revisions to the Constitution in 2018 define the “voting faculty” as tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track instructors, researchers, and librarians with at least a .75 FTE appointment). Most of those who spoke had signed the petition calling for the meeting; they were strongly in favor of unionization and argued for “standing up to the administration” and “doing what the students ask of us.” A few carried signs (“No Confidence Vote Now”). Votes were taken on three resolutions, two of which passed. See Appendix I for a fuller description.

What role does the BFC play in this process?

The Executive Committee of the BFC (formerly known as the Agenda Committee) set the agenda for the special meeting and made all the arrangements. Logistical and security constraints, as well as the 2005 precedent, informed its decisions about the form and structure of the meeting. This activity all occurred during the week of final exams and Commencement, at a

time when the Faculty Council office is completely *unstaffed* (an hourly student worker resigned in February, the Director of the Faculty Council Offices took a position elsewhere on campus in early April, her assistant has recently been out of the office on personal/medical leave). The Executive Committee (chiefly the President and President-Elect) made all arrangements with the Auditorium; printed, cut, and stapled ballots; organized the printing of informational material (solicited from the proposer of each resolution, as well as from the IGWC-UE and the Provost's office); organized check in, vote counting, etc. etc. In addition, members of the Executive Committee met or spoke with the petitioners and other colleagues repeatedly during the ten days between the petition's delivery and the meeting.

Does the BFC have a position on the resolutions?

A resolution similar to resolution 3B was introduced at the April 12th BFC meeting by Israel Herrera (Teaching Professor, Spanish & Portuguese) and was adopted by a vote of 26-19. The other resolution has not come to the BFC. See Appendix II for a fuller description on the April 12th meeting.

Are Emeriti Faculty allowed to vote?

Yes, the Constitution (1.6.c) defines emeriti as "voting faculty" on matters that arise from a special meeting of the full faculty.

Why are we now asked to vote?

The Constitution defines quorum for a full faculty meeting as 200 (out of a full faculty of approximately 2800) and says that any actions taken by a meeting with fewer than 800 faculty members in attendance must be referred to the full faculty for ratification or rejection (approval/disapproval).

What issues are we to vote on?

You are to vote on the two resolutions that were passed in the May 9th meeting. Resolutions that failed or were withdrawn, as well as motions referred to committee, will not be sent to the full faculty.

What will the outcome of the vote mean?

I'm a historian, not a fortune teller!

Neither resolution makes or amends policy in an area where the faculty have legislative authority; rather, they are expressions of "the sentiment of the meeting" (their verbs are "assert," "call on," etc.). Approval of the first would officially commit the campus faculty as a whole to the position that SAAs who went on strike this spring (or might do so in the future) should not be penalized for non-fulfilment of job duties (including failure to submit grades in a timely fashion). Approval of the second commits the faculty as a whole to the position that a union should be recognized and the University should empower it to represent SAAs.

Appendix I (the following account was sent by the BFC Secretary to the full faculty, including emeriti—except for those who have asked to be taken off the email list—late on Monday, May 9th)

As you know, a special meeting of the full faculty was convened (via [a petition](#) signed by over 200 colleagues) to consider issues related to the graduate-student workers' unionization movement, their strike, and the response of campus leadership. Though the Constitution does not specify, the precedent of November 2005 indicates I need to get the report of today's meeting to you as soon as possible. What follows is therefore bare bones.

The number of voting faculty members in attendance fluctuated during the meeting between 700-740.

Faculty President Marietta Simpson gaveled the crowd in the IU Auditorium to silence at 4:12. After thanking the faculty as a whole, the members of the BFC Executive Committee, the Auditorium's staff and the Provost's office (which picked up the significant tab for the meeting), she introduced Parliamentarian Rachael Cohen who concisely summarized the rules for the meeting including: Robert's Rules with motions to "suspend the rules" disallowed; three-minute limit for each speaker; paper ballots for agenda items, shows of hand for amendments. Most important, the Constitution defines "quorum" for a special meeting of the full faculty as 200 members of the voting faculty and specifies that any actions taken by a meeting with fewer than 800 votes cast must be sent to the entire faculty for a further vote.

President Simpson quickly explained items that were not on today's agenda:

- 1) a proposal to extend the Bloomington grading deadline to June 17th was not allowed because it would have contradicted university-wide policy ACA-66; the Executive Committee did however vote to extend the Bloomington grading deadline ("three days after a course's scheduled final exam") to match the university policy ("four days after the end of the semester") for the Spring 2022 semester only;
- 2) a motion to create a policy on SAA (Student Academic Appointees) workloads which was referred to BFC committees;
- 3) a resolution to include SAA stipends in annual salary review processes was withdrawn by the proposer and has been sent to the SAAAC (SAA Affairs Committee) for consideration;
- 4) a resolution stating "contingencies that would automatically trigger a full faculty meeting in order to vote condemnation/no confidence in campus administration"—this was rejected because the Constitution specifically gives authority to convene such meetings to people and not to events;

She also observed that since colleagues obviously want to speak, be heard, and be heard by administrators, the Faculty Council was planning discussion fora for next semester, including Town Hall meetings scheduled for the Whittenberger Auditorium in September.

Turning to items on the agenda:

["A Resolution of the Bloomington Faculty Concerning Shared Governance and Graduate Student Supervision"](#) (proposed by Will Winecoff, Political Science) was introduced by

Margaret Graves (Director of Graduate Studies in Art History and Bloomington’s representative on the Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty Council). Professor Graves moved to amend the final section (“Resolved...”), many hands were raised to second that motion, and Elizabeth Housworth (Math and Statistics) explained her reasons for suggesting the new language (of which Professors Winecoff and Graves approved). The amended resolution substitutes the following language for the original final section:

“Resolved, the IU Bloomington faculty asserts (1) as per the Graduate Academic Appointees Guide, reappointments of SAAs are determined by departmental and school policies; (2) no SAA will fail to be re-appointed in Fall 2022 due to participation in the Spring 2022 SAA strike, including failure to turn in Spring 2022 grades in a timely manner; (3) the VPFAA will immediately release the SAA appointments for Summer 2022; (4) as per the Constitution of the Bloomington Faculty, the faculty will review the performance of the administration with respect to future labor disputes; (5) the BFC will ensure that all disciplined students receive due process for grievances via the SAA mediation and review structures of the BFC; (6) the BFC will re-constitute and empower the new SAA Affairs Committee to strengthen and clarify IUB policy for SAAs, particularly emphasizing the central role of the department, program, or other supervising unit concerning SAA reappointment.”

Discussion followed. An unidentified participant “called the question” (i.e. called for a vote that would end discussion), that vote passed, and votes were cast on the resolution as amended.

The amended Resolution passed by a vote of 683 in favor, 39 against. Because fewer than 800 votes were cast, this resolution will now be submitted for a vote (electronic) to the entire faculty.

We passed then to “[Two Resolutions of the Bloomington Faculty concerning Student Academic Appointees and the Administration](#)”—after some brief debate, Erik Tillema (School of Education) withdrew the resolution he had drafted (3A) in favor of the one asked for by the striking students (3B, introduced by Alex Lichtenstein from History). Further discussion followed, Sarah Knott (History) called the question, and the assembly proceeded to a vote. Resolution 3B passed by a vote of 623 to 75. This resolution will also be sent to the entire faculty for electronic vote.

The final agenda item, “[A Resolution of the Bloomington Faculty Concerning Cooperation among Graduate Students and Administration](#)” was introduced by John Walbridge (Middle Eastern Studies). After discussion, this resolution failed by a vote of 50 yes, 592 no. Since rejecting a proposed resolution is not (by Robert’s Rules) an “action,” this resolution will not be sent to the full faculty for a vote.

The meeting adjourned at 5:47.

I could tell you more about who said what, how they spoke, and perhaps even how they were dressed, but time presses and you will have a recording and transcript available soon enough. As for future “Rebecca Reports,” perhaps I will start a Substack.

Appendix II (extracted from the BFC Secretary’s Report circulated April 14, 2022)

The special session of the BFC for discussion of SAA-related measures convened at 4:37 p.m., April 12, 2022 (fifteen minutes after that the close of that day’s regularly scheduled meeting). Faculty President Marietta Simpson welcomed us to “truly the last BFC meeting for 2021-2022” and explained that as an ad-hoc meeting it also had its own ad-hoc rules: each speaker would be held to two minutes and could speak only once on each proposal. Israel Herrera (Teaching Professor, Spanish & Portuguese) then introduced a resolution supported by the IUB chapter of the AAUP:

A RESOLUTION OF THE BLOOMINGTON FACULTY COUNCIL IN SUPPORT OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

Whereas, Student Academic Appointees (SAAs) play an essential role in the educational and research mission of IU Bloomington;

Whereas, SAAs are both students and workers;

Whereas, as workers, SAAs have the right to organize, associate collectively, and, when necessary, to strike;

Whereas, as students, SAAs have rights of academic freedom and shared governance that are best protected when they are organized;

Whereas, the Indiana Graduate Workers Coalition (IGWC) has been organizing and campaigning responsibly and effectively on behalf of SAAs and has gained significant support from IUB graduate students, at least 1,600 of whom have signed union cards;

Whereas, an SAA strike will have negative impact on IUB's mission, particularly its educational mission;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Bloomington Faculty Council calls on Provost Shrivastav to dialog with the IGWC immediately to avoid a strike, and not retaliate against any SAAs who engage in a work stoppage; urges Provost Shrivastav, President Whitten, and the Board of Trustees to reconsider their decision to refuse SAAs request to form a union: and urges all faculty and campus administrators not to penalize any of their graduate students who choose to exercise their right to strike.

A transcript of every word uttered in the discussion that followed will eventually be available (though there may be some delays because of the staffing situation in the BFC Office). For now, I hope to convey something of the conversation’s tenor. J Duncan (Luddy) spoke briefly to urge a “yes” vote, saying that since nearly all of us had once been graduate students it would make sense for us to recognize their struggles and support them. Ben Robinson (present as an alternate for Huss Banai) then spoke in favor as well, saying that the response of the campus administration had created for him a “terrible ethical bind” such that it was “impossible to know what to prioritize... my responsibilities to all students are being divided between immediate needs and the future of the department.” Professor Thomas Sterling (Luddy) noted that he was at the meeting as an alternate, that he had been instructed by his school to vote in favor of the resolution and he would do so, even though he personally belonged to the minority who opposed it. Student body president Ky Freeman commented that past good faith protests (like the graduate student strike) had culminated in some of the best things on campus (such as the Neal-Marshall

Center); Professor Steve Sanders (Law) countered that many advancements for justice and equity on this campus (such as the LGBTQ Center, domestic-partner benefits, or the Hudson & Holland Program) came not from protests but from strategic and visionary administrators working with students and behind the scenes. Stating “this is not an Amazon warehouse; students, faculty and administrators work together,” he concluded it was “irresponsible” for faculty members to support unionization.

Some Council members spoke positively of their own experience as unionized graduate students. Miriam Northcutt Bohmert very interestingly said she did not read the resolution as advocating for a union (I think many of us did read it that way) and that her own experience with unions—“I grew up in Michigan.... My father was UAW; my mother was in a union... my schoolteacher husband is unionized”—had been mixed. Valentina Luketa once again spoke adroitly and with great conviction about the importance of dividing academic advisors from HR and argued that unionization was necessary for mutual respect. As he did last week, the Provost mentioned the many meetings he has had with groups of graduate students since arriving on this campus; what it means to “meet” with somebody is clearly a bone of contention, as she responded to him by saying, “We have been working on this for seven years, you just showed up two months ago. ... We have an elected bargaining committee ready, but you won’t meet with us.”

The strongest voice against unionization was that of Past-President and Emeritus Professor of Psychology Jim Sherman. No one doubted him when he said “I have been here longer than anybody else, I know this university, I feel this university.” Insisting that IU was and is different from other universities, that the institutions of shared governance are especially strong and the community especially tight-knit, he urged a “no” vote: “A union will change things.” With great poignancy and conviction, he concluded: “I know what you will say. You’ll say I’m old, I’m out of touch. Maybe I am. But I know IU.” So compelling did I find his words and his person at that moment that I could not help turning on my own mic to say, “I’m not old. I’m ‘in touch.’ And I agree with Jim Sherman.”

Other comments were made. As I said, you will eventually be able to read them all in the transcript, but I think this gives you a sense of the discussion’s flavor. Rachael Cohen, acting not as Parliamentarian but simply as a Council member called for a roll-call vote and the resolution passed, 26-19. I did not manage to get all the votes into my notes, but they will appear in the official minutes which will be circulated with the agenda for the first Council meeting of the fall semester. For myself, I think the wisest vote of all was that of Carolyn Calloway-Thomas who, upon hearing her name called, replied: “I don’t know.”

We passed then to a second measure, brought to the floor by Miriam Northcutt Bohmert on behalf of her constituents. Concerned that faculty members are caught in the middle of a labor dispute between students and administrators, she proposed faculty endorse a version of the “[neutrality pledge](#)” circulated elsewhere. The text brought to the BFC read:

“As a faculty member of IU Bloomington, I acknowledge the crucial role that graduate students play in fulfilling IU’s academic mission. I affirm that a graduate student’s participation in a strike will not affect my evaluation of their academic work, nor will it affect advising, mentoring, or letters of recommendation.”

Brief discussion followed, with Steve Sanders quickly commenting that the text was not a resolution from a body but an individual statement and hence could not be voted on by us collectively. J Duncan noted that as such, it was something we could and should all share with the graduate students with whom we personally work (a sentiment I seconded). As there seemed no way in the remaining time to rewrite it into a resolution and as the urgency perhaps was lessened by the success of the first resolution, the meeting adjourned shortly thereafter.