

Marquette University faculty and graduate workers: Hold May Day rally, celebrating workers and demanding the administration's written commitment to fair process in the midst of unionizing efforts

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MILWAUKEE- Today Marquette University non-tenure track (NTT) faculty and graduate workers rallied to demand that the administration issue a written commitment to a fair process to form their union and avoid procedural challenges, delays, or union-busting tactics. In a display of overwhelming support, the workers were surrounded by tenure track/tenured faculty, undergraduate students and community supporters as they explained why a fair process is in alignment with Marquette's Jesuit values and important to ensuring good faith for future negotiations.

"When we say a fair process, we mean the written assurance that the Marquette will abide by current case laws and not try to implement tactics to delay or deny our rights as workers. We love our school and our students, but Marquette is failing to uphold its Jesuit values of social justice, which means it is failing its workers. Any further delay in committing to a fair process or efforts to delay and derail our ability to vote for our union is a divorce from the very values Marquette claims to hold dear," said Sue Giaimo, a non-tenure track professor in Political and Biomedical Sciences. "As a 15-year veteran Marquette non-tenure track faculty member, I'm

helping to build our union to fix the level of job instability and stagnant wages we experience as professional academics, which have severe consequences for faculty teaching conditions and student outcomes.”

Marquette’s non-tenure track faculty and graduate workers announced their efforts to organize their respective unions on April 12. During the announcement, they presented to the administration public letters with hundreds of signatures from members across the campus community expressing support and solidarity of the unionizing efforts on campus.

“In my three years as a graduate teaching assistant, I have watched as our health insurance costs skyrocketed and were then taken away altogether. I lived with constant pain and nausea for months before I finally received Medicaid, which I now rely on to be treated because my employer denies me access to healthcare,” said Steve Vickers, a graduate worker and PhD candidate in the Department of History who suffers from chronic medical issues.

Maquette’s non-tenure track faculty and graduate workers are joining a nationwide movement in higher education for better working conditions, a living wage, job security, and benefits.

“I’m unionizing to bring much-needed reform. Right now, job security and fair pay are structural impossibilities for NTT faculty like me. There is no path for career advancement open to us. For me that means never being able to put down roots and always searching for the next faculty position. I love teaching here, but how can I give my students my best when teaching a four-course load means short-changing my future prospects? It’s an impossible choice. I need to know that great instruction is valued at Marquette, and that means reforming NTT contracts to reflect our crucial role here,” said Sebastian Bitticks, a non-tenure track professor in English.

Background:

Graduate workers are uniting together to build the Marquette University Graduate Workers Union, under SEIU Graduate Workers Forward. The union is a part of a larger movement among graduate workers and non-tenure track faculty at colleges and universities nationwide, who are unionizing to raise work standards, improve wages and benefits, establish job security and restore respect for their professions. At Marquette, a Jesuit university, workers are urging the administration to live up to its Jesuit values on social justice, which supports the right of workers to fair wages,

better working conditions and their efforts to unionize.

In April 2018, Loyola University non-tenure track faculty, represented by SEIU Local 73, ratified their first contract with the university, more than a year of negotiations, a strike and other protests. Graduate workers supported the efforts of the faculty. In July 2018, non-tenure track faculty at Fordham University won a new three-year contract, after a long fight, that secures huge wage increases for most non-tenure track faculty. In April 2018, Georgetown University agreed to allow a union election for graduate workers through a third-party process. Non-tenure track faculty at Saint Louis University have also formed a union. In September 2018, Brandeis University graduate workers won their first contract. By December 2018, Graduate workers at Illinois State University and Southern University of Illinois Edwardsville voted overwhelmingly to form their union, represented by SEIU Local 73. Now, the pressure is building for Jesuit institutions to live up to their values for all their workers, including graduate workers.