

### **Gisselle Cunningham**

Throughout my years as an undergraduate student of what was then known as Polytechnic University, and now as a graduate student at the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering, I've seen fellow students and friends work toward earning a distinguished graduate education from a prestigious university while also struggling at maintaining a basic livelihood with enough food, shelter, and medical insurance to get by. These stories are indeed honorable, but appalling and unjustified. As graduate students, you've proven your ability to learn and apply skills that distinguishes you from the rest. As graduate employees, you've applied these knowledge and skills to help distinguish YOUR University from the rest. Whether it's participating in cutting-edge research or a teaching assistantship, YOU are the backbone to the success of your teaching institution, and you should be compensated accordingly! Our message is simple: to fight for a fair contract with NYU that will provide fair compensation, tuition and fee remission and medical insurance for all graduate employees and their families. GSOC/UAW has won historic gains before, and I will fight to resonate a message to NYU that is very clear: fair compensation, tuition remission and affordable healthcare for all graduate employees. Together, we can do this.

### **Jacob Denz**

I am running for the Bargaining Committee on the basis of two years experience organizing with GSOC/UAW, during which time I have spoken to hundreds of graduate students across NYU schools to learn about their working conditions and encourage participation in our campaign. I believe such work, by myself and many others, was the backbone of our ultimately successful eight-year struggle for recognition and continues to be central to our ongoing contract campaign. In 2002 we won a groundbreaking contract that raised stipends 38%. This contract changed the face of graduate education in the United States and is the reason many of us attend NYU today. Now we are poised to do something similar, with over 1,000 graduate students supporting a contract that includes fair compensation, health care for graduate employees and our families, family benefits including child care subsidies, and tuition and fee remission. NYU is shamefully unique in its willingness to staff courses with graduate TAs who lack paid health care, and that is unacceptable.

Making History Again at NYU (MHA-NYU) is a progressive slate of members who share the goal of achieving a groundbreaking contract that, like our first GSOC contract, will inspire change across the nation. Our slate includes two candidates from NYU Poly, which employs the lowest-paid workers in our bargaining unit at rates as low as \$10/hour, and one parent. We are determined to fight to raise unfair wages, expand family benefits, and end NYU's ludicrous mismanagement of our health insurance.

### **Hadi Gharabaghi**

As a graduate employee with a wife and child, I am running for the GSOC Bargaining Committee to Make History Again because I believe that NYU must provide substantially better health insurance and family care options for the people whose hard work make NYU a world-class institution. Many of my colleagues and I have had to put our children on state-subsidized health plans even while we worked for NYU as teachers or researchers because NYU's benefits were so prohibitively expensive—a fact that should embarrass a

university that charges tens of thousands students over \$50,000 per year in tuition and fees. I am also very happy to be running with two graduate employees from Poly, where for years graduate workers have contributed incredible work to groundbreaking scientific and technological projects for as little as \$10 per hour and no benefits. We will need to bargain intensively and aggressively with NYU, but my experiences as a member of the Cinema Studies department—where we as graduate students got the Deans of Tisch and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to agree to remit our health care and maintenance of matriculation fees through grassroots organizing—prove to me that we can Make History Again by fighting together and fighting hard.

### **Ashwin Gopi**

We graduate students deserve better pay, healthcare benefits, a fair contract, and more importantly, respect. I have spent the last four years at Poly—first as an MS student, and now in the PhD program in the department of Technology Management and Innovation—and I have watched NYU promote the school using glossy, multimillion-dollar projects that overshadow the interests of the students and the low-paid graduate workers whose labor makes those projects possible. Yet I know that we can change NYU because I have experience negotiating with the NYU administration, especially when I worked with them to create the Greenhouse, a work space at Poly entirely designed and run by students. Getting the Greenhouse was not easy because lack of work space is a chronic problem at Poly, but, in the process of making it happen, I learned how NYU administrators think and how to influence them. As a member of the Bargaining Committee, I will use that knowledge and experience to push for a fair contract with better pay, paid health-care premiums, and benefits for graduate employees with families. It will require real pressure to make NYU stop treating Poly students like second-class members of the university community, but I will strive to make this university more inclusive no matter how much NYU may struggle against it.

### **David Klassen**

I am running for the bargaining committee on the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union slate for the same reason that I supported the union when I first arrived here as a PhD student in history five years ago: because as an institution, NYU behaves pretty terribly. Not only does this university treat its grad students poorly on wages, health benefits, child care, and other issues, but it also acts badly to undergraduates, faculty, workers across its global campus, and the community. NYU's astronomical tuition has left students mired in debt or simply made NYU inaccessible to many; expansion plans have alienated faculty and led to votes of non-confidence in many departments; and the building of NYU's global brand has been fueled by absolutely egregious labor practices around the world.

Now I am under no illusions that a more democratic Bargaining Committee will immediately force NYU to pay construction workers in Abu Dhabi a living wage, or make NYU freeze tuition, or even entirely fix the myriad structural problems facing grad students. But I do think that an active, engaged, and mobilized union can put a brake on NYU's seemingly inexorable race to the bottom and with the co-operation of allies amongst undergrads, the community, faculty, and other workers could begin to reverse some of their worst excesses. But to start

achieve to these goals, the union, quite frankly, has to do better. It has to more open, more responsive to worker demands, more democratic, more engaged, and more mobilized.

### **Ayesha Omer**

Representation is a serious responsibility. I have worked as an artist, performer, teacher, researcher, cultural campaign consultant, and organizer of general elections in Pakistan. My work has always explored issues of power and social justice in top-down social structures. Now, I am a PhD student at NYU Steinhardt, a member of the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union and a candidate for the Graduate Student Union Bargaining Committee.

My activist work began during my graduate studies at Tisch (Art and Public Policy) where I started developing public performances, while also engaging political critiques of NYU's institutional expansion initiatives. Like many international students around me, I was concerned about why I had to pay nearly full-tuition (and offered severely limited on-campus work opportunities) especially at a time when NYU was opening its campus in Abu Dhabi to facilitate 'global exchange of knowledge'. I was concerned that NYU was exploiting its international students in NYC, and also exploiting international demands for higher education - and cheap labor - around the world.

Now, as a PhD student at NYU with 5+ years ahead of me, I only see those concerns worsening. While the Graduate Student Organizing Committee's grassroots movement has yielded a historic victory for all of us, there is tremendous work still left to be done. Graduate workers lack healthcare, childcare, job placement, tuition remission, sex and gender justice facilities. I am running for a place on the bargaining committee to participate in winning us a strong contract. I want to make this academic community un-exploitative of its knowledge workers, but I want to make this possible WITH you, not for you. I believe the members of the graduate student union must have democratic rights to the processes of bargaining and therefore participate in the very decisions that will impact their bread and butter. My experiences with political campaign leadership showed me that top-down leadership misrepresents voters, often turning conciliatory and exploitative. I wouldn't ask for your vote if i did not take representation very very seriously - please join me and Shelly, David and Ella, and vote for the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union to bargain for your interests in our union contract!

### **Shelly Ronen**

I am running because we need a strong contract, an active membership, and a union that engages with other social justice causes both within our university, around our city and throughout our “global university.”

A strong contract means we must bargain for pay increases, affordable support for our families, health care expansions, dental coverage and more. These fundamental provisions will position us to work best, live better, and take a seat at the table to determine the future of our academic institution.

I am currently a fourth year PhD student in sociology and I have been organizing with GSOC since 2012. I have a deep commitment to equality, justice and self-determination. I want a union

that stands for these principles whether we are bringing up the lowest paid workers at NYU (because \$10/hour is not enough!), protesting the Sexton 2031 plan, or working in solidarity with undergraduates against high tuition and debt.

Our bargaining process is exciting. We are poised to win big and serve as an inspiration to other private universities. But last semester's conciliatory bargaining strategy is not good enough. NYU has no incentive to make concessions unless we pressure them. We must pressure them democratically, inclusively, and with vigor! I am running alongside several candidates in NYU Academic Workers for a Democratic Union (AWDU) because I believe we can and must do better!

### **Ella Wind**

I am a second-year MA student in the Middle East department running for the bargaining committee on the AWDU slate, along with David Klassen, Shelly Ronen, and Ayesha Omer. I have been closely following the elections and bargaining process of the union since coming to NYU last year, and over this time, I have become totally persuaded of the necessity of fighting for increased democratization of the union, as a means for ensuring as strong and inclusive a contract as possible.

We need a union which can put the most pressure on the administration for pay increases for all student workers, ensures excellent healthcare coverage, and supports the needs of student workers with families. When we say "all student workers," we especially mean those students with the weakest contracts and pay, such as Polytechnic Institute student workers and international students who are more vulnerable to exploitation by the university. As we've seen from last year's stalled bargaining attempts, NYU will not give us this out of sheer kindness -- we have to show them we have the pressure of the graduate student body behind us.