

International Graduate Student FAQs

As international graduate student workers, we face unique challenges in Higher Education. We are invested in making Illinois Higher Education institutions a better place to teach and conduct research, and one where the innumerable challenges that our non-citizen colleagues face are better understood. Below, you'll find a quick guide to help dispel any myths about international students' right to organize!

Can international student workers join the Union?

Yes! All student employees, regardless of their immigration status, have the state-protected rights to engage in activity with their co-workers concerning their working conditions and form a union. It is illegal for an employer to retaliate against any student employees for exercising their rights under the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Act.

Do international students have the right to free speech in the U.S.?

Yes! International students have the same right to free speech as U.S. citizens. The U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment, applies to everyone within U.S. borders, regardless of citizenship status.

Will my union membership affect my student visa? Can it affect future visas?

No. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) cannot ask you questions about your union membership or participation in lawful union activity. In addition, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recognized the importance of enforcing labor laws and signed an agreement with the Department of Labor (DOL) to that effect. It is your right to belong to a union and union membership cannot affect your visa application.

How can the Union help me as an international student?

Our union benefits international students in many ways. A union gives international students a platform to collectively address common concerns such as clarity in departmental hiring processes and job opportunities. Because student visas typically limit the number of hours that students can work, achieving higher stipends that keep pace with the cost of living is of particular importance for international students. Most importantly, a union allows student workers to unite for improved pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment and join a nationwide movement of higher education employees uniting to improve higher education.