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Graduate Employee Unionization as Symbol of and Challenge to the Corporatization of U.S. Research Universities

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!

Mario Savio, December 3, 1964

A student leader in the Free Speech Movement at the
University of California, Berkeley

Introduction

We open this article with a quote from Mario Savio for three reasons. First, we wish to convey a critical element of graduate employee unionization that seeks to challenge what is perceived by many organizers as the “corporatization of the academy.” In this regard, the graduate employee union movement has a political quality to it—that is, the movement seeks to alter the distribution of power within the academy through collective bargaining. Relatedly, Savio’s speech generally is recognized as one of the first publicly articulated critiques of the “corporate academy.” A second reason we use a portion of Savio’s

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famous speech is that one of the graduate student organizers with whom we spoke referred to this quote as part of his discussion of the corporate influence in academe. This graduate student was one of 40 participants interviewed within the context of four case studies conducted with graduate employee unions. We turn to the data deriving from these interviews, including the comment referencing Savio, later in our paper. A third reason for turning to Savio and the Free Speech Movement is that it was within the context of the student movements of the Sixties that serious discussions of graduate students unionizing first arose at campuses such as UC Berkeley.

We want to be open and forthright in positioning ourselves in relation to this study. Both researchers come from critical traditions within sociology and believe that all research is in some manner or form political. In this regard, we embrace Fay's (1987) characterization of critical social science as forms of inquiry and thought that seek to elevate human consciousness around issues of social inequality. In keeping with their own self-definitions as "marginalized workers," we contend that graduate employee unionization may be examined as a form of resistance to dominant cultural forms operating within academe. As critical scholars of higher education, we see much value in highlighting the nature of the critique offered by graduate student organizers. Such criticism has a key role to play in elevating a deeper understanding of universities, their corporate connections, and the role of unions in the academy. Whether one agrees or not with the positions presented by graduate organizers in this paper, the critique itself is worth sharing, because it provides a vehicle through which one might reflect on the evolving identity of the contemporary university. We do not have to accept accusations of "corporatization," but we should at the very least consider the bases for such charges. But in order to do that, we first must have greater knowledge of the nature of the criticism. To date, no U.S.-based journal focused on higher education has addressed the critique of the research university by graduate student organizers, but nearly every higher education journal has published articles promoting university-corporate partnering.

We use a study of graduate employee unionization to shed light on what arguably is a growing critique of the academy—a critique that centers on increased ties to corporate interests and the growing adoption of corporate practices (Bensimon, 1995; Bérubé & Nelson, 1995; Giroux, 2002; Rhoads, 2003). Our intent is to highlight interpretations that graduate student organizers have about the connections between graduate employee unionization and the advance of corporate influences in academic life. Given that much of the previous critique has come from academics, graduate employee organizers have the potential to offer new knowledge and insights about the current era of higher education.

From a scholarly point of view, we believe a study centered on a critique of the “corporate academy,” as many of our interview participants described it, has equal merit with the many studies that have sought to better understand university-corporate partnerships, in particular, and entrepreneurialism, in general (Bowie, 1994; Clark, 2001; Etzkowitz & Stevens, 1998; Etzkowitz & Webster, 1998; Fairweather, 1988, 1989; Francis & Hampton, 1999; Paulson, 2002; Privateer, 1999; Rogers et al., 1999; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Whether explicitly stated or implicitly conveyed, many of these studies have sought to advance or limit university-corporate partnerships. Our point here is not that we are critical of such studies, but that we want to recognize that these studies too are political, whether the authors clearly stated their position or not. Finally, although it is not our intent to thwart university-corporate partnerships and the adoption of corporate practices—indeed, we see potential good in many such partnerships and practices—we also see great value in bringing a critical perspective to bear on this trend.

With the preceding in mind, this qualitative study of graduate employee unionization seeks to explore the critique graduate student organizers have of the contemporary academy. In no way do we suggest that a critique of corporatization is *the* reason why graduate employees have chosen to organize unions. Such a statement would undermine the very serious “bread-and-butter” issues upon which graduate organizers have focused. Such bread-and-butter issues include concerns linked to wages, health care, hiring and grievance practices, and working conditions (Rhoades & Rhoads, 2003). Additionally, given the emergent quality of research on graduate employee unionization, it is important to note that we do not intend to provide a general understanding of graduate employee unionizing; such an endeavor already has been undertaken by Julius and Gumpert (2003) and Rhoades and Rhoads (2003). Our more focused intent is to better understand the substance of the mounting critique of what has been described as the “corporate academy”; our study has found that graduate employee organizers have a great deal to say about the topic.

Finally, we probably should clarify what we mean by the phrase “graduate employee”: we use this phrase to describe a graduate student employed as a graduate assistant or teaching assistant, as well as any other form of university-employed graduate student included in a graduate employee union contract.

Background of Graduate Employee Unionization

To understand the relevance of this study one must recognize the increasing importance of graduate employee unions. Indeed, the expansion of graduate employee unions in the past decade has been

remarkable. The number of unionized graduate employees has increased by 175% since 1990; close to 40,000 graduate employees are now unionized (Smallwood, 2001). Additionally, not only have the number of bargaining units of graduate student employees increased from only a handful in the late 1980s to triple that today (with a similar number involved in organizing campaigns), but unionization has been undertaken at elite private as well as public research universities (Julius & Gumpert, 2003; Rhoades & Rhoads, 2003). For us, this trend raises the following question: to what extent and in what manner does graduate employee unionization represent a critique of universities and the direction they are moving?

For many graduate employee organizers unionization is quite explicitly a critique of the corporate turn of American higher education. Organizers describe corporatization as a major contributor to the rise of graduate employee unions; they offer a commentary on its influence on universities that is consistent with yet distinct from critiques by scholars. They also provide an account of graduate employee unions that undermines the claim of commentators, administrators, and faculty members that such unions are bringing an industrial model to the academy. Thus, as our title suggests, graduate employee unionization is both a symbol of and challenge to the corporatization of the American research university.

A critique of the contemporary research university has been issued from many quarters. In some cases it has come from the most significant and influential associations and policy organizations in higher education, though often in conflicting ways. For example, not long after outgoing president of the American Council of Education, Stanley O. Ikenberry, warned against corporate sponsorship of research and the commercialization of intellectual property for fear of conflicts of interest damaging academic culture (Wheeler, 2001), his same organization released a report calling for increased research ties to industry (Basinger, 2001). The differences expressed by Ikenberry and the subsequent report issued by both the ACE and the National Alliance of Business call attention to the contentiousness of opinion around the relationship between universities and private-sector forces.

Among scholars, one finds a similarly conflicted discussion of patterns of privatization in American higher education. On the one hand, several studies focus on the adverse effects of privatization on the research ethics and practices of faculty (Anderson, 2001; Blumenthal, Campbell, Causino, & Louis, 1996; Campbell & Slaughter, 1999; Louis, Blumenthal, Gluck, & Stoto, 1989), and on resource allocation patterns in research universities (Slaughter, 1998). On the other hand, many

scholars champion the desirability and significance of connecting with industry to enhance the economy and the growth of higher education (Clark, 2001; Fairweather, 1988; Geiger, 1990, 1993; Matkin, 1990; Stahler & Tash, 1994; Tornquist & Kallsen, 1994).

In regard to the domain of instruction, a common complaint among those tracking student attitudes and behaviors has been the trend in which students increasingly value making money over making a difference in the world (Astin, 1998; Kuh, 1999). Other scholars have tracked the increasing vocationalization of the undergraduate curriculum, critiqued by various national organizations in the late 1980s (Delucchi, 1997; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Rhoades, 1990). At the same time, scholars have offered a critique of colleges and universities as unresponsive to both the needs of their students as consumers or customers and to the needs of the employers hiring college graduates (Dill, 1999; Terenzini, 1999; Tierney, 1998).

At the heart of debates about the role of private enterprise in higher education are concerns about the degree to which private sources of revenue and market-driven forces will shape the values, objectives, and practices of research universities. We see the critique of graduate employee unions as consistent with these concerns, but as offering a distinct criticism of employment practices, seeing those as significant in their own right, even as they also see a link between those practices and quality education (for studies that address students and issues related to corporatization see Slaughter, Campbell, Holleman, & Morgan 2002 and Slaughter & Rhoades, 1990). Faculty unions provide such a critique as well, but for graduate employees the focus is distinctively on what universities are doing to their own students, by way of what they see as exploitation, in the interests not of students, either undergraduate or graduate, but of the institution.

For many observers of higher education it should come as no great surprise that graduate student unionization arises in part as a reaction to perceived shifts in the academy. After all, graduate employee unionization largely was born of the student anti-war and free speech movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, arising most vociferously at campuses such as the University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of Oregon, and University of California, Berkeley. The early graduate employee union push arguably represented a reaction to the emerging trend to lessen the importance of academic work, specifically teaching, and run universities with loss-cost labor (Vaughn, 1998).

It was in 1969 that the University of Wisconsin at Madison recognized the first graduate student union, the Teaching Assistants' Association (TAA), which several years later, in 1974, affiliated with the American

Federation of Teachers (AFT). At the University of Michigan, graduate student teaching and staff assistants also affiliated with AFT and reached their first contract with the university in 1975. Similarly, the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) of the University of Oregon affiliated with AFT and successfully negotiated their first contract in 1978. Graduate organizers at the University of California, Berkeley met far greater resistance than their Wisconsin, Michigan, and Oregon counterparts and struggled for over three decades to gain recognition from the UC administration. It was not until 1999, some 36 years after the initial organizing efforts of the former University-Employed Graduate Students (UGS), that organizers finally won recognition. It took another acrimonious-filled year to actually agree upon a contract (Leatherman, 2000).

By 1980, only a handful of graduate employee unions existed across the United States (Barba, 1994b). Gradually, however, additional unions and organizing drives emerged (Barba, 1994a; Saltzman, 2000; Villa, 1991). In fact, during the 1990s, the number of unionized graduate employees increased from 14,060 in 1990, to 19,900 in 1995, to 38,750 in 2001 (Smallwood, 2001). Although the American Federation of Teachers played a pivotal role in the early formation of graduate employee unions, today the largest union membership is with the United Auto Workers (42%) followed by AFT (24%) (Smallwood, 2001). In fact, the UAW has been so active in academe that a January 17, 2003 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ran a front-page headline in which "United Auto Workers" was scratched out and replaced by "United Academic Workers" (Smallwood, 2003). What we suggest in this article is that graduate employee unionization and the rise of UAW activity in the academy may be part of a major turn in the U.S. economy, as we move from an industrial to a post-industrial society.

When we think about the history of graduate employee organizing, we must remember the context of criticism within which this movement first gained strength. Our study suggests that such criticism of the academy not only continues, but has likely grown as a source of union organizing. But graduate employees engaged in union activities are not alone in their critique of the contemporary academy and the growing strength of a market-driven orientation in American higher education. As a background for understanding the distinctiveness of the graduate employee union critique, we now explore scholarly criticism of corporatization in some depth.

A Critical Framework for Viewing the Contemporary Academy

The vast majority of criticism of increased corporate influence in higher education derives from left-leaning scholars skeptical of capitalism, in general, and the growing influence of private capital in academe,

in particular. Much of the academic criticism has centered on an assault of “neoliberal” economic policies, characterized by the increasing prominence of capitalist and corporate influence in higher education policy circles (Apple, 1995, 2000; Chomsky, 1998; Giroux, 2002; Nelson & Bérubé, 1995; Rhoads, 2003; Rhoads & Mina, 2001). To some extent, there is a sense of a hostile takeover by an external enemy that threatens the basic values of the academy. The growing dominance of economically driven forces in higher education is seen as posing a major challenge to liberal learning and undergraduate education, as revenues are increasingly directed to science and technology at the expense of the humanities and social sciences (Nelson & Bérubé, 1995).

Because colleges and universities are such a significant discretionary cost to the public purse, and because they play such a crucial role in workforce preparation and economic development, higher education has been the target of much public and political criticism as business and industry have sought to increase their influence over the training and research and development roles of postsecondary institutions (Apple, 1995, 2000; Morrow & Torres, 2000). Often employing the discourse of “globalization,” and centered upon the need to remain competitive in an international arena, business and industry seek to channel state and federal resources more toward the ventures of global capitalism than to other educational goals, including efforts to advance citizenship in a global multicultural world (Burbules & Torres, 2000). Indeed, phrases such as “globalization” and “international competitiveness” are central to the discourse compelling entrepreneurialism in the academy.

Apple (2000) argues that calls for increased globalization have been used to support a “conservative restoration,” in which both neoliberals and neoconservatives share a common alliance to promote stronger connections between the international economy and education. While neoliberals advance the idea of the “weak state” and promote a market-driven view of education by stressing its’ connection to economic vitality, neoconservatives tend to promote greater control over teachers and curricula, arguing that schools and universities ought to promote an economic form of nationalism. “Among the policies being proposed under this ideological position [neoconservatism] are national curricula, national testing, a ‘return’ to higher standards, a revivification of the ‘Western tradition’, and patriotism” (Apple, 2000, p. 67). Neoconservatives thus suggest a “strong state” in which educators are controlled by state-mandated standards and assessment practices.

Consequently, although neoliberals and neoconservatives differ over the “weak state vs. strong state” debate, they are able to forge compromises in light of a common commitment to an economic-centered vision of democracy. The consequence, for Apple, is that democracy is no

longer seen as a political idea, but instead “is transformed into a wholly economic concept” (2000, p. 60). The conservative restoration then centers upon a consumerist mentality in which education is situated as a product exchangeable in an open market. The growing power of market-driven strategies in the academy has resulted in higher education itself becoming conceptualized as a commodity for international exchange under the supervision of the World Trade Organization (Altbach, 2001).

Yet there is another dimension to the academic critique of corporatization, a focus not on hostile takeover, but on internal dissolution. For example, in higher education the term “CEO” (Chief Executive Officer) is increasingly the title for what years ago was more often than not described as “President”; and the salaries and perks of these executives have escalated as a percentage of university personnel budgets (Benjamin, 1995; Nicklin, 2001). Similarly, business modalities such as Management by Objectives (MBO), TQM (Total Quality Management), CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement), and Strategic Planning along with a language of consumerism that situates students as “customers” and education as a “commodity” has become embedded in the culture of many universities (Altbach, 2001; Bensimon, 1995; Pallas & Neumann, 1995). Furthermore, a culture of assessment rooted in neoconservative views about the role “managers” ought to play in evaluating the performance of faculty and students has grown so commonplace that few even call into question the philosophical positions suggested by various measurement and evaluative processes. In the neoconservative quest to verify that colleges and universities provide a social good, and therefore deserve state support, we have ignored the reality that competing visions of what constitutes the social good in fact exist (Tierney & Rhoads, 1995). Consequently, the view that has come to define assessment is rooted in an economic model of U.S. society, and higher education has been firmly planted as an institution that ought to serve the economic functions of the larger society. Clearly, this is very much a pro-capital position.

Part of the context of this internal shift in orientation is increased public scrutiny over funding and accountability (this may be seen as part of the neoconservative shift). Universities have increasingly explored entrepreneurial avenues for generating revenue. This has led to a shift in the balance of research universities’ sources of monies; a declining share of institutional monies come from public sources, just as a declining share of state monies now go to higher education (although the monies in absolute terms have actually increased; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). These patterns consist of and coincide with a weakening of the public sector in general as privatization grows increasingly dominant throughout society.

As universities behave in more entrepreneurial ways, seeking to generate new monies in the face of economic structures they have lobbied to change, Slaughter and Leslie argue that “the academy has shifted from a liberal arts core to an entrepreneurial periphery,” in which “marketization” of the academy leads to the rise of “research and development with commercial purpose” (1997, p. 209). The global dimensions of “academic capitalism” are evident in Slaughter and Leslie’s study of higher education policy in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These countries developed higher education policies promotional of privatization (namely in the areas of academic research and development) as part of a global competitiveness agenda (Slaughter & Rhoades, 1996). In the process, faculty work and graduate and undergraduate education were significantly altered.

Some have argued that the dominance of capital-driven incentive systems and entrepreneurial efforts in higher education, shaped by compelling forces associated with globalization, pose serious threats to the role of the university in serving anything other than the generation of capital (Apple, 2000; Chomsky, 1998; Morrow & Torres, 2000; Rhoads, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). With the increasing influence of corporate and market-driven interests, the curriculum in higher education has seen a fundamental shift toward investment in programs and fields seen as economically productive, such as engineering, business, agriculture, the sciences, and law. Concomitantly, the humanities, arts, social sciences, and service professions (such as education, social work, and nursing) have experienced disinvestments. As Miyoshi argues, “There is a decisive change in the academic outlook and policy to de-emphasize the humanities and to shift resources to applied sciences. Culture—arts and literature—is being driven out of academia, just as in the old days, and has every sign of being reorganized into media, entertainment, and tourism—all consumer activities—that would be assigned a far more legitimate role in the emergent global economy” (2000, p. 18).

Yet, for the most part, scholars have not connected such patterns and resource allocation shifts to changing social relations that make the university ripe for social challenge and struggle from within. If we think of graduate students in the context of large, privatizing, globalizing universities, we can see that they are dually situated in a complex, post-industrial knowledge enterprise. They are at one and the same time consumers and employees; they pay for high quality educational services, while delivering educational services for the same enterprise which maximizes its revenues and productivity by managing human resources in such a way as to enhance the ability of faculty to generate knowledge (and its products) by exploiting the abilities of its own graduate customers. In

this context, many graduate employees have come to see themselves as “line workers in the production of knowledge,” doing the educational work of the entrepreneurial university (Rhoades & Rhoads, 2003). It is this critique, born of the perceived corporatization of the academy and expressed by graduate student organizers, that is of interest to us.

The preceding discussion is relatively consistent with a critical view of the contemporary academy and the changing role of private capital. Accordingly, and consistent with our own theoretical location, there are several points that help to frame our study of graduate employee unionization. Like some of the authors discussed in this section, we too are concerned about what may be lost if universities continue to lose autonomy to private sources of revenue, including corporations and their economic interests. Hence, going into our study we were curious as to whether any of the contemporary qualities of the academy are influencing graduate students’ decisions and commitments to organize unions. Is it possible that the increase in graduate employee unionizing reflects a new era in U.S. higher education?

A second concern raised by those critical of the supposed corporate turn relates to the decline in value of less revenue-generating fields of study. If some of these criticisms are on target, then graduate employee unionization might reveal differences across disciplines. This raises another important question: to what degree does graduate student union activity vary across academic fields of study? For example, are graduate students who are most committed to unionization coming from less lucrative fields of study?

A third concern raised by our analysis of the literature relates to resource allocation patterns and the possibility that research universities may contribute to perceptions of increasing social inequality and marginality within the academy. To what extent then does graduate employee unionization reflect the view that research universities unfairly allocate resources, and, in essence, devalue the instructional mission of the university?

Methods

Data were collected using a multisite case study approach, a method particularly suited to exploring contemporary phenomenon within real-life contexts (Yin, 1989). We relied upon the multiple sources of evidence and research tools typically associated with qualitative inquiry, specifically employing formal structured and informal interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Maxwell, 1996). A qualitative approach seemed most appropriate given our interest in the

narratives graduate student employees construct to describe their experiences and involvement in unionization. In selecting a narrative-oriented approach, we work in the tradition of higher education analysts from various theoretical perspectives who underscore the need to attend to cultural and ideational aspects of university life (Clark, 1970; Rhoads, 1998; Tierney, 1988).

Site visits lasting two to three days were conducted at each sample institution during the academic year 2000–2001. We visited four universities where graduate employee unions exist, are recognized, and have or are seeking a contract with their respective institution: Michigan State University (MSU), New York University (NYU), University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the University of Michigan (UM). The corresponding graduate employee unions are as follows:

- UCLA—AGSE/UAW Local 2865 (Association of Graduate Student Employees/United Auto Workers)
- NYU—GSOC/UAW Local 2110 (Graduate Students Organizing Committee/United Auto Workers)
- MSU—GEU/AFT (Graduate Employees Union/American Federation of Teachers). Also affiliated with the Michigan Federation of Teachers and School Related Personnel (MFT&SRP) and the American Federation of Labor/Council of Industrial Organizations (AFL/CIO)
- UM—GEO/AFT Local 3550 (Graduate Employees Organization/American Federation of Teachers)

In selecting sites we wanted a geographically diverse sample (with the exception of the South, where graduate employee unionization is rather limited). In addition, we wanted a mixture of well-established (UM) and more recently formed (MSU, NYU, UCLA) unions. Finally, we wanted a mixture of public and private universities: at the time of the study, graduate employees in two private universities had organized (NYU and Yale)—in only one case (NYU) had the union been recognized by the administration.

We conducted 40 formal structured interviews, which lasted from one to two hours and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim (in addition to 36 interviews with graduate student employees active in the union, we also interviewed four union staff who were not graduate students). Participants were purposefully sampled based on their active involvement in union activities at their university (“active involvement” was determined based on an analysis of lists of organizing committee members). Purposeful or criterion-based selection “is a strategy in

which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). Such a sampling strategy was appropriate given that we wanted to understand unionization from the standpoint of graduate employees who were actively involved in the union.

The study also employed informal interviews with key informants who helped us negotiate the various organizational contexts. Data from these interviews were generated through field notes. Additionally, we observed various settings at the sites, including formal unions meetings, informal planning meetings, and classes taught by graduate teaching assistants. Finally, a variety of key documents were collected and analyzed. Documents included union contracts, organizational mission statements, letters, memos, fliers, newspaper and magazine articles, and archival documents outlining the history of graduate student organizing at individual institutions.

In terms of human subject concerns, widespread practice in higher education research is to protect the identity of the individual, but not necessarily the institution, as long as the individual cannot be identified by a description of her or his location within the organization. Furthermore, although it is common in field-based studies to offer anonymity to participants, we instead offered ours the choice of remaining anonymous or allowing us to use their names. Only one individual requested anonymity, and we have followed those instructions accordingly. Finally, although we had the option of using our participants' names, we chose instead to simply identify their institutional and union affiliation, thus offering a degree of anonymity.

Our analytical interest was in the extent to which, if at all, graduate employee unionization represents a critique of universities and the direction they are moving. We wanted to explore this question in terms of the views of those who are active in the unions. This marks a contrast with our previous work, which focused on the public discourse of graduate employee unions as presented on Web sites (Rhoades & Rhoads, 2003). In this previous work, we addressed the public identities, ideologies, and strategies of graduate employee unions. Here, we concentrate on graduate student organizers' convictions relevant to the contemporary academy and graduate employee unionization. Thus, we make a distinction between the public discourse of the graduate employee union movement, which must take into account a broad array of graduate student union members and their respective political and ideological positions, and the more personal beliefs and convictions that often motivate individuals to engage in the difficult and time-consuming work of union organizing.

Data analysis was conducted both deductively and inductively. First, utilizing categories derived from our previous analysis of Web sites (Rhoades & Rhoads, 2003), we examined whether graduate employees articulated ideologies that represented one of three general frameworks: (a) a traditional, union-based ideology of bread and butter issues such as health care insurance and wages; (b) a professional-based ideology that concentrated on issues that are significant to academics as professionals—academic freedom, educational quality, involvement in decision making; and (c) a more public-interest-oriented ideology that emphasized larger issues of social justice and serving the public good. In this regard, part of the data analysis proceeded deductively. However, qualitative research also enables researchers to generate understandings that emerge from the data, from the experiences of research participants. This inductive form of theory generation (“grounded theory” is how Glaser and Strauss 1967 describe such a process) has been very useful for us in exploring the relationship between graduate employee unionization and the critique of the contemporary academy. Accordingly, this paper reports our more inductive findings tied to perceptions of increased corporatization within research universities. Additionally, to help ensure the data’s authenticity, we employed member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We asked several graduate student employees and key informants to review preliminary drafts of this paper. Comments from these reviewers led to additional conversations about the evolving paper and shaped later versions.

The Interview Sample

Late in the data collection stage it became fairly clear that the substance of the critique of the university was in some interesting ways shaped by the nature of the students involved in unions. Of particular significance were the fields of study most typical of the active members of graduate employee unions. Ninety-one percent (33) of the graduate student organizers who were interviewed were from the humanities, social sciences, and professional studies (namely law and education) with the specific disciplines of sociology (8), English (6), history (4), and cultural/American studies (4) leading the way. A small number of interview participants came from the natural sciences and engineering (3). This roughly parallels the general breakdown of students actively engaged in graduate student unions at the four institutions, be that as a union steward or a member of the mobilizing team, steering committee, or executive board. With regard to this latter point, at each site we obtained lists of students actively involved in some form of union activity,

including students beyond those whom we interviewed. From these lists, we identified areas of study: of 128 students, 106 (83%) were in the humanities, social sciences, or professional studies; only 22 (17%) were in the natural sciences or engineering. The discourse of the students not uncommonly directly reflected the language of particular fields of study. For example, one student likened the contemporary university to McDonald's, drawing on metaphors and references from sociology (Ritzer, 1998; Weber, 1968): "I saw . . . that the changes that were going on in the university were part of a corporatization of the academy. I think there is a McDonaldization of the university. And I think having a union is one way to have some control over that, some input, to slow it, or stop it, which I doubt will happen. So unionization is really an attempt to de-McDonaldize the classroom and pedagogy, kind of a Weberian assault on the iron cage of humanity" (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865, UCLA/University of California).

We also were able to trace student involvement by gender, which was much more evenly distributed than field of study: we interviewed 17 men and 19 women. Perhaps more importantly, the overall gender breakdown of students involved in union leadership roles at the four universities was 68 men and 60 women. Despite the considerable number of women, it is interesting that gender issues played a relatively minor role in the private discourse and ideologies of the graduate student union leaders we interviewed, surfacing from time to time in discussions about the need for child care and collaborative, nonhierarchical forms of organizing. Such forms of organizing could be observed at various union meetings where heavy emphasis was placed on consensus building.

For the graduate student employees we interviewed, we were also able to gather data on their ethnicity and socioeconomic background. Union leaders, like graduate students generally, are predominantly White (75%): in our sample of 36 students, 27 were White, four were Asian-American, two were Latino/a, two Multiracial, and one was African American. Again, this parallels data on the movement's leadership in general, where we found 78% of the graduate students to be White (the racial identity of the movement's leadership was solicited from key informants). The dominance of Whites in the movement was a source of concern for many of the graduate union leaders we interviewed. Several expressed the belief that many graduate students of color are involved in social movements to advance racial equality, and consequently, have little time left for union organizing. One graduate union leader, a woman of color, believed that graduate students of color are more likely to take off-campus employment. She saw the problem as one of race and class; she believed that the financial challenges of

underrepresented graduate students of color are likely to necessitate employment beyond a teaching or research assistantship. The additional work, like racial activism, leaves little remaining time for union organizing. Finally, at one site in particular we observed a clear strategy to recruit graduate students of color by making affirmative action and the diversification of the graduate student body key concerns of the graduate employee union. For example, at the headquarters of this particular graduate employee union, we saw sheets of newspaper print listing points to be addressed through upcoming contract negotiations and affirmative action was included as a key topic of concern.

In terms of social class, graduate employee union organizers are overwhelmingly from middle-class backgrounds or higher: three identified as having come from upper-class backgrounds, 14 from upper-middle class, 13 from middle class, six from working class, and none from lower-class backgrounds. The class origins of graduate organizers highlights a central concern of the movement, a concern expressed by nearly every person with whom we spoke: That graduate school, as a consequence of both costs and lack of financial support, increasingly has become a middle- and upper-class experience and that doors are being closed to prospective graduate students from lower-middle-, working-, and lower-class backgrounds. If this in fact is the case, we might also expect a differential impact to be experienced across racial groups, given the relationship between race and class.

Findings

A majority of the graduate employee union organizers articulated a critique of the corporatization of the research university (31 out of 36 graduate employee organizers responded to one or more questions by discussing the corporatization of the academy). Such criticism was largely in response to questions we asked about the nature of graduate employee unions and their present-day rise to prominence. Examples of these sorts of questions include the following:

- Why is it necessary for graduate student employees to unionize?
- What led students to organize at your institution?
- What are the basic purposes or functions of the union?
- What beliefs are central to the character of the union?
- In what ways is unionization a reaction to the contemporary university?

The latter question presumes that something may be different about the contemporary context, given the incredible increase over the past few

years, but the question in no way assumes the nature of such a difference, nor does it lead a respondent toward a particular point of view. Thus, even we were surprised by the number of graduate organizers who discussed corporatization issues. We also note that not a single respondent refuted the notion that union organizing was in some manner or form a response to corporatization within academe (again, we are not claiming that it is *the* reason, but that it is *a* reason). Several did not raise the issue of corporatization, but none offered any commentary that suggested a rejection of this critique.

The essential features of the critique were as follows. In general terms, graduate employee union organizers decried the increasing prominence of a corporate-driven economic logic in the contemporary university. A smaller number of graduate organizers tied increased corporatization to globalization and its influence on the academy. In addition to criticizing changing economic practices, many interviewees also described what they saw as a corporate management culture that has taken a stronghold on the research university. Finally, the majority of graduate union organizers disparaged the exploitation of the workforce and the use of part-time labor, relating these patterns to a devaluing of undergraduate education at research universities. This attention to workforce issues is in considerable part what distinguished their critique from that of other commentators on privatization in the academy.

A caveat is in order. We are quite aware that there are alternative explanations for some of the conclusions drawn by the organizers we interviewed. For example, when organizers point to corporatization as one of the sources of problems with undergraduate education, one might choose to question such a critique and instead point to the research push and the quest for prestige as the real cause, as Fairweather's (1996, 2002) research tends to suggest (a neo-Marxist would likely see "prestige" and "capital" as highly intertwined). Likewise, the over reliance on part-time instructors and TAs as a sign of the lack of commitment to undergraduate education has been analyzed with little to no mention of a corporate turn in the academy (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Gappa & Leslie, 1993). Certainly, one could study the problems of undergraduate education without examining the changing political economy of research universities, including the global and corporate pressures that they face (again, a neo-Marxist analysis likely would not ignore the role of capital). One might, for example, suggest that large classes run by graduate teaching assistants are the necessary byproducts of a more democratic and highly accessible higher education system. Indeed, there are many legitimate counter interpretations to the points conveyed by our research participants. But we suggest that despite the many alternative

explanations we should take seriously the comments of graduate employee organizers, if for no other reason than to raise questions that often are left unasked. With the preceding in mind, and in keeping with a field-oriented approach, our objective is not to critique each and every point made by graduate employee organizers, but instead we wish to convey the nature of the organizers' interpretations and discuss the connections or lack of connections to existing critiques of the corporate turn.

The Corporate Academy

Graduate employee organizers often expressed disdain over what they described as the "corporate academy." In deploying this phrase, they offered a critique of organizational initiatives based primarily on market-driven strategies and economic-oriented concerns at what they saw as the exclusion of other academic ideals. In their formulation, the academy was being taken over by corporations, a sentiment sometimes articulated in terms of particular companies:

I think unionization is all about the contemporary university. I don't think that you would have a movement as big as it is now. It didn't happen back when Wisconsin first organized. Twenty-five years ago the big fight was to keep Dow Chemical off campus. But today, the campus is Dow Chemical. They've recognized that the way to take the academy was not simply to recruit, but to own, to possess the academy. The culture wars were not simply fought at the ideological and cultural level, but there's an economic level to it that is far more powerful. (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU)

Part of the critique of the corporate academy centers on faculty and program sponsorship on the part of corporations. Graduate employee union organizers repeatedly expressed concerns about such relationships.

I think a lot of people are watching the graduate students now, because we're making some kind of headway. There's a corporate movement within the academy and unionization is one way of responding. The international headquarters for Taco Bell is in Irvine and at the School of Management at UC Irvine there are actually Taco Bell professorships. It sounds pretty absurd but the faculty actually put this on their business cards. . . . It's certainly true that the university is more corporatized, but there are a lot of organizations trying to bring greater corporate consciousness to the academy. And the graduate student union I think is on the forefront of creating increased consciousness—a consciousness that management is organized and therefore labor should organize as well. (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865, UCLA/University of California)

As the preceding quote suggests, graduate organizers saw unionization as a response to, not a cause of, corporatization in academe. Several directly addressed the fact that for them graduate student unionization was

a resistant movement seeking to challenge market-driven aspects of the university. As one graduate student organizer at NYU said: “I think [graduate student unionization] is quite explicit in its critique. It’s very aware of the increasing corporate logic of the academy and of capital being the dominant logic, of trying to re-situate the relationship between labor and capital” (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110).

Another aspect of the criticism graduate students have of the contemporary research university is the tendency to place the bottom line over the well-being of students and employees. To graduate student organizers, such qualities of the corporate academy reflect anything but the “collegial community” that they often are accused of threatening with their turn to collective bargaining. The following graduate student spoke to these issues:

I really think that the university has become much more corporatized, especially in terms of human workers being seen as resources and the goal to maximize them as resources. I see them acting more and more like business enterprises and less as educational institutions. And so I think a lot of this has come to a head as workers have come to see how they are being defined by the university. What I see is that the university wants it both ways. They want to make corporate kinds of decisions when it comes to funding, but when it comes to dealing with the graduate students embracing the same discourse, then the administration claims that, ‘This is a collegial community and why do you want to disrupt that.’ They make the basic claim that they have everybody’s best interests in mind. (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865, UCLA/University of California)

A second graduate student noted how the UC administration blamed unionization for creating corporate relations between graduate employees and the university (typically when graduate student organizers spoke of “the administration” or “administrators” they primarily referred to high-ranking institutional officials from the level of dean on up to provost or chancellor). One graduate student organizer noted how a university administrator went so far as to reference Mario Savio and his critique of the corporatization of the university, apparently unaware that graduate employee unionization largely was born as a consequence of increased concern for student rights.

I think universities are running more and more like corporations. The university attempts to class bait the unions. They did in our case, by saying, ‘This is a university not an assembly line, why do you want to have this corporate relationship with us?’ It really rang hollow. And over and over teaching assistants stood up to the administration at UC Berkeley. I remember a meeting with Chancellor Berdhal. I remember him saying that, ‘It’s really ironic that we’re meeting in the shadows of Sproul Plaza where Mario Savio critiqued the corporatization of the university. I think it’s really ironic you students

want to turn to a corporate model by unionizing.’ He took it one step further by class baiting the UAW and saying, ‘You don’t want this to be an assembly line but why are you bringing in assembly line workers to represent you.’ But this was shot down immediately by the students saying, ‘We’re not the ones who created this corporate structure. But if that’s the way you guys want to play it, we know what we need to do and we need to get some power on our side. We’re not the ones who made this corporate structure. You have all the power and you’ve defined us as assembly line workers. Who better now to represent us than the UAW?’ (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865, UCLA/University of California)

A number of graduate student organizers made connections between the corporatization of the academy and globalization. These comments provided some insight into how one might interpret the turn toward entrepreneurial models of higher education and graduate employee unionization as a response. As one UAW/University of California organizer theorized, “You have to ask the question why did mobilization work this time. And I don’t know. Maybe if unions had tried systematically years before it might have worked then. But the new economy and the changing workforce makes it really easy for people to say, ‘Oh yea, we are the union members of the future.’ It makes sense. There are no manufacturing jobs left, or relatively few, relative to 30 years ago.” For a few others as well there was a sense that the changing context of higher education brought about to a large extent by globalization has encouraged corporatization. One graduate student organizer alluded to the increased role universities are expected to play in promoting the economic well-being of the broader society. This student felt that universities have become research centers for U.S. corporations seeking to expand their influence beyond national boundaries.

Although graduate union organizers offered varied descriptions of what they meant by “globalization,” their primary understanding centered around economic pressures connected to forms of global competition that are changing the fabric and archetype of the elite U.S. research university.

Just look at the way NYU has repositioned itself as the global university, through global real estate, global media, and global entertainment. And the idea of New York as a global city. They stopped a long time ago trying to be an Ivy League university and so NYU turned down this road a long time ago, trying to become a global university. In many ways we became the testing ground over the battle to see if you could have a corporate university. And you can’t. Not because simply graduate students get pissed off, but everyone gets pissed off. (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU)

Similarly, a graduate organizer at Michigan State University criticized the growing involvement of corporations at MSU and President Peter

McPherson's determination to advance the university's global influence through its Internet-based "Virtual University": "So much of the university's money is coming from corporations and going into activities like Virtual University and teaching over the web" (GEU/AFT, MSU). This graduate student felt that McPherson's background in global banking and international development, along with his lack of academic credentials, made him perfectly suited as "CEO" in the emerging model of the global university.

As the preceding comments suggest, the critique of the research university as a global enterprise centers around economic pursuits and expansionism—the university as a corporate enterprise seeking to expand its markets and influence—not the emergence of a global multicultural university in which students and faculty represent and interact around the diverse cultures and regions of the world. In this regard, the critique is focused on a particular strain of globalization that may be described as "corporate globalism." A graduate employee union organizer at MSU alluded to corporate globalism and its effects upon the academy:

We see capital, the idea of a capitalist system, kind of infiltrating and penetrating higher education, producing corporate education, and changes in the workplace, changes in how we relate to each other. . . . We see massive amounts of private funding for research. Now, maybe it's been there all along, but it seems like this has intensified in the past 25, 30 years. . . . We see more students and less full-time faculty, more part-timers, and they are in charge of the dirty work, the business of the classroom. I think these changes are a direct response to global changes in culture, in our society, and the economy. (GEU/AFT)

The preceding student spoke cogently about an issue raised by many of the organizers with whom we spoke. They saw the overreliance on part-time instruction as a strategy to reduce the cost of undergraduate education and thereby free funds for research and development activities associated with corporate expansionism of the global variety. Promoting Web-based forms of education and instruction transnationally was an example cited by several graduate organizers.

Interestingly, several comments from graduate union organizers indicated that the center of a radical campus critique of globalization rests not with graduate employee unions, but with the undergraduate anti-sweatshop movement. One graduate organizer in particular stressed the key role undergraduates have played in challenging multinational enterprises and raising awareness about workers' rights around the world. Several stated that the antisweatshop movement had been instrumental in orienting some graduate union organizers to the effects of globalization. "The antisweatshop movement, which has been very successful in

many ways, brought a lot of attention back to campuses. This has helped motivate people to focus more on what's happening on the campus. People are thinking more globally" (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU).

Globalization, then, from the perspective of some graduate employee union organizers, offers a broad context and background for understanding the increasingly economic-driven strategies of universities seeking to maintain and/or advance their competitiveness within an international economic arena. The influence of globalization also explains in part why several graduate union organizers interchangeably used the phrases "corporate university" and "global university." Graduate student organizers thus see the efforts of administrators to compete in a global environment as one more pull that leads to a devaluing of undergraduate education.

Promotion of a Corporate Management Culture

Several graduate organizers expressed the belief that unionization in many ways has served as a catalyst for heightening awareness about corporatization in the academy. In their eyes, it has enabled graduate students to see the exploitation inherently embedded in a corporate logic that has taken hold with the rise of a culture of corporate management. Although such comments are clearly part of a critique of the corporate academy, we include them in a separate section simply because they address the more cultural facets (and less the economic facets) of the contemporary university. The following comments capture this sentiment.

The extent to which we have come to recognize and talk about the university as the corporate university has come up finally in the atmosphere of unionization. People have begun to recognize that the mythology of the ivory tower is that—a mythology. The fact is that the university has become a business enterprise. Universities have learned a great deal from the business world and are doing a variety of corporate-kinds of things to compete, and in this sense they are employers. It's easier to see oneself as a cog in the wheel, as an employee, potentially exploitable, when you see the university as a corporation. You see the steady decrease of full-time employment and so you see your chance of getting a full-time position as something quite slim. And that most of us are going to have to piece together 2-3 jobs without benefits just to survive. When we look at this trend, then it seems to leave little option but to unionize. We're getting the point about unionizing. (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU)

Again, then, graduate employee union organizers reject the claim that it is unionization that brings a corporate model to higher education. Instead, they see union activity as a reaction to an increasingly corporatized

management culture in higher education. In the words of a University of Michigan graduate union organizer: "The more managerial they get, the more we feel the need to organize" (GEO/AFT Local 3550).

In referring to a corporate management culture, the particular phrasing varied among interviewees. Yet the general critique had to do with the character, language, and behaviors of university central administrators. A graduate union organizer in GSOC/UAW Local 2110 at NYU put it this way: "It's being done at the highest levels. I mean the people we hire to run our universities look more and more like corporate leaders." A second NYU graduate union organizer added, "I think there is a corporatization of the academy, with presidents coming from the private sector and getting CEO kinds of salaries."

While some graduate student union organizers criticized the backgrounds of university presidents, others saw corporatization reflected in the campus landscape and culture. A University of Michigan graduate student organizer active in GEO/AFT Local 3550 put it this way: "Corporatization is a huge thing here. You see it as you drive around on campus. They're in the process of putting together this Life Sciences Institute. It's basically going to work as a drug pipeline for drug companies who are going to take publicly supported research and turn it into medications that they're going to charge people exorbitant prices to use. I mean it's embarrassing to me to be associated with it" (GEO/AFT Local 3550, UM). A second UM graduate student echoed the preceding remarks, while also reflecting back on the origins of the union movement at UM: "Early graduate union organizers used to protest over the use of university research in Vietnam, for the military. It must have been perfectly clear to the people who were unionizing here that there were these increasing connections, not only organizational connections between corporations and the universities, but between the management structure and philosophy of corporations and universities."

Frequently, graduate student union organizers alluded to compromises that they felt were being made as a result of the shift to a more corporate management culture. A Michigan State University graduate student active in GEU/AFT offered these remarks: "The university's president just made several statements about how student are customers and I fairly believe that's pretty much how he views students. Not only that, but it's more than interesting that the International Center has become this place of fast food restaurants. I remember years ago it was a cafeteria. I just think that there's a lot more corporate money than we know, going into research here. And everything is justified in terms of accounting, but some of the decisions are not conducive to a good education." And a graduate student from NYU added the following remarks:

At NYU, and I know a lot about this because I've worked in several roles in several different departments, the university does a lot of its planning through cost-benefit analysis and they speak of students as clients and administrators and staff as service providers. We're getting away from a meritocracy, which in one sense is good—but we're paying presidents like CEOs and the way this gets justified is that 'He's a very successful CEO—he brings in money, and he doesn't lose the university's money.' So when a president brings in money or doesn't lose money then the president is seen as successful. But in terms of teaching and learning, those questions don't really come into the realm of upper-level administration. They get shoved down to the lower levels. . . . Overall, what I'm saying is that we're adopting the culture of the corporate world and important issues related to the intellectual and academic life of the university get lost. (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU)

Embedded in the preceding comments is a sense not only of employees and students being exploited, but of something being lost in terms of the ultimate character and goals of the academy. The something seems to connect to long-standing ideals associated with valuing undergraduate education, the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake, and a separation between business and educational endeavors.

Exploiting Part-Time Labor and Graduate Employees

For many of the graduate union leaders with whom we spoke, pedagogical issues were central to their condemnation of the corporate academy. They saw the university as focusing on creating the most cost-effective undergraduate program possible, and thereby compromising the quality of the undergraduate experience and undermining important goals linked to teaching and learning. Throughout our site visits discussions of improving teaching and learning were commonly linked to unionization activities. For example, at one union planning meeting we observed, the thrust of the discussion centered around how organizers might adequately convey the seriousness with which they viewed undergraduate education and the need to elevate the teaching aspect of academic work. A consistent belief expressed was that university efforts to advance efficient techniques for undergraduate instruction often had a "dehumanizing quality" about them. Relatedly, a central narrative about the corporate-driven classroom was the large number of students per instructor and the university's lack of commitment to ensuring that undergraduates are instructed by professors. The latter critique relates to the adjunctification of the academy and the casualization of the workforce to which union leaders spoke.

More specifically, graduate union leaders offered a critique of universities' reliance on part-time instructors. They argued that the heavy use

of part-time instructors to carry out the brunt of undergraduate instruction amounts to a deskilling of academic labor, a consequence of which is to limit the influence of the professorate in organizational decision making. A student leader at UCLA talked about this strategy: "I think that the contemporary university is at the forefront of the attempt to create a temporary labor movement, to move labor from permanent to part-time. UC was one of the first places to implement voluntary early retirement. They are trying to get faculty to retire early so they can replace them with 2-3 part-time lecturers" (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865).

In the eyes of graduate employee union leaders, the deployment of part-time instructors to reduce labor costs is part of the corporate logic that is increasingly embedded in the academy.

As one graduate student at the University of Michigan said, "I think people point to trends—the reliance on graduate students as instructors and the fact that universities are more focused on part-time faculty than they used to be. I think these trends suggest to a lot of people a more corporate or business approach" (GEO/AFT Local 3550). And a graduate student leader at MSU noted, "They're giving us bigger and bigger classes with less to work with in terms of teaching resources. Whether you're assisting a professor with a course or teaching your own course, they're just getting larger. With 300 students [in a class] . . . it's clear that the university has attempted to get more out of us for less" (GEU/AFT). A second MSU graduate student echoed this view:

We're a very small portion of the annual budget, but we teach something like 25% of the undergraduate courses. And yet we get paid less than one tenth of a percent of the overall budget. So there's definitely a discrepancy there. It's the corporation thing . . . they want to dump the money into a new science building, and into this or that, but they're not gonna dump it into people who are making this university run—the graduate students who are teaching the undergraduates. (GEU/AFT)

And a union organizer working with NYU graduate employees talked about research that was conducted on graduate teaching assistants and their work load. The organizer noted the importance of documenting the fact that graduate teaching assistants are indeed "workers":

The university is relying heavily on graduate assistants to do more and more work done by faculty. Early on in the process [of unionization] we started collecting data and it was eye opening. At first our campaign was that 'We have the right to organize' and along with that building evidence of our right. There was the Yale study, 'Casual in Blue,' on casualization. It was a real strength of our movement to have data on the increasing importance of the role of graduate students as teaching assistants and as instructors. So the data was very important for us to be able to show that these people are workers

and that they do a good portion of the work at NYU. It was over 50% in the College of Arts and Sciences. The core of the undergraduate curriculum was covered by graduate students at around 87%. So, clearly we have a changing labor force in the academy and the university is trying to capitalize on the position in which graduate students find themselves—one of largely disempowerment. (Organizer GSOC/UAW Local 2110)

At the heart of the conflict between graduate teaching assistants and university administrations has been debate over the rationale for the use of graduate students as part-time instructors. University administrators have argued that graduate students gain a valuable apprenticeship experience as a part-time teacher; therefore, they have often argued, in response to campaigns to unionize graduate employees, that graduate students are apprentices, not employees. But such claims ring hollow to most graduate teaching assistants, many of whom speak of few opportunities for full-time faculty jobs down the road, teaching outside their areas of academic study, teaching the same large classes for several years, and grading stack after stack of blue books. The following four quotes all speak to issues tied to the academic labor of teaching assistants and offer opposition to the idea of “TAing” as an apprenticeship:

TAing is a good experience, but I don’t think the reason we TA is because they want us to have teaching experience. I think they do it because they want to save money. We’re basically cheap labor. Giving us the teaching experience is kind of the argument they give, but I don’t think someone needs to TA for six years if they are simply learning to teach. Maybe a few quarters would do it. I don’t think TAs do a bad job, don’t get me wrong. It’s just that if TAing is to gain teaching experience, we don’t need to do it for so long. (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865, UCLA/University of California)

The hiring of faculty has certainly gone down and the chance of us getting faculty positions is not very high. I mean none of us will be going on very soon to be full professors and do what our advisers are doing. A lot of us are looking at adjuncts or postdocs and so it’s harder and harder to say what we are doing is an apprenticeship. (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU)

I think that the apprenticeship model has failed, especially in certain fields. There are students teaching classes that don’t even relate to their fields. So there’s no ground to stand on to say that that’s part of their learning. It’s cheap labor. (Member AGSE/UAW Local 2865, UCLA/University of California)

It seems clear that the role of the graduate student has changed rather dramatically. What we have is much more of an employment relationship than one of mentee working under a particular professor. Very often, at least at Michigan, people are teaching classes that aren’t under the supervision of their academic advisor, and often they teach classes outside of their specialization. (GEO/AFT Local 3550, UM)

The rationale and depth of sentiment underlying the statements of the graduate employees may vary, but what is shared is the conviction that they are “cheap labor.” Implicit in such phrasing is a sense that graduate employees are exploited. Some union leaders are more explicit in articulating this sense of exploitation, the sense of being used in ways that do not serve the interests of the graduate employees as students. As one graduate union leader explained, “In our department alone there used to be an unbelievable number of Ph.D. candidates admitted to our program. They essentially glutted the market. So now it’s quite easy to take advantage of us as workers, since we have so few options down the road. At the same time, more part-time positions are used to replace full-time faculty, which then leaves us with fewer options as well” (Member GSOC/UAW Local 2110, NYU).

Discussion

Graduate employee unionization is characterized by many union organizers as a challenge to the corporatization of contemporary research universities in the United States. From their perspective, the corporate academy is reflected in the heavy reliance on part-time instructors and teaching assistants, and the general adjunctification of undergraduate education. Graduate employees spoke of their concerns by invoking such phrases as the “knowledge factory” and “assembly line undergraduate education,” calling into question the cost-minimizing strategies employed by research universities at the expense of high quality undergraduate education and living wages for graduate instructors. Graduate union organizers see such strategies as part of a shift toward business models of education and a general turn toward corporate mindedness among university administrators. Indeed, they point to a corporate-oriented discourse and inflated salaries at the upper levels of university administration as evidence of the corporate turn. For some graduate employee organizers, their critique is linked to efforts on the part of research universities to compete economically in a global market place in what may be described as “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

We believe it is worth noting that much of the Left’s critique of the corporate academy often turns to globalization as a force acting upon research universities. The influence of globalization then may be understood as a possible indirect cause of increased graduate student union activity. To be more clear, as the United States increasingly seeks to support global corporate enterprises as part of a turn to neoliberal privatization, there is a relative decrease (as a percentage of funds to public colleges and universities) in support for “public good” enterprises such as

higher education. Additionally, as corporations increasingly seek to compete in a global marketplace, they must continually minimize labor force costs while increasing their research and development initiatives as part of a strategy to ensure their overall competitiveness. With fewer dollars relative to overall operating costs and with corporations charting the course toward global privatization, research universities seem to have little alternative but to minimize their own production costs (instructional costs) and turn more and more to research and development as revenue-generating activities. In essence, universities are forced to mimic the strategies of the corporate world (although shipping production processes to Third World countries does not seem to be a viable option).

The distinctiveness of the critique offered by graduate employee union organizers lies in its focus on employees' rights and working conditions. It goes beyond decrying the use of part-time instructors, which limits or damages the long-term opportunities for graduate students to become full-time faculty. The discourse and ideology of the graduate union leaders situates graduate employees as "workers," sometimes as "marginalized workers." As such, it challenges views publicly conveyed by some university administrators, who argue that union activity among graduate students is inappropriate in the collegium and that such students are apprentices in a guild and not workers in an industrial model of employment. Yet graduate employee organizers consistently tell a story of unionization as a response to a corporate course that has already been charted by university administrations willing to exploit the labor of graduate students. In this regard, graduate employee unions are not just challenges to, but also are symbols of, corporatization.

One particularly interesting way in which graduate employee unions mark what is happening in higher education is by the fields in which graduate union leaders are located. Overwhelmingly, they are found in the social sciences and humanities. These are precisely the fields that are experiencing a declining share of resources in a period of academic capitalism, when increasingly institutional monies are disproportionately allocated to departments and units that are perceived to be (or have the potential to be) productive of new monies. Thus, academic capitalism is sowing the seeds of its own challenge. The disciplinary homes of the graduate union organizers highlight the growing divide and differentiation in universities between the fates of different fields. They also highlight, in an ironic way, the different functions of various fields; part of the role of social sciences and humanities is to generate social critiques of and commentaries on significant social institutions, patterns, politics, and practices.

The growing unionization of graduate employees may have significant implications for the future shape of the academy. Perhaps the most

obvious implication will be increased costs tied to better wages and benefits for graduate employees to the extent that they are negotiated by graduate employee unions and to the extent that such wages and benefits are offered to nonunionized students to undermine an anticipated or articulated move to unionize. The issue of cost is somewhat paradoxical. One might argue, for example, that many of the issues raised in this study relate in one way or another to the rising costs of higher education. The very use of graduate students as teaching assistants in part may be explained as an effort by universities to control costs and thus maintain a degree of access. Thus, a question that arises with increased graduate employee unionization and criticism of the corporate academy is this one: To what degree is it even possible for research universities to offer accessible undergraduate education if all classes are to be taught by ladder-track faculty?

Although the issue of labor costs is significant, we think there is a much larger issue lurking beneath the surface of graduate student unionization. That issue is the relationship between on the one hand, knowledge construction and transference, which represents the work of graduate students and faculty, and on the other hand, the operational/administrative side of university life. In this regard, graduate employee unionization clarifies a general pattern in the academy—the increasing distance between knowledge workers and managers and the increasing control of the former by the latter. More and more, faculty are managed professionals (Rhoades, 1998). Now, graduate unionization makes explicit the reality that graduate students are also a resource to be managed and potentially exploited. Given that today's graduate students are tomorrow's faculty, what can we expect in the coming years as larger numbers of graduate students are socialized to the professorate while members of a graduate employee union? How will this impact their orientation to the organization, its administration, and faculty unions?

As research universities increasingly embrace academic capitalism, new class issues and identities emerge. In effect, the shift to a more corporate model of the academy is likely to produce a clearer delineation of manager and worker, with graduate students pushed toward embracing identities as workers. At least this is one possible reading.

An alternative reading speaks to emerging realities that are more post-industrial than industrial, more fluid and polyvalent than fixed and dichotomous. Arguably, what graduate employee unionization brings out into the open is the extent to which significant boundaries have become blurred in the post-industrial university. With corporatization in the academy has come, more than ever, a blurring of boundaries between public and private worlds and practices, between not-for-profit and for-profit

settings and activities. In some ways, we can see this phenomenon encapsulated and inscribed in the lives of graduate employees. They are not just customers, paying for educational services, or apprentices learning how to perform certain services; they are also employees who provide educational services and produce academic work. And in a post-industrial world that focuses on consumption to the exclusion of all else, the graduate employee unions bring back to center stage the fact that people are not just consumers, but they are employees, workers, and producers as well. What remains is to move beyond a corporate model based on a totalizing and globalizing exploitation of academic work for short-term economic value, to develop a forward-looking alternative construction of a global university concentrated on more than the pursuit of new revenues.

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