



At Harvard, Union Organizing In The Ivory Tower

News

11.15.16

The article, “At Harvard, Union Organizing In The Ivory Tower,” featured on *WGBH News*, discussed how Harvard University will be the first school to vote on a graduate student union following the National Labor Relations Board’s ruling in August, which determined that students who are research and teaching assistants at private universities do have the right to unionize.

Joe Ambash weighed in on why research and teaching should not be considered work.

“The notion that students who are doing teaching or research as part of the curriculum are entitled to bargain with their institution flies in the face of the very nature of what academic life is about,” said Joe, who represented private colleges in a 2004 labor case that found graduate students at Brown University were not employees.

The 2004 case was overturned by the NLRB’s ruling in August, but Joe said he maintains that graduate students have primarily an educational relationship with their institution.

He said public institutions are different than private institutions, where students are allowed to teach or conduct research as a part of their curriculum.

“[Private institutions are] different than public sector universities where graduate assistants are asked to teach for the purpose of teaching undergraduates and for the purpose of earning money for tuition,” Joe said.

Ambash said graduate student unions at private institutions could bring unintended consequences, including higher administrative costs and tuition.

“It’s not sufficient to say, ‘Okay, maybe they can reallocate the money.’ The question is, ‘What programs in the institution would suffer as a result of having to reallocate funds to deal with unions or to deal with higher stipends?’” Joe said.

To read the full article, please visit [WGBH News](#).

Please reach out to our [Media team](#) for any news inquiries.

Related People



Joseph W. Ambash

Partner

617.532.9320

Email