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NEWS >>

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO STUDENT LIBRARY EMPLOYEES JOIN TEAMSTERS

Low Wages, Irregular Hours Assured Vote for Local 743

University of Chicago student library employees have voted to unionize, with more than 80 percent of voters supporting affiliation with Teamsters Local 743.

These workers — 226 in total, known as the Student Library Employee Union (SLEU), and affiliated with Local 743 — will be the first nationally-recognized undergraduate and graduate student union at a private university.

The election was held June 2-8 in a vote count conducted by the National Labor Relations Board.

“We welcome these student workers into the Teamsters family at Local 743,” said Debra Simmons-Peterson, President of Local 743. “We’ve been representing the professional library staff at the university since 1980 and that experience will enhance our representation of the student workers.”

“I’m, of course, thrilled about the election results, but I am especially excited for what this means for me as a student worker, where having a voice in collective bargaining will really impact my relationship with the university,” said Katie McPolin, a second-year student worker at Eckhart Library. “Student labor makes the day-to-day functioning of this university possible, so it is imperative that student workers should have a voice in how it functions.”

Before the union vote, students felt that wages were too low and hours too irregular for part-time student library workers in need of a secure source of income. Some students even took on second jobs outside of the university system to cover expenses necessary to receive an education.

Moving forward, Local 743 will negotiate with University of Chicago for a contract that prioritizes issues such as employee wages, hours, and third-party legal representation in cases of Title IX, ADA and labor violations. Students say that only as unionized workers will they be able to protect their rights as well as fully engage in the academic mission of the university.

“I’m so excited about the outcome of the election because for me, the most pressing issue is fair pay,” said Sloan Rucker, a student worker at the Joseph Regenstein Library. “I know many students who overwork themselves due to the low pay. The overwhelming support for unionization confirms this.”

The university’s student library employee union is part of a national trend to unionize student workers at universities. The university’s Graduate Students United, a coalition of graduate student employees, is also seeking to unionize.

“As someone from a right-to-work state, I’m proud of my fellow student workers fighting back against dominant anti-labor narratives,” said Michael Weinrib, a third-year student worker at the Regenstein Library. “Young people from my generation are demanding that our voices be heard, and unionization is an important part of our movement. Our election sets a precedent for student workers across the country; they can demand a seat at the bargaining table and make their universities more equitable and accessible.”