



STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

April 13, 2021

President Vincent Price
Office of the President
Duke University
Box 90001
Durham, NC 27708-0001

Dear President Price,

I am writing this open letter to urge the Duke Administration to recognize the Duke University Press employees' union and to enter into a collective bargaining process. I am aware that Duke has negotiated with other employees and has collective bargaining agreements with employees in maintenance, dining, transportation and even faculty. I last wrote to your predecessor - President Brodhead - asking for support of contingent faculty's right to form a union. I am aware that there was some resistance to unionization from the administration at that time and am hopeful that under your leadership this important process can move forward seamlessly.

I read an article in the Chronicle from 11/13/20 (*Q&A: President Vincent Price on leading Duke through a pandemic, University's anti-racist mission*) in which you mention that you'll have a staff survey this spring to assess the climate in workplaces around the University. While I hope that you'll move forward with that assessment, you have already received feedback from the Duke University Press employees about issues of equity. They have expressed concerns about discrimination, as well as issues with staff turnover, lack of professional growth opportunities, and compensation that is not commensurate with employees' quality of work, experience or cost of living, all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

In that same Chronicle article, you not only acknowledge that Duke is only as strong as *its people*, but you also mention the importance of investing in staff, a belief in a distributed system of decision making, making financial decisions in light of your values, and valuing equally every member of the Duke community. I am aware that you have been a part of increasing the minimum wage for Duke employees and contract workers, have improved specific policies for staff and faculty, and have used a progressive approach to making cuts (with less impact on lower income staff). I am also aware that you have committed the university to an anti-racism mission.

It is because of these bold statements and actions in support of *Duke's people* that I am hopeful that you will be supportive of the efforts of the Duke University Press staff to organize.

As the director of an organization that has a contract with the same union that is working with Duke Press employees - Washington-Baltimore News Guild – I can attest to the benefits of working with a union for both employees and management. Having a contract eliminates arbitrary decision-making by management and provides clarity about solutions that employees have for concerns in their workplace. It creates a transparent structure for management and employees to have critical discussions about pay, benefits, conditions, and equity.

As an alumna of the Duke Divinity School (1994) and the leader of a workers' rights organization that has been housed at Duke's Center for Documentary Studies since 1992, I want the university to be a leader in how it treats *its people* – one that will respect Duke Press employees' right to organize, that will listen to their concerns about the need for higher pay, clearer paths for advancement, and equitable enforcement of policies, and that will sit down with the workers and negotiate in good faith.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melinda Wiggins', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Melinda Wiggins
SAF Executive Director