



# DOUBLE TREE DOUBLE STANDARD

Comparing Harvard University's  
Workplace Standards  
On and Off Campus



## Harvard's Hotel compared to the Harvard Community's Standard

By Gabriel Bayard

**A**s a Harvard student, I have been taught that the Harvard community is inclusive. It comprises not just students, but faculty, the administration and staff. Together, as the University has taught us, we build “a community guided by shared values” such as “respect for the rights, differences, and dignity of others.”<sup>1</sup>

When I learned that Harvard owned the DoubleTree Hotel in Allston, I wondered if our university would treat hotel workers with the same respect and dignity afforded to campus workers. At Harvard, workers make a living wage, have affordable health-care for themselves and their families and have a voice at work. They participate in the process of making their workplaces safer and better. Given Harvard's definition of community, I asked myself: does Harvard's workplace standard apply to hotel workers at Harvard's hotel in Allston?

In order to answer this question, I surveyed dozens of DoubleTree workers over the summer of 2013. I was dismayed to hear stories of chronic pain, debilitating injuries, poverty and loved ones without health insurance.<sup>2</sup> Ninety-six percent of surveyed workers said that their jobs had gotten worse in the past six years; 84% said

they could not imagine working there for the next ten years. I was shocked. This was not the Harvard that I knew.

Harvard is one of the most respected institutions in the world. As a Harvard student, I want to ensure that all members of the Harvard community – especially workers at Harvard's hotel – are treated with equal dignity. In this



report, I share some of the dozens of stories I have heard from workers at the Harvard-owned DoubleTree. Their stories are Harvard's stories, and I hope that our community will listen and act.

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## Overview

In 2005, Harvard University purchased the Doubletree Hotel in Allston, Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> Harvard is the sole owner of the hotel, and contracts Hilton to manage the property. On March 12th, 2013, a supermajority of workers at Harvard's DoubleTree came together to ask their employer for a fair process to decide upon unionization.<sup>4</sup>

A fair process is an established, common agreement whereby the employer pledges not to retaliate while employees decide whether or not they would like to join a union. Since 1999, all hotel workers that have chosen to unionize in Boston and Cambridge have done so through fair process agreements.<sup>5</sup> In December 2011, Harvard Law School dining services workers, who were vendor employees of Restaurant Associates, were granted a fair process and chose to become members of Boston's Local 26.

However, on May 8, 2013 in a letter to Local 26, Harvard Human Resources stated that the University "respectfully declines Local 26's request for the University to insert itself into this organizing campaign."<sup>6</sup> Since then, workers at Harvard's DoubleTree have not received a fair process.

## Pain and Stress

Emma Perdomo works hard as a housekeeper at Harvard's DoubleTree. Studies have shown that housekeepers like Emma assume 8,000 different body postures every shift.<sup>7</sup> The more rooms housekeepers are required to clean, the more housekeepers bend, twist and lift to prepare guest rooms, clean bathrooms, make beds, vacuum and dust.



In the hotel industry, work is typically distributed to housekeepers in the form of a daily quota. At Harvard's DoubleTree, all housekeepers surveyed were assigned fourteen

suites per day. This is almost double the quota of workers at union hotels in the Boston area.<sup>8</sup> While working the same eight hour shift as union housekeepers, they are required to perform almost twice the amount of work.

***"Every day I would arrive home with pain."***

For Emma, who has worked at Harvard's DoubleTree for nine years, "work changed after the recession..they started to put pressure on us; they left me alone to do my work at night. Every day I would arrive home with pain." 100% of room attendant surveyed at Harvard's DoubleTree said that they felt pain when they were at home and that pain kept them from other activities after work. The top three areas of pain for room attendants were backs, shoulders and knees. Emma reported that her back, feet and legs were in pain while she was taking the survey.

Heavy workloads can create stress and anxiety both at work and at home. As a result of her

### At Harvard's Hotel

of room attendants surveyed:

**91%** said that since they started working at the hotel, they do more work

**100%** said that they were in pain while taking the survey

**100%** said that they were in pain at home

**100%** said pain kept them from other activities after work

### At Harvard<sup>9</sup>

the University coordinates a "Health, Safety and Workloads Committee" to "review complaints concerning safety, sanitation, workloads and work standards" for dining hall workers. Moreover, there is a defined process to address "unreasonable workload claims."<sup>10</sup> Workers are also reimbursed annually for their purchases of safety equipment that decreases risk of injury at work.<sup>11</sup>

increased workload, Emma reported: "I started to have stress at my job." She explained that, "I would get really nervous, and start feeling heart palpitations. I couldn't sleep. I would wake up feeling a lot of pressure. Now when I wake up, I feel my heart beating quickly. I have called to make a doctor's appointment."

The stress of work has carried over into Emma's home life. She explained: "Because I am so stressed, I don't have the patience I used to have with my thirteen-year-old son. I want to be a good mother, but I find myself snapping at him because I am tired, stressed and in pain."

## Injuries

Delmy Lemus has been a housekeeper at Harvard's DoubleTree for five years and knows firsthand that her job can be dangerous. Housekeepers are injured at almost double the rate of non-housekeeping hotel workers.<sup>12</sup> They are more likely to hurt their lower backs



than workers in any 20 common manufacturing jobs, including truck and auto assembly.<sup>13</sup>

"I never have enough time to complete my assignments in the evening, so I am always rushing," Delmy said. Rushing

can be dangerous, especially for housekeepers. As Delmy explained, "when I rush, I hurt myself."

In the last five years, Delmy reported that she has hurt her shoulder, injured disks in her spine, and broken her nose at work. When Delmy told her supervisors she had broken her nose, she said they responded by asking, "How many rooms do you have left to clean?"

During her pregnancy, Delmy explained that managers continued to assign her the same workload. "I was nine months pregnant and still doing difficult heavy labor. This injured my spine."

**"I was nine months pregnant and still doing difficult heavy labor. This injured my spine."**

time for me to go on my maternity leave, my supervisors pushed me to keep working. I worked until 3 days before my daughter, Arianna, was born." Because of her back injury,

Delmy said: "I could not even pick up Ariana. It hurt me very much, and made me angry and sad to not be able to care for her like I wanted to."

In 2012, Delmy had to take disability leave as a result of her back injuries. During this time period,

### At Harvard's Hotel

of workers surveyed:

**78%** report that they do not consider their workplace a safe place.

**100%** of room attendants had cleaned up blood, vomit and/or defecation

### At Harvard

Workers who have been employed at Harvard dining services for less than seven years receive 75% of their weekly pay during disability leave. Workers who have been employed for over seven years receive 100% of their regular pay.<sup>15</sup>

she received a reduced portion of her wages, or approximately \$325/weekly after taxes.<sup>14</sup> She faced the challenge of supporting Ariana on a reduced paycheck while feeling serious pain.

## Family Health Insurance

Sandra Hernandez has worked at Harvard's DoubleTree for twenty-one years. She is one of many employees at Harvard's hotel with uninsured loved ones. "I want to be able to afford health insurance and the benefits that come along with it," she said.

"My earnings don't allow me to afford family coverage. If I decided to obtain family coverage, I wouldn't be able to bring enough money back to my home."

Sandra cannot afford health insurance for her family at Harvard's DoubleTree. According to Sandra, medical coverage including dental and vision for her, her husband and their daughter would cost \$170 per week. At



her hourly wage of \$16.59, the cost of this plan requires 25% of her monthly earnings before taxes. As a result, Sandra only purchases health insurance

***“If my husband gets sick, I don’t know what I would do.”***

for herself. She relies on state subsidies to insure her daughter through Mass Health, while her husband remains uninsured.

Lack of affordable family health insurance at Harvard’s DoubleTree subjects workers to constant uncertainty. Without health insurance, a minor incident can be financially devastating and a serious illness that could have been treated earlier can go undetected. As Sandra explained, “in case of emergency, I wouldn’t know what to do. If my husband gets sick, I don’t know what I would do.”

### **At Harvard’s Hotel**

The average weekly premium cost for healthcare was **\$69.81** for surveyed workers who purchased the hotel’s plan. This totals **\$279.24** per month.

### **At Harvard**

Harvard Business School, Law School and Medical School dining services workers, who are subcontracted employees of Restaurant Associates, pay a weekly charge of **\$4** for individuals, **\$8** for individuals and one other family member and **\$12** for a family for health care. This totals a monthly charge of **\$16**, **\$32** or **\$48**.<sup>16</sup>

## **Poverty**

Fen Fen Wang, like many other workers at Harvard’s DoubleTree, struggles to make ends meet. “I need to pay my bills, I need to support my family,” said Fen Fen, a housekeeper at Harvard’s DoubleTree and mother of two.

Last winter, Fen Fen was not consistently assigned a full time work schedule. “I don’t know what will happen to me and my family this winter,” she said. “I wanted more hours at the hotel [last winter], but I couldn’t get them. I looked for part-time jobs because I wasn’t making enough money, but it was impossible because my schedule at the hotel was always changing.”

Unable to get another job or earn enough at

Harvard’s DoubleTree, Fen Fen was forced to rely on government assistance during Boston’s winter. From November 2012 to April 2013, Fen Fen reports that she qualified for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). She used the \$200 a month she received from SNAP to feed her four year-old and nine year-old.

Low wages and an irregular schedule also mean that Fen Fen has been unable to give her daughters the help she feels they need to succeed at school. “If I made more money, I could afford to pay for after school help for my daughters,” she explained. “My daughter who is in third grade has a lot of homework to do, and I can’t always help her. I want to send her to classes where her teachers can help her, but to do that you have to pay extra money. I just don’t have it.”



***“I don’t know what will happen to me and my family this winter.”***

### **At Harvard’s Hotel**

among surveyed workers:

**19%** reported that they use Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)

Workers earn **68¢ on the dollar** of Harvard University Dining Services employees who have two years or more experience at the University.<sup>17</sup>

### **At Harvard**

in the University Dining Services the average wage after two years across classifications is **\$21.73**.<sup>18</sup>

Harvard also offers a set of learning and development programs that provide tuition assistance, professional development, literacy classes and other education classes to its employees.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the University also contends that “education is at the heart of the Harvard experience, not only for students, but also for all members of the Harvard community.”<sup>20</sup>

## Harvard Can Do Better: A Path Forward

This report shows that Harvard does not uphold its high workplace standard at its hotel in Allston.

In dozens of surveys, workers at Harvard's DoubleTree reported pain, high levels of injury, lack of access to family healthcare and poverty. Workers reported needing to supplement their wages with state subsidies like Mass Health and SNAP to make ends meet. They spoke of bringing pain and distress caused by working at the hotel home to their families. Many expressed anxiety about being able to provide adequate financial and emotional support for their children.

By contrast, workers on Harvard's campus receive a living wage, paid holidays and vacation pay. They enjoy benefits including safety equipment, accident pay when injured and can participate in workplace safety committees. Harvard offered university employees opportunities for workplace education and advancement.

Harvard "strives" to be a "stable, responsible enterprise... and an employment leader in the larger community."<sup>21</sup> Harvard's high workplace standard must be applied to all Harvard workers,

including workers at the Harvard-owned DoubleTree in Allston. DoubleTree workers are Harvard workers and their stories are Harvard's story. As George Sabatino, a cook at the Harvard Business School, explained, "I have prepared food and taken care of students, faculty and staff for over thirty years. Workers at the DoubleTree work for Harvard just like me. They deserve dignity and respect at work."

"I have worked at the Harvard Law School for three years. When my co-workers and I decided to organize to make our workplace better in 2011, Harvard listened. They quickly agreed to a fair process, and we chose to become members of Local 26.

I'm proud to work at Harvard, and I hope that the University will treat workers at the DoubleTree Hotel the same way they treated us. They are part of our community, and I want them to be proud to work for Harvard too."

—**Judy Rouse**  
Restaurant Associates Employee at Harvard Law School Dining Services, 3 years

1 "A Message from the Vice President for Human Resources." Employment at Harvard. Available at: <http://www.employment.harvard.edu/insideharvard/mision/hausammann.shtml>

2 During the summer of 2013, Gabriel Bayard surveyed 26 workers at Harvard's DoubleTree during his participation in Local 26's "Organizing Beyond Barriers" summer program. Bayard interviewed workers off-site from the hotel on a set of 48 survey questions. Local 26 staff members tabulated and analyzed survey results to form the content of this report. Local 26 staff members also performed follow-up interviews with four workers based on their responses to the survey: Emma Perdomo, Delmy Lemus, Sandra Hernandez and Fen Fen Wang. All statistics included are calculated based on the 26 workers' surveys. Workers had the option to decline to answer specific questions during the survey; as such some of the statistics included were calculated with a reduced number of responses.

3 "Harvard Purchases DoubleTree Hotel." Harvard Crimson, 1/7/05. Available at: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2005/1/7/harvard-purchases-doubletree-hotel-in-the/>.

4 "Employees of Harvard-Owned DoubleTree Suites Consider Joining Union." Harvard Crimson, 3/12/13. Available at: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2013/3/12/doubletree-harvard-union/>

5 UNITE HERE Local 26 Research Department.

6 Letter received by Brian Lang, President of Local 26 from Bill Murphy, Director of Labor and Employee Relations at Harvard Human Resources dated May 8th, 2013.

7 Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. Occupations & Workplaces: Hotel Housekeeping. Available at: <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshaanswers>.

8 All housekeepers on the survey reported a 14 suite quota. In the Local 26 city-wide standard, suites count as 2 rooms. According to this conversion rate, Local 26's 15 room quota becomes a 7.5 suite quota in a hotel with all suites, like the DoubleTree. This is almost double the workload.

9 Harvard's Community Standard throughout the

report is based on the University's contract with UNITE HERE Local 26 for Harvard University Dining Services employees effective 9/26/11-6/19/17, "Harvard Local 26 Dining Services Agreement," except when otherwise stated.

10 See Article 18, sections 2 and 4 of "Harvard Local 26 Dining Services Agreement"

11 See Article 7, Section 2 of "Harvard Local 26 Dining Services Agreement"

12 "Why Hotel Housekeeping is Dangerous Work." Hotel Workers Rising. Available at: <http://www.hotelworkersrising.org/media/Why%20Housekeeping%20is%20Dangerous%20Work.pdf>

13 Marras, WS. "Field Applications of the Lumbar Motion Monitor." 2006. Biodynamics Laboratory, Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering, Ohio State University. Available at: <http://biodynam-ics.osu.edu/research.html#tools>

14 See paystub from Delmy Lemus for week of 4/5/13-4/11/13 for "Temporal Total Disability" check for \$325.60.

15 See Article 11, sections 2(a) and 2(b) of "Harvard Local 26 Dining Services Agreement"

16 Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Welfare Fund.

17 The average wage among surveyed workers was \$14.85 an hour, excluding calculation of additional wages for tips. This is 68% of the average of wage of Harvard dining hall workers (see 18).

18 See Article 6, Section 10 description of wages for workers who have worked at Harvard for 2+ years as of June 13th, 2013 in "Harvard Local 26 Dining Services Agreement."

19 "Learning and Development." Available at: <http://www.employment.harvard.edu/benefits/learndevelop/>

20 "Learning and Development." Available at: <http://www.employment.harvard.edu/benefits/learndevelop/>

21 "Labor Relations at Harvard." Available at: <http://laborrelations.harvard.edu/welcome/>