

GEO

Graduate Employees Organization

February 18, 2008

Dear University faculty and staff,

As you may know, the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) began renegotiating its contract with the University in November 2007. GEO represents approximately 1,700 Graduate Student Instructors and Graduate Student Staff Assistants who work in units throughout the University of Michigan Ann Arbor campus. Facilitating discussion sections, overseeing labs, and grading papers, it is GEO's stance that graduate employee work is valuable to the University, and that working conditions should reflect that value. GEO has shown good faith in its bargaining, with its membership voting to extend the contract for two weeks past its March 1 expiration (until March 17), to give more time for negotiations to reach a conclusion. We look forward to working with the University to finish these negotiations in a timely manner while ensuring the core principles of **Access, Compensation, and Equity** for which our members stand.

The tone of negotiations between GEO and the University began cordially, bolstered by our extensive work with the University this past year around protecting benefits for same-sex couples after the February 2007 Michigan Court of Appeals ruling. This negotiation cycle, we worked with the University, helping them reserve rooms for negotiations when they had difficulty; we have also provided assistance in other ways. Our weekly negotiation sessions and membership meetings are attended by a range of members concerned about a high-quality teaching environment. We want to ensure that concerned faculty know what has been happening as well. The following timeline gives a general picture of negotiations so far:

- *October*: Both sides agree on a set of ground rules for bargaining sessions. This includes time limit on presenting counter-proposals.
- *November*: Negotiations begin. GEO presents a slideshow on member survey data, the relatively low cost for the administration to extend health care to low fraction GSIs, and discrepancies in current pay. For the latter, GEO points to the administration's own published cost for a graduate student to live in Ann Arbor and attend UM (\$15,980, not including tuition and fees), and the fact that a .50 GSI is paid \$781 less than this figure (approximately \$15,199 before taxes).
- *December*: GEO presents its child-care subsidy proposal, which include increased subsidies, more flexibility in eligibility requirements, and increased day-care hours. Proposals are also presented concerning better accommodations for employees with disabilities, anti-bullying language, summer funding, a parental leave policy, and job postings.
- *January 10*: Administration rejects GEO's main proposals, returning with current contract language.
- *January 17*: GEO presents salary and benefits proposals. These include tuition waivers and no-premium healthcare for low-fraction employees (those working at .25 or below) and wage parity across fraction levels, as well as a 9%, 9%, 9% salary increase for the next three years.
- *January 24*: No counterproposals from the administration.
- *January 31*: Administration presents counterproposals to health care and compensation proposals, again with existing contract language. The proposed salary increase is 2%, 2%, 2%. GEO members at the table argue that 2% does not even cover cost of inflation and that the administration has proposed three years of wage cuts.
- *February 14*: GEO counters the administration with a proposed salary increase of 9% in the first year, with the second and third years of the contract keeping up with the cost of inflation. A 9% increase in the first year will close the gap between the .50 GSI salary and the administration's cited cost of living and attendance while keeping up with the rate of inflation.
- *February 20*: With the current contract set to expire on March 1, as a show of good faith, GEO membership voted to extend the contract's coverage by two weeks (plus the weekend of March 1).
- *March 17*: GEO's contract expires.

For more information regarding GEO's activities, please visit our website at <http://www.umgeo.org>, where you can learn more about GEO, download the union's newsletters, and keep up-to-date with bargaining sessions.

Sincerely,
GEO members and supporters