

20 March 2008

Dear University faculty and staff:

We are writing on behalf of the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) to inform you about the possibility of a GSI work stoppage on March 25 and 26. GEO is prepared to call a work stoppage if the administration does not move toward a contract that reflects GEO's set of proposals. We think our proposals are reasonable and address the professional needs of the University's graduate community.

*Background: 2007-08 contract negotiations*

GEO began renegotiating its contract with the University in November 2007. The organization represents approximately 1,700 Graduate Student Instructors and Graduate Student Staff Assistants who work in units throughout the University of Michigan Ann Arbor campus. Graduate employee work is valuable to the University, and it is GEO's stance that working conditions should reflect that value.

GEO has shown good faith throughout the bargaining process, and the membership even voted to extend our contract two weeks past its March 1 expiration date. We did this to give the bargaining teams the time they needed to reach an agreement that ensures the core principles of Access, Compensation, and Equity for which our members stand.

Our extended contract expired on Monday, March 17; in order to show good faith toward bargaining and retain the benefits of working under contract, we extended our contract once again to March 24. In our current negotiations GEO has won an increase in **child-care subsidies** and **paid parental leave**. However, the administration remains reluctant to engage with several of our core proposals.

- We have asked for **wage parity** across employment fractions. Currently, employees working at lower fractions make less per hour than employees working at higher fractions. *The administration has proposed to retain current contract language on this issue.*
- GEO has proposed that GSIs working at .2 fractions and above receive a **full tuition waiver**, and for employees working below a .2 to pay a lower percentage of tuition than is currently stipulated. *The administration has proposed to retain current contract language in this area.*
- GEO has proposed that all employees receive zero-premium **health care coverage**. *The current proposal from the administration is that employees working at .2 and above receive this coverage.*
- GEO has also proposed a **salary that brings GSI wages in line with the cost of living in Ann Arbor**. There is currently a \$781 gap between what a .5 GSI makes in a year and what it costs to live in Ann Arbor for the academic year according to the University's own Office of Financial Aid. *The administration has countered with a 3% increase in all three years of the contract, plus a \$150 "competitive adjustment" in year 1.*

*What now?*

The administration claims that they would like to settle this contract and avoid a work stoppage. However, in the first three bargaining sessions of this week, their bargaining team failed to deliver *any counterproposals*. Thursday's bargaining session presented marginal movement on behalf of the administration. If negotiations fail to yield satisfactory results within the next few days, it is likely that GEO will call for a work stoppage.

### *Work stoppage*

The proposed dates for the stoppage are **Tuesday, March 25 and Wednesday, March 26**. In the event of a work stoppage, members and allies will not hold classes, and they will be picketing outside major buildings on central campus. We want to emphasize that GEO has not yet called the stoppage. We remain hopeful that the bargaining process will yield a contract that both sides can embrace. Our membership, however, has decided to stand strong on the issues in our platform. Solidarity demands that we see to the needs of our whole bargaining unit, and we will fight for a contract that reflects that principle.

### *What you can do:*

- Honor the picket line
  - Avoid entering university buildings
  - Don't hold class. If this is not an option, consider holding class off-campus.
- Wear a button in support of GEO.
- Talk to your students about a possible work stoppage and the importance of standing in solidarity for social justice.
- Join the picket line (or bring us coffee!)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to talk to us about these issues.

Sincerely,  
GEO members and supporters