

GEO proposes changes to 10-term rule, disability accommodations

GEO met with UM's bargaining team for the second negotiation session on Dec. 13. GEO's team was backed up by 49 members who came to support the union and observe the proceedings.

"We once again exceeded our turnout goal and I was particularly excited to see so many new faces," said Matt Desan, GEO's co-organizing chair.

During the session, GEO made several proposals regarding eligibility for and access to employment, as well as for support on the job. First, the union proposed removing the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts' 10-term rule, which limits graduate employees to five years, or ten terms, of funding from the College.

GEO argued that various LSA departments arbitrarily issue waivers to student employees, allowing some students to bypass the time limit, but not others.

The union also proposed that the university improve the central job-posting Web site and enforce strict rules for posting jobs. This would allow all potential GSIs a fair chance to gain access to GSI positions. GEO also proposed sweeping measures to give employees recourse against on-the-job bullying by superiors or colleagues.

Finally, the union proposed to change the way that GSIs with disabilities receive necessary accommodations. Under current practice, employees must take the initiative and navigate the university bureaucracy in order to receive the accommodations needed for employment. Under GEO's proposal, the university would be required to take a proactive role.

GEO members present said that the talks continue to be amicable, with both sides asking questions. However, GEO is still waiting for the university to respond to Nov. 29 union proposals on membership cards, time at orientation and access to member information. According to the ground rules established by GEO and the university, counter-proposals are due on the table no later than two weeks after one side makes a presentation.

Your GEO Calendar of Events!!

Bargaining Schedule for Jan 2008.
Be there! Drop by for any amount of time!

Week of Jan 7-11 Proposals on benefits -- health
Location TBD care, mental health, dental, vision

Week of Jan 14-18 Proposals on salaries, tuition
Location TBD waivers and training

From the grassroots

Among the new faces in the crowd of GEO members who attended the bargaining session on Dec. 13 was Mandy Davis, a fifth-year student in Comparative Literature.

Davis, who studies African literature and teaches an introductory composition course in the Department of English, said she was at UM during the last contract negotiations in 2004-2005, but started getting involved in the process this year.

"It was a crazy year last time around," she said.

Davis observed that she was struck by the cordiality and formal tone of the negotiations.

"I'm impressed with the professionalism – the efforts to communicate back and forth. Each side is trying to understand what it's being told by the other," she said. "It's an opportunity for education. I wish I could show this to my students so they can see how education comes from asking questions," she added.

Of the topics at hand at the session, Davis said that she was most interested in the discussion surrounding the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts' 10-term rule, which limits the amount of funding from the college to employees to 10 terms.

Davis said she doesn't particularly understand why the rule exists or the reasoning behind its enforcement. She said she was happy GEO was proposing to eliminate the rule and wanted to hear UM's rationale for it. "I wanted to see what sort of information the university would present on why it's in place," she said.

Davis also said she was impressed by the turnout, as well as GEO's organization around the event.

"I'm impressed with all the dedication that all these people from GEO are putting into bargaining – from the people at the team, to the signs in the hallway directing you to the session, to the people sitting at the table outside with T-shirts and sign-in sheets," she said.

Finally, Davis encouraged fellow GEO members to turn out at future bargaining sessions to witness the importance of what goes on there. "It's a different view of what we do at GEO," she said.

And for people who don't have much time?

"It's open to people to stop in for a short while," Davis said, noting that she had come to the session for 30 minutes.