

## GEO tables wage proposals

Challenging UM to back up its own estimates for the needs of graduate employees with adequate funding, GEO presented a comprehensive and reasonable package for a salary increases, tuition reductions and summer bridge pay on Jan. 17.

The centerpiece of the proposal is a 9 percent raise for each year of the contract. Currently, a GSI working at a .5 fraction for two terms earns \$15,199 – \$781 less than the university estimated cost of attendance for the same eight-month period. When taking into account a conservative adjustment for inflation, the initial year's 9 percent raise would close the gap.

GEO negotiators explained that 9 percent raises for two successive years would allow GSIs to afford to pay for their expenses. They contended that the university's figure for the cost of attendance is inadequate.

"UM's cost-of-attendance number is a low-ball figure," GEO lead negotiator Colleen Woods said. "It only leaves \$75 a week for GSIs to pay for their needs outside of rent, books, food and taxes. Our proposal begins to address that gap."

The university's figure also only allows for graduate employees to cover eight months of expenses. However, departments require their students to continue making progress toward their degree during the summer without paying them.

In order to begin to address this problem, GEO put forward a summer bridge pay proposal. GSIs would receive a lump-sum summer paycheck equivalent to one-half a month's salary for each term taught during the year. For example, a GSI who worked at a .5 fraction for both terms would earn a roughly \$1,900 summer stipend.

"With the research expectation during the summer, it's tough to make ends meet – especially if you have to travel and sublet your

apartment," said Erica Albert, a GEO member who attended the session.

Another part of the plan would adjust the weekly work hour requirement so that low-fraction GSIs earn the same hourly wage as their high-fraction counterparts. For example, currently a GSI with a .25 fraction is expected to work 12.5 hours a week, while a .5 fraction GSI is expected to work 20.

"We've rationalized all the fraction work hour requirements," Woods said.

The union is also proposing expanded tuition waivers, providing a full tuition waiver for .2 GSIs and increasing other low fractions' waivers by 20 percentage points.

"We have not expanded this for the last six years. But tuition has gone up by 7.4 percent this year alone, and we have individuals who work at low fractions going farther in the hole," GEO bargaining team member Julie Robert said. Finally, GEO proposed eliminating the \$89 registration fees all GSIs currently pay. "These fees amount to a flat tax on our members," Robert said, adding that low-fraction GSIs suffer the most. The fees represent 9 percent of the income of a .05 fraction GSI, and 1 percent of a .5 fraction.

At other universities, including Michigan State, graduate employees have discovered that their registration fees go into university funds designated to pay GSI salaries.

GEO expects resistance from the university on its proposals and encourages its members to turn out to support the union's efforts to win gains.

"These are things our members have asked for, but now our members have to fight for them," Woods said.

The next bargaining session will take place Thursday Jan. 24 in Palmer Commons, which is located one block east of the Rackham Graduate School near the Power Center.

### GEO plan highlights:

- 9% raise each year
- all fees waived
- tuition waivers increase 20%
- pay rate same for all fractions
- summer bridge pay equal to 2 weeks pay per term worked

## University fails to address GEO childcare issues

In a counterproposal that union negotiators say shows the university's low prioritization of graduate student parents, UM rejected or ignored every one of GEO's ideas to improve child-care access to GSIs.

Paradoxically, at the end of the session, UM's bargaining team informed GEO that they could not extend bargaining until 5:30 p.m. next Thursday because several university negotiators had "child care" problems.

The cruel irony of the comment seemed to escape university lead negotiator Ron Dick.

In its proposal regarding childcare, which took the university six weeks to develop, UM simply crossed out GEO's proposals regarding childcare and submitted the current contract article.

"They did not address any of our concerns," Kairos Marquardt, a GSI and parent who attended the bargaining session, said.

The union had proposed expanding childcare subsidies from \$1,870 to \$2,600 per term for the first child and from \$960 to \$1,400 per term for the second and third children.

In addition, GEO had proposed 24-hour access UM child-care facilities, which currently require parents to pick their children up for lunch and close at 4:30. Parents who are late are charged \$2 per minute in fines.

"Having all these rules is a pain," Marquardt said during a caucus session.

"With GSIs teaching classes during evenings and lunch time, and having employment responsibilities that extend into the night, extended access is critical," GEO bargaining team member Gene Cassidy said after the session. He added that the GEO grievance committee received a report from a GSI in the math department who was forced to grade until 1 a.m., demonstrating the potential need for increased hours.

Finally, GEO proposed eliminating a requirement that spouses or partners of graduate employees work at least 20 hours a week in order for them to be eligible for the subsidy. The current restriction makes most interna-

(See **UM FAILS** overleaf)

# UM FAILS

(Continued from front)

tional GSIs ineligible to use the child care facilities, as their dependents cannot legally work in the United States.

In presenting the university proposal, UM lead negotiator Dick explained that the university was confused by much of the language that the union had put forward in the proposal.

GEO negotiators were appalled that UM simply removed that language instead of attempting to clarify it in the six weeks since it had received the proposal, or at least asked questions in the three bargaining sessions since GEO presented it.

“Essentially he said ‘this language is confusing so we struck it.’” That’s not how you respond if you’re confused,” said Alyssa Piccard, an American Federation of Teachers consultant and former GEO negotiator.

Preceding the proposal, the university brought in consultants from the Office of Work and Life to give a presentation on the current state of childcare at UM. GEO Lead Negotiator Colleen Woods said that the presentation did not provide much new insight into childcare.

“Thank for your presentation, which confirmed much of the information our members know already. However, your proposal addresses none of our concerns,” she told Dick afterward.

In other proposals, the university proposed eliminating language that guaranteed GSIs the right to a telephone, office space, copying privileges and computer access, replacing it with a generic statement guaranteeing GSIs access to the materials necessary to do their jobs as determined by individual departments..

“It’s not our intent to back off of any of these things, but we think simplifies the language,” Dick told GEO.

Union negotiators reacted skeptically, noting that the lack of specifics in contract language in the past has been used by departments to deny their GSIs access to basic professional needs. Recently, access to printing and copying privileges has been a problem in many departments, including sociology.

**GEO member meeting!**  
•Jan. 31 7 p.m.  
•Rackham School  
4th floor amphitheater

# 103 GEO members pack house

In the fourth public bargaining session since negotiations opened, GEO members literally packed the Anderson room of the Michigan Union last Thursday. According to GEO figures, 103 union members attended at least part of the session.

“It was cool to see so many people show up,” said Alex von Hagen-Jamar from the Department of Political Science. “There weren’t enough chairs to seat our members at the beginning of the session.”

“I can’t ever remember a bargaining session that had this many people attend,” said Urmila Venkatesh, one of two GEO staff organizers. Venkatesh has been employed by GEO since 2004. From 2002 to 2004, she worked as a GSI in the Department of Art

& Design and represented her department as a GEO Steward.

The previous high for attendance this year was 77, set at the first session.

Among the members of the public in attendance was David Dick, a UM freshman and the son of university lead negotiator Ronald Dick.

Bargaining team member Spencer Piston said it is critical for members to keep turning out as negotiations become more intense.

“All the cards are on the table now,” Piston said. “As we make counterproposals and work to force UM to meet our demands, membership power puts pressure on university negotiators.”

## FROM THE GRASS ROOTS:

### Alex Von Hagen-Jamar

For Alex von Hagen-Jamar, a first-year student in Political Science who will start work as a GSI in the fall term, one of the most impressive things about attending his second bargaining session was the number of GEO members who attended.

“It’s cool to see so many people show up,” he said. “There weren’t enough chairs to seat all our members at the beginning of the session and that was neat to see.”

The high turnout also gave Von Hagen-Jamar a chance to make some new acquaintances outside his own department.

“I get to meet some new people, and I’ve encountered one old friend who I almost never get to see this year,” Von Hagen-Jamar said.

When he got done making friends and catching up, Alex said he was pleased with the professionalism of GEO’s team.

“GEO did a good job of expressing the needs and desires of its members,” he said. He added that he was happy the union is presenting comprehensive proposals on summer bridge pay, general and mental health care, areas about which he feels particularly strongly.

Von Hagen-Jamar also said he was impressed with GEO’s strategy for asking for a 9 percent wage increase. The union has

emphasized that the university’s estimated annual cost of attendance is \$781 higher than the amount it pays a .5 fraction GSI.

“Illustrating your arguments with hard numbers, especially when you’re using the university’s numbers, is good persuasive rhetoric,” he said.

Reflecting on the negotiations themselves, Von Hagen-Jamar said that the two sides

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“remained civil,” although he added that at times it was tough to tell what precisely was happening.

“Not all the negotiation goes on at the table, so you don’t see all the back and forth,” he said. He also said that he had not been present for

a GEO caucus during a bargaining session, in which members discuss proposals, although he plans to attend one soon.

And what would Von Hagen-Jamar say to his fellow members about the benefits attending a bargaining session?

“First, it’s useful because I learn about what some benefits I’m entitled to actually are,” he said. And he added that attendance is a fairly easy, low-cost way to get involved in GEO. “Like many graduate students, I don’t have much time,” he said. “But by attending a bargaining session for only an hour a week, I can leverage my mere presence into something useful.”