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**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN GRADUATE EMPLOYEES AUTHORIZE TWO DAY  
WORK STOPPAGE**

***LABOR UNION OF GRADUATE INSTRUCTORS VOTE 727 TO 177 TO STOP WORK***

Ann Arbor, MI – Members of the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO, AFT local 3550), the labor union representing approximately 1,700 graduate student instructors and staff assistants at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, voted in support of a work stoppage on campus. The walkout is planned to take place on Tuesday, March 25<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday, March 26<sup>th</sup>.

The GEO has been in negotiations with university administration since November of 2007, both sides have yet to come to agreement on core issues, mostly economic. GEO has shown good faith throughout the bargaining process. Membership extended the contract twice past its March 1<sup>st</sup> expiration date, and agreed to additional bargaining sessions during the week of March 17<sup>th</sup>. However, the administration's bargaining team failed to present new proposals at three of this week's sessions. GEO's contract will expire again at midnight on Monday, March 24<sup>th</sup>.

GEO's contract campaign prioritizes bringing the graduate employee salary up to a living wage, meeting the cost of attendance published by the university's Office of Financial Aid. Currently, the average graduate employee earns \$781.00 less than this figure. The university's administration has refused to raise wages to close this gap. To merely close this gap and account for a conservative estimation of inflation would require a 9% increase in wages in the first year of the contract.

GEO lead negotiator Colleen Woods said that the increase in the first year remains non-negotiable. "Our members have been consistently telling us that this is very important to them." This average salary figure is no longer competitive with what U of M considers its peer institutions. Northwestern University has launched a program that provides 5 years and 4 summers of funding, and Yale, Harvard and Princeton now provide graduates with an average of \$20,000 over 12 months. Beyond private schools, the average salary at the University of Iowa is \$16,575 for graduate instructors; and at Rutgers it is \$19,815.

With the university's current pay scale, those working fewer hours a week make less in hourly wages, and do not receive health benefits or full tuition waivers. This places a disproportionate burden on those who are already at a disadvantage. GEO has proposed a wage parity scale to address this, but this has been continually rejected by the administration.

On Thursday, March 20, approximately 300 GEO members and allies rallied in support of the current contract campaign marching from the central Diag to the Regents' Plaza. GEO President, Helen Ho, and Vice President, Kiara Vigil, delivered two letters that urged the Board of Regents to promote a swift and reasonable resolution to negotiations in order to prevent any work stoppage.