



Graduate Student Worker

Newsletter of the University of Michigan
GRADUATE EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATION
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<http://umgeo.org>

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University seeking health care give-backs

As the national debate on health care heats up, it looks as if health care will also become a major issue here on campus as the U-M administration seeks to have employees pay for more of the cost of U-M benefits plans. The stated U-M goal is to achieve a cost structure in which the university pays for 70% of health care costs, with the other 30% paid by employees.

Currently, the cost share is 80-20, meaning that U-M expects to pay 80% of health care costs, with 20% paid by employees. As recently as 10 years ago, University benefits plans aimed for an 85-15 cost share.

The Administration's interest in health care give-backs has been evident in its recent negotiating posture with campus unions. LEO, the Lecturer's Employees Organization, will shortly begin bargaining with U-M and has been mobilizing to protect its members health care benefits.

One of the ways U-M has sought to reduce its contribution to employee health care costs is by reducing its contribution to the premium cost for part-time employees. Since relatively few

lecturers are privileged to have full-time status, this means that many could face sharply higher health care costs if U-M's proposals go through. LEO has calculated that some categories of employees would end up paying three quarters of their take-home pay just to cover the cost of health care premiums.

Although GEO does not negotiate its next contract until the 2010-11 academic year, U-M's focus on reducing its contribution for part-time employees threatens hard-won benefits for lower fraction employees. As things stand now, all GSIs and GSSAs have zero-premium health care for themselves, their partners, and their dependents.

As we prepare to bargain next year, GEO members will investigate this issue to determine how changes to the university's cost share formula will affect graduate employees. For example, the U-M could seek health care savings through increased co-pays or restricting coverage, even while leaving premiums untouched. If you would like to get more involved on this issue, please contact OCchair@geo3550.org.

University plans benefits eligibility audit for enrolled dependents of all University employees

If you have dependents enrolled in your U-M health care plan, make sure that they are benefits-eligible. The University will be conducting an audit of the eligibility of dependents of **all** University employees, including graduate employees, starting in February 2010. **Disenroll ineligible dependents by December 18, 2010 without penalty.** To become familiar with the requirements for eligibility documentation, and for more information about the audit, go to:

<http://mydependentcheck.com/umich/>

GEO will keep in contact with members about potential impacts of this audit.



KNOW YOUR CONTRACT!

Track your hours and enforce your rights

When you're hired as a GSI/GSSA, you're hired to work a certain number of hours per semester (for instance, a GSI appointed at a .5 is hired to work between 16.5 and 20 hours per week). GEO's Contract ensures that if your duties end up requiring more hours than what you are hired for, you have a right to either a change in appointment fraction or a change in duties.

So how do you know if you're working too much?

Check your Fraction Calculation Sheet. Your hiring unit is required to provide a specification of how much time each responsibility of your appointment is estimated to take. It's important to think at the beginning of the semester what is being asked of you--don't be afraid to ask the hiring unit about the appointment fraction if it seems obviously too low for what you will be doing over the semester! For instance, if your Fraction Calculation Sheet doesn't include ANY hours for course preparation time, and those hours aren't built in to any other duty, it's possible that your appointment should be higher.

Talk to your supervisor. Come to an agreement about expectations for the semester's work and make sure that you both feel comfortable with the duties assigned to you. While most departments make reasonable estimates for the work required of a job, some departments or supervisors may not realize how much work a job actually requires. Setting expectations at the beginning of the semester makes it less likely that you'll be overworked later.

Track your hours. By keeping track of your labor, you can ensure that you are paid for the work you do. In your GEO PLANNER, use the hours tracking column to keep track of your weekly work. Then add up your totals for the month and semester. Count ALL work you do that you wouldn't be doing if you weren't appointed as a GSI/GSSA: office hours, grading, reading course material and lesson planning, setting/cleaning up labs, emailing students, meetings with students or supervising instructors, creating exams...

Track your hours weekly...

10 Tuesday	office hours prep	2 1.5
11 Wednesday	lecture grading	1 1
Veterans Day		
NOTES:		Total hours 9.5

...then add up your monthly totals.

Week of Term	Notes	Hours
weeks before classes begin	syllabus	8
1		19.5
2		20
3	(no grading)	16.5
4		19
5	exams	22

If you think you're working more hours than what you're being paid for, contact GEO! Hours grievances are one of the most common grievance types, and they are often swiftly solved--either by an increase in appointment fraction or a decrease in duties. Contact the Grievance Committee at grrr@umich.edu if you have concerns about your hours.

Know your contract, know your rights!

<http://contract.umgeo.org>

**Need a planner? Stop by the GEO office!*



GET INVOLVED IN YOUR UNION

Join a committee!

ORGANIZING

Works to increase the level of involvement and activism in GEO; works to organize members and coordinate campaigns

OCchair@geo3550.org

GRIEVANCE

Helps enforce the GEO contract by stewarding employees through the grievance procedure and providing contract education

GRRRchair@geo3550.org

SOLIDARITY & POLITICAL ACTION

Educates and advocates around political issues affecting GEO's membership; forges solidarity with other unions

SPAC.Chair@geo3550.org

COMMUNICATIONS

Ensures that information is available to GEO members through newsletters, the GEO planner, the GEO website, and other media

CommChair@geo3550.org

Take on an issue!

CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT WORKING GROUP

Holds policymakers accountable and advocates for graduate student interests in implementation of Rackham's Continuous Enrollment Policy.

cewdoc@gmail.com

JUSTICE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (JSD)

Works to create a community of students with disabilities to ensure equity in accommodations.

justice_4_sd@ctools.umich.edu

Get stuff done!

ACTIVISM FACTORY

Meets every other Wednesday (alternating with Stewards Council meetings) at 7 PM in the GEO office to perform needed tangible tasks while enjoying food and drink.

http://umgeo.org/events

Members in Action



GEO Members show solidarity with the walkouts at the University of California system. UC community members walked out in protest of system-wide budget cuts in September.

Several members attended the semi-annual AFT-sponsored Alliance of Graduate Employee Locals conference, held in November at MSU.



Top: Comp Lit Steward Spencer Hawkins, GEO Past President Helen Ho, and AFT staffer Chris Goff during the plenary session. Right: Grievance Chair Lauren Squires co-leads a session.



AGEL Photos by Ben Seese

Continuous Enrollment Update

This summer, Rackham Student Government passed two resolutions, requesting that Rackham address multiple student concerns in writing, including the policy's provisions for students with dependents, chronic medical conditions, fieldwork needs, etc.; and a guarantee that no students will be adversely affected. Rackham's unsatisfactory responses leave unaddressed concerns that departments may alter their definitions of "satisfactory progress" to overcome departmental tuition fellowship shortages, and Rackham has failed to guarantee that students who don't pay tuition now won't be forced to pay tuition in the future. Additionally, Rackham's communication with students is still inadequate and has failed to disclose full details of the proposal.

See the *Michigan Daily* for a recent article highlighting lingering concerns over CE: <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/continuous-enrollment-still-causing-contention>



GEO Membership Meeting!

- GEO Updates
- Issues Workshops (suggest your own!)
- General Merriment

Thursday November 19

Food/drinks: 6:00p.m.

Meeting starts: 7:00p.m.

GEO Office 330 E. Liberty Suite 3F

contact: umgeo@umich.edu

At the Membership Meeting we'll update members on what has happened at GEO this year and form working groups around possible bargaining items for the 2010-2011 contract campaign. What are aspects of GEO's contract that you think work well? What are aspects that you think could change? What are issues pertinent to GSIs/GSSAs that aren't currently covered by the contract? Bring your ideas to the meeting and come ready to discuss with your fellow union members! We need to hear from YOU.

For GEO's updated events calendar, bookmark: <http://umgeo.org/events>