



# Graduate Student Worker

Newsletter of the University of Michigan  
GRADUATE EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATION  
330 E. Liberty St., Suite 3F, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, (734) 995-0221

<http://umgeo.org>

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## With a disability and a job to do: GEO's fight for access, awareness, and action

GEO has a legacy of fighting for (so-called) minority issues by making them majority concerns. Such was the case with disability issues in the 2008 bargaining year, and as we approach the next bargaining year it's become clear that this particular struggle is far from over.

In 2008, GEO was able to negotiate the implementation of an Equity and Access GSSA position to be jointly overseen by the union and Academic HR. The initial purpose of this position, as laid out in the contract, was to "Develop educational materials for employees and employing units that (a) describe services and resources available to Employees with disabilities and (b) describe the accommodations process, and develop a distribution plan for [said] materials," and to "research and summarize 'best practices' with respect to disability accommodation for Employees at the university" (78-9).

With the creation of this position, the University seemed to be making an effort to address the dismal campus climate on disability! Members with disabilities and their allies agreed that research and education were indeed badly needed.

Rachel Wells, the first to hold this position, made some progress toward these goals. She developed a flow chart and resource guide for employees with disabilities and made regular presentations at Stewards Meetings. However, as she neared the end of her employment, it was clear to her as

well as the wider disability community that much work remained to be done.

So a group of activists got together and decided they should request that the position be reinstated in 2009-2010, to which the University agreed. Members from both sides jointly redefined the job description so that the GSSA would also (a) collaborate with ADA Coordinator in the Office of Institutional Equity and with GEO to develop a distribution plan for educational materials, (b) conduct presentations to department administrators, graduate students and other appropriate audiences about the accommodation process using the resource guides, and (c) identify other units on campus (e.g. CRLT and Rackham) with knowledge, information and/or programs relevant to graduate employees with disabilities and investigate possible appropriate collaborations.

We hired Joanna Tatomir into this position with a shared sense of urgency. Climate issues seemed to loom ever larger, as evidence -- particularly in the form of personal accounts -- continually rolled in. Misguided professors have called anxiety disorders "the butterflies" and depression "the blues." GSIs with learning disabilities have waited for months for adaptive software to be installed, and GSIs with chronic pain disorders have been denied ergonomic chairs for their offices. Departmental administrators regularly shrug off accommodations requests citing "budget constraints." (*Story continues p. 2*)

## March 4 Rally in Support of Public Education: National Day of Action

The Rally in Support of Public Education in Detroit on March 4, 2010. GEO stood alongside Wayne State graduate students and part-time faculty, and Detroit public teachers and students on this national day of action. Members of universities across the country rallied to defend public education from budget cuts and administrative threats, such as cutting programs or restructuring departments.

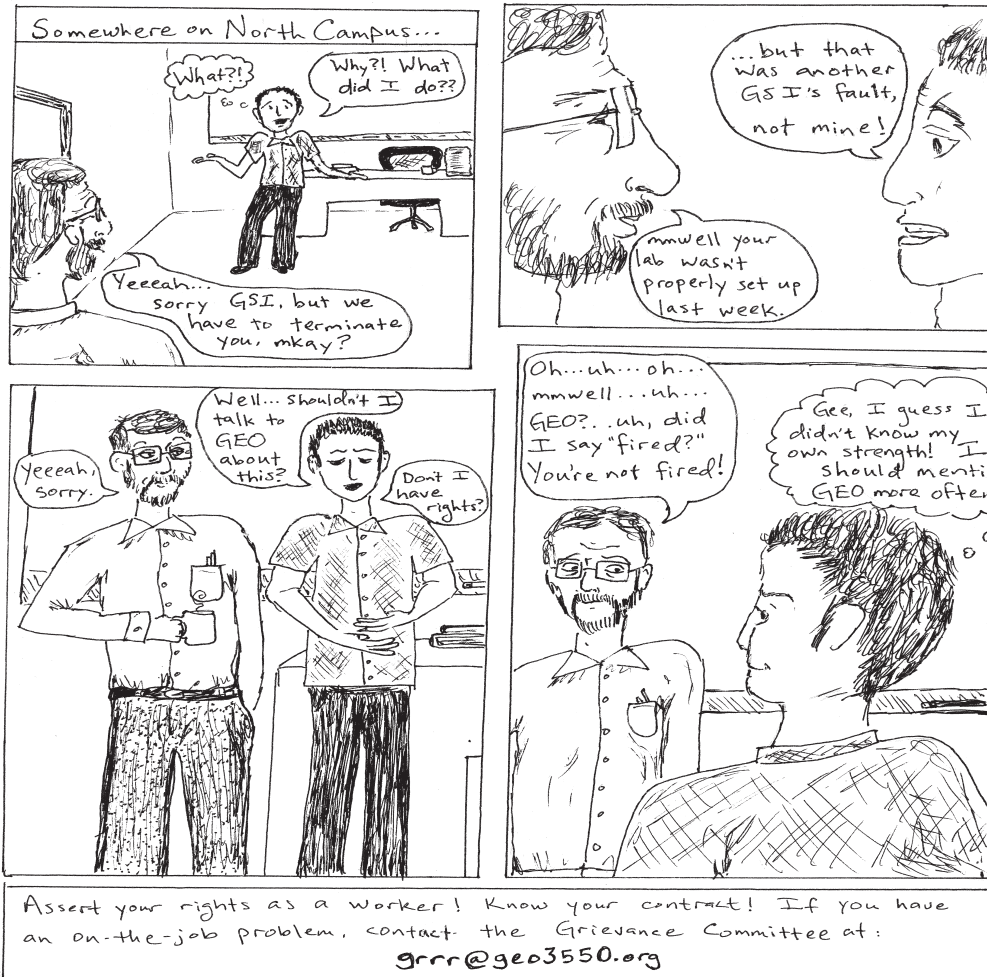
Photo courtesy of Ben Seese





## In the land of GRRR

created by Lauren Squires  
illustrated by Denise Bailey



Assert your rights as a worker! Know your contract! If you have an on-the-job problem, contact the Grievance Committee at: [grrr@geo3550.org](mailto:grrr@geo3550.org)

## GEO's fight for disability access and awareness (continued from p. 1)

The SSWD accommodations process is convoluted and wholly ineffective in addressing graduate employees' needs in particular. And even the University's ADA Coordinator - Joanna's supervisor - has been slow to actually take our concerns seriously.

According to these stories, the University only seems to care about diversity in name. It seems they want credit for the claim rather than the proof. What's worse, these problems are not ultimately the result of personal biases, but of a lack of *institutionalized* awareness and advocacy. Employees with disabilities have specific needs for which *all* departments should budget both money and staff time. Employers need extensive education about accommodations, needs, and sensitivity. And the University needs to be held accountable in following the guidelines of the ADA, which specify that a collaborative investigation must be made into *all* possible and reasonable accommodations until one is agreed upon by both parties. This means nothing to a GSI with a disability and a job to do if it takes months to happen!

Although Joanna continues to work toward these goals, progress has been slow due to a lack of support from Academic HR. It's become clear that we also need to treat this problem as a contract issue. We need language added to the contract specifying actual step-by-step procedures for the accommodations process, for instance. And we need to renegotiate the terms of the Equity and Access GSSA position. But, most importantly, we need the strength of the whole membership behind this language.

Activists with disabilities have been meeting regularly to develop a platform on disability, but we need our allies to make themselves more present. You can become an active ally by attending these meetings, or by talking to your colleagues about the realities faced by GSIs with various disabilities. And if you aren't sure what those disabilities are, you can help improve the climate on campus by educating yourselves.

-Denise Bailey

## GEO's 2010-2011 Bargaining Timeline

get involved!  
all events are open to all members!  
our contract reflects YOUR action!

- MARCH 2010**
- 17 Activism Factory: Bargaining Brainstorm
  - 24 Stewards Meeting
  - 29 Bargaining Committee Inaugural Meeting
  - 31 Activism Factory
- APRIL 2010**
- 1 Platform Development  
Web Survey Initiated
  - 7 Stewards Meeting  
Budget Ratification
  - 14 Membership Meeting!!!!  
Elect New Officers  
Vote on Initial Bargaining Platform
  - 21 Stewards Meeting  
Elect New Committee Chairs
- SUMMER 2010**
- Refine Bargaining Platform
  - Solidify Bargaining Committee
  - Draft Contract Proposals
- FALL 2010**
- Elect Bargaining Team
  - Ratify Final Bargaining Platform
  - Submit Intent to Bargain to UM
  - Begin Bargaining
  - Build Strike Platform
  - Build Solidarity!
- Winter 2011**
- Continue Bargaining
  - Vote on Strike Platform
  - Rally - Pressure - Act!
  - Reach Tentative Agreements with UM on Contract Articles
  - Membership Meetings
  - Contract Ratification
  - Celebrate Victory!**



## GEO & ROC-Michigan: building solidarity to better the lives of restaurant workers

ROC (Restaurant Opportunities Center) has been very active in bettering restaurant working conditions since starting its Michigan chapter in 2008. In January, GEO organization joined forces with ROC to take on the local restaurant chain, Andiamo, who was singled out for its particularly egregious violations of labor laws. The management had been discriminating on the basis of race, nationality, and gender, in addition to violating overtime and minimum wage laws. Members of GEO have been participating in weekly protests, putting increasing pressure on the owners and management to mend their ways. Recently, our union even rolled out its drum corps in order to make our presence impossible to ignore. Our efforts have already met with success. The restaurant began meeting its obligation to pay overtime this month. In addition, on February 12th, workers filed a federal lawsuit for \$125,000 in back wages.



ROC-Michigan protest outside Andiamo restaurant in Dearborn.

Photo courtesy of Ben Seese

*"I was treated unfairly. I'm here to make sure this never happens to anyone again."*

- Jose, Andiamo Restaurant Worker, Busser, and Leader in the campaign for Justice at Andiamo

For more info: <http://www.rocunited.org>

Many Andiamo workers have participated in the protests, sharing their stories of mistreatment and expressing their appreciation of community solidarity. The effort by ROC and GEO is an example of how community organization efforts have a very tangible effect on improving lives. Our union will continue to show solidarity until the grievances of the workers are addressed and local businesses understand their responsibility to respect employee rights.

-Serge Farinas

## GEO supports LEO's contract fight

*News from the Lecturers' Employee Organization (LEO)*

A recent LEO newsletter presented the first of a series discussing the framework shaping LEO's bargaining strategy. The underlying issues for LEO are a health benefit cost increase which will cut members' paychecks significantly, and job security - the interim and major review processes need to be revised to reduce the fear and anxiety for lecturers currently in the system.

The bargaining framework asks whether the university can afford to raise wages for lecturers. LEO calculates that an estimated \$12 million is needed for a fair raise in lecturer wages. To do that, they propose a marginal "0.7% or less - shift in the priorities that govern General Fund spending."



*Why LEO Matters to Us!*

LEO represents all non-tenure track faculty who teach at the University of Michigan. As GSIs, we share common interests with LEO. They too work to improve their working conditions and strive for expanded benefits and annual wage increases. We are united in our goals to guarantee equal treatment for our members and spread social justice across our campus.  
-Yioryos Nardis

Support Lecturers as they bargain for a new contract! Pick up a LEO button, talk to your students about LEO, and attend LEO events!

For more info: <http://www.leounion.org>

## Meet a GEO Activist!

### "Why I Joined the Union"

*Being a GSI has been one of the most rewarding parts of graduate school for me. I love getting my students' perspectives on books I've read before but that are new for them, and working with them on their papers has taught me a lot about expressing myself clearly. GEO respects my work and protects my rights so I can focus on being a better teacher. As graduate students, we have many different people making conflicting demands on us as students, as researchers, and as teachers, and we need an advocate to help us balance these roles. GEO makes it possible for me to do the work I want to do.*

-Harriet Fertik, Classical Studies



Attend!

April 14th 2010  
from 7pm-8pm

@ the U Club  
@ the Michigan  
Union

*Come VOTE on the  
Bargaining Platform!  
It's YOUR union!!!*

the GEO  
General Membership Meeting

[www.umgeo.org](http://www.umgeo.org)

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## RUN FOR OFFICE IN GEO!

NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN FOR 2010-2011 LEADERSHIP

### Officers

President . Vice President . Treasurer . Secretary

### Committee Chairs

Organizing . Communications . Grievance . Solidarity & Political Action . Bargaining

Nominations can be submitted in person or by mail at/to the GEO Office

330 E. Liberty St., Suite 3F, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; or by email: [umgeo@umich.edu](mailto:umgeo@umich.edu)

Officers will be elected at the April 14 Membership Meeting

Committee Chairs will be elected at the April 21 Stewards Council Meeting