

GEO presents platform for a better contract

The GEO laid out its vision for a stronger contract for GSIs during bargaining on December 8 and 10. Strong member attendance during the week bolstered the spirit of progress and democratic participation.

On Wednesday, December 8, the bargaining team put forth proposals on GSI training and tuition waivers. They proposed changes to ensure that complaints about communication skills were handled fairly and that GSI training in the sciences was adequate to the demands of a wide range of lab situations.

On Friday, December 10, the team made a presentation on the five major platform planks for improving the contract: (1) expanding health benefits, (2) increasing wages, (3) improving the accommodations process for employees with disabilities, (4) improving conditions for GSA parents, and (5) restoring the right to collective bargaining for GSRAs. Detailed proposals on Salaries and Disability Accommodations were presented.

The union's platform presentation powerfully made the case for a fair contract while expressing sensitivity to the University's needs in a tough economic climate. The bargaining team provided numbers demonstrating that the price of expanding health care benefits for GSIs was well below the University's set ceiling for GSI health costs. Proposed salary increases were charted against tuition increases and major administrators' raises, starkly demonstrating that GSI wages lag behind in rate of increase, and that proposed increases are modest.

The union's proposal on Disability Accommodations further demonstrated the GEO's focus on making the contract the foundation of a smooth working relationship between GSIs and the University. A central office for handling accommodations would streamline the process for both GSIs and departments. It would give students an advocate to proactively ensure appropriate accommodations instead of requiring students who did not receive accommodations to convince the University to police non-compliance. Further, creating a central fund for the costs associated with accommodations would take the focus off of cost for individual departments and put it back on meeting the needs of teachers and students. GSIs would be able

to work with the University to ensure their needs are met, and would not be forced into an adversarial position in order to receive the legally guaranteed and necessary support for doing their job.

The GEO consistently expressed its interest in working with the University team to effect changes that benefit GSIs and the University. As Lead Negotiator Renee Echols stated in preface to the Disability Accommodations proposal, "We know that the

administration has expertise, too. We want to have your feedback and input. We want it to be collaborative." The University team, however, has so far not contributed major proposals or counterproposals to demonstrate their willingness to engage in discussion.



It was standing room only as GSIs packed the room at Friday's bargaining session

Mark your calendar!

Dec. 15: Proposals on GSRAs, Article 11: Benefits, Article 12: Child Care, Article 13: Medical and Parental Leave (Palmer Commons, Great Lakes North, 4th Floor)*

GSRAs and parents especially encouraged to attend

Dec. 17: Proposal on Article 21: Employee Rights (Palmer Commons, Plaza Room, 3rd Floor)*

International students strongly encourage to attend

*Closed captioning provided. Bargaining runs from 1-5pm, but come at any time to make our union's presence known.

Bargaining Proposal Tally:

Proposals contributed by GEO: 8

Proposals contributed by the University: 1*

*Concerning Article 3 of the Contract: "No Interference" - asking GEO to commit to no strike

We want feedback!

Tell us what you think about bargaining:
<http://umgeo.org/webcaucus>