

Major gains in Disability Access, more pressure needed for continued progress

On Wednesday, February 16, the Administration team put across a long-awaited counter that accepted the major provisions of GEO's Disability Access proposal. The University agreed to structural changes that will make it much easier for GSIs with disabilities to get the accommodations they need to do their jobs: the designation of a central office for processing accommodation applications, a central fund for paying them, and a standardized form and procedure for applying for them. Additionally, a notification that these services are available will now be included in each GSI's job offer letter.

Bargaining sessions continued Friday with progress on Article 21, Employee Rights. The Administration team made a counter-proposal that included a guarantee of access to existing lactation space (a request they had rejected in their prior counter), a guarantee that only Employees with offices in the School of Music's Earl V. Moore Building may be excluded from having after-hours access, and a restriction on late night work hours stating that group work sessions must end by 1am.

With these promising developments, GEO is hopeful that a tentative agreement can be reached next on both Employee Rights and Disability Access. Much work, however, remains to be done in other areas of core concern as the number of bargaining days before contract expiration dwindles.

On Friday, GEO presented its counters on economic proposals. For Article 10, Salaries, GEO countered the University's initial offer of 1.5% raises all three years with a proposal of raises of 3% in the first year of the contract, 3% in the second, and 4.5% in the third. Requests for a guarantee of monthly pay and SEVIS fee reimbursement for all employees were also reiterated. The proposed raises are a slight concession from GEO's original proposal, but they were accompanied by a continued request for all fees to be waived under Article 20. For Article 11, Benefits, GEO proposed accepting the University's increased co-pays on doctor visits, ER visits, and Tier 3 prescription drugs with the addition to the contract of an out-of-pocket cap on co-pays of \$250 per beneficiary every calendar year.

As members have started to increase their visibility and put pres-

sure on the University through actions such as the call-in day and the Regents meeting, gains at the table have started coming. Continued and increasing pressure is critical to ensuring that progress toward fair wages and benefits, expanded support for parents, and the recognition of GSRAs' right to union representation keeps happening. It is the message GEO sends through its members' presence at bargaining and participation in other urgent actions that determines what the bargaining team can achieve at the table.

Historic Day for GEO

Renee Echols, Lead Negotiator

Three years of organizing and the effort of numerous volunteers leading up to this year's negotiations has resulted in major success for GEO and a historic accomplishment for organized labor. Since 2008's negotiations, GEO has devoted considerable attention to the challenges disabled grad employees face at U-M. Union officers, staff, and members have reached out to the campus community, building relationships with both graduate students with disabilities, allies, and key stakeholders in the university administration.

In the months leading up to negotiations, GEO members organized awareness-raising events as they researched and drafted an accommodations process. After work group discussions with the administration and consultants from the Office of Institutional Equity and multiple conversations at the bargaining table, the University's team responded by accepting major provisions of the proposed accommodations process. GEO's contract will now contain an article detailing the process by which graduate employees with disabilities can request and receive reasonable job accommodations, making it one of the first collectively bargained contracts to address this issue. While the GEO bargaining team and administration continue to iron out the details of this article of the contract, we are overjoyed that the University has responded to our proposal substantively and positively, and we look forward to working collaboratively with the University on this issue for the remainder of the negotiations and throughout the life of the next contract.

To keep momentum going, we've got to keep the pressure on:

**Come to the General Membership Meeting
This Wednesday, February 23
6-8pm @ the Michigan League Ballroom**

Putting on the pressure at the February Regents meeting

GEO packed the room during the February 17 meeting of the Board of Regents to lobby for support of GSRA collective bargaining rights, fair compensation and benefits, parents' rights, and an accommodations procedure for employees with disabilities. GEO members and a GSRA shared their experiences and made the case for a fair wage increase, expanded support for parents, and for recognizing GSRA as workers:

- **Interim Vice-President Chelsea Del Rio** brought GEO's proposals to life with vivid examples of how GSIs contribute to the University's mission and why contract proposals for better support for international student parents and work hours protection will help us maintain excellent job performance.
- **GEO Treasurer Daniel Marcin** did the math and articulated GEO's reasoning behind asking for a small wage increase relative to prior contracts and delaying the largest increase until the end of the contract in awareness of tough economic conditions.
- **Member Denise Bailey** spoke on behalf of GSIs with disabilities and GSI parents. She applauded the University's commitment to working with and alongside grads on the issue of disability access, as shown by Wednesday's proposal in bargaining, and expressed her hope that it was just the beginning of a process of working together to create a more inclusive campus community.



Solidarity on the move: members walk from LSA to Fleming to enter meeting together. Photo by Ben Seese.

- **GSRA Alix Gould-Werth** also spoke to ask the Regents to encourage the University to recognize GSRA as workers with the right to have a say in determining their working conditions.

Our speakers were powerful, and they made an impact. As member Jenny Kohn said of the event, "It was inspiring to sit among 60 fellow GEO members, filling the room with our signs and brightly-colored GEO t-shirts--and inspiring to hear three Regents speak out in support of GSRA union representation!"

Mark your calendar!
Come when you can, leave when you need to.
To win a strong contract, we need you in the room.

This week's bargaining sessions:

Feb. 23: GEO anticipates presenting counters on Childcare, Leaves, and Disability Access. Job Posting counter from the University possible. (Palmer Commons, Great Lakes South, 4th Floor)

Feb. 25: Topics TBD (Palmer Commons, Plaza Room, 3rd Floor)

These are the final days of negotiation before our contract expires on March 1. Attendance now sends a message that we are serious about our proposals and committed to making them a reality.

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

Member Attendance Crucial: Last General Membership Meeting before contract expires March 1

Wednesday, February 23 @ the Michigan League Ballroom, 6-8pm

This meeting will be our last chance to debate and determine our strategy for what to do after contract expiration.

Fast ways to get involved now!

- We want feedback! Tell us what you think about bargaining @ <http://umgeo.org/webcaucus>
- Come to bargaining! (see calendar above for times and locations)
- Friend us on Facebook: Michigan GEO & Follow us on Twitter: [geo3550](https://twitter.com/geo3550)
- Check the GEO Events Calendar @ <http://umgeo.org/events> (& subscribe via Google Calendar)
- Check out the website: www.umgeo.org - includes RSS updates