

GTFF Bargaining Summary and Look Ahead – April 16th, 2014

Written by Richard Wagner (Physics) of the GTFF Bargaining Committee

The first bargaining session under an expired CBA took place on Friday, April 11th, and mostly consisted of the GTFF providing counters for each of the articles it had originally opened. Movement was made by the GTFF in quite a few of these, as the GTFF tried to work with the university administration to locate ground both sides could be happy with. For a few articles, the GTFF held fast and kept its original article language, asserting that the administration had not sufficiently demonstrated that the original GTFF proposal was unfeasible. The session also included a visit from a GTF to speak about his experience with layoffs and the presentation of a report from the health and welfare trust. The session concluded with the administration reviewing the economics overview put forth by the GTFF at the last session and with both sides sharing their views on the cost of some items in question.

Layoff Testimony

The session began with testimony from GTF Jay Breslow from the college of education's CSSE doctoral program. He shared a story of his department attempting to lay him off due to low enrollment numbers. Had he lost his position, he was worried about making ends meet, losing his health insurance, getting his degree done on time and taking out loans to do so. Luckily, the department attempted to lay him off after the deadline laid out in the CBA, so he was able to keep his job after filling a grievance. Moreover, it was GTFF's impression that the department had been very unhappy with not being able to lay Jay off. That is, there had been little institutional concern for Jay and the drastic impact a short-notice layoff would have had upon him. This is exactly why the GTFF strongly feels that the current layoff policy should be scrapped: the hardship faced by a hastily laid off GTF clearly outweighs that faced by the university when it must keep a GTF position open. The GTFF's view is that once a contract for any given appointment has been signed, that should be binding upon the employing unit—and that layoffs after this point are unacceptable.

GTFF Proposals

The following table outlines the original and current status of all GTFF proposals, along with a brief description of what movement on the article (if any) has been made at the table.

Article	Original	Current	Comments
8 - Non-discrimination	New language protecting many different groups	Add protection for HIV antibody status, color, pregnancy status, parental status, veteran status	After consulting with its lawyer, the GTFF dropped language without strong legal precedent under Oregon/US law
9 – Frac Calc Sheets	The GTFF desires frac-calc sheets across campus	Keep original proposal	The administration's only response has been "no," offering no counter after the GTFF made a strong push here in the previous session
10 – Kitchen Access	All GTFs must have access to kitchen facilities	All GTFs (and the union) have a right to request kitchen access	This was largely the administration's counter. Let's see if this language is strong enough to solve our problems, or we can revisit this in the next bargaining cycle
10 – alternative work spaces	GTFs get alternative work spaces if their normal work space is unavailable	Departments must arrange alternative work spaces or alter work duties	Administration had countered with the idea that departments would <i>attempt</i> to arrange alternate spaces—the GTFF thinks they can do better than <i>try</i>
10 – Clean/safe work environment	Clean and safe work spaces on and off campus	GTFs have the right to refuse to work in unsafe spaces	Administration claims they cannot force external spaces to be clean/safe, so we want GTFs not to be forced to work in these spaces
17 – Multiyear Contracts	Departments try to offer 2 year contracts to GTFs	DROPPED	Administration said this was too hard to do with uncertain enrollment numbers
17 – Make funding offers binding	Any offers made to GTFs for years of funding upon acceptance must be binding	Include language in acceptance letters saying funding offer is not guaranteed	Administration countered by saying they couldn't make things binding as funding situations are always in flux
17 – Tuition and Hiring	Departments cannot use tuition cost when making hiring decisions	Keep original proposal	Clarified at table that the GTFF is focusing on deciding who to hire and not whether to make positions available or not
18 – Summer tuition waiver	Change "summer sandwich" to 1 quarter in year prior	Change sandwich to 2 quarters in year prior	Administration said hardly anyone accesses the sandwich in this way, that it is also confusing, and so suggests eliminating it entirely
20 - Layoffs	Eliminate Layoffs	Keep original proposal	See testimony of Jay Breslow described above

Article	Original	Current	Comments
21 – Minimum Wage	6.1% minimum wage increase both years	5.5% increase in both of next two years	We cannot close the wage-living expenses gap in 3 years at 5.5%, but this would do it in 4. 5.5% saves the university \$200,000 over the life of the CBA compared to 6.1%. Hopefully the administration will make movement towards us. The administration's offer of 1.5% and 2% over the next two years barely covers the inflation rate...
22 – University Fees	Eliminate all fees	Keep original proposal	Continue to push for no fees. Going to a percentage fee (the administration suggestion) is dangerous and unworkable for GTFs
22 – SEVIS fees	University reimburses international students who have to pay a SEVIS fee to get a visa to come to the US for graduate school	Keep original proposal	Administration has never addressed this. This is a one-time fee for international students (maybe some have to pay it again when renewing their visa). University would only pay upon request when GTFs have to pay it in order to be in the country as a GTF
23 – Major Dental	The trust can add major dental coverage to our health plan	Keep original proposal	Major dental estimated cost of \$350,000/year. It remains a critical issue to our members
24 – Doubling Vision Benefits	The trust can increase GTF vision benefits to \$400/year	Keep original proposal	Estimated cost of \$295,000/year. Also remains highly important to our members
27 - Parental Leave	GTFs get 6 weeks of paid parental leave	Keep original proposal – we want <i>paid</i> leave	If all 6 weeks are taken, replacing the absent GTF is estimated to cost \$900–\$5400 for those 6 weeks. If 10 people take the full 6 weeks, that is only a \$54,000 maximum cost—a pittance compared to other costs
27 – Medical Leave	GTFs get 6 weeks of medical year	Keep original proposal – we want <i>paid</i> leave	Weekly cost is same as parental leave per week. We are unsure how to estimate how many GTFs this would affect so as to estimate total cost. Requested administration input.

A more detailed table of the entirety of the GTFF and administration proposals is in preparation and will be available at gtff.net soon.

Health and Welfare Trust Report

The GTFF health and welfare trust, which includes 2 members of the GTFF bargaining team and a member of the administration's bargaining team, finalized a report on trust expenses this past week, which was presented to the bargaining table. The report looks at the last 10 years of the trust and involves in 3 main take away points:

- Per enrollee, the premium increase has averaged 10.4% annually. Overall, the premium has increased an average of 12.5% per year, the difference being an effect of increased enrollment.
- The demographics of enrollment have changed very little. The proportion of enrollees who are individuals, partners, or children has stayed relatively stable.
- The main cause of the abnormally large premium increase last year was an unpredictable rise in major claims (individual health care events that cost more than \$25,000 – such as births, emergency surgeries, and major accidents). Years where we happen to have a lot of these events are the years where we see large increases in the premiums.

The trust has also been shopping our health insurance to different companies for the next year. The feedback from these companies suggests that our premium increase for next year will be on par with good years for the trust, years where premium increases were relatively low. Since both bargaining teams had a hand in putting the report together, we hope to see movement from the administration on the various healthcare proposals now that they have a better understanding of the costs for the year. This report (in a slightly redacted version) may be made available to GTFs and the public at large soon.

Administration Finances

At the previous bargaining session, the GTFF presented some figures on the total estimated cost of its proposals. At this session, the administration reviewed the GTFF figures and offered some of their own:

- The administration agreed, in principle, with the GTFF's assessment that a 6.1% raise to the minimum wage would cost around \$1.4 million over the life of the contract. Estimations for wage increases are difficult because there are many factors to take into account, but our figures were comparable enough that the administration accepted them.

- The administration was happy to have a better idea of the increase in cost for health insurance for the next year because the smaller increase than what they had expected frees up money to be spent elsewhere.
- The administration stated that each GTF enrolled in courses over the summer costs the university between \$2000 and \$3000 in tuition waivers. They believe the original GTFF proposal would end up costing the university around another \$100,000 per year. The GTFF did not estimate summer tuition costs as we did not have the enrollment or cost data to do so.
- The administration discussed fee rates in a very underhanded manner. Rather than comparing the cost between having no change in the CBA to the cost of making the proposed changes to the CBA, the administration just looked at how much extra money they would spend under their proposal compared to this academic year. Their conclusion was that switching to a 12% GTF contribution (from a flat \$61/term rate) would result in the administration paying an extra \$18,000 during the next academic year. This is not a fair way to address the issue because it conceals the cost to GTFs. The administration admits that fees next year will increase by \$90, to \$585/term. If we were to keep the flat \$61 rate, the administration would pay an extra \$60,000 in the next academic year. That means, if we change to a 12% GTF contribution, for the next academic year the administration would spend around \$42,000 less than if we stuck to a \$61 flat rate. This is a fairer way to look at the cost of changes to the CBA. If the university's proposal were accepted all of this \$42,000 would have to come from the pockets of GTFs themselves—further increasing the gap between wages and living costs in Eugene.

The next bargaining sessions are on April 18 (3pm-5pm, Lillis 112) and on April 25 (3pm-5pm, also in Lillis 112). At noon on April 25th, we will also hold a bargaining rally outside of Johnson Hall. This latter event will be especially important to our bargaining campaign, and we hope to see you both there and at the bargaining sessions to come!