

GTFF Bargaining Summary and Look Ahead – May 12th, 2014

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Progress

Really exciting and unexpected progress was made on some non-financial GTFF proposals during the bargaining session on Friday, May 9th. As occurred during the previous bargaining session (of May 7th), the administration continued to be open to the idea of Fraction Calculation Sheets (which are henceforth to be called “Something something something”). While these forms are not going to be the default way for GTFs to understand their work assignments, having the Administration open to making these an option across campus that GTFs can request is very exciting. There are still a few details to get worked out, but hopefully GTFs will soon have a formal and comfortable way to discuss and manage workload issues with their supervisors, rather than needing to file grievances when they feel they are being overworked. The GTFF offered a counter attempting to ensure the future usefulness of these forms, so hopefully next week the Administration will be looking to TA these changes.

In addition, article 17 was TA'd by both sides, agreeing to limit the option to layoff graduate students. While layoffs can still occur in cases where there is an overall change in the financial or academic status of a department (such as the complete closing of a department), layoffs can no longer occur on the basis of low course enrollment. No longer can the University put all of the risk of low enrollment on the shoulders of GTFs. In addition, in the event of a layoff, GTFs must be notified within 30 days (rather than 15) that they are to be laid off. This increase in time will help GTFs who have had their jobs taken from them hopefully find a replacement position.

The GTFF is excited that the Administration was able to find some room to work along side them to solve these problems that weigh on the shoulders of GTFs. We hope that the Administration continues to warm to the concerns of GTFs when it comes to completely unresolved financial matters.

Economic Proposals

The Administration offered economic proposals that drifted not too far from their original proposals. On student fees, the Administration continued to press for a percentage basis, but did change their language to a 10% GTF contribution on fees (with a 90% contribution in the summer). While this would slightly decrease the risk associated with student fees, it still unfairly puts a lot of risk on GTFs. GTFs have zero control over student fees, while the Administration has complete control over them. They set fees amounts and ultimately pay them to themselves. If there was any change to a percentage basis, it wouldn't change a dime that the University would be spending, even if fees were double, triple or increase by any amount—but GTF spending would increase right along with the rates set by the Administration. As they've done for much of their financial package, the Administration framed this change in terms of sharing risk. I don't understand how it is shared risk when the Administration has complete control over the amount to be spent and when the share they “pay” goes right back into their own pockets. When pressed on how the Administration came up with 10% as a fair way to share the risk, they were told point blank that 10% was “a number”. The Administration pulled it out of the air! They don't care what that number is, as long as it is a percentage they can use to jack up fees and draw more money out of graduate students. The GTFF wants a flat cap so that the Administration cannot exploit GTFs to increase the size of the University's bank accounts.

As the GTFF did last week, the Administration refused to make any movement on paid leave. The GTFF wants paid leave, the Administration refuses to allow any paid leave. They want you to have to make up all work you missed because you were in labor, were concussed from being hit by a car, or were arranging a funeral for a relative. You must make up all of it. It would cost the University pocket change to give graduate students any amount of leave. It costs roughly 3 hours of bargaining time paid to the Administration's Lead Negotiator Jeff for the University to give a graduate student 6 weeks of paid leave. But still, the Administration holds firm on its stance that GTFs aren't valued enough as people to have any leave.

The Administration did make movement on wages a little, to 3% raises to the minimum GTF salary for each year of the collective bargaining agreement. The GTFF was excited to see movement on wages, but 3% still isn't enough. At 3%, if there is no inflation, the gap between the cost of living and gross minimum GTF pay would close in 2018 – 2 bargaining cycles from now. Most current GTFs, hopefully, won't still be at the U of O by then. Some of the future GTFs who would be affected by this are still in high school. At 1.5% inflation, the gap would close in 2022 – in time for current middle school students to be graduate students. And at 2.5% inflation, my children (who don't even exist) can have a living wage by 2042. On the other hand, the 5.5% that the GTFF asked for would close the gap, within 4 years. Even with 2.5% inflation, the gap would close by 2018, just as the Administration's proposal would do without any inflation. A hefty raise to make ourselves feel better is not the GTFF's goal. The GTFF wants to expedite closing the gap between wages and cost of living. That's what we are fighting for. That's what we will continue to fight for because we think that is the fair and right thing to do. This can be further hastened by not gouging GTFs on their healthcare costs.

(Trust) Bustin' 2 – Premium Cap Booooooo(galoo)

The Administration surprised the GTFF by bringing 2 different healthcare proposals to the table. The first was similar to their original proposal – implementing a cap on the contribution to healthcare premium increases, however this

cap was set to 7% over the life of the contract—or 3.5% each year. This *still* does not address the main concerns of the GTFF. This cap is *still* 6.5% below the average 10% growth rate of premiums over the past decade. This will *still* result in healthcare costs raising for GTFs or will force the trust to slash benefits for GTFs. GTFs cannot afford to pay more for health insurance. 1 in 10 GTFs' gross pay is under \$1,000 a month. If their health insurance premium cost is doubled (or worse), this will be a serious, serious financial burden on individuals. Cutting benefits or increasing GTF out of pocket costs for healthcare will drive GTFs to not seek medical attention for issues they face because they just can't afford to do so. This is a real risk that GTFs face. The Administration frames their proposal as “risk sharing” between the University and the GTFF, but their proposal shifts nearly all of the risk on GTFs. The raising cost of GTFF health insurance is *not* putting the University in a financial bind. Even with the uncharacteristically large premium increase during the previous year, the University is still expecting a \$30 million surplus in their E&G funds. That is *not* a dire financial situation. Saving a small percentage of their more than \$440 million E&G budget by drastically increasing the costs for GTFs is *not* sharing risk. That is shifting “risk” from the University and placing real, honest financial and physical risk onto GTFs.

As crummy of a deal as the Administration's first proposal would be, the other proposal is even worse. This language would have **all** benefits of our healthcare plan bargaining at the table. The Administration attempted to frame this as an extension of what the GTFF asked for on major dental and vision – if we want to negotiate those benefits, we should negotiate all the benefits. This is not what the GTFF had asked for. In keeping with tradition of bargaining, the GTFF asked the University for a one time increase in the amount it contributes to the GTFF Health and Welfare Trust, which the trust would use to add major dental and vision coverage to GTFs' health insurance plan. The GTFF is negotiating over funding amounts, not benefits. Under current CBA language, the trust could add these benefits for GTFs and just stick the University with the bill, but the trust hasn't done that, has never done that, and is not interested in doing that. Instead, the GTFF is seeking an agreement to increasing funding so that the trust can add these benefits after the fact. That's responsible financial management, a trick GTFs are forced to learn due to their depressingly low incomes.

The Administration's language is a clear attempt to, once again, bust the trust. Giving up control over what benefits GTFs receive to bargain the cost of each benefit completely defeats the purpose of the trust. The GTFF has been very clear from the beginning of bargaining that the reason its members care so passionately about the trust is that it gives the power to *their peers* to lay out a benefits package that meet the needs of all GTFs. If the bargaining team and the Administration are making decisions on benefits and encoding that in our collective bargaining agreement, there's no reason for a trust to exist – it has no more power. The Administration does not live the life of a GTF. They do not understand the financial hardships GTFs face. What they do understand, as has been made readily clear during bargaining, is just their own dollars and cents. Whatever they can do to save themselves money, they will seek to do it. They *will* seek to slash GTF benefits. They *will* seek to increase your premium rates and copay amounts. How can we be so certain of this? The Administration has suggested doing exactly these things at the bargaining table!

The Administration brought outlines of insurance plans offered to other University employees. If the GTFF were to adopt these plans, GTFs' deductibles would increase from \$100 to \$250. The maximum amount GTFs would have to pay annually would increase by at least \$500. Office visits, surgeries, hospital care, medical tests, emergency care, and mental health care all would require GTFs to pay a higher percentage of the total bill than they do now. The Administration argues that the other campus groups are willing to pay at these rates, so the GTFF is being stubborn to hold on to their own plan. The Administration is ignoring the fact that GTFs simply cannot afford these rates. 24% of GTFs have a take home pay of less than \$1000 a month. Already these GTFs might have to spend more than a full months wages a year on health care. Does the Administration really expect that these GTFs can afford to pay a month and a half or two months worth of wages? If they think that, they are wrong. We already struggle to afford the necessities to live, throwing in an extra few hundred dollars in healthcare costs is a thing we definitely cannot afford. Even with the raises proposed by the Administration, GTFs still cannot afford the proposed changes to our health insurance. Let's examine further how this works.

This is going to make you feel queasy

As the GTFF **will not** allow the Administration to bust the trust, I'll focus on the 7% cap to premium increases. For these purposes, I'll ignore union dues, fees and inflation, but will consider taxes as these will play a factor in the raises. For a level 1 GTF working 0.4 FTE being paid at the minimum, how might a 7% cap on premium increases affect the monthly cost of living? I will assume the past decade average of 10% increase in insurance premiums.

	<u>This Year</u>	<u>Next Year</u>	<u>In 2 Years</u>
Gross Pay (3% raise)	\$1,107.00	\$1,140.00	\$1,174.00
Pay after tax	\$934.00	\$962.00	\$991.00
Insurance Costs	\$26.00	\$44.00	\$101.00
Spendable Income	\$908.00	\$928.00	\$890.00
Gap to Living Cost	-\$683.00	-\$663.00	-\$701.00

Because the cap was hit in year 1, the GTF will see a huge increase in their insurance premiums during the 2nd year, taking back all (and then some) of the wage increases from raises. At the end of the agreement, this GTF would be *worse off* than at the start of it. And that doesn't include increases in costs due to inevitable fee increases, nor does it include any inflation in the cost of living.

Save for wages, all of the Administration's financial proposals will do nothing to help GTFs financially. All of the proposals will have the effect of taking dollars out of the pockets of GTFs. And even more disturbing, for the amount of money the Administration is giving to GTFs in wages, their other proposals take back even more. The Administration's proposals will not close the cost of living gap. They will make that gap **LARGER**.

One final note

To wrap up the session, Amber turned the floor over to David Craig, who wanted to revisit a question he posed a couple of weeks ago. As (now former) GTFF President, David was invited to the annual department head's retreat at the beginning of the academic year where he listened to President Gottfredson list as one of his highest priority for the University going forward to better support graduate students and keep our graduate programs competitive. As a leader on the campus community, he's heard this same desire repeated by all campus consistencies he's interacted with, from undergrads to faculty to staff to fellow GTFs and even other administrators. David wanted to know, as representatives of the University, does the Administration's bargaining team believe their proposals reflect those priorities? David felt hopeful that hearing the President speak to the importance of graduate support that we'd see those priorities reflected in bargaining, but the interpretation David has gotten from the GTFF membership is that GTFs on this campus do not feel as though the Administration's proposals show serious support of its graduates students.

The response from the Administration's lead negotiator, Jeff, started out fine. He stated their proposals are an attempt to (1) address the concerns of graduate students and (2) work within the means of the university, which has many different groups, with many different desires, that the administration must work on the behalf of. David asked a follow up question to clarify if the priority of graduate education that President Gottfredson put forth was included in the decision making process. Quickly, the Administration asked to borrow the GTFF's spreading-it-around-shovel and began to dig themselves a nice little hole. Jeff didn't recall this ever coming up in any management meetings he's had. Not once. Kassy Fisher shared that those meetings have had University Vice President's (not Gottfredson) at them, but she definitely did not say that the discussion on graduate education being a priority came up. Jeff was unsure as to this line of questioning by David, but pointed out he was "skeptical anytime a person in a political position speaks, including University Presidents." Maybe this was just part of Jeff's \$290/hour wit, but, even taking that into account, it does not sound like the Administration is on the same page at all. If the guy at the top wants one thing, and no one under him seems interested in carrying out his priorities, how is anything going to get done? No one is even talking about them. *Is no one being held accountable for what they do?* The President claims to place GTF support as a top priority, as do the rest of the University's constituencies, but a few mysterious administrators are holding this process up? What?

Next week there are two bargaining sessions. Wednesday (5/14) at 12:30pm and Thursday (5/15) at 1:00pm. They will both take place in the Graduate Student Center within Susan Campbell Hall. Those are the last two sessions that are scheduled. Amber has pleaded with the Administration to come with counters that accurately put into perspective the Administration's priorities on graduate students. Having this knowledge will be critical for GTFs to make sound decisions about how they want their bargaining team to proceed with labor negotiations at our Emergency General Membership meeting on Friday at 5:30pm at the Northwest Youth Corp (2621 Augusts St). It's a little out of the way, but it is a big enough space to hold the very large number of GTFs expected to be in attendance. Hopefully it'll be a nice day, and GTFs can take the opportunity to walk or bike through parts of Hendricks Park on the way there. It is really a beautiful route to take. The GTFF is also encouraging all interested members to attend a Contract Campaign Committee meeting on Tuesday (5/13) at 9am in the GTFF office to discuss courses of action the GTFF could take to continue to demonstrate our worth to the Administration. The CCC (with a brand new leader!) hopes to send a simple but powerful message and would like help in planning, organizing and executing it.