

## To the University of Oregon Administration: A Call for Ethical Discourse

An open letter by instructors in the University of Oregon Composition Program

Each year, roughly 6,000 undergraduate students take a course in the University of Oregon Composition Program. More than one hundred instructors teach these courses, all of which are founded on the bedrock principle of ethical argumentation. Upholding this principle requires that we not only acknowledge positions that differ from our own, but that we make an effort to treat those differences charitably and interpret the stakes of the argument as honestly and openly as possible. Ethical discourse is the foundation for how composition instructors teach their students to participate in the academic community with respect, empathy, and integrity.

In their dealings with the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) over the past year, certain members of the University of Oregon administration and its bargaining team (“the administration”) have not engaged in ethical argumentation. Examples are numerous, but three stand out as particularly egregious.

1. The administration’s representatives failed to offer the GTFF’s platform an open-minded reception. Jeff Matthews, an attorney for the administration, asserted at the bargaining table last May that bargaining does not require both sides to meet in the middle, implying a refusal to compromise. For much of the bargaining process, the administration’s representatives returned to the table with unchanged proposals and reasoning that demonstrated this inflexibility. Productive dialogue cannot happen without genuine engagement.
2. During negotiation, the administration’s bargaining team often treated the GTFF’s bargaining team with condescension, dismissal, and disrespect.
3. Recent emails sent by provosts to the entire university paint a limited and misleading view of the bargaining process and the GTFF. Since the GTFF has no way of addressing the entire community, these emails are, by definition, one-sided. Ethical argumentation cannot occur when one side is portrayed as unreasonable and then given no means through which to respond.

Through such actions, the administration has violated the principles of responsible discourse essential at a top-tier university. Indeed, such practices are not merely a suggested form of writing; they are fundamental to the meaningful and respectful exchange of ideas. These ideals ground the mission statement of our university, which includes a commitment to helping individuals “question critically, think logically, communicate clearly, act creatively, and live ethically.” The administration has modeled the opposite.

As instructors of record (past, present, and in-training) teaching in the Composition Program, we are obligated to address the administration when it breaks its promise to uphold the ideals of civil discourse and ethical argumentation. The Composition Program is not solely responsible for teaching students the skills and the responsibilities of ethical argumentation. Professors, instructors, and graduate students from all departments are also teaching these practices. We who teach in the Composition Program tell our students, “In academia, we write and speak to each other with thoughtfulness and integrity.” We cannot say this in good faith when the administration’s actions are sending a much different message.

The university's stated goal is to offer its students access to a "world-class education." In order to enhance the university's status as an internationally-renowned institution, all those affiliated with this university must hold themselves to high standards of ethical argumentation. The majority of UO students want to hold themselves to high standards. They hold us, their teachers, to high standards. And thus we must hold our own administration to high standards as well. Let us all, as representatives of the University of Oregon, model for our students that the skills they learn in the classroom have real-world implications. It is time for the University of Oregon administration to practice what it asks us to teach.

We invite members of the administration to respond to these concerns.

Endorsed by:

1. April Anson, Graduate Teaching Fellow
2. Amanda Bartenstein, Adjunct Instructor
3. Jacob Berns, Instructor
4. Margaret Bostrom, Graduate Teaching Fellow
5. Allison Bray
6. Elizabeth Bruno, Graduate Teaching Fellow
7. Zach Cheney, Graduate Teaching Fellow
8. Elise Choi, Graduate Teaching Fellow
9. Teresa Coronado, Former Graduate Teaching Fellow
10. Elizabeth Curry, Graduate Teaching Fellow
11. Rosemary DeBell, Adjunct Instructor
12. Courtney Floyd, Graduate Teaching Fellow
13. Bill Fogarty, Graduate Teaching Fellow, Assistant Director, Composition
14. Mary Ganster, Graduate Teaching Fellow
15. Brian Gazaille, Doctoral Candidate, Graduate Teaching Fellow
16. Susana Gómez, Graduate Teaching Fellow
17. Claire Graman, Graduate Teaching Fellow
18. Shane Hall, Graduate Teaching Fellow
19. Matthew Hannah, Graduate Teaching Fellow
20. Helen Huang, Graduate Teaching Fellow
21. Bethany Jacobs, Postdoctoral Fellow
22. Remy Jewell, Tutor for the Center of Teaching Writing
23. Kristy Kelly, Graduate Teaching Fellow, Assistant Director of Composition
24. C. Parker Krieg, Graduate Teaching Fellow
25. Katie Jo LaRiviere, Graduate Teaching Fellow
26. Mitchell Macrae, Graduate Teaching Fellow
27. Taylor McHolm, Graduate Teaching Fellow
28. Martina Miles, Doctoral Candidate, Graduate Teaching Fellow
29. Erica Morton-Starner, Graduate Teaching Fellow
30. Bess Myers, Graduate Teaching Fellow
31. Katie Myers, Graduate Teaching Fellow, Assistant Director of Composition

32. Ryleigh E. Nucilli, Graduate Teaching Fellow
33. Carmel Ohman, Tutor for the Center of Teaching Writing
34. Nick Recktenwald, Adjunct Instructor
35. Rosalie Roberts, Graduate Teaching Fellow
36. Rachel Rochester, Graduate Teaching Fellow
37. Danielle Seid, Graduate Teaching Fellow
38. Stephen Siperstein, Graduate Teaching Fellow
39. Bjorn Smars, Instructor
40. Michael Bennet Smith, Former Graduate Teaching Fellow, Assistant Director of Composition from 2008-2009
41. Kaitlin Stodola, Instructor
42. Jenna Tucker, Graduate Teaching Fellow
43. Eleanor Wakefield, Graduate Teaching Fellow
44. Kristin Wilkes, Graduate Teaching Fellow
45. Paula Wright, Graduate Teaching Fellow
46. Robert Zandstra, Graduate Teaching Fellow