

October 14th, 2015



# THE AGITATOR

Newsletter of the University of Oregon

GRADUATE TEACHING FELLOWS FEDERATION

870 E 13th, Eugene, OR 97401 (541) 344-0832 <http://gtff.net> [gtffnewsletter@googlegroups.com](mailto:gtffnewsletter@googlegroups.com)

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## Upcoming Events!

**Thursday, October 15th, 6-8pm**

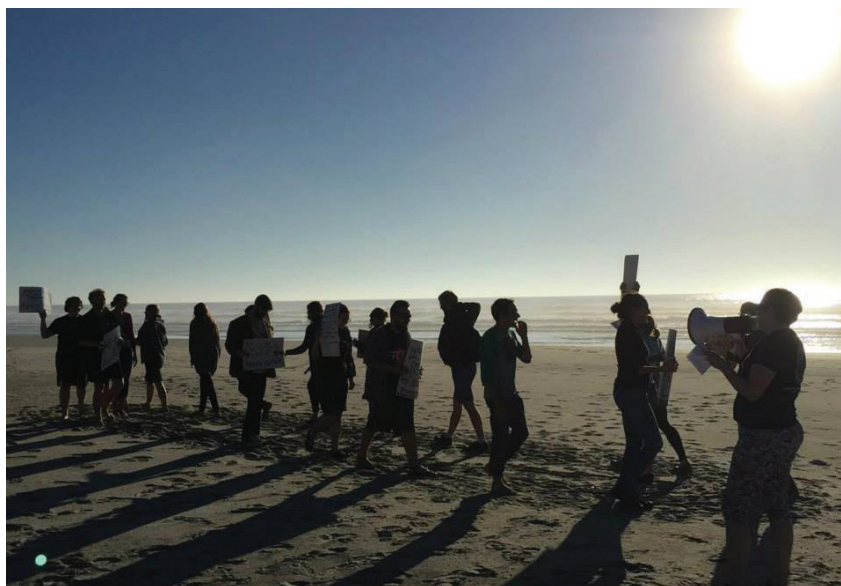
The Political GMM will be held in Chiles, room 128. This is an excellent opportunity for all of us to decide who we endorse for the coming election season, and to stay politically informed!

**Thursday, October 29th- 31st**

This year the national AGEL conference will be held in Corvallis, OR. This is a great opportunity for our entire membership to participate in this important union function. Activities include: a social in Portland, Helping PSU grads organize, and the annual Civil War Brew-Off! Contact our VP of External relations, Natalie Brenner, at [external.relations@gtff.net](mailto:external.relations@gtff.net) for more info.

**Saturday, October 31st**

It's time for the annual showdown between GTFF and CGE that we have come to affectionately know as the Civil War Brew-Off!. If you are interested in attending, contact Malori Musselman at [malori@uoregon.edu](mailto:malori@uoregon.edu) to register!



## A Letter From The President: Welcome Back GTFF!

Welcome to all new GTFs and welcome back to those returning for another year! For those who don't yet know me, my name is Shawna Meechan and I am your GTFF President for the 2015-2016 school year. I am excited to work with each and every one of you to improve working conditions on the University of Oregon campus, enhance our connections with other campus groups including the two other unions represented at UO, and just hang out and get to know you.

Your executive board, executive council, and bargaining committee along with many active and engaged individual GTFs have been working hard this summer to prepare for the coming year. I could fill a whole agitator with all the work that has been done, but I want to highlight some of the most exciting things that have been happening and what that means for the upcoming year.

First, the executive council held the fall retreat out on the Oregon coast. At the retreat, the e-council discussed the likely passage of "Right to Work" legislation (See "**Freeloader Initiatives -a.k.a. Right to Work legislation- On The Horizon**") and the effect that would have on our union... *cont'd pg. 2*

**Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation, Local 3544, AFT Oregon, AFL-CIO**

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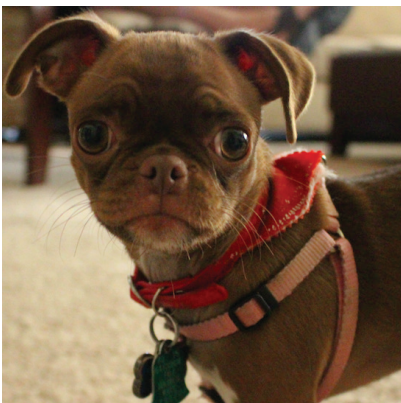


## A Letter From The President...

One of the strategies they came up with to combat these devastating effects is to work hard to sign up at least 80% of our membership as full members. This goal is not only achievable, but with full membership rates this high, we can do a better job of representing the interests of all our members. So expect to see your friendly department stewards stopping by with a “blue card” and ask them about the many benefits of full union membership! If you aren’t sure if your department has a steward, or if you would like to be one or are simply interested in helping us reach this goal, you can find the current list of stewards on the website at <http://gtff3544.net/about/stewards/> or you can contact our VP of Organizing, Annie Caruso, at [organizing@gtff.net](mailto:organizing@gtff.net).

The second big project that we have been working on is bargaining over the new Oregon State law on paid sick days. Over the course of the last several years, the GTFF has been helping to lobby for mandatory paid sick days for Oregon workers and earlier this summer, we succeeded! Within a couple of days of the new law being passed, the GTFF requested to open “impact bargaining” with the administration over this issue. Because the new law goes into effect in the middle of our current contract (policies must be in effect January 1, 2016), and this is a bargainable issue, we can open just those articles affected by this new law to bargain separate from and before our normal bargaining cycle begins. After dragging their heels all summer, the administration has finally agreed to start meeting with us and impact bargaining for paid sick days began on Friday, September 25. Please stay tuned for continuing updates on this issue!

Finally, in addition to their hard work preparing for impact bargaining, the bargaining committee has also been hard at work preparing for our regular bargaining cycle which begins on October 15th! They have been researching suggested proposals from last Spring’s GMM bargaining brainstorm and have been putting together language for the GTFF proposals. There is still a lot of work to be done for bargaining and I encourage anyone and everyone who is interested in joining the committee to email me at [president@gtff.net](mailto:president@gtff.net). There are lots of different jobs to do (research, create presentations, recruit stories from your fellow GTFFs, note taking, and more!), so any skill set you think you could bring to the committee will have a place!



As you can tell, many people have been hard at work for you this summer and the work continues! I hope to get to know each of you as the year goes on. Please feel free to stop by the office to grab a cup of coffee, some candy, and a chat! I will usually have my puppy, Mabel (see photo), with me if you need more enticement!

*Shawna Meechan  
GTFF President  
Political Science*

## Fun Facts About Your Board & Staff

We’ve compiled some fun, interesting, and outright surprising facts about your staff and new board. Can you guess which fact belongs to who?

- 1) I broke my nose playing a game of hide-and-seek
- 2) I was a television and film actor as a child
- 3) I’ve been to Azerbaijan
- 4) I know the first 10 digits of pi. I used to know the first 100 when I was in middle school. I wanted to break the record for memorizing the digits
- 5) I spent a year abroad after college on a Fulbright grant.
- 6) Birds kind of freak me out, even the little ones
- 7) I broke my first bone (my pinky finger) playing dodgeball in college
- 8) I have double jointed knees
- 9) I am allergic to chewing gum.
- 10) I had scarlet fever in high school and started an outbreak which was written about in a medical journal
- 11) I can identify hundreds of different shellfish species
- 12) I love Mariah Carey
- 13) At various points, I have been able to read 4 different ancient languages
- 14) I was on a softball team that placed third in the World Championships, in which I pitched a no hitter during the series.
- 15) My high school career counseling screening determined geriatric podiatry was an ideal career for me.
- 16) I like heavy metal music but really dislike Metallica

cont'd pg 3



# Get to Know Your New Board Members!



*Here we see Meaghan cuddling with the fossil of an animal she loved so much she had to study it, an oreodont.*

## Meaghan Emery VP of Equity and Inclusion

I'm a Ph.D. student in the Geological Sciences department studying paleontology (fossils!). In my free time, I like to climb and cave, and generally get outside. I ran for this position because I see ways our union could better represent and engage its members. Over the next year I plan to increase caucus participation, address participation and inclusion issues at GMMs, identify areas of inequity within our union and work to solve them, and collaborate with campus groups to address more systemic issues that can't be fixed through collective bargaining.

*Meaghan Emery  
VP Equity and Inclusion  
Geological Sciences*

## Camila Alvarez VP of Membership

Dear Members---My name is Camila Alvarez and I am your VP of Membership this year. The VP of Membership is a brand new position, as it was voted in by the members last academic term. In this position, I handle all blue cards and the membership database, along with all other general e-board responsibilities. My interest in the GTFF stems from my activist background. My father is a shop steward in the Culinary Union-UNITE HERE local 226- in Las Vegas which represents 60,000 casino workers. In Vegas, I was involved with immigration and social justice movements. In my mind, activism is an essential complement to academia. :)

I double majored in mathematics and sociology at UNLV. I am a fourth year (doctoral candidate in "professional" terms) sociology student. My research interests are statistics and urban-environmental sociology. When I graduate, I hope to open a labor education and research center in Las Vegas. I am really happy to serve on the E-board this year! Please let me know if there is ANYTHING I can do to assist you—I serve the members! Hope we get to meet soon~



*Camila Alvarez  
VP Membership  
Sociology*

### Fun Facts...

- 17) I secretly love Dolly Parton
- 18) I have a scar from when I got bit by a wiener dog when I was 2
- 19) I used to smoke cigarettes
- 20) For the past 10 years, I've not lived at a single address for longer than 12 months

- 21) My body's electrical field makes it so I cannot wear quartz movement watches for more than a year without them malfunctioning
- 22) At my house I have at least six ways to make coffee, plus crystals in case of emergency.
- 23) I've summited Mt. Hood 3

- times
- 24) I am currently working on developing a graphic novel series with two of my siblings, which is rather slow going because, you know... Grad school.

*GTFF E-Board*





## Freeloader Initiatives (a.k.a. Right to Work legislation) On The Horizon

Two Oregon ballot initiatives and a Supreme Court case are attempting to make Freeloader Initiatives (a.k.a. 'Right to Work') law of the land, either statewide or nationwide. The Oregon Department of Justice is currently considering two initiative petitions' ballot titles in the spirit of right to work. Simultaneously, and more importantly, the Supreme Court will soon hear the *Fredrichs v. California Teachers Association* case. Both the SCOTUS and state ballot measures are aimed at making mandatory fair share fees illegal for public sector employees. Both are a part of the 'right to work' style attack on unions.

An agency-shop agreement between the employer and the associated union allows the employer to hire non-union employees, however these employees must pay fair share, or agency fees, in order to cover collective bargaining costs. Right to work legislation prohibits unions from collecting these agency fees from non-union members. This increases the number of 'free-riders' in a union because non-union employees still receive the benefits that the union provides without being a member or paying fees.

*Fredrichs v. California Teachers Association* is attempting to turn back legislation that allows agency fees. Rebecca Fredrichs, along with other teachers and the right-wing litigation group Center for Individual Rights argue that agency fees are a violation of First Amendment rights. Specifically, they claim that union activity is inherently political, and that paying fees towards political activity is a violation of their freedom of association, protected under the First

Amendment.

It is important to note that, while one could argue that union activity is inherently political, much



of our union fees do not go toward political contributions. Most of our fees go towards operating costs, staff, and per capita fees to AFT-Oregon and AFT-National. While it is legal for unions to use public resource for political purposes (see Oregon Ballot measure 64), AFT-Oregon uses voluntary member contributions to the Political Action Fund for political purposes. Fair share fees primarily go toward collective bargaining activities and grievance support, which every employee – union or non-union members alike – benefit from. In short, the purpose of right to work legislation (that is, a freeloader initiative) is to undermine unions through allowing workers to benefit from union gains without economically contributing to the union's ability to protect and advance these benefits.

Right to work legislation reflects a coordinated attack on unions in this country. Such legislation not only reduces the bargaining power of unions, but it also undermines worker solidarity by instigating disagreement and competition between workers. Right to work laws also do more than reduce the power of unions—they also reduce the overall quality of life in states that adopt them. In states where right to work laws have been

passed, median household income is nearly 12 percent less than other states. Workers in right-to-work states are also less likely to have access to job-based health insurance and are more likely to pay for a larger share of the premiums. Right-to-Work states invest less money into education; have higher poverty rates and higher workplace fatality rates than their non-right-to-work counterparts—they dramatically erode quality of life by multiple measures, all so employers have greater options to disempower workers and cheapen their labor costs.

Although there is little we can do to influence the SCOTUS decision at this time, we can begin building a stronger union now, and be prepared and informed in the case that such a decision is made. In the event that SCOTUS decides to undermine unions and quality of life for a whole sector of labor nationwide, union and labor movement preparations are the first step to fighting (and ultimately winning) the war on labor. One place to start is by getting more involved in various with the GTFF, specifically in political education activities and the organizing committee. By strengthening our union and building solidarity with others, we can help fight back the right-wing offensive and secure labor rights for all!

(Visit <http://www.aflcio.org/Legislation-and-Politics/State-Legislative-Battles/Ongoing-State-Legislative-Attacks/Right-to-Work> for more info.)

*Kadie Manion*  
VP Political Education  
Sociology

## Ask Glenn! Fall 2015 Insurance FAQ with your friendly neighborhood benefits administrator

**Q:** Hey Glenn, I had insurance last spring, but did not decide to take the summer insurance because I did not have a GTF, I'm all good for fall term, right?

**A:** No. If you did not take the summer insurance, you fall off the map. As far I know, you tumbled over the edge of the earth and were eaten by sea serpents, or worse, graduated. You did not get any of my reminder emails and your coverage is not currently active. You have to fill out a new payroll deduction form for your share of the premiums—yes! You have to do this *\*every\** year.



**Q:** What's all this noise about dental plans? I heard we can switch plans?

**A:** True! You have until Halloween to switch from the plan you are on to the other plan. After that, your plans turns into a pumpkin. No, it just means you are stuck with the plan you currently have for another year.

**Q:** Quick follow up, if I may, what is the difference between the two plans?

**A:** Why so formal, we're all friends around here.

- The "Plus" plan: is a preferred provider network, but you can see *\*any\** dentist and have the visit covered. If you go to one or one hundred fifty dentists who are preferred providers, they waive a \$50 deductible on non-preventive work (e.g., filling, tooth extraction, root canal, and crown). Minor procedures (e.g., filling, tooth extraction, root canal, wisdom tooth) covered at 80%, your share is 20%. Major services (e.g., crown, implants) covered at 60%, your share is 40%. The major limitation is you have a \$1000 annual cap on your coverage. i.e., once insurance's share comes to \$1000 they have paid to your dentist, your coverage ends!

- The "Essentials" plan: is an "HMO," plan which means you pick one of six clinics to be your exclusive dental provider. Every time you go in you pay a \$25 office fee—even if you are only getting a free clean-

ing. From there you pay a flat co-pay fee instead of percentage. The main benefit of this plan is there is no cap on coverage. As long as you keep paying your co-pay fees, the insurance keeps on paying out!

**Q:** Glenn, which plan should I select?

**A:** It's a matter of your preference versus your needs. Here's what I tell people\*

- If you want to go to a specific dentist, go with "Plus."
  - If you *\*only\** go in for cleanings, exams, and x-rays, go with "Plus."
  - If you go in for cleanings, exams, x-rays, and maybe couple fillings, two plans financially even out.
  - If you have kinda messed up teeth, the "Essentials" will probably be a safer financial bet.
- \*These recommendations should not be construed as any kind of guarantee, either in terms of benefit pay out or personal satisfaction. If you have questions, ask me, ask your colleagues, ask the insurance company! But know none of us can soothsay your dental future needs.

**Q:** What is this \$534 insurance change on my Duck Web account? I thought the GTF plan was only \$57.36 per term for an individual! What's all the she-nanigans?

**A:** You must not be from around these parts! As an international graduate student, the federal government requires you to carry health insurance as part of your visa requirements. Because of this, the UO automatically signs you up for their own insurance (for \$534/term). You need to actively waive the UO's international student insurance. Come by the GTF office and sign up for the GTF insurance. It is about 1/10 the price and equally, if not slightly better in many regards, to the UO's. If you already signed up with the GTF plan, make sure you log into Duck Web and waive the UO's insurance by Halloween (Oct. 31).

*Glenn Morris  
Health Benefits Administrator*





## In Search Of Asylum: One GTF's quest to help the Nepali people rebuild in the aftermath of disaster



*You hear a rumble. Then you see shaking around you. Trees. Houses. Fences. The earth is suddenly ALIVE. You see bricks falling. Dust rises for miles around as houses collapse and masses of earth follow gravity. In some ways everything seems silent. But you still hear the screams of women, the howls of dogs, and the cries of terrified children. Then you see and feel the ground moving underneath you, like millions of fists are punching at random from below. "Quake" is not a sufficient description at this magnitude. The earth isn't simply quaking or quivering or even shaking. It has turned into a fluid. Like an ocean during a storm. The sudden instability of the ground below your feet is inconceivable. For an instant, you think the earth might open up and swallow everything whole. Sounds become muffled as your mind struggles to comprehend what you're seeing. You feel like you're in a video game. Or in one of those scenes in a movie after a bomb blast when all you hear is ringing as sounds slowly begin to register. It seems to last for an eternity. Later you find out it was only a couple of minutes. All you can do is stand or crouch in a "safe" place and wait for it to pass. Eventually it does. But you are left with this sense of loss. The intractable faith that you can feel safe at any given moment is gone. There's no warning. Not like a hurricane, a tornado, or a tsunami. Nothing. You're living your life one second and the next it may be shattered in as little as 30 seconds. And everything could change. So for days or weeks you sleep lightly (or outside), you stay away from tall buildings and narrow alleys, you take lightning-fast showers. Always ready to run. I imagine this must be what it's like to live in a war zone. But there's no enemy here. There's no one to blame or to beg for mercy. THERE IS NO ASYLUM. This is how it felt to be in Nepal. This is the fear that many are living with every day. I got to come home. Far away where the ground doesn't move several times a day as a cruel reminder that it can shatter your life in an instant. And I left far too many people behind.*

While conducting research for my dissertation in Myanmar and Cambodia last year, I had the opportunity to visit the beautiful country of Nepal in January 2015 and was immediately enthralled by its beautiful mountain scenery, spectacular Himalayan trekking, exquisite-yet-simple vegetarian cuisine, and overall atmosphere of...

*cont'd pg 7*

## In Search Of Asylum...

caring and community. In short, I fell in love. So as I was wrapping up my research in Cambodia in April, my travel companion – Randy - and I decided to return to Nepal before leaving the region to return to the US and booked our tickets to Kathmandu for May 1.

On April 25, Nepal was hit by a devastating 7.9 magnitude earthquake. Randy and I were deeply saddened by this news and torn between cancelling our plans or keeping our plane tickets and assisting with relief efforts instead. We were concerned that our arrival would be more of a burden on the infrastructure than our assistance could compensate for. So we frantically set out to assess the situation on the ground and determine whether there was a place or organization that could use our help. I contacted a friend who does a lot of international work and she put me in touch with ICA-Nepal, a local NGO that said they could definitely use our help. But their e-mails were few and far between and it was still unclear what the situation was on the ground. So 4 hours before our flight on the morning of May 1, we finally made the decision to go. And we were so glad we did!

ICA-Nepal was distributing relief supplies, but they were also looking for ideas for earthquake-proof housing that could be built quickly, cheaply, and without professional training. Randy and I have been interested in sustainable and self-sustainable homes and their potential to alleviate social and environmental stresses, so we already knew where to look for resources. Randy found some information on Earthbag homes, which are built using rice bags filled with soil and are resistant to earthquakes and floods. So with the help of some volunteers from India, we wrote a proposal for ICA-Nepal. Before we knew it, we were building the home using only instructions from the internet and the labor of roughly 50 volunteers from the local village where we built the home, as well as other areas of Nepal, India, and the US.



On May 12, a second major earthquake (7.3) hit Nepal, and being there to experience it deepened my empathy and highlighted the urgency of helping Nepali people build earthquake-proof homes so that they can once again feel safe. Many of the people of Nepal lost everything in the earthquakes, including loved ones. And six months after the earthquakes, the political and economic situations of Nepal continue to deteriorate with strikes over the newly drafted constitution, an unofficial fuel embargo on the Indian border, and continued corruption and mishandling of relief supplies. Hundreds of thousands of Nepali people still wait for materials and help with rebuilding their homes and communities. Making these new (earthquake-proof) homes self-sustainable would not only be good for the environment (and thus future generations), but would allow these communities to have some autonomy from corrupt politicians and corporations. It would also reduce their labor load and perhaps free up some time for many to strengthen their communities and build solidarity networks.

Randy and I will be returning to Nepal for 5 weeks this winter to help with building self-sustainable homes on a project (Rebuild For Change) that we believe to be socially and environmentally responsible, with emphases on community involvement in the planning/building and making space for women's voices to be heard when/if they wish. We are paying for our trip independently, but the organization responsible for the project has asked for our help with fundraising for materials and local labor. Please help us spread the word!

Crowdfunding campaign site: <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/rebuild-for-change-help-manegaun-nepal/>

Benefit Party: Tentatively at Blairally Vintage Arcade on Thur, Nov 12, 2015.

*Sierra Deutsch  
Sociology*





# From The Editor

The Editorial Committee for the Agitator is very pleased to have received so many submissions to the newsletter. Keep them coming to [member.communications@gtff.net](mailto:member.communications@gtff.net)!

If you do submit, we ask that you submit up to 300 words in a Word document with standard formatting. Also, don't forget to include a title!

## Staying informed & connected is easier than ever!

- We want feedback! Tell us what you think about the newsletter at: [member.communications@gtff.net](mailto:member.communications@gtff.net)
- Come to membership meetings and social events! (see calendar on pg. 1 for times and locations)
- Join the Facebook group: GTFF
- Follow on Twitter: @GTFF\_3544
- Check out the website: [www.GTFF3544.net](http://www.GTFF3544.net)

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*Submissions of all sorts are  
welcome!*

*Contact your  
VP Membership  
Communications at  
[member.communications@  
gtff.net](mailto:member.communications@gtff.net) for more  
Information*



### About The GTFF

Our Mission Statement:

*“The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation, a union of the graduate employees of the University of Oregon, commits to creating a strong, safe, and diverse community of educators and scholars for the purpose of protecting and promoting the interests of its membership.”*

The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) is a labor union representing over 1300 Graduate Teaching Fellows and Research Assistants at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

Our goals are:

- to improve the quality of life for GTFs in the areas of salary, workload and working conditions through collective bargaining and the enforcement of our contract,
- to fight for an adequately funded educational system, accessible for all people, and
- to help create a revitalized, socially aware union movement, which is a positive force for change for the entire community. Volunteers and activists are welcome!