

December 8th, 2015



# THE AGITATOR

Newsletter of the University of Oregon

GRADUATE TEACHING FELLOWS FEDERATION

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## Upcoming Events!

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### Wednesday, December 9th

GTFF End of Term Party. Come share your favorite board games and desserts at the Northwest Youth Corps to celebrate a great term with your fellow GTFFs. Beer, wine, cider and burrito bar are provided. All are welcome!

### Now- December 12th

Bags of Love Toy Drive in the GTFF office! The GTFF Parent's Caucus and Women's Caucus are co-sponsoring a toy and clothing drive this winter for the many local children in need of toys, clothing, and school supplies. As you're wrapping up the term, please consider wrapping up a few items too, and dropping them by the GTFF office to fill the barrel for Bags of Love by December 12!



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## The GTFF is Political: A Retrospective on Our Union's History, and a Call To Action

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This December marks an historic moment for the GTFF: it marks the one-year anniversary of the first strike in our union's history. It also marks our union's 40th anniversary year; we won our first contract, in 1978, following two strike votes and several years of collective organizing. This anniversary offers an opportunity for deep reflection on the state of our union: we have a lot to celebrate and be proud of, but we also have significant and ongoing work to undertake as unionized graduate employees and members of the broader campus and local communities. Particularly following our strike, graduate employees across the US look to us as leaders in the movement to unionize and fight for social and economic justice. This is both a privilege and a responsibility, as we cannot afford to disengage from a struggle and a movement that are far from over.

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## The GTF is Political...

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Last year's strike, and the very formation of our union forty years ago, were powerful political acts. Our members, past and present, stood up for their rights as workers, and for their values as citizens. We must not forget that organized labor is, by nature, inherently political. Last year's fight for paid parental and medical leave--along with every other fight in our union's history--underscore the political nature of collective bargaining. We would not have the strong contract we have today were it not for the political power inherent to labor organizing. We would not have our contract were it not for solidarity within our own membership and, more significantly, from other unions and political allies across the campus, the state, and at a national level.

Beginning in January, graduate employees will have access to paid sick

leave for the first time in our union's history. The connection between our contract and political engagement is self-evident; graduate employees at the University of Oregon would not have access to paid sick leave were it not for coordinated political action and solidarity with other unions and political allies at the local and state levels. We are indebted to our community and labor allies who participated in the campaign to turn paid sick leave into state law.

At this significant moment in our union's history, we must not forget, repress, or deny the critical importance of outside solidarity and the inherent role of political action in our organizing efforts. We must not forget who we have been historically as a union: a community of workers committed to fighting for social and economic justice and equity.

We must do more, now, to enact and uphold these values, both within and beyond our union. Time is of the essence, as labor unions across the United States brace themselves for the *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* Supreme Court case and dangerous anti-worker legislation, known as Right to Work. Right to Work legislation effectively legalizes the dismantling of union rights and organizing and ensures a lower quality of life for workers and their families. When workers are not supported and represented by strong and active unions, they are much less likely to earn a living wage, they experience decreased access to employer-provided health care, and they face higher rates of workplace injuries and fatalities.

In states where Right to Work legislation has already passed, such as Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Idaho, Texas, and Florida, the agency and power of labor unions have been stripped away. Many states have already implemented extreme right-wing measures, including: (1) anti-abortion legislation, (2) limited or denied access to free and/or affordable women's health clinics, (3) discriminatory practices, such as the right to deny a trial by jury to people (of color) accused of a crime, and (4) decreased spending on public education. These measures not only disenfranchise and disempower workers and their families, but also are explicitly misogynist and racist.

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## Back From The Oregon AFL-CIO Convention

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The weekend of October 23, I had the privilege to attend and participate as a GTFF delegate in the 2015 Oregon AFL-CIO Convention that took place in lovely Seaside, Oregon. For new members who may not be familiar with the Oregon AFL-CIO, it is the state chapter of one of the oldest labor unions in the United States: the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. It is our “grandparent union” -- while AFT is our parent union, AFL-CIO is AFT’s parent. Because of this affiliation, the GTFF has the opportunity to send (a) delegate(s) to the annual convention. It was interesting and exciting to participate in the democratic process of this statewide organization and to meet unionist cousins from diverse backgrounds and professions, ranging from letter carriers to stagehands, from carpenters to food-service workers. Highlights from this year’s convention included watching three candidates for Oregon’s next Secretary of State (Senator Richard

Devlin, House Representative Val Hoyle, and Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian) debate each other on the convention stage, and a rousing speech from Oregon Governor Kate Brown, which was met with multiple standing ovations and a motion from the floor to endorse her in the upcoming gubernatorial elections. The motion passed unanimously.

Aside from offering a space to bring politicians and unionists from all walks of life together in the same room to discuss ways to move forward together in terms of political campaigns, the economy, and social justice, another primary order of business at the AFL-CIO convention is to hear resolutions proposed by members of the many locals represented within the larger body. This portion of the convention was exciting and inspiring as several progressive resolutions were passed, including:

Resolution no. 3, “On Race and the Labor Movement” - this resolution states that the Oregon AFL-CIO will hold at least one racial justice workshop in 2016 and work to advance issues faced by workers of color in Oregon, however possible. Resolution no. 8, “Two Free years of Post-Secondary Education in Oregon” - this one is pretty self-explanatory; it states that the Oregon AFL-CIO will support legislative efforts to promote free access to two years of higher education to students in Oregon.

Resolution no. 13, “Expanding SNAP Eligibility to Include Graduate Employees” - this is especially relevant to GTFF members, as it stipulates that the AFL-CIO will support and promote legislation that expands SNAP benefits to include graduate employees. Resolution no. 15, “Endorsement of \$15 Minimum Wage Initiative and Campaign” - this resolution states that the AFL-CIO shall support and promote the \$15 minimum wage initiative and encourages its members to help in the campaign, while also educating its members and their communities on dangerous anti-worker ballot measures in Oregon.

Resolution no. 19, “In Support of Black Lives Matter” - this resolution holds that the AFL-CIO is committed to the principle that Black Lives Matter, and that “Black Jobs Matter,” and that these principles should be enacted in all AFL-CIO affiliates.

I highly encourage interested GTFF members to consider attending the 2016 convention! You will learn a lot, meet interesting people from all over the state, and hopefully be inspired by the momentum and power of the labor union in Oregon.

*Natalie Brenner  
VP of External Relations  
Romance Languages*



## Solidarity Peanut Sauce

### Ingredients:

- 3 tbs of peanut butter (creamy)
- 2 tbs of Hoisin sauce (brown-ish sauce you see at Pho places)
- 1 tbs of Sriracha sauce
- 1 tsp of sesame oil
- ½ lime
- ¼ to ½ tbs of toasted sesame seed
- 2-3 mint leaves, chopped
- 1 tbs of crushed peanuts
- A pinch of salt (or ½ tsp of fish sauce)

### Directions:

1. In a small pot, heat the peanut butter on low heat.
2. When the peanut butter starts to bubble, add hoisin sauce, little by little. Stir.
3. Simmer. Add Sriracha sauce. Squeeze in the lime. Add salt or fish sauce.
4. Stir. When all ingredients are dissolved, turn off the heat. Add sesame oil.
5. Sprinkled with crushed peanuts, toasted sesame seed, and chopped mint leaves.



### Notes:

This recipe is simply the base; you can easily adjust it. Add more peanut butter if you want it thick. Add a little bit of warm water if you want it less thick. Add more Sriracha if you want your forehead to sweat. The sauce can be refrigerated and is good for about a week or so. You can warm it up in the microwave (10 seconds or less). It's cheap to make and good on veggies, meat, and rice. I have a pretty terrible personality, but this sauce has led me to make some friends. Thank you, sauce.

*Prakaiwan Vajrabhaya  
Linguistics*

## The GTF is Political...

Labor unions must work in solidarity against these laws that weaken the agency and well-being of all workers. We know that Right to Work legislation and the upcoming Supreme Court case are backed by conservative politicians and funded by right-wing billionaires and corporate entities, such as the Koch Brothers and the Walton Corporation. If we want to protect our rights and benefits as graduate employees in this increasingly anti-union political climate, we must acknowledge the political nature of our union and engage in its political processes.

As we look toward the future, we must direct our political engagement both inwardly and outwardly. We must not only acknowledge but also work to confront systemic issues of racial, gender, and sexual inequities, both within and beyond our union. Through our ongoing commitment to social and economic justice for all workers, we must begin to address these issues in meaningful ways. To this end, look for a continuation of this discussion in the next Agitator.

*Natalie Brenner, VP External Relations, Romance Languages*

*David Grych, former Bargaining Team Member, Physics*

*Kadie Manion, VP Political Education, Sociology*

*Erin Moberg, former VP Political Education, Ph.D., Romance Languages  
(Fall 2015)*



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# Give GTFs An Opportunity To Review Their Course Supervisors

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## Supervisor

**Noun** /'soʊpər, vīzər/

1. Someone who is in charge of an activity, a place, or a group of people such as workers or students.

According to the Macmillan Dictionary, the term “supervisor” encompasses a broad definition that includes overseeing the activities of other workers or students. Definitions set forth by the federal government or the State of Oregon for the term supervisor narrow even further based on categories of private companies, public entities, or in cases of harassment or workplace misconduct. But for the purpose of this article, defining supervisor has a simple purpose: as Graduate Teaching Fellows (GTFs) our course professors act in the position of supervisor, and we should have a right to formally and routinely review them at the end of each quarter assignment.

Because my supervising professor determines my workload, the hours I dedicate outside of class, my discussion content, and how I interact with students, I feel I have a right to review that professor, who is acting in a position similar to a boss or manager. While course professors and GTFs are engaging in a supervisor/employee relationship, there are very few human resource mechanisms in place to protect GTFs from

underperforming supervisors.

As a PhD student in the University of Oregon’s Department of History, I am not given the opportunity as a GTF to formally and routinely review my course professors. However, at the end of every quarter, the department asks my supervising professor to review my efforts as a teacher and employee. This is an antiquated system that favors the course professor and alienates or silences the GTFs. My request is not a demanding one: in many other organizations in this country, private and public, employees are given the opportunity to review their supervisors.

There is, of course, a system already in place for the course supervisor to receive some feedback on their teaching. Undergraduate students enrolled in each course are asked to review their course professor on DuckWeb. In comparison to undergraduate students, however, GTFs are in a unique position to provide a thorough, sophisticated review of a course professor. We have advanced academic skills that allow us to understand, critique, or praise the content delivered in lecture. We also have a right to formally tell our departments that a course professor acted fairly or unfairly as a supervising employee.

The most recent Collective Bargaining Agreement between our union and the University of Oregon does account for a GTF to review the amount of work a course professor

expects of them: “Within three months (one term) of the end of an assignment, the GTF has the right to make recommendations about the workload allocation for their specific work assignment(s). Recommendations may be submitted in writing or the GTF may request to meet with their supervisor or other department representative to provide the recommendations verbally.” This recommendation process, however, only considers workload expectations, and does not allow the GTF to comment on the course professor’s other skills or deficiencies as both a teacher and supervisor. GTFs should be given an opportunity to systematically and quarterly review their course professor in a way that does not cause protest or retribution against the GTF within the department. There is an easy solution to this problem. At the end of a quarter, when graduate students sign onto DuckWeb to review the professors for courses in which they are students, there should be another link to review the supervising course professor in which they are GTFs. Under that link, GTFs can comment on the course professor’s workload requirements, delivery of course content, abilities to lead or direct the GTFs, and their responsiveness to issues such as student plagiarism, harassment, or attendance.

*Hayley Brazier  
History*



## 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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*Want to contribute to your union newsletter?*

*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!