

October 14th, 2016

# The GITATOR

Newsletter of the University of Oregon  
GRADUATE TEACHING FELLOWS FEDERATION  
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## Upcoming Events!

**Wednesday, October 19th, 5:30-7pm**  
The fourth annual Graduate Student Family "Night at the Museum" will be held at the Museum of Natural and Cultural History! Meet other graduate students, enjoy free snacks, and take a guided tour of the museum! Visit <https://gradschool.uoregon.edu/family-museum-night-rsvp> for more details.

**Monday, October 24th- 28th**  
GTFF Collective Bargaining ratification vote! Our hard-won gains in our new CBA have only one more step--they need to be voted in by you! Stop by this week and vote--as a member-driven union we can't do it without you! The office will be open for voting from 9am to 4pm.

**Saturday, November 12th**  
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 Jessica Neaife at [operations@gtff.net](mailto:operations@gtff.net) to register!



## A Letter From The President: Welcome [G]rad Employees!

Welcome new Graduate Employees (GEs) to the GTFF, and welcome back to returning members! For those who don't know me yet, my name is Kadie Manion, your GTFF President for the 2016-2017 school year! I hope you all have had an enjoyable summer. It seemed to be a busy summer for organized labor, both locally and internationally, and a few occurrences helped me gain some perspective.

The National Labor Relations Board ruled that GEs are in fact... wait for it... EMPLOYEES! This ruling is a huge win for GEs everywhere, as now no one can deny our employee status. Between the conversations Michael, Lola, and I had this summer about the NLRB ruling with GEs across North America (at the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions Conference), I've come to realize that the GTFF has been an indisputably influential force in the academic labor movement. It has been 40 years since the GTFF first won recognition as a labor union, and we are among the first three GE unions ever in the U.S. This history has given us a fantastic collective bargaining agreement (CBA), a powerful voice on this campus, and it inspires newly formed GE unions across the country. Add a pinch of winning-an-historic-strike a few years ago and you have a recipe for a union that I'm beyond proud to be a member of, let alone the President!  
(con't pg. 2)



## A Letter From The President...

What is so uniquely encouraging about the GTFF - and GE unions in general - is the fact that our union relies on being organized, member-driven, and democratic: organized because our membership has such high natural rates of turn over, so we have to be prepared to reach out to every new employee to inform them of their rights to join a union; member-driven because we only have two (awesome) paid staff members, so we have to do most of the dirty work ourselves; democratic because our general membership makes up the strong decision-making force of our union, such as by voting to ratify the new contract our amazing bargaining team won for us (voting takes place Oct. 24-28).

My goal is to further extend these principles that are already so integral to the GTFF. One way to do this is by bolstering our caucuses and committees. I can't do this alone... in fact, that would be against these principles! The GTFF is not my union or "the" union, it's our union and that means we need everyone to feel empowered to have a say in what our union does and how it runs. There are so many ways to do this and I'm here to support you and our union, so please don't hesitate reach out to me for anything!!

*Kadie Manion  
GTFF President*

## Statement Against Proposed Bylaw Amendment, Article 11 "Replace Robert's Rules of Order with Graduate Employee Union's Rules of Order"

The former VP of Equity and Inclusion and a committee created the Graduate Employee Union's Rules of Order to replace Robert's Rules (RR). While I think that RR is problematic, I do not think that there has been enough experimentation or trial of any new system of rules to bind us to them within our bylaws. We are currently experimenting with consensus decision making, and I think that this is a worthwhile endeavor that seeks to value all input and come to agreement, rather than the current system of simple majority rules. We can continue to think about the benefits from different systems of facilitation and group decision making in order to finely tailor a process that works for our union.

*At this time, I urge you to vote NO to the proposed Article 11 amendment.*

*Nicole Francisco  
VP of Equity and Inclusion*

## Ya Gotta Keep 'Em Agitated:

### Labor History Edition!

#### *Did you know...*

##### ... This Labor History Moment?

The first recorded labor strike occurred c. 1155 BCE in Deir el Medina, Ancient Egypt under the reign of Ramses III. The workers went on strike after not receiving their rations.

##### ... These October U.S. Labor Events?

*October 6th, 1986* – Female flight attendants won an 18-year lawsuit against United Airlines for firing them for getting married, resulting in the reinstatement of 475 attendants and \$37 million back-pay settlements for 1,725 flight attendants.

*October 7th, 1879* – Birth of the legendary Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organizer, poet, and songwriter Joe Hill.

*October 18th, 1648* – First labor organization in America, the Shoemakers of Boston, was founded.

*October 24th, 1940* – The 40-hour work week first went into effect under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

##### ...This Important Quote?

"Goodbye Bill. I die like a true blue rebel. Don't waste any time in mourning. Organize.", Joe Hill, before he died, in a telegram to 'Big Bill' Haywood

**Well, now you know!!**

*Jeff Ewing  
VP of Membership Communications*

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## Get to Know Your Contract!

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If you are a GE at the University of Oregon, you are a member of the local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), GTFF 3544. Congratulations! Now you are also a member of our Union's bargaining unit, which works to improve GE working conditions whenever possible or necessary.

Over the past 40 years, through collective bargaining with University representatives (and through the occasional strike) we have achieved milestones including-but-not-limited-to pay increases, insurance for GEs and their dependents, student fee caps, and (most recently) access to both nursing spaces on campus and paid sick days.

Our contract is an agreement between GEs and their supervisors, and one of its purposes is to make sure GEs, supervisors, and the University all do their jobs. The whole contract is full of useful information, and it can be accessed through [GTFF3544.net](http://GTFF3544.net), but I'd like to summarize a number of rights and articles that I've found most useful to GEs with employment-related questions.

**Weingarten Rights:** As union members, we have the right to union representation at investigatory meetings with employers. We can ask for a union representative before or during such a meeting, and this action is not punishable.

**Article 8- Nondiscrimination:** The University will not discriminate or tolerate discrimination in the workplace, and (along with the Union) agrees to abide by federal and state laws and regulations for affirmative action.

**Article 9- Work Agreement/ Work Assignment:** With the exception of unexpected changes (including variation in student enrollment and courses offered), course assignments should be made at least two weeks prior to the beginning of the new term. You are under no obligation to exceed the hours of your full time equivalent (FTE), and are encouraged to communicate with your supervisor about your workload and any potential overwork. If you are concerned about adhering to your FTE, you should fill out a workload allocation form with your instructor, which can also be found at [GTFF3544.net](http://GTFF3544.net).

**Article 10- Health, Safety and Work Environment:** The University is obligated to provide GEs with a safe, clean and healthy working environment, as well as reasonable office or desk space and access to private spaces for meeting with students and faculty.

**Article 21- Salary:** GE workloads are prorated on the percentage basis of FTE, which means that a GE with a 0.50FTE workload cannot be expected to exceed 219 hours in a term. Scaling down, this also means

that a GE with a 0.40FTE cannot be expected to exceed 175 hours in a term, and so on.

**Grievances and Complaints:** While the contract insures that most GE appointments run smoothly, it is possible that the contract will be violated by a participating party either intentionally or unintentionally. In such a case, you should be aware that there is a system in place known as the grievance process, through which the Union works to defend workers' rights as outlined in the contract.

If you are concerned that your contract has been violated, or are made uncomfortable in the work place in some other way, help is available!

- Contact your department stewards, whose names should be listed on your department's Union bulletin board.
- If you don't know who your stewards are, or wish to reach the Union directly, you can contact Genevieve Perdue ([Grievances@GTFF.net](mailto:Grievances@GTFF.net)) or Michael Marchman ([Stafforganizer@GTFF.net](mailto:Stafforganizer@GTFF.net)). Even if your contract is not explicitly violated, it is important to bring complaints to the Union, because they can be intrinsic in strengthening the contract language at the next round of bargaining for the next generation of GEs!

*Genevieve Perdue  
VP of Grievances*



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## Student Debt- Clinics

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Over 20 million people in the United States are struggling to make their monthly student loan payments, and millions more see economic and personal opportunities pass as they prioritize paying down their debt. Does this sound like you or someone you know?

Over 40 million people in the United States carry student loan debt that is cumulatively worth over \$1.3 trillion – on average over \$30,000 a borrower. This debt has a significant impact on our individual and collective economic well being, with people delaying important life decisions like buying a home or starting a family. Around 20 million borrowers are in distress and unable to keep up with their monthly payments. This is a crisis that goes far beyond the individual and requires collective action.

Many of these people may qualify for free federal programs that can help reduce their monthly payments and eventually lead to student loan forgiveness, but these lifeline programs are significantly under-enrolled.

The GTFE and the American Federation of Teachers are deeply concerned about the impact that student debt is having on you and your colleagues, and it is important to address this crisis to help current borrowers and prevent future generations from going into debt in order to finance their educational goals.

We are proud to host a Student Debt Clinic, which will provide information on how to enroll in Income-Based Repayment programs

and Public Service Loan Forgiveness. Please note, these programs are only available for people who have federal student loans (either FFEL or Direct Loans). Limited information will be available to assist people with private student loans. If you are unsure whether your loan is a federal loan, visit <http://nslds.ed.gov/>. You will have to login, and this website will list all of your federal student loans.

The GTFE will be hosting student debt clinics later this year, but until then we need your help assessing the current needs of our membership and determining our priorities in addressing this problem.

The first step is to take this very brief survey. It only takes a few minutes, and your input will be invaluable in helping to shape our shared agenda!

[https://oregon.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_6VuRnOTaLS8GTCR](https://oregon.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6VuRnOTaLS8GTCR)

*Jessica Neafie  
VP of Operations*

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## Remembering Ayotzinapa

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Monday October 26th marked two years since 43 students were kidnapped and went ‘missing’ in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, in Mexico. These abductions happened in a context of escalating violence throughout Mexico, and these students were not just random targets of the state and federal governments.

The ‘Escuelas Normales’ are schools in Mexico where students go to become future teachers. These schools offer board and food, and are mostly located in rural areas. The state of Guerrero has a long tradition of

radical political activism, and the ‘Escuela Normal de Ayotzinapa’ is mostly attended by students that come from very impoverished families. For these students, becoming a teacher is not merely a matter of economic survival, but of upholding a political tradition of collectivism and social justice.

The day they went missing, the students were in the midst of preparations for a rally that takes place every year to remember the Tlatelolco Massacre, where the Mexican government killed more than 300 students. It’s a very bitter irony of history that the ‘normalistas’ were killed trying to maintain the memory of students killed by the government more than 40 years ago.

Remembering the struggles of teachers, students, and educators around the world is of key importance today more than ever before, when democratic, inclusive and accessible education systems are under attack, being destroyed or significantly reduced worldwide, not only in Guerrero but here in Oregon as well.

Let us not forget the normalistas’ struggle. Let’s keep demanding justice from the federal and state governments in Mexico, and build solidarity bridges and bonds that show that these struggles know no borders!

FUE EL ESTADO. VIVOS SE LOS  
LLEVARON, VIVOS LOS QUEREMOS!

*Lola Loustaunau  
VP of Political Education*

*Diego Contreras Medrano  
VP of External Relations*

## Ask Glenn! The Fun Fact-Filled Q&A about Your GTFF Insurance Coverage.

*Q: Glenn, why do I have a \$635 charge on my student account labeled... something like "insurance...something...something?"*

**A:** You're not from around these parts, are you? In fact, I bet you may be an international graduate student... as an international graduate student, the UO has already automatically enrolled you in their student insurance.

You don't want that, you want my insurance! (Ask the UO and they will confirm that).

Enrolling in my insurance is only half of the process. Once enrolled in the GTFF plan you need to actively waive the UO's insurance! This is NOT automatic. What you need to do is to log into your Duckweb MyHealth portal and provide the UO your GTFF insurance information. **EVEN IF YOU ARE A RETURNING GE, YOU NEED TO DO THIS EVERY YEAR!**

So, (1) enroll in the GTFF insurance coverage, and (2) plug your GTFF insurance info into Duckweb. Problems? Contact Glenn Morris at (541)344-0832, or [benefits@gtff.net](mailto:benefits@gtff.net).

*Q: Glenn, ol' buddy, my coverage is not active right now, I just went to the pharmacy and they said my coverage is inactive. I had coverage last spring. I'm automatically re-enrolled in fall because I have a GE, right?*

**A:** Wrong, my summer-gap-having friend! If there was a gap in your coverage, you basically fall off the map and are eaten by sea serpents and such.

You need to re-enroll. How?

If you have only been off the plan for one term (3 months) I can simply reinstate your coverage after you provide me a 2016/2017 payroll deduction form. Please tell me you need to be reinstated after you get me the form.

*Q: To Whom it May Concern: I was told the department pays for my insurance, but you have seemed to imply in your*



*quixotic missives I owe some sort of "fee" for the insurance? Perhaps someone with your organization will set the pecuniary record straight?*

**A:** This concerns me greatly. Well, OK, I still go to bed and sleep soundly every night... so this less concerns me, and more... how do you say it... fills me with glee, since I have the opportunity to educate folks about "premiums!"

As an employee of the graduate variety, your employer (i.e., the UO) pays 95% of your premiums every quarter you have a GE appointment. You pay...that's right! 5%. (Small print: you pay 20% for summer term if you are NOT a GE during the summer term).

*Q: Oh man, I am a super-fan of the GTFF insurance and am dying to know, anything new this year?*

**A:** Let me tell you a little story of 90-day supply of prescription medicine, that's what! Is the 30-day supply a pain to have to go in every month for? Sign up for our mail order pharmacy service and you can have a decadent 90-day supply mailed to your very doorstep!

*Q: Glenn, I just signed up for the insurance. Where's that insurance card you promised me?*

**A:** First a Q(i), then an A: by "just" what do you mean? Well, two weeks ago.  
**A2:** Ah, got it. Both PacificSource and I are... how do you say... busy as little bees taking applications and processing them. It will take maybe another week, stay strong!

In case you need to go to doctor before then, use the UO health center and they may delay billing until your coverage is activated. Emergency? Urgent? Need prescription drugs? Pay with a credit card, and after your coverage kicks in submit your receipts to PacificSource for reimbursement. When your coverage is activated, it is RETROACTIVE back to 09/16/16.

Glenn Morris  
Health Benefits Administrator

## Welfare Gaps for Impoverished Graduate Employees



Welfare programs in the United States arose out of the Great Depression as a class compromise between capital and labor. Labor ceded control over the production process while companies would pay higher taxes, wages, and benefits. The state would administer the compromise through the establishment of welfare provisions, such as social security, unemployment insurance, food stamps, and the like. Today, many companies take advantage of these policies as a means of corporate welfare.

Corporate welfare refers to the process by which the state expends its resources in a manner through which companies can tangibly benefit. Many companies rely upon the state to provide these tangible benefits to subsidize their operations. This typically includes public investments in infrastructure, emergency response, and/or tax subsidies meant to encourage private investment in communities. Simultaneously, companies have exploited programs to their benefit that were originally designed to help workers weather rough economic situations. Corporations, notably those providing low wages, use state welfare policies to subsidize low wages. Prime examples include Walmart and McDonalds, who encourage workers to sign up for state benefits rather than provide those benefits through wages that would meet the cost of living.

This is not dissimilar to the structure that universities have set up with graduate employees who are forced to work for the university in order to go to school to earn their degree. In a response to the lack of full public investment in the university system, graduate students

must work for the university to receive both a wage (to buy the necessities to make it through life) while also receiving a tuition waiver. The university can consider the tuition waiver as part of the total compensation of graduate employees, which is then used to justify (along with other rhetoric about graduate employees) wages that are below a subsistence level.

Being paid below subsistence wages puts graduate employees in an extremely tough position. Normally, a worker who doesn't make subsistence wages could go to the state and receive various benefits, as mentioned above, to help make it through life. However, the state of Oregon considers graduate employees to be students first (despite taxing their wages as earned income), and correspondingly denies these benefits to graduate students. This means that either graduate students have to find another job, which cuts into their time to study and advance their work (the primary purpose of their enrollment in higher education), or take out student loans.

In other words, where most workers have state support measures open to them graduate employees have more restricted options. Taking out student loans can incur interest rates beyond that of a mortgage while costing just as much. Graduate employees, then, are forced to pay for their own welfare provisions because the university, for a number of reasons, does not pay graduate employees a living wage.

Taken in the aggregate this only magnifies structural problems with the economy. Student debt, especially for advanced degrees, cuts into consumer demand as young workers seek to pay off these loans with high interest rates. This is effectively a redistribution of wages upwards, back to the state or a private company (through a lower tax rate or directly through ownership of loans). The cost then is still social; rather than directly fund education in the form of publicly investing in graduate education America has chosen to pay the price in the form of reduced demand for consumer goods, all the while placing graduate employees in a difficult economic situation for, often, a decade or more.

The end result of this process is that it shrinks the overall size of the economy, places a large burden on our youngest and brightest, and only serves to directly distribute wealth upwards.

*Andy Labuza*  
*Chair, Workers' Caucus*

## No Jobs on Dead Planets: Towards 'Green' Unionism

Beyond a doubt, two of our most pressing social crises are, first, the decades of decline in the power of labor (including the inequality it produced) that we are now challenging, and second, our increasingly dire ecological crises. Although both crises are caused most centrally by the power of Big Business and Big Finance over society, the labor and environmental movements have often been seen as working at cross purposes—a narrative often promoted by the fossil fuel industry, and which sometimes infects union responses to these complex issues.

Case in point: on September 15th, 2016, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka defended the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline despite its intimate connection to the environmentally destructive fossil fuel industry (as well as its violation of the rights and sacred sites of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe\* [see below for opportunity to help]).

Labor needs to do better. As a movement, we have a big role to play in promoting environmentally friendly economic policies and practices—and as the old adage says, *there are no jobs on a dead planet*.

Climate change threatens to produce a large array of changes: increasing global temperatures to dangerous levels, melting ice caps, and heightening storms... but there are other changes that are less well known. Climate change will likely contribute to:

- Increased rates of species extinction:** the World Wildlife Fund expects 10,000 species to become extinct every year.
- Rising sea levels:** melting glaciers will gradually flood coastlines and displace communities.
- Ocean acidification and coral bleaching:** as the ocean absorbs excess CO<sub>2</sub> its pH decreases, acidifying the water and, consequently, threatening to destroy entire marine ecosystems.

What can the labor movement do to combat climate change, and work towards truly 'green' economic

practices? While the changes we need are wide-ranging and complicated (environmental sociologists and ecologists have long known growth-and-profit oriented economic systems cannot solve our ecological crises), how can the GTFF start to make a difference?

First, we can adopt real sustainability as a core commitment of the GTFF in the communities to which it belongs. This can include the development of a caucus devoted to environmental issues, or partnering with campus labor and environmental groups to promote sound environmental policies at the UO, in our community, and within AFT.

Second, we can join other organizations in supporting proposals to transition away from fossil fuels, and should strongly consider joining labor-environment coalitions such as the BlueGreen Alliance or the Labor Network for Sustainability, linking us with growing networks of labor activists who are increasingly committed to ecologically sound economic practices.

Finally, we can work with other groups to bring environmental speakers, events, and conferences to campus and to the community.

While the transition to a post-growth, eco-friendly economy is complex (and part of a long term project of wresting economic activities away from profit and towards collective and non-anthropocentric well-being), the GTFF can lead the way in our community, and set an example for others.

\*The GTFF e-board has voted to coordinate donations to the Standing Rock Sioux/ #NoDAPL protesters. Please bring donations of warm and dry winter clothes, camping gear, or anything off this list (<http://sacredstonecamp.org/supply-list/>) to the GTFF office, starting Monday, October 17.

Jeff Ewing  
VP of Membership Communications

## 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  
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*Contact your  
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[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 1400 Graduate Employees at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

Our goals are:

- to improve the quality of life for GEs 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!