

Provost McCauley remarks for public session - 5/18/23

Thank you, President Ono. I would like to provide a brief update on graduate student funding and negotiations with the Graduate Employees' Organization, or GEO.

Last week the university's negotiating team delivered a comprehensive package to GEO in response to all outstanding issues. This package includes the fourth salary proposal from the university: 12.5% over three years on the Ann Arbor campus and 6.75% in total raises over the same period on the Dearborn and Flint campuses. This is one of the largest packages proposed to the union in its 50 year history. The union has yet to make a counteroffer on salary. Their demand stands, as it has for six months, at a 60% increase for graduate workers in Ann Arbor and Dearborn and 88% for Flint in the first year.

Under the university's proposal, GSIs would make about \$39/hour by the end of the contract. Most GSIs work 16-20 hours per week, eight months a year. The current living wage in Ann Arbor, according to the MIT wage calculator, is \$18.67/hr for one adult with no children, working full time.

Combined with child care subsidies, comprehensive health insurance, university-paid full tuition for GEO members who work as few as 7.5 hours per week, and the value of a U-M degree, our offerings will continue to attract and retain top-tier graduate students. Indeed, the total package for our GEO members ranges on average between 64 and 77 thousand dollars per year.

For doctoral students, the compensation and benefits provided in the collective bargaining agreement are part of a broader academic funding commitment. Each year, we spend nearly \$750 million in financial aid for graduate students. As of May 1, U-M is at the top of the BIG 10 and the top of AAU public peers.

With the support of a state-appointed mediator, the university continues to ask GEO to bargain more frequently. As of today, they have only agreed to one additional day in May and will not commit to dates for June.

Last week, U-M negotiators informed the union that without “substantial movement” from GEO, the university would petition the state labor board to engage in the “fact finding” process. The union did not make substantial movement, and the university filed for fact finding yesterday.

This process involves a neutral, state-appointed fact-finder who reviews the remaining issues and provides recommendations for settlement. The final report is not binding on either party but often, and we hope will, aid in coming to a mutual agreement.

Over our five decade-relationship with GEO, we have consistently arrived at agreements that support grad student career success. We hope that more frequent and collaborative bargaining will result in a mutually beneficial contract soon.

One adverse effect of the strike is the withholding of grades by a small number of instructors. As of today, 95.5% of all grades

have been submitted. The large majority of classes that are still missing grades are independent study or study abroad classes that, while still vital to record, customarily arrive later than usual.

Concerns have been raised in recent days about the methods some departments are using to resolve missing grades. We are looking into those concerns and asking leaders across our units to do all they can to ensure that grades are as accurate as possible and meet our standard of academic integrity.

This has been a challenging series of events for our campus. Leaving students without grades for a course they have completed is disheartening. It affects their financial aid, applications for work and graduate school, enrollment in spring and summer classes, and other career plans.

For those who would like more information, the university's GEO negotiations webpage and the U-M Key Issues page about the negotiations provide background information and regular updates.