

GTFs can't live on eroding wages

By Carol Faulkner

Right now, contract negotiations between graduate teaching fellows and the University have reached an impasse. Here are the facts: GTFs make, on the average, \$469 per month. In the last year, the cost of living has increased 5 percent; rents have increased 25-28 percent and ASUO health insurance rates have gone up a minimum of 50 percent — over 100 percent for families.

The University has its own set of facts. They say they can't afford the health care payroll deduction plan any more. They

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say they don't have the money to offer more than 2 and 3 percent raises for the next two years respectively.

I could go on and on with facts, but this is not a problem of facts. It's a problem of people.

If you are an undergraduate, this is about the GTF in front of your English, sociology, Spanish, PE, history, physics, biology and probably several other classes. That person goes home every night and busts his or her butt to be a good teacher and worries about money. That person sweats over every dollar she has to spend. We don't get a check from Mom or Dad each month. Many of us *are* moms and dads.

Let me tell you how most GTFs started this year. ASUO announced its new insurance rates on Aug. 16. Two weeks

before classes started, the payroll office was still assuring GTFs that the payroll deduction plan would be available to them. The administration had not informed payroll of the change in policy. I had to personally call the graduate school to have the mix-up straightened out.

Many GTFs did not know what was going to hit them until they walked into registration. For many GTFs, these exorbitant costs are not optional. Foreign GTFs are not even allowed to register without proof that they are insured.

So what does this have to do with you? Well, the quality of a school is not contained in its buildings, but in its teachers and researchers, and GTFs teach 25-40 percent of all undergraduate classes. Do you pay your high tuition so that you can be taught by people who live at the poverty level, who literally cannot go to a doctor when they are sick? How long can this go on before the quality of your education suffers?

The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation has been very reasonable in its demands. From the very beginning, we asked only for 5 percent increases each year — just enough to keep up with inflation. It is not as if we believe the University has cash sitting around that it just refuses to give to GTFs. We know that is not true. But, we also know that the University has an enormous budget, and we know that budgets can be juggled.

Just as you and I can spend

all of our money on a fancy car and not have enough for necessities, the University can spend over \$100,000 of its money renovating the new president's mansion, \$24,000 on a study of the Physical Plant which "didn't tell us anything new," and not have enough to offer GTFs a decent living.

Given current economic conditions, a 2 and 3 percent pay increase is not a raise; it's a reduction. People who live at the poverty levels cannot absorb even a "small" erosion in their income.

Right now, GTFs are 1,000 strong. Undergraduates could make us 10,000 strong. Please support your GTFs. Come to our rallies and show us and your administration that you care about our cause.

Carol Faulkner is the vice president of organization for the GTF.

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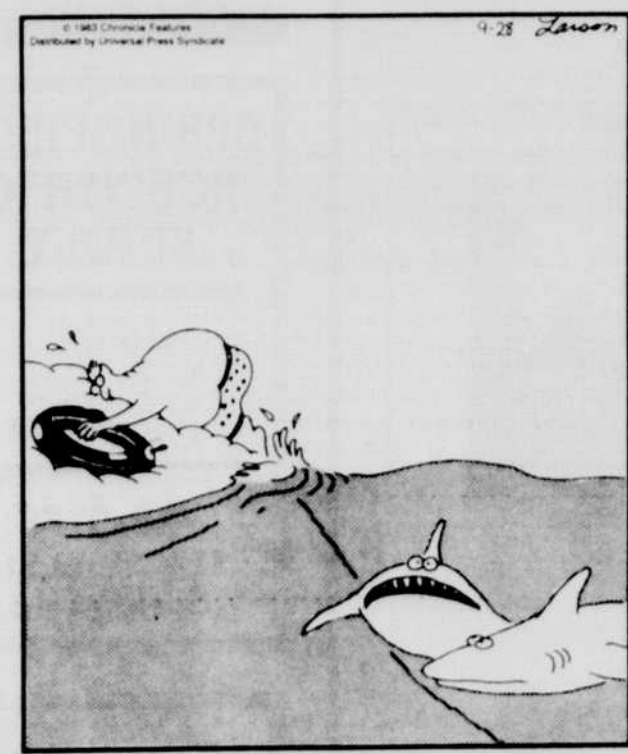


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