

# GTFF contract debate centers on health care

■ **INSURANCE:** If all parties agree, GTFs could have a new contract in a few days

By Kristine Sohnrey  
Higher Education Editor

They bargained hard to get health insurance two years ago, and now the Graduate Teaching Fellowship Federation is at the negotiating table again.

The insurance coverage became an important issue for graduate teaching fellows while negotiating their 1993-95 contract. At that time Measure 5 prevented an increase in salary, said Ken Pendleton, graduate student in the philosophy department and vice president for university relations for GTFF.

Now the GTFF is able to renegotiate because the last contract allowed for the insurance article to be reopened, said Maggie Morris, assistant dean of the graduate school.

On Aug. 26, the GTFF submitted a proposal to the University requesting an increase in insurance coverage and an increase in the third-party administration of the COBRA plan, said Eric Buckles, employee relations manager in the human resources department. The COBRA plan allows an employee to carry the group insurance at the employee's expense after the job ends.

Steadman Upham, vice provost for research and Dean of the Graduate School, said the University met with GTFF representatives on Wednesday to complete the 36-day negotiation for GTF employees.

"According to federal law, the insurance plan is subject to COBRA, which means the University of Oregon must make insurance available to GTF for 18 months after employment ends," Pendleton said. "The insurance covers medical, dental and vision."

Buckles said the GTFF checked into alternate third-party administrators, required by law to take care of the COBRA paperwork. They received bids and found a lower cost, changing the final proposal before the Oct. 2 meeting, something the University appreciated.

"The University agreed to make an approximately 7 percent additional contribution to the GTFF Trust to administer the insurance plan that GTFF and the University of Oregon have," Pendleton said. "The University still agreed to pay a 100 percent contribution to the insurance plan."

Morris said, "We ended up with a tentative agreement."

She said the contract's wording awaits confirmation from all parties before negotiations can be completed. This should happen in the next few days.

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