

CONTACTING US

NEWSROOM:
(541) 346-5511
E-MAIL:
ode@oregon.uoregon.edu
ONLINE EDITION: www.uoregon.edu/~ode

ADDRESS:
Oregon Daily Emerald
P.O. BOX 3159
Eugene, Oregon 97403

PERSPECTIVES

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Sarah Kickler
EDITORIAL EDITOR
Mike Schmierbach
NIGHT EDITORS
Sarah Kickler
Teri Meeuwsen

University should place more value in GTFs

After agreeing to a raise for summer GTFs, the University promptly reduced the hours allocated to summer positions

It seems that the administration needs to go back to school. Summer school. According to an article in Thursday's Emerald, University administrators are once again using graduate teaching fellows to save money. This time, the school is reducing hour estimates for GTFs who won a pay raise last fall.

When the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation negotiated its contract with the University in the fall, the two sides agreed to boost summer pay for GTFs to the same level assistants earn during the rest of the year. When the GTFF received a preliminary indication of the hours summer GTFs will be offered, however, the agreement appeared to have shattered.

The University will hold to its pledge to pay the higher wage, but many departments are offering fewer hours, apparently as a way to offset the higher cost of labor.

Graduate students are sent offers that designate the full-time equivalent value of an assistantship. Students are then paid based on that FTE allotment rather than actual hours. By reducing the FTE estimated for many positions, the University is assuming that summer GTFs do less work.

The Emerald story quotes Maggie Morris, vice provost for research and graduate education, as saying, "The University takes the position that summer is different." It seems administrators have been too busy vacationing and soliciting corporate funds for new buildings to notice how wrong that claim is.

If University officials were to check in on summer school, they would find that summer classes cover the same amount of material in a condensed time period. Students earn four credits in four- or eight-week sessions instead of the usual eleven weeks.

Presumably, if a class is worth the same number of credits as during the year, it requires a similar amount of work from both students and instructors. If the University honestly believes summer classes carried with them less work, it should reduce the number of credits allocated.

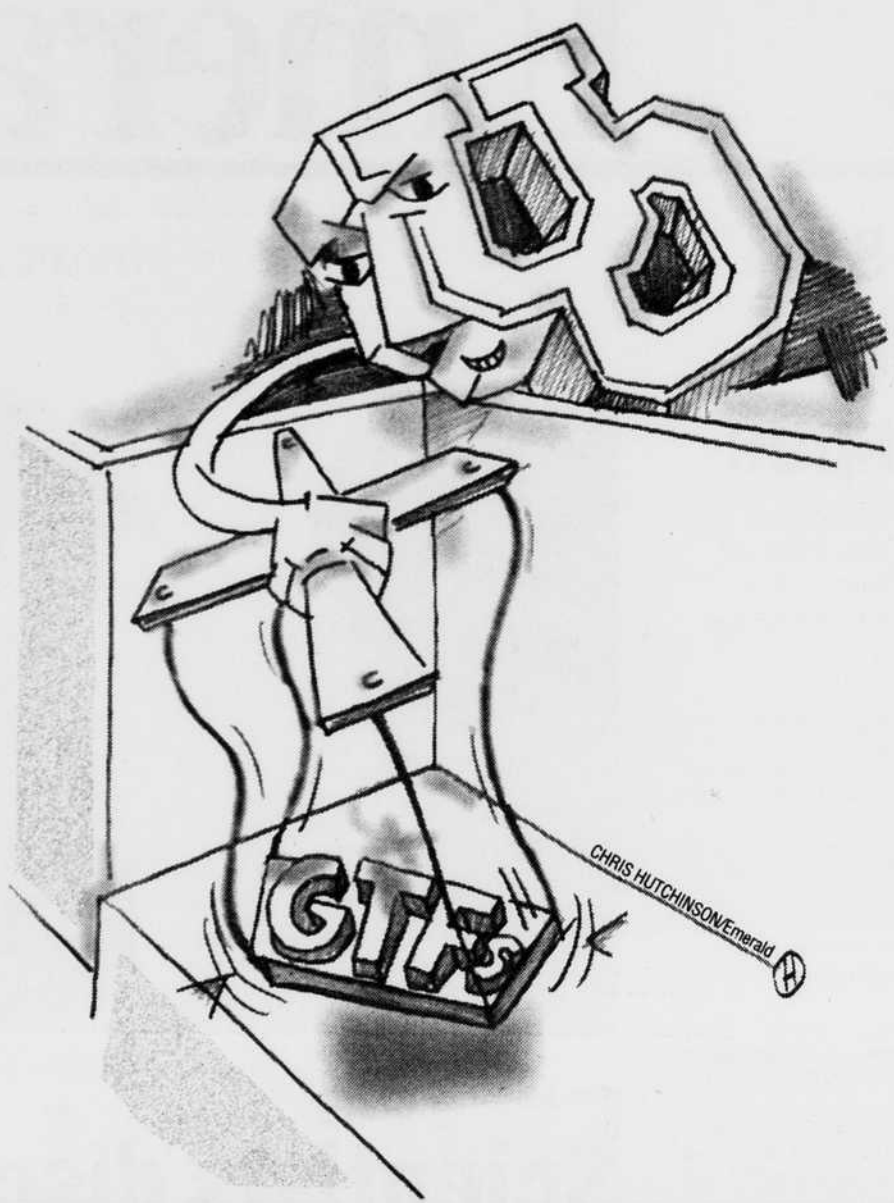
Instead, the school is playing more cost-cutting games with a union that represents one of the most underappreciated aspects of the University. Reducing the number of hours cuts GTF pay, but it also risks dropping graduate students below the minimum number of hours for union membership. That could prevent GTFs from filing grievances to complain about inaccurate FTE estimates and could even prevent some GTFs from receiving tuition waivers, the most crucial part of any offer.

While inexcusably harsh, the University's action is not unusual. Fair treatment of GTFs has never been a priority for higher education administrators.

Consider the past two years:

Student groups have lobbied hard for a tuition freeze without opposition from administrators. These efforts met with success for this year, locking in-state tuition in place.

Faculty have, justly, complained about low salaries and have received donations and state funding to attempt to adjust those salaries to match national averages.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

AN EMERALD EDITORIAL

In addition, administrators have solicited funding for a number of programs and building improvements, including the controversial donations from Phil Knight that were earmarked primarily for the new law school building, faculty chairs and a salary increase for the University president.

Meanwhile, graduate students have not received a tuition freeze. As the cost of attending school has risen, the GTFF managed to negotiate a slight pay increase in the fall. Even that is now being offset by reduced hours that are justifiable only by the logic of the bottom line.

It's poor logic at best. While the need to assist undergraduate students and faculty is clear, graduate students are also a crucial aspect of the University. Reasonable funding offers are a key part of recruiting exceptional graduate students. The arrival of those students, in turn, helps improve research and the University's image as well as placing more skilled GTFs in the classroom.

The presence of a GTF union on campus is

an important part of ensuring graduate students receive fair treatment from the University. Such unions are present on only a few campuses around the nation, although organizing efforts are taking place at many institutions.

If the GTFF is going to be effective at protecting graduate student interests and indirectly the long-term interests of the school, it deserves more respect from administrators. Reducing summer hours is a clear violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of fall contract negotiations.

Perhaps the people whose hours need close scrutiny are University administrators. If they aren't busy, we could certainly send them to summer school.

Let's just hope their grades depend on those same overworked and underpaid GTFs the University is manipulating once again.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Thumbs



TO PROPOSALS FOR A NON-PARTISAN LEGISLATURE:

According to a story in The Register-Guard on April 6, Springfield Democrat Lee Beyer plans to introduce a bill in the Oregon Senate that would render all Oregon legislative races non-partisan. Just as many local government races are between candidates with no officially designated party affiliation, Oregon legislative seats would now be filled by names without a party platform — or agenda — behind them.

There are problems with this

proposal, but they aren't the ones suggested by Republican Lynn Snodgrass, the Oregon House majority leader, in the article. Snodgrass is in fact completely wrong in her arguments, but that isn't unusual for her. She said the same partisan battles would continue, but they would be between liberals and conservatives instead of Democrats and Republicans.

What both Snodgrass and Beyer miss is the fundamental problem with partisan politics in the state and nation: We have too few parties, not too many.

Party platforms represent a way for candidates to run based on issues rather than personality. Eliminating those platforms would make candidates' personalities even more important in the elections process.

The origin of partisan bickering is largely the similarity, rather than the differences, between the two major parties. Both stage elaborate battles over minor issues in an attempt to provide a political dichotomy that simply does not exist. If the system included several parties, there would be a larger

distinction between the views of each party. The groups would also have to form coalitions and compromise on issues because no group would hold control over the Legislature.

One proposal that was being circulated for potential inclusion on the ballot would have instituted a system similar to that used in many European nations. Under the plan, voters would cast their ballots for political parties rather than individuals. The parties would have a list of candidates who pledged support to

the party platform. Voters would thus decide based on policy rather than personality. Additionally, the plan would allow many parties to gain strength because legislative allocation would be based upon the percentage of ballots each group received.

There are many problems with this idea, but it would move the state in a positive direction. Beyer's proposal, despite being well-intentioned, would increase the superficiality of campaigns without doing much to solve partisan bickering.