

# Graduate teaching fellows strike UO

EUGENE — University of Oregon (UO) graduate teaching fellows (GTFs) put up strike picket lines Dec. 2, the week before final exams, and just before this issue of the Labor Press headed to the printer.

Marathon bargaining with a state mediator was held Nov. 25-26, and again Dec. 1, without success.

It's the first-ever strike for the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) Local 3544, founded in 1976. The union's 1,500 members are graduate students who teach classes and run discussion groups and lab sessions. One-third of UO courses are taught by GTFs.

The union — an affiliate of American Federation of Teachers — has been in contract negotiations since November 2013. Its previous contract expired in March.

The dispute centers on wages and

UO's refusal to add paid medical and parental leave to the union contract.

GTFs work a maximum of half-time (219 hours per academic quarter) for a minimum pay of \$4,090 per quarter (\$4,619 with a masters, and \$4,878 for doctoral candidates.) Local 3544 is proposing two annual raises of 5.5 percent; UO is proposing raises of 5 and 4 percent. The difference would be \$220,000 over the life of the contract, Local 3544 estimates — at a university that just gave outgoing president Michael Gotfredson \$940,000 in "severance."

The other issue is paid medical and parental leave. GTFs currently have 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth of a child or serious medical condition. The union proposed to make two weeks of that paid, and estimated it would cost UO \$52,000 a year. UO proposed an alternative — a \$150,000 hardship fund that any grad student could tap for \$1,000 or \$1,500 in the case of illness or the birth of a child. Local 3544 agreed, but UO refused to specify in the contract how the hardship fund would operate. Ironically, UO Interim President Scott Coltrane is a sociologist who has appeared on NPR and in the Atlantic Monthly for academic research on paid paternity leave.

The relationship between the two sides is frayed. Local 3544 Vice President Richard Wagner says the

union's volunteer-led bargainers have had to contend with sarcasm and disrespect from UO's \$300-an-hour private attorney. The attorney, Jeffery Matthews, is with the Harang Long Gary Rudnick firm, which employs former UO president Dave Frohnmayer.

Strikes are volatile, and a lot may have happened by the time this issue reaches your mailbox. For further details, look to our Dec. 19 issue, or follow us online at [nwlaborpress.org](http://nwlaborpress.org), on Facebook at [facebook.com/nwlaborpress](https://www.facebook.com/nwlaborpress), or via Twitter at [@nwlaborpress](https://twitter.com/nwlaborpress).



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Labor's Community Service Agency (LCSA) and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council are accepting donations of toys and cash for the 18th annual Presents from Partners Holiday Toy Party. The event — for families of unemployed union members and those facing temporary hardships — will be held in mid-December at the Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 Hall in Northeast Portland. Entrance is by ticket only. Members must be referred by their union. Referral forms must be returned to LCSA by Dec. 9.

Toy donations also will be accepted through Dec. 9. Donations can be dropped off at IBEW and United Workers Federal Credit Union, or the Northwest Oregon Labor Council (Suite 305), or LCSA (Suite 211). All of the offices are located in the same building at 9955 SE Washington St., Portland.



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