

EOU faculty seek pay parity

By **DICK MASON**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Contract negotiations between the faculty and administration at Eastern Oregon University did not go well Wednesday.

A bargaining session of about two hours ended at Hoke Hall when the team for the university’s faculty stated it would be moving negotiations to mediation. Any bargaining team can move negotiations to mediation after bargaining has passed the 150-day mark. Eastern and its faculty have been bargaining since January.

The primary reason the parties are moving to mediation is they can not agree on teacher pay.

“We felt like we were not coming together on the salary issue,” said DeAnna Timmerman, psychology professor at EOU and the president faculty union.

The Employment Relations Board has been notified of the move to mediation and will provide a mediator to help the parties find common ground during upcoming bargaining sessions. Timmerman said she believes mediation likely will start in early December.

EOU’s faculty are requesting base wage increases of 5% this year and 4% in 2020-21 and 2021-22. The university is offering wage increases of 3.9% for 2019-20, 1% in 2020-21 and another 1% in 2021-22. Eastern’s faculty wants any increase the first year to be retroactive to July 1. The administration, Timmerman said, is proposing the increase be retroactive to Sept. 15.

Zimmerman said it is likely salary steps will be part of the negotiations. Professors who have not reached the top of their salary schedules are eligible for step increases.

Eastern’s faculty seeks a reasonable increase, said Bryan Lally, a field representative for the American Federal of Teachers-Oregon, the union representing Eastern’s faculty.

“We are not asking for the moon and the stars, we are just asking for a fair contract,” he said.

Lally also said low salaries are making it hard for Eastern to recruit and retain faculty. He wants Eastern to be in a better position to land faculty who will teach here their entire careers. Lally said paying faculty competitive wages is critical in terms of furthering the education process.

“How can Eastern invest in students if it does not invest in faculty?” Lally said. “You can’t have good students unless you have good faculty.”

Lally spoke at EOU Wednesday morning at a

rally he helped lead prior to the start of the bargaining session. Faculty members, carrying signs, twice walked a circular route between Hoke and Loso halls during the rally, which started at 7:30 a.m. and ended before classes started at 8 a.m.

They chanted, “What do we want? A new contract! When do we want it? Now!”

Eastern faulty want their next contract to reduce the gulf between their salaries and those of professors at Western Oregon University and Southern Oregon University, since both are the state universities in Oregon most comparable to EOU.

The average salaries of Eastern professors are below those of SOU and WOU in all cases, according to information from EOU biology professor Shaun Cain. The average salary for Eastern’s professors between 2016-19 was \$48,274 for an assistant professor, \$55,757 for an association professor and \$65,985 for a full professor.

Western Oregon over a comparable span paid an annual average of \$54,215 for assistant professor, \$61,535 for associate professors and \$72,339 for full professors. And Southern Oregon paid an annual average of \$58,770 for assistant professors, \$66,468 for associate professors and \$78,602 for full professors.

The contract at Eastern tops out at \$82,854 for full professors, while the ceiling at Western for a full professor is \$98,766 and the Southern’s high end provides \$104,524 for full professors.

Timmerman is trying to remain optimistic both sides can reach an agreement.

“I am hopeful that we can get to a place where we all can show our commitment to the university,” she said.

The Observer contacted Eastern for a comment on the negotiations. Tim Seydel, Eastern’s vice president for university advancement, said, “We will not deviate from the mutual agreement that has us only issuing a joint statement (with the EOU faculty) to the media (about bargaining).”



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
A walker is silhouetted against the afternoon sky during a stroll through Rice-Blakey Park in Pendleton on Thursday.

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