



Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation

American Federation of Teachers, Local 3544, AFL-CIO

Date: March 8, 2019

From: The Executive Board of the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation

To: The University of Oregon Senate

The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation writes in response to the proposed “Academic Continuity Plan” before the UO Senate. While we recognize the need to prepare for unforeseen and uncontrollable disruptions to university operations, we strongly oppose the proposed policy. The original language of the policy conflated labor actions by employee groups with natural disasters and suggested the university is powerless in preventing such disruptions. Even with the removal of all examples of when this policy would be implemented, however, it remains the case that the policy could be activated in the event of a strike. The implications of a faculty endorsement of this policy are far-reaching and troubling. We ask you to reject any form of this policy that does not explicitly exclude labor disputes.

Labor actions by employee groups are not in the same category of events as natural disasters, epidemics, or other unforeseen and uncontrollable disruptions. Strikes are not forces of nature that are disconnected from any possible interjection or control by the university. The power to avert a disruptive labor action is always within the university’s hands.

In addition, the proposed policy has the effect of circumventing the provisions contained in multiple employee collective bargaining agreements by pressuring one employee group to fulfill the duties and labor of another in the event of a labor action. While the policy does not contain a strict requirement for faculty to perform GE labor, in practice faculty will be pressured to perform labor beyond the scope of their collective bargaining agreement and individual employment contracts for fear of reprisal. This is echoed in the statement from United Academics Representative Assembly, which makes clear that “the idea of ‘academic emergency’ in case of labor dispute is inappropriate and illegitimate; faculty should not be pressured to or feel obliged to do the work of striking employees.”

The proposed policy:

- is designed to undermine the collective bargaining power of other employee groups to negotiate a fair contract and to exercise some control over the conditions of their employment; and
- encourages faculty to serve as strikebreakers against other employees at UO should those employees democratically decide that it is necessary to withhold their labor in order to achieve a fair contract from the university.

Given these implications, GTFF would again like to ask Faculty Senate members to consider the following questions:

- What signal does the endorsement of this policy by the Senate, send while both GTFF and SEIU are actively engaged in contract negotiations with the university?
- What are the potential ramifications of an endorsement on relations between different employee groups at UO and in the wider community?

- What effects would this policy, or an endorsement of it by the Senate, have on the ability of faculty members to successfully engage in direct, collective action over their own pay, benefits, or working conditions in the future?

The GTFF has no plans or intentions to strike. We are bargaining in good faith with the university to reach a fair agreement and will continue to do so, but we reserve the right to engage in concerted, collective action, up to and including striking, if the university is unwilling to agree to a fair contract. This proposal, coming in the context of ongoing contract negotiations, signals to us that the university is interested in disempowering graduate employees and their ability to ensure a fair agreement. Endorsing a plan that is clearly designed to weaken campus unions and drive a wedge between employee groups on campus is not in the interest of the university community or the University Senate.

We then ask that you reject any form of this policy that does not explicitly exclude labor disputes, and consider revisions that can achieve the commendable goal of preparing for unforeseen and uncontrollable disruptions to university operations without eroding the collective bargaining process and agreements of multiple employee groups on campus.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board of the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation