

November 20, 2014

TO: President Scott Coltrane, Provost Frances Bronet, CAS Dean W. Andrew Marcus,
Members of the University of Oregon Community, and to Whom it May Concern:

We, the undersigned department heads and program directors, while affirming that we will continue to do our present jobs to the best of our abilities, do not agree with those members of the University Administration who tell us that it will be required as part of our jobs to engage in labor practices designed to break a legally declared strike, should it actually begin on December 2.

We do not think that the final demands the GTFF is negotiating for are unreasonable, and we strongly urge those responsible for negotiations on behalf of the University Administration to come to an agreement with the GTFF before a strike occurs. A strike would be damaging to the university community as a whole, a community already discouraged by other controversies and unexpected changes in leadership.

We have been informed that in order to cope with a strike, should it happen, department heads and program directors will likely be made instructors of record on each of the classes in their units involving GTFs. We were not asked whether we were willing to take on this additional responsibility voluntarily; we were told that we would be assigned this responsibility as an additional part of our jobs. Compelling us to take on additional teaching and/or grading responsibilities beyond our normal and contractual load is something that may even be considered a breach of contract. Although this point can be debated, we have been told in no uncertain terms that it will be our job to make sure that grades get turned in on time, regardless of the integrity of those grades, or the unreasonableness of these involuntary changes to our workload. Compelling us to do this work is tantamount to compelling us to perform strike-breaking labor.

We were also told that we would be instructed to ask for volunteers within our units to take on the work that striking GTFs would otherwise be covering were they not on strike. In other words, we were being asked to identify people already in the university who would volunteer to work as scabs, and who would be paid for taking on additional overload work as a replacement for the GTFs. If no such volunteers could be identified, we were told to investigate whether others, from the community or beyond it, could be hired as replacement workers. While we acknowledge the commitment that we owe to our students (all of our students, not just our undergraduates) so that the educational mission of the university be served, we assert that our commitments stretch to all the members of our community: undergraduates, graduates, fellow faculty, staff, as well as upper-level administrators. We refuse to be forced to privilege the interests and convenience of some to the detriment of the interests and wellbeing of others, especially given that the latter includes some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

There are three types of reasons that many of us cite as the basis for why we refuse to take on any strike-breaking work: one is practical, a second is pedagogical, and a third is moral. With regard to practical reasons, many program directors and department heads are stretched to the limit already, and telling us that we are forced to be responsible for the grades in all GTF-related courses in our units – for some of us numbering 90 sections or more, with literally thousands of total students – is not tenable.

Second, it is not tenable to ask us to compromise the academic integrity of many of the courses in our units by canceling final exams in some cases, by diluting final exams or paper assignments in other cases (as cited specifically in the University Senate resolution US14/15-20, passed overwhelmingly on 11/19), or by compelling us to hire individuals not fully qualified and/or not physically able to provide meaningful feedback on exams and essays to thousands of students in the time frame required (even if given a few days of extension for the submission of grades). We do not consider the strategies proposed to date by the University Administration as viable for many of us in the units we lead.

Even in those units where the proposed solutions might be practical and not compromise pedagogical integrity, nevertheless, many of us feel that to impose these solutions in our departments and programs would be wrong, for nearly all the solutions would involve us and/or our proxies having to take on the role of scabs. This brings us to the third major group of reasons that many of us give for refusing to accept strike-breaking work, which is based on our moral principles. We will not be made to compromise our moral and ethical principles simply because someone tells us that it is our job to do so. If our commitments to our job as department heads or program directors directly conflicts with our commitments to our deeply held moral convictions, many of us will be forced to conclude that we have no other choice but to resign from our leadership positions and return to the general faculty.

We genuinely hope that such a situation can be avoided and urge those in a position to negotiate on behalf of the University to do everything in their power to reach a settlement in advance of a strike. Morale around the university has hit a new low, and in such dark times, our institution is in desperate need of leaders with the courage to chart visionary and compassionate paths toward brighter horizons. Please join us in preserving the integrity of our academic mission and rebuilding the trust in our community so that we can work together toward the common cause of leading the U of O as whole toward a dynamic and productive future.

Sincerely,

Monique Balbuena, LAS
Yvonne Braun, AFR
Frederick (Rick) Colby, REL
Scott DeLancey, LING
Lynn Fujiwara, ES
Deborah Green, JDST
Mary Jaeger, HUM
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