

For Immediate Release

## **GAU secures three-year health insurance agreement with UF**

On May 8th, 2017, Graduate Assistants United (GAU) GAU agreed to an extension of the GatorGradCare health insurance plan as part of our collective bargaining agreement for the three-year period from July 1st, 2017 through July 1st, 2020.

The agreement reached between GAU and the university administration makes it possible to maintain GatorGradCare as a stable, affordable, usable program for the next three years at least, and puts the program on solid footing for years to come.

It protects the most vulnerable members of our unit by keeping healthcare costs affordable for GAs who need to use the services often. It protects the lowest-paid members of our unit by keeping services affordable. It protects dependents, who have suffered the gravest harm over the past few years, by reducing dependent premiums by 20% and capping annual increases at no more than 5%. It protects everyone in the unit by preventing the university and GatorCare administration from arbitrarily increasing costs without bringing them to the bargaining table.

The agreement also locks in status quo rates on many key plan benefits under Tier 1 services (which includes all of UF Health and Florida Blue), including out-of-pocket maximums for both individuals and families; copays for physician visits, specialist visits, and urgent care centers; and coinsurance rates for hospital services.

"The healthcare agreement GAU reached with the University represents a win for our most vulnerable populations: the chronically ill and dependents," said GAU's healthcare chair and co- chief negotiator Robert Mermer. "We also secured low-cost doctor's visits for all GAs and stemmed the university's assault on the peace of mind that enables GAs to teach and conduct research effectively, aiding the University in meeting the goal of national preeminence."

GAU made some difficult sacrifices toward the advancement of larger goals. For months, we stood firm against the university's insistence on introducing a \$10.00 monthly premium, but in the end, the Bargaining Team agreed to this modest unit-wide premium to prevent steep increases in out-of-pocket costs that would make the plan unusable for low-paid or chronically-ill graduate assistants.

The premium, which is structured in a way that enables GAs to retain health benefits during summer semesters, will not go into effect until August 2018.

In other wins, the annual deductible initially proposed by the administration of \$300.00 became \$100.00, and the \$600.00 family deductible became \$200. We also negotiated zero pharmacy premiums for generic medicines.

In previous years, GAU has been concerned by efforts of the university administration to increase health care costs arbitrarily and unilaterally, without bringing those increases to the bargaining table, and indeed took the administration to arbitration for such actions in 2015. The new agreement requires that the university bring all substantial changes to the plan to the bargaining table, and assures GAU a seat at the table in future rebids for the health insurance plan.

With millions of Americans uncertain about the future of their health insurance, graduate assistants at the University of Florida now have a secure, stable health insurance program for years to come.

“This agreement provides peace of mind for our members by securing a guaranteed, robust health care program that will continue through the next three years and, we hope, well into the future, whatever may come from Washington and Tallahassee,” said Charles G. Shields, GAU’s communications chair.

“Though the university had considerable political leverage in dictating its terms on any health care deal, GAU worked very hard to strike a deal that, despite containing very difficult compromises, was significantly better than UF’s initial offer,” John Hames, GAU’s co-chief negotiator.

The new agreement does include a \$100.00 deductible for Tier 1 services which are not subject to co-insurance. However, GAU secured a \$50.00 gift card rebate for users of the deductible who use their free annual wellness benefit (a preventive health screening).

Nearly 4,000 graduate assistants at University of Florida's are responsible for conducting a significant portion of the university's teaching and research. However, one out of three UF GAs earns below the poverty line after paying approximately \$720 in fees each semester. For many UF GAs, this amount is more than their biweekly paycheck. The next step in our bargaining process will be to fight for increased stipends.

Both GAU and the UF Administration will have until June 30, 2017 to come to an agreement on all 26 articles of the CBA. GAU encourages all those interested to join us at bargaining on Mondays at 3pm in Pugh Hall 150.

In solidarity, GAU

#### **About Graduate Assistants United (GAU)**

UF Graduate Assistants United (GAU) is the official labor union that represents all Graduate Assistants at the University of Florida. Founded in 1972, GAU has been fighting to improve working conditions for GAs for over a generation. The organization negotiates a Collective

Bargaining Agreement with the University of Florida that guarantees GA stipends, access to health care, personal leave days, due process, intellectual property rights, and more. UF-GAU is affiliated with the United Faculty of Florida, the Florida Education Association, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the AFL-CIO.

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