

October 22, 2015

Graduate Assistants United Is Taking the University of Florida to Arbitration on October 28 over Illegal Changes to Health Insurance

Gainesville, FL- GatorGradCare, the health insurance plan offered by the University of Florida (UF) for Graduate Assistants (GAs), has been altered by UF without proper negotiation with Graduate Assistants United (GAU), the official labor union which represents around 4,000 graduate, teaching, and research assistants at UF. Since GAU's grievance was denied by the UF administration, GAU will take UF to arbitration over the unilateral and illegal changes it has made to GAs' health insurance. The arbitration hearing will be held on October 28th at Tigert Hall.

These changes include significant increases in dependent premiums and certain deductibles. According to the GatorGradCare website, the 2015-2016 premium for a spouse/partner is \$2,783, while the premium for family coverage (spouse/partner +child(ren)) is \$5,311. Respectively, these new premiums represent increases of \$516 and \$986 from the previous year. This is equivalent to an increase of over 22.8 percent in costs. For graduate assistants who are appointed at .5 FTE (full-time equivalent, the way our workloads and stipends are calculated) and earn the minimum stipend of \$13,000, extending health insurance to their partner and child(ren) will now cost 40% of their annual pay.

GAU is very concerned that the University implemented these changes to GAs' healthcare plan without bargaining over them. As noted by Taylor Polvadore, GAU's Grievance Officer, "Regardless of their impact, UF violated the contract with these changes. It's as simple as that."

Consequently, GAU filed a chapter grievance through the university's arbitration process in July. Although the University agreed not to change the deductibles for the duration of the 2014-2017 contract, it still refuses to acknowledge that it does not have the right to implement future unilateral changes. Consequently, GAU decided to take the case to arbitration.

An outside mediator will listen to both sides at the arbitration. Based on the contract between UF and GAU, the mediator will make a final decision about whether UF has the right to implement changes to GAs' healthcare (now or in the future) without negotiating with GAU. This is a very important decision that could have severe long-term consequences. The hearing is open to the public and GAU is encouraging Graduate Assistants, dependents, and other interested parties to attend.

GAU supports UF's "Rise to Preeminence" campaign and hopes to partner with the administration in helping to make UF a Top-10 public research university. However, these health care changes contradict that mission, as they significantly impact the graduate assistants who are responsible for a substantial portion of the University's teaching and research, forcing some of them to have to choose between providing health insurance for their family and paying for food and rent.

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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