

Updated Guide to GEO Contract Proposals (2023-26)

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Graduate Employees' Organization
American Federation of Teachers Local 3350
www.geo3550.org/bargaining

Updated: March 15, 2023

Topic	Proposal	Explanation
Childcare	Increased subsidy amount and expanded eligibility	The current subsidy eligibility requirements – that you must use full-time, licensed, in-state childcare and your spouse must be working full-time – mean that the people who most need the subsidy don't have access to it. This proposal would abolish the eligibility requirements so that the subsidy is open to people who can't afford full-time care, who hire a nanny instead of finding a daycare spot, or who have family members do the work of childcare. Grad employees are also proposing to increase the subsidy to cover 75% of the cost of U-M childcare centers.
	Increased leave for birth or adoption	Grad employees are bargaining for 12 weeks of leave, as other U-M employees get.
	Guaranteed healthcare for unpaid medical leave	Grad employees are bargaining to ensure they don't lose their healthcare if they're on unpaid medical leave.
	Guaranteed healthcare for family necessity and dependent care leave	Grad employees are bargaining to ensure they don't lose healthcare if on family necessity leave.
	Paid school and daycare closure leave	Grad employees are bargaining to ensure parents can receive pay and take time off to care for their children when schools or daycare centers close.
Compensation	Living wage	Grad employees are bargaining for a 60% raise to \$38,537 (the living wage for the Ann Arbor area according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator) for GSIs and GSSAs working 2-term, 0.5 FTE appointments. The salaries that GSIs and GSSAs make over two terms are, in many cases, the amount of money they have to live on for the entire year. Grad workers deserve to afford basic necessities while they're in grad school.
	Pay for Training	Many GSIs and GSSAs are required to take training courses as a condition of employment – courses that they would not have taken in the absence of an employment relationship. Grad employees are proposing they be compensated for their time in money, not course credits.
	Summer Compensation Deferral	Grad employees seek the option to defer a portion of each paycheck to the summer months to help with budgeting. (Dropped as part of GEO package sent on 3/10).

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

Contract Education	Orientations	The advent of online, asynchronous CRLT orientations means that many new GSIs and GSSAs do not receive an in-person GEO orientation, where they can learn about their rights, benefits, and responsibilities under the GEO contract. Grad employees are proposing expanded access and clearer language around orientations in our contract.
	Bulletin Boards	Tentative Agreement Reached 1/27: GEO and U-M agreed that GEO will have access to additional bulletin board space on the Ann Arbor, Flint, and Dearborn campuses
	Contract Distribution	Tentative Agreement Reached 1/27: GEO and U-M agreed to reduce the number of paper copies of the contract both parties are required to print upon ratification.
	Add enrolled department and program type to weekly information reports	Tentative Agreement Reached 1/27: GEO and U-M agreed that enrolled department and program type shall be included in the weekly information reports provided to GEO by U-M-AHR.
COVID	Masking & HEPA filters	<p>The pandemic rages on, particularly for immunocompromised grad workers and/or grads with immunocompromised loved ones, roommates, and friends. When it comes to GSI work, these folks are on their own: they cannot require students to wear masks, and they cannot move their classes online. The situation is all the more serious now that U-M has unilaterally and immediately eliminated its vaccination requirements for anyone not living in U-M housing and begun phasing out the CSTP program. Requiring immunocompromised GSIs to teach in classrooms where they cannot require that students wear masks is ableist and discriminatory. To address this situation, grad employees have put forward common-sense, evidence-based proposals with broad support in the campus and scientific communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grad employees propose that instructors have the right to require masks in their classrooms. This is also the position of the Lecturers' union, LEO, and is supported by over 500 campus community members (76 of who gave anonymous testimonials about their experiences). U-M's peer institutions have provided this basic right to workplace safety, like Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Brown, Princeton, UPenn, EMU, Villanova, and Columbia's School of Public Health. ● Grad employees propose that GSIs should have the right to pivot online if they feel unsafe. This is the best practice recommended by the COVID Safe Campus Coalition and a policy position that nearly 2,000 U-M faculty, students, staff, and others supported in January 2022 during the first Omicron wave. ● Grad employees have also proposed the university commit to high-quality air filtration. U-M's own Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering recently hosted an event at which nationally renowned atmospheric chemist Dr. Kimberly Prather said, "It's kind of a no-brainer, from a public health perspective, to do something about getting these viruses out of the air." ● Grad employees have also proposed that the university negotiate any future COVID policy changes that would affect GSIs or GSSAs before announcing them. (U-M gave just 41 minutes advance notice of the February 20 COVID policy changes.)
Disability	Disability Cultural Center Staff	Disability Culture @ UM , Central Student Government , and the University's own Student IDEA Board have all called for the creation of a Disability Cultural Center (DCC), building on work that's been happening for at least a decade. U-M's data shows that roughly half of disabled grad students suffer discrimination and that this rate has increased since 2016, yet the

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

		disabled community lacks a centralized space on campus to gather, build connections, and develop programming and training. Many other universities have established DCCs to address similar issues. This is why the Student IDEA Board's landmark 2019 report called the DCC a "core recommendation" and "the only way to truly make the work of improving the climate for students with disabilities and fostering disability culture sustainable in the long term." The Board recommended UM hire 2 GSSAs and establish a paid committee to further work on the DCC; grad workers are simply asking the University to follow through on this recommendation.
	Healthcare Spending Equity	<p>An equitable living wage must account for the roughly \$1,000 in out-of-pocket healthcare costs that our survey of grad workers found the average disabled grad worker pays compared to fully able-bodied grads. As a 2021 Rackham report found, regular copays can add up quickly. That's why we're proposing a series of healthcare copay caps for all grad workers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capping prescription drug copays at \$250 per individual and \$500 per family (down from \$2.5k per individual and \$5k per family) 2. Capping copays for all office/online visits at \$250 per individual and \$500 per family <p>Note that these copay caps are in addition to the caps on mental health and physical therapy copays described below. Grad workers are also proposing contractual language clarifying that ADHD diagnostics are covered by GradCare, as many grad workers have reported receiving misinformation from BCN and providers on this point.</p>
	Disability Accommodations	Only a handful of people ever get formal workplace accommodations each year. The 2019 Student IDEA Report and a 2021 Rackham report on disability accommodations showed that the cost and wait times to get the documentation necessary for accommodations are large barriers for disabled workers. Following recommendations from both reports, grad workers are proposing that 1) U-M provide funding to get this documentation and that 2) an "accommodations-first" model in which U-M grants temporary accommodations while grad workers are getting documentation (a best practice recommended by the Association on Higher Education and Disability, among others).
	Accessibility Training	There is a general lack of knowledge about disability issues and accommodations. The 2019 Student IDEA Report and a 2021 Rackham report both showed how the process for getting disability accommodations is obscure and confusing. Following recommendations of the Student IDEA Report, grad workers are proposing that GSI/GSSAs, faculty, and units receive training on accommodations processes and that GSI and faculty orientations include information on inclusive teaching.
	Accessible Physical Workplaces	Grad workers deserve accessible workplaces. Grad workers are proposing that U-M implement the recommendations of the Student IDEA Report for a) an up-to-date electronic map with accessibility information, b) signage on all buildings indicating accessible entrances, and c) expanding paratransit to run on weekends and cover locations within a 2-mile radius of University bus routes (rather than the current 0.75-mile radius).
Harassment & Discrimination	Transitional Funding Program	Grad employees are proposing a no-questions-asked Transitional Funding Program available to all graduate students to provide at least one additional semester of funding to transition out of unhealthy relationships, including disrespectful, abusive, discriminatory, and/or harassing relationships. This will be an extension of an existing transitional funding program for graduate research assistants at U-M's College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

	Fieldwork Safety	Grad employees are bargaining for harassment and discrimination-free fieldwork by creating fieldwork safety orientations and no-questions-asked emergency funding for students experiencing harassment or discrimination. U-M shall provide all graduate students experiencing harassment and/or discrimination during their fieldwork emergency funding to cover up to \$6,000 of expenses, such as flights and transportation, moving costs, housing expenses, and mental health support expenses. The amount of funding will be decided depending on the student's necessity.
	Survey	Grad employees want the U-M to commit to transparency by identifying unhealthy environments within departments and units through an anonymous, department-level survey administered each semester.
Healthcare	Mental and Physical Health Co-Pays	Grad employees want to ease financial barriers to accessing mental and physical health therapy. For mental health access, grad employees want to make in-network therapist sessions completely covered by eliminating the \$25/session copay and to have GradCare cover 60% of the cost of out-of-network therapist visits to support employees with specific needs that are not met by the limited in-network therapists. Grad employees are also bargaining for a copay maximum of \$140 (approximately 5.5 sessions) for physical therapy to improve access for grads with long-term physical therapy needs.
	Expand Summer Insurance Coverage	Grad employees want to ensure that those who GSI in the winter term have access to summer coverage, regardless of their employment status in the Fall.
	Benefits Notification and 30-day insurance gap	Grad employees seek to be notified about their benefits eligibility prior to the start of the term so that any mistakes in their employment registration can be fixed before benefits are withheld. Grad employees also want reimbursement for grads who must pay for new insurance while transitioning to U-M within 30 days of their employment start date.
	Healthcare Fund	Grad employees often have to either incur significant healthcare expenses that are not covered by GradCare or are forced to put off getting necessary treatment. Grad employees have proposed a \$700,000/year Healthcare Support Fund in which grads could apply for funds to cover medical expenses not covered by GradCare.
	Dental II and Vision Coverage	Necessary dental treatment is the most commonly delayed type of medical treatment among U-M grads, and yet our default Option I dental plan has no coverage for restorative procedures. Grad employees want \$0 coverage for Dental Plan Option II and the Vision Plan as the default.
International Grad Workers	Grad Worker Assistance Fund	Grad employees are bargaining for an International Graduate Workers Assistance Fund to support international grad workers facing additional costs related to immigration and legal expenses if the legal matter involves an immigration issue directly affecting their ability to work at U-M. Grad employees are proposing U-M allocate \$100,000 per fiscal year for this fund.
	SEVIS and other Immigration Fee Reimbursement	Grad employees propose U-M covers all visa-related fees required for their legal employment. Currently, only SEVIS fees are eligible for reimbursement. Grad employees also propose that U-M notify all eligible employees, in writing, of their eligibility for reimbursement each term during which they are eligible.

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

	20-hour cap enforcement	Grad employees seem to shift responsibility for enforcing the non-negotiable work-hour cap of 20 hours per week for international students at U-M. International GSIs are not legally allowed to work more than 20 hours per week per the terms of their visas.
	Employee Rights/Immigration	Grad employees seek for the International Center to provide advice and assistance to international GSIs experiencing difficulty maintaining legal working status and for U-M to continue to provide pay and benefits to employees who cannot complete their immigration processes in time due to unforeseen circumstances such as natural disasters or consulate closures.
	IGSI training	Grad employees propose U-M clarify the framework for International grad employees who are required to take ELI 994 and for the university to adjust the compensation provided for attending this course for inflation.
Master's	Common application, hiring notification, and onboarding	Grad employees propose to make the GSI and GSSA application process more fair and less burdensome for those in master's programs and doctoral students without guaranteed funding. We have won restrictions on the materials required for GSI/GSSA applications, and other process improvements that will make the application experience smoother. We also won an agreement for the University to provide an onboarding checklist to new hires, essential for master's students who may work just one semester in their time at U-M (and thus have less institutional knowledge). We are still fighting for the University to share more data publicly to make the hiring process more transparent.
	Payment 4 Placements	Master's of Social Work (MSW) students at U-M have to complete approximately 900 hours of internship work in the social work field in order to graduate. Currently, about 88% of MSW students do this labor completely for free, and the remaining 12% who receive a stipend may earn as little as \$1/hour for their work. Grad employees' proposal of Payment for Placements would provide equitable payment for MSW labor through stipend funding equal to \$20/hour. Funding would be diverted from U-M's unrestricted endowment to the School of Social Work to provide for payments.
Reproductive Health	Contraceptive Coverage and Abortion Care	In a post-Roe world, grad employees want to ensure free access to contraceptives and abortions for all grads, regardless of if they work on campus or in a different city/state. Grad employees also want to eliminate the current restriction of 13 weeks for voluntary abortion coverage by expanding it to what is allowable by law in the state you receive the abortion (e.g. up to 24 weeks in Michigan).
	Reproductive Leave	Because accessing certain reproductive healthcare is much more restrictive or even illegal in some states, grad employees want the university to provide a 1-week reproductive leave for individuals who need to travel or take time off to access their necessary care.
	Reproductive Health Fund	Grad employees propose the university establish an annual \$10,000 Reproductive Health Fund to cover any out-of-pocket costs related to reproductive healthcare, including but not limited to travel costs for an abortion, a need for non-generic contraceptives, infertility treatment, etc.
Safety	Felony Disclosure	As part of the fight for a safe workplace free from discrimination, grad employees seek to remove the Felony Disclosure Policy from their contracts. The policy, which was announced in 2019 in the aftermath of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal at Michigan State University, is shown to be potentially discriminatory, to discourage people from criminalized

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

		communities from applying to work or study at the university, and to perpetuate the myth that the leading causes of harm on campus are unknown “felons,” rather than faculty and administrators who hold considerable privilege and power (including over grad workers).
	Immigration Protections	Grad employees are bargaining for contract language that would protect international students’ rights and employment by limiting U-M’s cooperation with immigration enforcement authorities except as required by law. This proposal is modeled closely on language in other grad employee contracts, including at the University of California system, the University of Oregon, and New York University.
	Public Safety GSSA Positions	Grad employees propose the creation of 10 paid, unionized Graduate Student Staff Assistant positions to develop public safety and transformative justice resources, modeled on the success of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion GSSA positions won in 2016-17.
	Unarmed urgent response	Grad employees support creating an unarmed urgent response program, which is being developed locally and received 93% support in a recent City of Ann Arbor poll. Grad employees propose U-M should pay its fair share to ensure that grad workers can access this public safety program on campus and in the community.
Trans Health	WPATH SOC-8, CGSP and MM staffing	<p>U-M GradCare insurance nominally covers some transgender healthcare services, thanks to the efforts of trans organizers during previous contract cycles, but accessing these services is extremely difficult (if not impossible) and involves long wait times. In particular, patients are only eligible for services if they meet certain criteria, which come from an outdated clinical protocol published by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) more than ten years ago. Some of these requirements are 1) the patient must provide 1-2 letters of support written by mental health clinicians (and obtaining these letters involves a lengthy and dehumanizing process), 2) the patient must undergo 12 continuous months of hormone therapy prior to obtaining surgical procedures, and 3) the patient must undergo 12 continuous months of “living in a congruent gender role” prior to obtaining surgical procedures.</p> <p>Consistent with the current clinical protocol published by WPATH, grad employees propose that both Michigan Medicine and our GradCare insurance no longer require written referral letters, a history of hormone therapy, or living in a congruent gender role prior to obtaining gender-affirming services.</p> <p>Additionally, Michigan Medicine requires transgender patients to access services through its Comprehensive Gender Services Program (CGSP) rather than directly from the relevant medical providers. CGSP is notoriously backlogged, and there are serious concerns about its ability to treat transgender patients in a compassionate manner. Grad employees propose that U-M hire two GSSAs to work at CGSP to identify and reduce barriers to obtaining care through that office.</p> <p>Finally, Michigan Medicine currently has an insufficient number of surgeons capable of providing gender-affirming surgical procedures, and there are serious concerns about the competency of those surgeons it does have. Grad employees propose that GradCare cover gender-affirming surgical and outpatient procedures obtained from <i>out-of-network</i> providers anywhere in the United States at no additional cost.</p>

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

	Speech Language Therapy MOU	<p>GradCare nominally covers <i>up to</i> 15 sessions of speech-language therapy for the treatment of <i>gender dysphoria</i> (a diagnosis typically applied to transgender patients), but the sole in-network provider commonly prescribes around 30 sessions to reach a typical patient's goals, and in reality, our insurance provider frequently approves coverage for <i>fewer</i> than 15 sessions. Additionally, patients' access to these services is hindered and delayed by the requirement to obtain a PCP Referral and pre-authorization (a lengthy process that often requires extensive documentation and enables our insurance provider to arbitrarily deny coverage).</p> <p>Grad employees propose that GradCare covers up to 60 speech-language therapy sessions per calendar year (with the exact number to be determined by the <i>medical</i> provider, not the insurance provider) and that GradCare no longer requires a PCP Referral or pre-authorization to obtain these services.</p>
	Laser Hair Removal MOU	GradCare nominally covers laser hair removal services for treating gender dysphoria, but obtaining these services requires preauthorization. Grad employees propose that GradCare cover laser hair removal services for treating gender dysphoria without requiring preauthorization.
Workload & Workplace	Class Size Caps	Improve learning and teaching outcomes (and create more GSI positions for master's students) by reducing the ratio of students to GSIs.
	Combined Appointments	Some departments have increasingly relied on combined GSI appointments, where one GSI takes on grading and teaching responsibilities for multiple courses. This proposal would ensure that GSI positions for different courses are posted separately unless taught by the same professor in the same department.
	Course Content	GSIs have been forced to teach racist, sexist, and homophobic content, including, in one instance, a GSI who was asked to grade essays about whether a genocide in their home country was justified. Our proposal would create a process through which GSIs can flag objectionable content and seek a resolution with their instructor of record, including having someone else teach the objected-to content. DROPPED as of 3/17.
	Limiting Late Work	The latest a GSI should be required to stay on campus to work is 10pm. The proposal includes an exception for proctoring an exam but provides that the department will pay for the GSI's transit home. No more mandatory late-night grading sessions!
	Parking Access	Reduce commute time by letting grad employees buy blue parking passes.
	Other Employment	Guarantee grad employees' ability to take on other jobs outside the contracted GSI/GSSA positions.
	Registration Waivers	Tentative Agreement reached 3/14. GSI and GSSA's are currently required to be enrolled in 6 credits. Under the agreement, GSIs and GSSAs would be allowed to reduce this requirement to 5 credits, with faculty approval. Additionally, this requirement would not apply to students who need only one course to graduate.
	Process for Leave/Quitting	Tentative Agreement reached 3/14. Under the agreement, if a department cannot reach a grad employee (e.g., because the employee is experiencing a medical emergency and is out of contact), the department must wait five days before

Updated Guide to GEO Bargaining Platforms (2023-26)

		initiating termination proceedings, and must notify the employee of the types of leave available to them. Additionally, the employing department must contact GEO. In cases where an employee is reached after the 5-day window has closed, the employee can request retroactive medical leave, so long as this request comes within the term of the appointment.
	Compensation and Modality	U-M has tried to avoid paying international grad employees their contractually mandated stipend for the required English Language Institute course, with the justification that the modality of the course has changed, and so the stipend is no longer necessary. Grad employees are proposing that participation in this course be compensated regardless of modality.
	Availability Requirements	All required availability for GSI and GSSA positions must be listed in the fraction calculation and job posting. No more surprise required weekend field trips!
	Eliminating Fractions Below 0.25	Some GSIs currently work tiny fractions for even tinier salaries. Sometimes, the employee would only have to work an additional fifteen minutes each week to reach the next fraction. The minimum salary for a GSI – no matter how many hours they work – should be a 0.25.
	Tuition Waivers	Grad employees propose that GSIs get full tuition waivers, no matter how much they work.