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TUGSA Still Riding High After Big Contract Win

Members discuss new initiatives at annual planning retreat

It's been one year since TUGSA members won the largest gains to their contract since the organization's inception, and the union is still going strong. Riding high on momentum fueled by last year's big win, members recently met at an annual planning retreat to discuss ways the union can continue to improve the lives of Temple graduate students.

Meeting the third weekend in July, members along with the executive board tackled a varied agenda that included topics such as the importance of TUGSA's image at home and beyond, the setting of ambitious but tangible objectives, contract improvement, and methods and strategies for member recruitment.

Some of the more specific goals set forth for the 2007-2008 school year were increasing membership, facilitating a stronger relationship with the administration, educating members on an array of issues, building a steward structure throughout the different campus buildings, and moving forward on the existing child care initiatives.

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How Temple Stacks Up How Well Off Are Temple TAs and RAs?

Anna Peak, TUGSA Co-President

Ever wondered if you'd have gotten a bigger stipend at some other university? Better health insurance? Answers to these questions are hard to come by, because surveys of graduate student stipends and health insurance coverage are rarely done.

The most recent survey of graduate student stipends and health insurance coverage was done by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and

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TUGSA Riding High At Planning Retreat, cont.

Andrew Dixon, Staff Organizer, said: "When I was planning the retreat, I was hoping to do two things. I was hoping to introduce our new leadership to the basics of TUGSA, but I was also hoping to create an environment that would engender some new ideas on how to promote and grow the union. Both objectives were met, and to my surprise, I found both objectives to be well surpassed. I was surprised at the high level of knowledge that people had coming in. This gave us more time to discuss new ideas for activities and events that will continue building TUGSA's presence on campus which I feel has grown considerably over the past two years."

Cathy Bartch, the Secretary of TUGSA, commented that the TUGSA members were both ambitious and practical in their goals. She added, "It was also refreshing to see a renewed energy to focus on work in progress that may have waned during the summer months." Specifically, she mentioned the child care initiative, which the union has set targets to be reached for October 2007.

The members also discussed how to build on past successes.

Last September, TUGSA members ratified a new contract that was the product of a tough and fierce negotiating battle between TUGSA and the administration. The final contract, won by TUGSA's negotiating team and labor allies, granted full-time TAs and RAs free health care coverage under either the CompSelect or the Keystone plan, higher wages, a bonus each contract year, a designated contact in labor relations, and a more thorough review process with work grievances.

Members at the retreat also shared ideas and outlined steps for TUGSA to be more engaged in the local, national and international community. Anna Peak, Co-President of TUGSA, said, "It's especially important that we reach out to other student groups here at Temple."

TUGSA encourages anyone to participate and voice their ideas and concerns. To get involved, contact TUGSA at union@tugsa.org or 215-235-0512.

The Presidential Candidates Report, cont.

more easily, according to the AFL-CIO. Former Tennessee senator Fred Thompson has voted against collective bargaining rights for police, firefighters and public safety employees and similarly is against the Employee Free Choice Act. And former Virginia governor Jim Gilmore does not have much of a record to consult on labor, though there is little evidence that he would be a supporter of union issues.

Surprisingly, besides perhaps Congressman Paul, arguably the top GOP presidential candidate in terms of labor and union support may very well be former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee. In the first Republican presidential debate, Huckabee stated that one of the most important things a president can do is protect American jobs, and, as mentioned on the AFL-CIO website, he supported raising the minimum wage as Arkansas governor. Besides this, Huckabee reappointed an executive director of the AFL-CIO as Arkansas' director of labor. Though Huckabee may be in rare company with anti-union Republican presidential candidates, one small optimistic part of the Republican debate now does include whether American jobs deserve protection and whether unfair international trade policies should be revised.

Sources Consulted

On the Issues website <<http://www.ontheissues.org/2008/>>, accessed 16 July 2008.
AFL Campaign website <<http://www.aflcio.org/issues/politics/candidates.cfm>>, accessed 16 July 2008.

This Labor Day Celebrate Labor

Join TUGSA in a March for Solidarity at the Philadelphia annual labor day parade

Show support for labor and labor rights by taking a stroll down Columbus Boulevard with TUGSA members. 9 a.m. on Monday, September 3rd. Call 215-235-0512 or write to union@tugsa.org for more info.

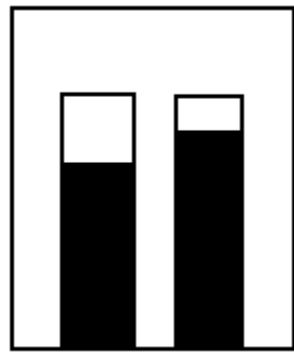
published in their Oct. 15, 2004 issue. Since then, there have of course been some changes: Princeton and Harvard, for example, have a track record of regularly raising their stipends by a considerable percentage*. But the majority of universities have a track record of changing little or not at all*.

How well does Temple compare to the 82 other universities surveyed in terms of stipends? Very well. Temple's current average stipend is higher than 66% of universities surveyed; only 11% of universities offered average stipends higher than Temple's current average**. Further, students in the humanities at some schools received stipends as low as \$8,000 a year**; the lowest any TA or RA at Temple receives is over \$14,000 with a built-in, yearly cost-of-living increase.

What about health insurance? Here, Temple graduate student employees are even better off. 23% of universities surveyed offered no health coverage at all, and we're not talking about the University of Southern North Dakota at Hoople here; universities like Emory and Carnegie Mellon, as of the *Chronicle's* survey, refused to shell out one penny towards health insurance to graduate student employees**. 56% of universities offer a partial subsidy, which can be as low as 20% of total health insurance premium costs**. Temple is one of only 33% of universities surveyed that offer free health insurance to graduate student employees**.

Temple TAs and RAs weren't always so well off. In 2001, graduate employees at Temple received a minimum stipend of just \$11,000 a year, with an extra \$400 thrown in to use towards health insurance. Given that coverage under the Keystone plan that Temple TAs and RAs now receive for free actually costs \$1776 per month, that \$400 a year didn't go very far. Further, the *Chronicle* survey did not ask about the type of coverage offered or what options, if any, students had in terms of health insurance. This leaves open the possibility that some universities offer free health coverage of a very minimal type, as Temple did before TUGSA's most recent contract. Temple now offers students not just free health insurance, but a choice of plans, one of which (the Keystone plan) offers vision and dental coverage as well as low co-pays and extensive preventative care.

All of these gains can be credited directly towards TUGSA. Having a union makes a difference



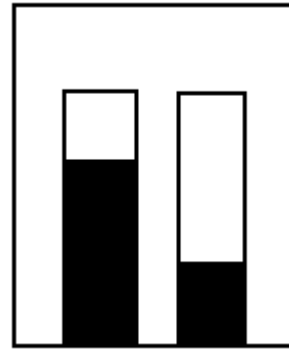
English Ph.D.s
Avg. stipend: \$12,000
Temple stipend: \$14,000

because with a union, graduate students who work for a university and are paid to do it must be considered as and treated as employees as well as students. Nationwide, much of the teaching in colleges and universities is done by graduate student employees, but at most universities, the TAs doing all that work aren't considered to be real employees. Instead, they're treated as children who should be grateful for the opportunity to work hard for low pay, just because they're also students. In the real world, of course, no employer would dare to tell a hard-working secretary that she forfeits her benefits because she has enrolled in night school, but without a union, universities can tell graduate students employees essentially the same thing at any time.

TUGSA's existence ensures that Temple TAs and RAs receive a decent stipend and free health insurance, not as a gift, but as a token of respect for the hard work that they do.

* Smallwood, Scoot. "Stipends are Key in Competition to Land Top Graduate Students." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 28, 2001. <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v48/i05/05a02401.htm>.

** Survey of Graduate Student Stipends. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 5, 2004. <http://chronicle.com/stats/stipends/>.



Health Insurance
Universities offering some coverage: 77%
Universities offering full coverage: 33%

The first segment in The TUGSA Tribune's Special Series on the 2008 Presidential Campaign

Where do our candidates stand? A Look at the 2008 Presidential Candidates on Labor and Union Issues

Part I: Republican Candidates

Michael Martin, TUGSA Co-President

The general consensus among labor leaders and unions is that the Republican Party is not receptive to issues involving labor organizations, worker rights, and equal wage issues. After consulting sources that provide ratings and voting records for the Republican presidential candidates for 2008, I find very little to indicate that the consensus view on Republican politicians having anti-union positions is incorrect. According to the AFL-CIO website, every single Republican presidential candidate in Congress, including Ron Paul, John McCain, Tom Tancredo, Sam Brownback, and Duncan Hunter, voted against the minimum wage increase which was recently passed. Further, the top legislative priority for labor in Congress this year, the Employee Free Choice Act, which would make it easier for employees to sign up for and be represented by labor unions, is opposed by all Republican presidential candidates. The bill, which passed the House of Representatives, was stalled by several Republicans in the Senate, including Brownback and McCain, ultimately leading to the bill being tabled and stalled from becoming legislation.

Arizona senator John McCain has an abysmal rating on labor issues, according to the On the Issues political site, and has a low 15% rating by the AFL-CIO on votes for labor issues. California congressman Duncan Hunter, who does support ending offshore tax havens, a pro-labor position, also has an extremely low AFL-CIO rating of 20% on labor issues, while Kansas senator Sam Brownback has the lowest rating possible, a 0% score, when it comes to labor issues. Colorado anti-immigration congressman Tom Tancredo similarly receives a 20% rating on labor issues and views tax relief as the key to improving the economy. Out of the candidates who have served in Congress and received a rating by the AFL-CIO, Texas congressman Ron Paul receives the highest marks, since he was scored 47% by the AFL-CIO, though this was before he opposed the Employee Free Choice Act and voted against raising the minimum wage on a federal level.

Of the candidates who are not currently serving in Congress and thus don't have a traceable record on votes for labor issues, their stances on unions and working families are not as easily discernible. One might guess that former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, who had to work with unions on a regular basis as mayor, would have a positive union record; yet the more conservative positioning of his views includes labor, and he spoke out against the Employee Free Choice Act and is against protectionist trade barriers with China. Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney also advocates free trade agreements which may further hurt the American worker, and he vetoed a bill from the Massachusetts legislature that would have allowed public-sector employees to form unions

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