

## **Open Letters to Oakland University students posted on Facebook by Professor Annie Gilson during the Unfair Labor Practice Protest (Fall 2009)**

Saturday, September 5, 2009 at 1:37am

Please pass this along to anyone who is interested. We need to get the word out, let people know what's happening from our point of view. Thanks!

All:

I just want to give you an update on the class situation. I also want to apologize to all of you for not being able to teach the classes you signed up for according to schedule. Rest assured, I am so looking forward to meeting you all and having a great semester! And I will make SURE that you get a full semester's worth of learning!

I thought I would also give you a run-down of the situation, from my point of view. This is only my take on what's happening, and I fully admit that I don't know everything that's going on, but I wanted to let you know why I honestly think that this job action is important, for professors, for students, and for the overall integrity of OU as an institution of higher learning.

We have been bargaining with the administration since May, hoping to come to a settlement before the start of classes. But throughout the summer, they issued demands that were impossible for us to accept. Most of the issues we weren't able to agree on have nothing to do with our salaries. Rather, they have to do with the kind of education we can give to students, and how much control we have over what happens in the classroom when we interact with you guys, and when we hire new faculty who will also be responsible for teaching and guiding you.

Here are the highlights of what they demanded, as far as I understand the situation:

1. They want rights to some or all of our intellectual property, from books to articles to lecture notes to syllabi, so that these things would now be owned by them, not us.
2. They want to make cuts to our health care, and make us take physical tests to determine how much we should pay for office visits and prescriptions, etc., based on how fat we are, whether we smoke, etc.
3. They said they couldn't afford to give us a raise, even though in 2008, the president and many top administrators all got big raises. The president's raise was 40%. The athletic staff members also got raises. Earlier this summer, the administration then announced salary freezes for everyone else.
4. But the biggest problem we had with what they proposed is that, at OU, the faculty have a say

in how the university is governed, helping to make decisions about how it's structured, its mission, how we serve our students (in terms of class size, the subjects we cover in class, etc). In other words, OU was set up 50 years ago to allow professors a say in how the university is run. The administration wants to take our voices away from us. If they succeed, we will have little or no say in how students learn and what happens in the classroom.

5. You may have heard that OU is creating a medical school. Legally, they have to show the faculty what's in the application they made to the accrediting body of medical schools. However, they've refused to show us this application. In the meantime, we've filed a Freedom of Information Act, and now we have to wait to see if they will show us the application. (They appealed, and as a result they get two weeks before they have to show us the application.)

6. I want you to remember this: OU has been banking profit EVERY YEAR, in spite of the woes Michigan is currently experiencing. They can afford raises for administration, so why do they want to raise student tuition 9%? Why do they want to take benefits away from faculty?

These are the reasons why we're fighting. We want to make sure that OU remains a good place for students to learn, with an excellent faculty, who have the time and energy and resources to help students learn, to help students go on to find good jobs, and to help all of us be engaged, productive members of our society.

We care deeply about you. Please accept our apologies for the disruption that is currently happening.

Sincerely,  
Annie Gilson

Wednesday, September 9, 2009

11:37 pm

Classes are canceled for tomorrow, as you guys know. Some really scary messages are coming from the administration.

Please believe us: we haven't walked away from the negotiations. Our team left tonight after hours of being stonewalled by the administrative team. Our team has been up all night, night after night, and the administration is trying to wear them down. So our team decided to bring it before the judge tomorrow. And our simple message to the judge is the same one we've been telling you:

All we want is the right to have a say in the kind of education you receive.

The administration does not want us to have this say. By having to answer to us, they're prevented from doing things that we think aren't in the students' best interests.

That costs them money.

It seems that they care more about making money than treating professors and students fairly. What we want is to give you the best education we can.

We are determined to do this.

And that's why we'll be out there on the picket line again. In the rain or in the hot sun, even though it's no fun to stand there, thinking of all the classes we should be teaching.

But we're out there for you. For education. For schools where professors don't have a union, and get fired for speaking up for the students.

We are speaking up. And it's making them really mad.

Thanks for your support. We are here for you. I keep saying that because it's true.

Annie Gilson

Wednesday, September 9, 2009

12:39 pm

Update to students:

You might have received messages from President Russi and VP Snyder this morning. Their messages claim that we are being unreasonable. Here's the thing: after the faculty team bargained for 18 hours over the last 24, the administration produced a completely new document, one that we'd never seen before. If we signed it, we would no longer have input into how we teach and how the university is run as an institution of higher education.

The administration is going to court to try to get an injunction to force us back into the classroom without allowing us to make sure we still have a voice in the kind of education we deliver to you. We contest that our job action is not illegal: we filed an unfair labor practice against them last week saying they would not bargain.

Please understand: we want to make sure that we can control the kind of education you get, not the administration. We are afraid that they want to silence us to create yet another Big Box University. But your Oakland education is why you come here. We will not let them take it away from you, or from the students who come here 5, 10, or 20 years from now. Your children have the right to the same excellent educations you are getting from us!

Please be patient. We want to be back in the classroom, but if the classroom we return to is one that prevents us from teaching you the way you should be taught, what's the point of higher education? Thank you so much for all your support, and please remember, we're here for you.