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For Immediate Release

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Academic Student Employees Gather in Mary Gates Hall For a Study Hall Session on Academic Excellence: 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 31

On Wednesday, March 31, 2010, hundreds of Academic Student Employees (ASEs), members of UAW Local 4121, will gather in Mary Gates Hall Commons for a study hall session about the proposals made by the University of Washington during contract negotiations to reduce wages, pass on a share of health insurance premiums, gut layoff protections, and cut more than 447 instructional jobs from the College of Arts and Sciences.

"We're outraged," said Madhavi Murty, a Teaching Assistant from the Communication and Women Studies departments. "We're already struggling with increased fees and tuition, and now the University wants us to pay more for health insurance, decrease our wages, and get rid of the few months of security we get when jobs are promised to us. Plus it's harder to do a good job in the classroom because of increasing class sizes and tutoring center closures. We've got to take a stand at some point."

Despite the University's claims to the contrary, ASEs aren't buying the line that there's no money available to support wage increases. According to the University's Board of Regents, last year's increases for ASEs paid on state funds cost \$664,000, which amounts to one-tenth of one percent of the University's state operating budget. At the same time, Union negotiators have discovered that \$10.6 million dollars has been overpaid to the ASE health insurance plan in the past seven years – more than the amount it would have taken to preserve jobs and increase pay during the economic downturn.

"I don't see how they can justify reducing our pay," said Celeste Hoffman, a Research Assistant in the Civil and Environmental Engineering department. "60% of us are paid on Research Grants and Contracts, whose budget has increased by \$57 million in the past two years. If they reduce our wages, they would be turning down money that outside funding agencies like the NSF already promised to the University. It makes no sense."

The Union has proposals to make improvements to salary and health insurance benefits, as well as student to instructor/tutor ratios.

"We have a focused bargaining agenda that's organized around maintaining quality in teaching and research at the University," according to David Parsons, Local 4121 President. "The average ASE makes less than \$15,000 per year. When the University makes cuts it hurts our ability to do our jobs, not to mention our competitiveness in recruiting more students."

"We stand behind our TAs and Tutors," says Francis Gaze, an undergraduate studying Economics. "My education would be absolutely incomplete without them. If they go away, we have very few options left. We're paying more for less."