

GSA Delegate Assembly Meeting Minutes

July 7, 2020

1:00pm-2:00pm

Zoom

Members in Attendance

- Adam Binswanger (Applied Math)
- Ben Falandays (Cognitive Science)
- Anuvetha Govindarajan (Physics)
- Melissa Baker (Political Science)
- Jordan Collignon (Internal Communications Officer)

Opening Remarks, Jordan

- Farhana recently resigned as Internal Vice President, so Jordan will be filling in for the position until we can hold an election in the fall.
- Noted that it's important to take time this summer for the DA to organize before the fall semester begins.

Notes on GSA Structure

- The Delegate Assembly started as a group of department representatives elected through the GSA or the graduate groups they serve. This was a separate branch of the GSA compared to the Executive Council, but back then no structure was in place where the DA is given supervisory powers directed at the EC. In 2016, the DA was given power to oversee the allocation of GSA funds through a budget proposal proposed by the Treasurer. In other words, no funding could be officially utilized until the DA approved the annual budget. In 2019, the GSA evolved into a system where both the EC and DA must approve proposed legislation.
- It is very difficult for the EC to reach out to individual graduate students. The EC is more suited to work directly with university administration and create organizational programming. The DA is far more suited to reach out to graduate students because each representative is chosen directly from the graduate group they work in. That connection allows the GSA to reach individual graduate students through the DA.
- Building the foundation for how the DA will operate this year is a major objective. The structure of the DA is underdeveloped or non-existent. Over the past few years, documentation of the DA is limited to the GSA bylaws. Most documentation concerning

DA operations has not been passed down to future GSAs, which is likely one of the reasons the role of the DA is confusing. This summer is an opportunity to build upon the existing structure and address what is needed to ensure the DA has the power to operate.

- It was mentioned that the current system is a top-down method of communication, where the EC would make recommendations to the DA on what to do next. This not an ideal system, since it implies that all proposals for action start from the EC, and implicitly limiting the power of the DA to present its own proposals. One important part to consider is to work on a system of bottom-up communication from the DA to the EC. Would like to have a fraction of legislation proposed in the DA first as well, then passed to the EC for approval. This process only occurred a couple times last year; calls to action requiring approval from the entire GSA should be a two-way street rather than exclusively top-down.
- A future goal is to have the EC and DA as separate, independent bodies of the GSA. The structure will take a while to define. It is first necessary to redefine the structure of the GSA so that the DA is not dependent on the EC to operate.

Addressing Vacant DA Seats

- There are a total of 16 seats in the DA. The Economics program was introduced last year, which may open a 17th seat if students join the program in the fall. Currently, 6 out of 16 seats are filled, leaving 10 vacancies. An election will be held in the fall to fill all vacant seats in the GSA.
- The bylaws state that graduate clubs that represent the interests of their graduate groups are responsible for selecting their representative on the DA. Only two of these clubs are found on Catlife (Public Health and Sociology), but the GSA lists five departments that select their own representatives. What are the other clubs? CogSci has a club that selects the representative in its department.
- There also seems to be confusion regarding who has selection authority for each department. It was noted that the GSA elects a representative from Physics but was not listed as doing so. In a meeting with the EC, it was noted that in last year's fall election Environmental Systems should have had the authority in its department. Jordan will work on distinguishing between which departments are responsible for selecting delegates, and which departments the GSA is responsible for. DA members are encouraged to assist in this task. Would like to have this done well before the election.

Promoting Student Involvement

- COVID-19 had a significant impact on student participation at UC Merced. It is necessary to stress that students should stay informed on university affairs even during a pandemic.
- Would like the GSA to get students more involved with graduate clubs, and encouraging graduate clubs to host more events. Since DA members know their graduate department better than the EC, it would be great if DA members can do this.
- Would like to have DA members regularly check in on students in their departments. It was suggested that departments hold virtual social gatherings over Zoom. It was noted that the physics department hosts a weekly virtual coffee hour.
- It was also suggested that members of the GSA host its own event over Zoom that is focused on having students learn about the GSA and ask questions. This is similar to GSA officers holding office hours but is more of a panel than an individual setting. There was also a suggestion to have students be able to join GSA meetings and offer comments to agenda items.
- Jordan presented ideas that members of the GSA have suggested to hold for the organization. In-person events may be at risk of being cancelled, but the EC is looking into one of its suggestions to see if it will be okay to host. Many of these events need a host, DA members can host some of these events too. Jordan will be meeting this week with the committee in charge of planning the event schedule and bring these ideas forward.
- It was noted that since the pandemic started, events with a focus on professional development became less frequent. The GSA can work on bringing back events like these.

Updating Governing Documents

- Quickly highlighted the important parts of the GSA constituting and bylaws as applicable to the DA. The DA has the responsibilities of approving how GSA funds are utilized and updating the bylaws; these are the only two powers that are completely vested only in the DA. To solidify the DA as an independent body, it is necessary to have procedures that will allow the DA to be autonomous, without relying on the EC.
- Defining the DA this year is not enough to guarantee that the structure will maintain itself. The governing documents must be amended to allow the DA more autonomy for future GSAs.

- The process of updating the governing documents of the GSA occurs twice each academic year, each at the beginning of election cycles. The DA is the only body in the GSA that has the authority to amend the bylaws.
- Jordan would like to form a small group that will be responsible for reviewing and proposing amendments to the current constitution and bylaws for the upcoming election cycle. This group will meet separately from the DA to gather ideas, and make their final recommendations to the DA for approval in a future meeting. Adam has volunteered to be part of this group; Jordan will send out more info later.

Future Meeting Logistics

- The EC currently meets every two weeks this summer, would like the DA to meet every two weeks as well. The next DA meeting is scheduled for July 20th from 1-2pm.

Meeting adjourned at 2:03pm.