

GSA Executive Council Meeting Minutes

June 29, 2020

2:00pm-3:30pm

Zoom

Meeting moderated by Shayna Bennett

Minutes prepared by Jordan Collignon

Members in Attendance

- Shayna Bennett (President)
- Taylor Fugere (Academic Affairs Officer)
- Jordan Collignon (Internal Communications Officer)
- Carlisha Hall (Public Relations Officer)
- Ritwika VPS (International Affairs Officer)
- Larisa Gavrilova (Climate, Diversity & Equity Officer)

(2:04-2:25) Event Committee Setup and Social Event Ideas

- The event planning committee has its first meeting on Saturday to talk about the pros and cons of suggested activities for the academic year. The committee would like to solidify an events calendar as soon as possible. There are so many suggestions that it will be extremely difficult to implement them all.
- For the next meeting, committee members were asked to draft their own preliminary calendar. A consensus on a significant portion of the events to host and when should be established before the July 13th meeting, and finalized by the July 27th meeting.
- Can the GSA work on sponsoring outside events for graduate students?
- Yoga over Zoom was a suggested activity but there are things to consider:
 - Should we instead hire a Yoga instructor to lead the activity, and does the instructor have to be from UC Merced or elsewhere in the UC system, particularly someone on payroll? Shayna will look into this restriction. The GSA can also reach out to the recreation department.
 - It may be questionable to host yoga as an athletic activity. Yoga holds deep spiritual and religious roots in India which is completely different than how yoga in the U.S is practiced. This can be seen as a misappropriation of a cultural activity as a recreational one.

- It was noted that it will be difficult to find a traditional practitioner given our own resources, even if there is one in the UC system. Taylor can reach out to one person in the UC system. Ritu can reach out to members of MIGSA. It could be possible for MIGSA to host a yoga series.
- The GSA should encourage other graduate groups to host their own events.
- The GSA is planning to host a reading group, but given the time constraints of graduate students, we cannot expect that students will read an entire book before meeting the group. The reading group can become more of a discussion group focused on the topic of the book rather than the content.
- It was also suggested that the GSA can partner with Grad Division to host a welcome back party at the lake. This can include kayaking and picnicking while students still maintain social distancing.

(2:25-2:36) Update on DA and IVP

- Farhana recently resigned as the Internal Vice President. This leaves the Executive Council with four vacancies to be filled in the fall election.
- The GSA has found someone who is interested in running for the IVP position. We can schedule her for the next meeting on July 13th. Chris Kello and the interim assistant dean will also be joining the meeting on July 13th.
- The DA has met once last month and will be meeting again in the beginning of July. There are six delegates in the DA each excited about their position.
- We want opportunities to train new DA members. No formal training for DA positions has ever been offered previously. What would the training look like, and who will lead the training? Can we get former delegates to lead the training? Taylor will work on this. She will also contact Shannon and Albert from last year's DA.
- The DA members are looking at different opportunities to get involved. It was suggested that the DA should join the EC meeting next time.
- Jordan volunteered to be interim IVP and will meet with Shayna to learn more this week.

(2:36-3:01) Undocumented Affairs and Racial Inclusion & Pride Officers

- Ritu has reached out to Maria regarding what the duties of the undocumented affairs office should be. It was suggested that Maria be invited to attend the meeting on July 27th to talk more about this.

- A rough draft of the officer's duties was sent out shortly before the meeting to review. The position so far will be structurally similar to the International Affairs Officer but will be working more closely with Services for Undocumented Students and UndocuAlly. This is a critical requirement for the office as undocumented students have specific legislative needs.
- It was questioned whether only undocumented students should be in this position. While anyone can run for office, having someone who has little to no knowledge of undocumented student services will make the office less meaningful. Moreover, having someone in the office who is undocumented might place that student at risk. The Non-discrimination policy of the UC System may not allow us to limit the position to only undocumented students.
- The Racial Inclusion & Pride Officer will be a difficult position to establish. It was also suggested that offices that target specific groups, and not particularly those of a broader legal status such as domestic, international, and undocumented, may be too focused and questionable. There may be legal issues for having positions targeting those in non-legal statuses. However, it's clear that people of color and LGBT are disproportionately affected groups as well, and the GSA must find a way to address these groups too.
- It was suggested that the GSA continue conversations about the Undocumented Affairs Officer position and drop the proposal for the Racial Inclusion & Pride officer position. Instead, the duties originally brainstormed for this position can be a part of the Climate Diversity & Equity Officer position. The GSA should make a list of actionable items for thought, and email Larisa about what responsibilities to add. A meeting will be held next week specifically about how to do this.
- Shayna will be meeting with Alex next week to talk more about the Legislative Officer position.

(3:01-3:37) Discussion on the Letter

- There are many things that black grad students are asking for: Defunding the police, hiring a black psychologist, offering awards for black scholars. There are little to no fellowships catered toward black scholars. Do students know about these fellowships? Can we get a sponsorship from a foundation?
- Should the solidarity letter instead be a part of the GSA newsletter? It was suggested to keep these two items separate. The letter is already two pages long.
- Points in the letter to revise:
 - Replace the item involving offering committee stipends to hiring a black psychologist.
 - Replace adding GSA officer position to reevaluating current officer position.

- The library has obtained multi-access digital copies of 2 of the 4 books on our list.
- For the book club, we shouldn't ask students to read the entire book, but rather have a discussion that summarizes the book's contents.
 - It is unlikely that students will have time to read beforehand.
 - Theme the discussion around a specific topic. The book can act as a springboard.
 - Those who don't participate should still be able to learn something.
 - Consider including fictional works of people of color, such as Sci-Fy or fantast books.
 - Consider having professors from Interdisciplinary Humanities or Critical Race & Ethnic Studies departments lead the discussion.
- A broader term is a book club focusing on black literature.
- It was decided to pause this discussion and meet later to finalize the details.

(3:37-3:39) Mental Health

- This item was tabled due to lack of time.

Meeting adjourned at 3:39pm.