

GSA Executive Council Meeting Minutes

July 27, 2020

2:00pm-4:00pm

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)
- Ritwika VPS (International Affairs Officer)
- Larisa Gavrilova (Climate, Diversity & Equity Officer)
- Betsabel Chicana (General Membership)
- Maria Ramirez Loyola (General Membership)
- Maria Nishanian (Graduate Academic Counselor)
- Tawana Parks (Office of Student Involvement)

Taylor's Update

- Taylor's position as Academic Affairs Officer includes assigning students to administration and campus committees. She is doing a lot of outreach efforts and taking note of what students that committees want. Grad group representatives may have ways of contacting certain committees, and important info is usually reported to grad chairs. Will be working with Jordan to figure out how to get this information directly to students so they can apply.
- We can also continue posting to our social media. It was suggested that the GSA should add posts about academic resources during the academic year. Posting info about the IRB will assist students in getting research authorization.
- Taylor is also working with Carlisha to plan professional development activities. Maria is thinking about panels for grad students to handle imposter syndrome and managing advisor/advisee relationships.
- We would also like to get grad students involve in Research Week. There were no grad students on that planning committee last year.

- Training for committees: might want to ask Emilia from HSRI
- GROW week planning: everyone's just so busy. Is there a panel? It was suggested that GROW should include a place for graduate student clubs as well. A grad fellow is involved in the planning. Ritu sent an email to exchange ideas with the planning committee, no replies yet.

Maria and Undocumented Affairs Officer Position

- Undocumented students have specific issues and requirements related to their legal status, and currently there is a lack of representation and resources specifically pertaining to undocumented graduate students. The objective is to have an officer position in the GSA that represents specific needs for undocumented graduate students and speak out about existing issues.
- This will be a difficult position to establish; we specifically don't have experience working with policies concerning undocumented students, and so we must work with someone who does and flush out the details in collaboration.
- We must work with Service for Undocumented Students to gather information on resources and related services. These services have been available for as long as UC Merced has been around, yet very few even know that these resources exist. Many students felt like dropping out of school because their needs were not being addressed and didn't feel like they were part of the campus community.
- This new officer position will be different from the International Affairs Office because these two offices cover two different legal statuses. It is unclear how new policies will affect the responsibilities of this position.
- Many undocumented students fall under AB540 which allows students to attend college and pay tuition. However, employment is another issue for some students, meaning they have to pay tuition out of their pocket as a grad student.
- It was suggested that responsibilities concerning undocumented students should be given to the Climate Diversity & Equity officer.
- Another concern was whether the person in this position has to be an undocumented student. Students might not respond to this position for fear of open legal status.
- Any information about the position should come from both the GSA and SDS. Could the grad fellow help establish a connection between GSA and SDS?
- Around four Undocumented grad student mentors are being recruited for the fall.

EVP and LAO Position

- Officers were asked to review the proposal to revise the responsibilities of the External Vice President and include responsibilities of the Legislative Affairs Officer.
- It was suggested that no changes are needed, and a vote was held to approve the two proposals. The vote to approve the responsibilities passed unanimously. These will be considered for DA approval.

Elections Commission

- Jordan is in charge of keeping track of who appoints representatives in the Delegate Assembly and is required to work with the Elections Officer.
- It was suggested that the Election Commission have three members. Shayna and Jordan will be a part of the Commission, and one DA member should join.
- The DA will be asked to vote on who among the three members will be voted on to be the Election Commissioner.

Maria Nishanian and Campus Mental Health

- Maria works as the Graduate Academic Counselor within Grad Division and provides counseling services to graduate students and postdocs. She can help with conflict resolutions and assist with issues regarding communication between PIs and their students and make referrals when necessary. It is a confidential service, although the degrees of confidentiality are not the same as those in CAPS. Required to report if there is a Title IX issue.
- It is important that graduate students utilize Maria as an important resource. Grad Div wants to know how students are doing, but needs to hear from the students directly to have a clearer picture of the student population.
- It was suggested that Maria should continue joining GSA meetings and help maintain a flow of communication between the GSA and the Dean. We encourage Maria to come to the open meetings and Executive Council meetings.
- Updates on mental health services
 - CAPS is currently understaffed
 - Telehealth services are encouraged
 - There were issues with students being blocked from accessing counseling services outside UC Merced. It was mentioned that a glitch in the system used to check insurance status kept saying student didn't qualify for the service because the given insurance was invalid. Our insurance falls under UCSHIP, so this shouldn't be the case. Graduate students also qualify for this service.

Update from Meeting with Chris Kello

- The Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) will be closed for the entire fall semester. This will be problematic for student-parents.
- Grad Div has provided a list of resources related to childcare. GSA can email students with these resources and should do so before August 10th.
- It was mentioned that two or three students formed a student-parent organization for graduate students.
- Are there additional funds leftover from the CARES Act that can be utilized? Will the childcare reimbursement increase?

Solidarity Letter

- The letter has been revised. Our timing is very late but we can explain why.
- We must send this out before the start of the fall semester at the latest, so please edit this as much as possible.

Fall Meeting Schedule

- Until the election concludes we cannot hold Executive Council Meetings once the semester starts.
- We will still meet on August 10th and schedule one last meeting on August 24th.
- For future meetings, please indicate your availability as soon as possible. A poll will be sent out later.

Elections Timeline, Tawana

- The GSA will start advertising any open positions starting early August and start soliciting nominations for open August 19th. Voting is scheduled for mid-September.
- The system used to handle ballots is Catlife, which is a product of Campus Labs. Tawana gave everyone a demonstration how ballots are created on Catlife and who can access them.
- An issue in the past for voting in the Delegate Assembly was that restrictions could not be placed to prevent students from voting on DA candidates outside of their department. Every student was placed on a single eligibility list to be applied to the entire election ballot. A solution to this issue was presented in the meeting: Create an individual Delegate Assembly ballot for every graduate group and upload a list of names corresponding to those who can access each ballot. Since there are 17 grad groups,

there would be 17 lists and therefore 17 ballots. One list will contain all the students in a single graduate group. This list comes from the registrar's office which is tied to Banner.

- There was concern about the ballot being able to reach new students given the timing of the election. It is unclear when the registrar's office includes new names; mid-September was suggested. There are nine graduate groups with vacant seats in the DA. The Economics group is new this year and might be left out of announcements if the student list isn't updated in time. Other departments can choose to elect delegates and for new departments it was decided to let them make the first choice, then we can formalize the process for next time. Jordan should have more information from the grad chair of Materials Science around the end of the week and will work on getting the completed list to Tawana.
- Tawana will continue to solicit nominations from graduate students, and handling nomination acceptances. It was also suggested that the GSA could create a form on its website and have students nominate others by filling out the form.
- It was suggested that everyone on the election commission should be given elevated privileges to Catlife, although that will mean users have full admin access which may be risky. The commission could have access until the election results are announced. Qualtrics is an alternative system which might be better, but the commission will discuss with Tawana about this later.
- Email language ideas for the ballot to Tawana when we have them.
- The elections commissioner won't be decided until the DA meeting on August 4th.

Items Voted On

- Proposal for responsibilities of the Legislative Affairs Officer passes the EC.
 - 5 yeas, 0 nays, 0 abstentions
- Proposal for revision of the responsibilities of the External Vice President passes the EC.
 - 5 yeas, 0 nays, 0 abstentions
- Shayna, Jordan, and one DA member will be involved with the Election Commission. The DA will be voting on which one of these three will be Election Commissioner.

Meeting adjourned at 4:02pm.