



GSA Executive Council Meeting Minutes
April 27, 2021
3:30-4:45pm
Zoom

This meeting is moderated by GSA President Shayna Bennett. Minutes of the meeting have been prepared by GSA Internal Communications Officer Jordan Collignon.

Members of Executive Council in Attendance

- Shayna Bennett (President)
- Benny Nguyen (Internal Vice President)
- Zunaira Iqbal (External Vice President)
- Taylor Fugere (Academic Affairs Officer)
- Jordan Collignon (Internal Communications Officer)
- Ritwika VPS (International Affairs Officer)
- Larisa Gavrilova (Climate, Diversity, and Equity Officer)
- Karla Seijas (Solidarity Officer)
- Betsabel Chicana (Legislative Affairs Officer)

Officer Updates

Shayna

- The elections process for the semester is complete, but we have yet to send the results due to a complication the commission is handling. There are a few positions in which write-in candidates have received the most votes and are being contacted one by one. Once the ballot indicated who won each position, Tawana still needs to approve the results. In this election, we expect to have all offices except the PR office in the Executive Council filled. A couple winning write-in candidates for Delegate Assembly positions have accepted, but there are still others that have yet to reply.
- The two proposals to create two new offices in the Executive Council have passed. The constitution will be amended to include these two positions.
- A total of 158 graduate students voted in this election, just barely attaining the 20% required to move forward with the proposed recreation referendum. Looks like about a third of voters voted yes and two-thirds voted no.

- About a month ago, Ritu nominated the GSA for the Building Community award, and last week the GSA was notified that it will be receiving the award! Thank you Ritu for nominating us! If anyone here can, come join us at the award ceremony hosted by the Souza Leadership Center on April 30th.
- Planning for last events: retirement party and new officer orientation. Hope we can schedule these during today's meeting.

Ritu

- As part of the Advocacy team, met with legislators to discuss about the white papers and upcoming bills.
- Must cancel the international student hangout tonight. These past couple weeks have been extremely stressful.
- Got the Undocumented Affairs position proposed this year; the proposal passed the general membership during this election.
- Did quite a lot of advocacy this year to bring international student affairs to light, including Basic Needs, and established a better working relationship with the international office.
- The IAO's role is pretty limited, so I think I signed up for a bunch of stuff outside as well because they interested me.
- Some things I would recommend for the next cohort:
 - Follow up on utility stipends
 - Follow up on TA loads and progress (I am working on this and will pass this onto the next IAO)
 - Worked a bit on the website with Jordan but that did not get wrapped up like I wanted to, so that's definitely something that should be followed up on.
 - I am really happy with being able to help out with the bylaws revision in whatever capacity I could, but definitely would be nice for a loose working group to sort of keep on top of the bylaws as the GSA and the grad community evolves.
 - Recommend some kind of diversity training targeted for International student needs in the context of them being thrown into a new country and culture.
 - In light of the advocacy work that Betsabel has been doing (and the MIT advocacy letters) it would be nice for us to frame the unique needs of UC Merced on an advocacy platform.

Taylor

- Looking back from the beginning of the year, my office connected with all campus committees and filled all committee spots this year!
- I wanted to do a training for those in committee spots. A poll was sent out to get a time scheduled, but not enough people filled out the poll, so scheduling was not possible. Would like the next officer in this position to try and get the training together.
- The aspects of the Academic Affairs office involve networking with different committees on campus, so it's important that each officer in this position maintain these connections. The next officer should work on building a relationship with the committee on Research Week; the office is usually part of the planning process each year, but this year the office was not given an opportunity to participate.
- Worked with Ritu and Larisa to collaborate with the international office.
- Several of us also contributed to social media and planning and posting/making flyers for events!

Larisa

- The Mental Health survey workgroup is working on the first draft of the survey and will hopefully send a draft to the survey team before the semester is over. Given the timing at which the workgroup was formed, it's likely that a polished draft won't be ready before mid-May since there was not enough times for the workgroup to meet.
- Two diversity trainings were planned. Dr. Berhe hosted one of these workshops in March on Improving Workplace Climate: Responding to Harassment. The second one will be an introduction to anti-racist pedagogy, hosted by Dr. Camfield on May 3rd and 4th.
- Outside of the GSA, Taylor and I hosted the CETL workshop series on evidence-based practices in the classroom.
- This year, the GSA was involved in successfully having the Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity offer stipends to council members.

Zunaira

- This weekend are the interviews with the candidates for UC Student Regent. This is expected to take up most of the weekend.
- Attending UCGPC meetings was one of the main tasks of my office. Something I would like this office to work on for next year are to assist the UCGPC in getting members

more engaged. It felt like they needed to explain the expectations of council members since it wasn't too clear what the objectives were this year.

- Worked with Shayna to get the bus routes up and running again. Shayna and I have been working with TAPS to create a survey for all students regarding the use of their services. The survey has not been sent out yet, but according to an Instagram post from the office of sustainability, the survey should be sent this week.

Benny

- The DA passed all the bylaws and approved the SRU Union resolution.
- For the transition, DA members have chosen to hold individual meetings with the candidate who will be replacing them. It was recommended that the DA have something written to pass on to the new Delegates before the end of the term.
- Would like the next IVP candidate to work on the office's transition. The IVP is in a flux, moving away from leading the DA to supporting graduate student organizations. Would like the officer to take steps to continue in the direction, and build relationships with the appropriate groups.
- It feels like the DA has become an independent body, and Adam has been the most integral person in making this happen as DA chair. However, since the chair will be changing each year, the IVP should continue to ensure that the DA can continue to operate independently. One suggestion was to have the DA elect a vice-chair that will assist the current chair and absorb some of the responsibilities where needed.
- Worked on drafting the GSA newsletters, hosted origami nights, and created the ideas for photo contests.
- Helped the Treasurer to carry out the funding application procedures.

Karla

- Throughout the year, students have reached out to me under various circumstances.
- Attended Union meetings throughout the year.
- The Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities Workgroup is going to carry over to the next year. The workgroup had already prepared a draft of the rights and responsibilities for review, but the group on conflict and resolution has not yet met to review the document. This has delayed the workgroup's progress significantly. One more meeting is planned this semester. It is expected that the final draft will be published around the beginning of the next academic year.

Jordan

- UC Disability committee had their monthly meeting last Sunday. It announced that the Emergency Planning subcommittee has merged with the Basic Needs subcommittee since there appeared to be significant overlap. The merged subcommittee affirms that accommodations for students with disabilities in both the classroom and residence are basic needs on their own. The subcommittee will be meeting every two weeks at 3pm; the next meeting is scheduled for this Sunday.
- As Benny stated, the DA has approved the new bylaws. It looked like there were no other changes that DA members suggested. The bylaws committee can move forward with ratifying the new bylaws.
- A draft of my officer handbook was uploaded to Teams recently. The only section that needs work is website management. I'm trying to include the basics of the editing interfaces so that it's easier to know what to do.
- Members of the Basic Needs Committee will be meeting with Bavneet at 9am on Monday to talk about how we can help graduate students sign up for CalFresh. A concern raised was that many graduate students may not qualify because of income limits, however there is a subset of students, such as those with families and dependents, who should qualify.
- A working strategy for updating the GSA's website is needed badly. In the beginning of the semester, pages had to be moved around, content had to be replaced, due dates had to be changed, and other things that were able to be done without too much effort. However, this took up way too much time because I had to do most all the research of campus departments on my own. The officer who takes my place next year should develop a strategy for obtaining website content from the appropriate groups so that the officer does not have to obtain the information on their own. This will save a ton of time and ensure verifiability of the information received. Within the GSA, officers should be able to make the necessary edits to the GSA's website on their own or at least ask the ICO what edits to make.
- No one in the GSA has been assigned the task of managing the GSA's email account, but with the approval of the new bylaws, the ICO will have this responsibility. The officer in this position should forward emails to the relevant officers and delegates when necessary, especially if the officer is not included as a recipient.
- It was also stated that the rest of our communication channels (i.e., Facebook, Instagram) can be managed by the Social Media Specialist now that the constitutional amendment has passed.

Betsabel

- The Advocacy committee recently met with legislators and their staff members to go over the white papers.
- I would like to keep this committee going and continue networking and building connections with legislators for the future. Starting this fall, I hope to recruit new members that will focus on tracking bills, noting which ones passed and which ones didn't, and thinking about whether the committee should offer support for some of the new bills proposed.
- As these meetings continue, I will have updates throughout the next few months.

Cohort Activities

- Betsabel sent out a poll last week requesting the schedule a time for us to take group photos and end this year on a high note. She bought a hanging background that we can use to take the pictures. Betsabel and Jordan had suggested doing this on campus. There are still concerns whether this would be allowed because we don't have specific business with university departments. Another suggestion made was to meet downtown near the Mainzer and the areas with lots of art. A time was scheduled for May 3rd at 5pm. Both individual and group shots will be taken since Larisa and Quy are not in Merced.
- Betsabel bought a second background that the incoming cohort can use to take their pictures. She wants the new cohort to have a good start to their term. This will be done on a later date.
- Shayna would like to host a retirement party for us. Looks like May 14th at 6pm works best for us.
- Ritu would like to continue the GSA outgoing/incoming officer series but needs everyone to contribute. So far, it looks like Yulissa is the only one who has filled this out. For the rest of the meeting, officers should fill out each column pertaining to their office before leaving.

Meeting adjourned at 4:45pm.

The final General Membership meeting will be on Wednesday, May 5th from 4-5pm.

The final Executive Council meeting will be on Tuesday, May 11th from 3:30-4:45pm.