



GSA General Membership Meeting Minutes
November 4, 2020
4:00pm-5:00pm
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)
- Taylor Fugere (Academic Affairs Officer)
- Jordan Collignon (Internal Communications Officer)
- Larisa Gavrilova (Climate, Diversity & Equity Officer)
- Karla Seijas (Solidarity Officer)

Members of Delegate Assembly in Attendance

- Adam Binswanger (Applied Math)
- Hugo Lopez Chavolla (Interdisciplinary Humanities)
- Shaina Sta Cruz (Public Health)

Speakers in Attendance

- Christopher Caskey (Graduate Student, Interdisciplinary Humanities)
- Chanelle Reese (Assistant Ombuds)
- Chris Kello (Dean of Graduate Studies)

Updates from the GSA President

- Welcome Betsabel Romero who is the GSA's first Legislative Affair Officer!
- There are a few events coming up in November:
 - 11/12: Trivia Night. Winner gets a \$25 gift card.
 - 11/17: 1st year Student Hangout
 - 11/18: Cardio & Strength Training, hosted by Recreation & Athletics

- The GSA has been receiving correspondence emails regarding travel awards. Award recipients who will be presenting at a conference online can be funded through the travel award. Regarding a policy for future travel awards amidst the pandemic, the GSA is putting something together.

Official GSA 2020-2021 Agenda

- A brief outline of the GSA's goals for the academic year has been sent out to everyone through email last month. That email contained the following goals:
 1. **Improve the functionality and sustainability of the GSA** through revised legislation, officer handbooks, standardized election and communication channels, and new marketing strategies.
 2. **Promoting greater involvement in the GSA and the campus at large** through committees and events.
 3. **Offer a wide range of social events intended to offset the isolation caused by COVID.**
 4. **Accomplish our 2020-2021 goals related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** as previously outlined.
 5. **Restart conversations with the administration about basic needs issues** of public transportation, housing, and campus dining options.
- In this meeting, we list each of the tasks that will be done to address these goals.
 1. **Improve functionality and sustainability of the GSA**
 - a. Write/update handbooks for each EC officer and the DA
 - b. Solidify the role and power of the DA as an independent body
 - c. Revitalize the website to be more engaging and informative
 - d. Improve marketing and visibility
 - e. Streamline the election process
 - f. Update the travel award and club funding application processes
 - g. Streamline/standardize the semester newsletter and social event offerings
 - h. Continue to revise the GSA constitution and bylaws
 - i. Establish separate bylaws for EC and DA
 - ii. Update the role of the Internal Vice President
 - iii. EC Officer to represent undocumented students

2. **Promote greater involvement in the GSA and campus at large**
 - a. First year graduate student involvement
 - b. Greater graduate student involvement in committees
 - c. Greater graduate student involvement in the community

3. **Offer a wide range of social events intended to promote community involvement and offset the isolation caused by COVID-19**
 - a. Work to partner with and support local businesses
 - b. Promote/encourage grad students to get outside and physically active
 - c. Evaluate the mental health system put in place during COVID-19
 - d. Work with the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning to create a graduate student community

4. **Accomplish our 2020-2021 goals related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**
 - a. Increasing Awareness of Anti-Blackness, Racism, Discrimination, and Injustice through Literature and start a more comprehensive effort to acknowledge the contributions of BIPOC scholars.
 - b. Diversity Training for grad students
 - c. Call to Hire more BIPOC Counselors in Counseling and Psychological Services
 - d. Promote retention of Black Graduate Students
 - e. Provide Stipends to Students Participating in Committees Related to Issues of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.
 - f. Build a relationship with Services for Undocumented Students

5. **Restart conversations with the administration about basic needs issues**
 - a. Better public transportation system
 - b. Housing and food options
 - Through collaboration with Graduate Division, progress has been made on Goal 5:
 - The GSA and Graduate Division have connected with TAPS director Karen Growth and will be working to get input for graduate students about bus needs. There is a cost control issue due to COVID. There may not be enough funding to address all the issues with the bus system, but we can help make the bus system smarter using the resources that exist.
 - Incoming international students should contact Chris if they are experiencing hardships with housing. UC Merced may be able to provide emergency housing,

but there are about 10-15 units available. Sending a general broadcast will not be feasible if demand for emergency housing becomes too high.

Privatization of the ECEC (Christopher Caskey)

- The UC Merced campus houses the Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC), a pre-school that serves as an essential need for student-parents by providing access to daycare services student-parents utilize while they study. These students receive pieces of financial aid that help these students afford ECEC services.
- UC Merced is planning to shift ECEC services to an outside party. Both GSA and ASUCM were notified about this deal a couple weeks ago and are trying to get more information. We are not sure how far along in the process the UC is, and it might already be late to stop it.
- A similar process happened last year at UC Santa Cruz when the university's plan to shift its daycare services to the company Bright Horizons was met with resistance from many parents who have to rely on childcare services to complete their degree.
- Major concerns have been raised about this process:
 - Lack of transparency. Very few people knew that a deal to outsource ECEC services was taking place. Even the GSA did not know this was happening until being informed two weeks ago. Such information is usually communicated from administration or from committee representatives. FWAf is communicating with those involved in the planning process.
 - The potential costs and quality of services after outsourcing
 - Do graduate students have a say? A good deal of graduate students and faculty utilize ECEC services. The idea that very few had an opportunity to weigh in on this matter is disturbing.
 - When UC Merced fully reopens, will the ECEC already have a new provider?
- It was recommended that we draft a graduate student memo to the planning committee mentioning these concerns and the concerns of the students who rely on the ECEC. A draft will be made available soon. The general membership is urged to email their experiences statements about the ECEC to the GSA for this letter.
- How much will students have to pay to use ECEC services? All students, graduate and undergraduate, pay a \$10 fee as part of their campus-based fees that go directly to the ECEC. How will this funding be used? Will students continue to receive financial aid to help pay for ECEC services? The student union negotiated with the campus to obtain

daycare support for students as it was the right thing to do. Multiple people would have had trouble finishing their program if it weren't for the ECEC.

Office of the Ombuds (Chanelle Reese)

- Chanelle Reese is the Assistant Ombuds at UC Merced along with University Ombuds Callale Concon.
- The Ombuds operates under four core ethical principles:
 - Confidential: All conversations with the office are off-the-record. The office does not fall under mandatory reporting protocols under Title IX or Title VII and will not disclose any information without your permission unless there is an imminent risk of physical harm.
 - Informal: The office is not a replacement for formal grievance processes.
 - Neutral: The Ombuds does not take sides or advocates for an individual as required by the Code of Ethics of the International Ombuds Association.
 - Independent: The office only reports to the Chancellor for budget or administrative purposes and does not disclose sensitive case information.
- What authority does the Ombuds have?
 - Can contact senior university officers
 - Gather information as part of looking into a problem
 - Mediate disputes
 - Bring any concerns to those in authority
 - Expedite administrative procedures
- Who does the office serve?
 - All undergraduate, graduate, and professional students
 - Post-docs
 - Staff and faculty
 - Parents of UC students
- Some of the common concerns brought to the office are interpersonal communication difficulties, performance feedback, ethical issues, student-advisor relationships, and harassment.

- The Ombuds is a trusted navigator, a source of empowerment, and is leading the way to a more just, engaged, and inclusive UC Merced
- The office does not keep formal records of your visits, provide counseling or legal advice, make decisions on formal issues, share information with others without your permission, nor advocate for individuals in a dispute.
- The office continues to offer its services remotely. Everyone can still set appointments with the office over phone or through their [website](#). Email is not used as a form of communication when setting up appointments due to privacy concerns.
- Students can also set up appointments for individually tailored training sessions. The office is also offering a 2-part tailored training session which includes conflict resolution + feedback and building trust + mediation skills.

Planning for Spring 2021 Events + Feedback from Membership

- The GSA hosted numerous events this semester such as Trivia Nights and Student Hangouts. We will need to start planning now for what events to host next semester. As such, we would like to hear what everyone wants to see next semester.
- The trivia nights have been successful. Many students submitted pumpkin designs (voting ends on November 4th at midnight). It seems that having competition type events are the most entertaining. We can also think about inclusive holiday themed events.
- All our events had fixed times, and often students are too busy to attend. A suggestion was made for having events where students can join on their own time.
- One idea for an event would be like getting a free cup of coffee somewhere and have informal info sessions or meet-and-greets with the GSA. It may be possible to do this at either ASIP or Coffee Bandits. The GSA held a similar event three years ago at Coffee Bandits. Perhaps this time let's consider making an event like this at ASIP. Taylor knows an employee at ASIP to express this idea to.
- What strategy for advertising should we be using? A concern was raised about the GSA sending too many emails in one day causing students to ignore our emails more often. One suggestion would be to send a weekly announcement about what events are coming up instead of having to send separate emails for each event.

Meeting adjourned at 4:58 pm.

The next General Membership meeting will be on December 2nd from 4-5pm.