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GSA General Membership Meeting Minutes  
March 3, 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)
- Zunaira Iqbal (External Vice President)
- Jordan Collignon (Internal Communications Officer)
- Ritwika VPS (International Affairs Officer)
- Karla Seijas (Solidarity Officer)
- Betsabel Chicana Romero (Legislative Affairs Officer)

**Members of Delegate Assembly in Attendance**

- Adam Binswanger (Applied Math)

**Speakers in Attendance**

- Charles Nies (Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs)

**Welcome from the GSA President**

- We got a few important things to discuss in this meeting. The election cycle is beginning! The GSA is introducing a few engagement opportunities for graduate students. Charles will be talking to us about COVID vaccines, the campus reopening plan and campus-based fees.
- Our spring newsletter will be published very soon. It will also include a crossword puzzle. Submit a photo of your completed crossword puzzle to the GSA before the deadline and you will be entered into a raffle for a gift card.

**Upcoming Recreation & Athletics Facility Fee Referendum**

- There will be a new fee referendum that aims to support the new athletics facilities built last year. Specifically, the new fee will support the aquatics center, recreation field, Bobcat field, and the outdoor basketball and tennis courts. If the referendum passes, students will be able to access these facilities without having to pay an additional membership fee on top of this new fee.
- The referendum seeks to add \$55 in new fees per fall and spring semesters, and \$25 in new fee per summer semester. These fees will then increase starting in 2024.
- If the referendum does not pass, there will be no additional fee. However, students will need to pay for a membership to access the recreation facilities.

## **GSA Spring Election**

- Every year the GSA hosts an election to build a new cohort for the next academic year. Our timeline is as follows:
  - March 8th – Nomination period opens
  - March 29th – Nomination acceptance opens
  - April 5th – Voting begins
  - April 9th – Voting ends
  - April 12th – Results announced
- What will be on the ballot?
  - Executive Council positions:
    - President
    - Internal Communications Officer
    - External Vice President
    - Internal Vice President
    - Treasurer
    - Climate, Diversity, and Equity Officer
    - Public Relations Officer
    - International Affairs Officer
    - Legislative Affairs Officer
    - Solidarity Officer
    - Academic Affairs Officer
  - Delegate Assembly positions (if your department is not listed here, it means your department has an internal selection process):
    - Chemistry & Chemical Biology
    - Management of Complex Systems

- Mechanical Engineering
  - Physics
  - Political Science
  - Psychological Sciences
  - Applied Mathematics
- Proposed legislative changes
  - Two new officer positions in the Executive Council are being proposed. One will focus on the needs of the undocumented student population, while the other will focus on the graphic design needs of the GSA and other student organizations on campus.
  - An email sent out recently contains the GSA's new proposal to update its bylaws. The DA will be voting on these changes on March 16th.
- Recreation & Athletics fee referendum
  - This will be added to our ballot as it requires a vote from all graduate students at UC Merced.
- Your GSA Election Commission members are Adam Binswanger (chair), Ben Falandays, and Shayna Bennett. Please contact them if you would like more information about the upcoming GSA election.

## **GSA Engagement Opportunities**

- Betsabel is presenting on the UC Merced Advocacy Committee:
  - Students from all 10 UC campuses are working with the UCGPC to compile information on legislation pertaining to a wide array of topics that matter to graduate students. Each school has been given a fraction of these topics to investigate on their own and report back. UC Merced will be focusing on basic needs legislation.
  - This is the first time that UC Merced is involved in this legislative group. It is necessary that a team be put together to compile legislation on basic needs. The work for this committee is expected to be done in the next 2-3 weeks.
  - Please contact Betsabel if you are interested in joining this advocacy committee. We need to have a team formed by March 15th.
- Zunaira is the chair of the GSA Basic Needs Committee:
  - The main objective of this committee is to bring awareness to basic needs issues that graduate students face. Over time, this will be an ever-evolving list so it's important that we stay on top of these issues as they arise.

- One objective we are focusing on right now is getting a utility stipend approved for students who have been forced to work at home and must deal with increased utility costs as a result.
- Another objective is to gather information on housing security for graduate students specifically to inform them of their rights as tenants.
- One issues that hits close to home is access to transportation for UC Merced students in general. We hope to work with transportation and parking services at UC Merced to improve the bus routes and access to parking on campus.
- Please reach out to Zunaira if you're interested in joining this committee.
- Karla is leading the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities Workgroup:
  - A call was set up last week requesting students join a committee to review and update the graduate students rights and responsibilities (GSRR) document: <https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/PDFs/graduaterightsresponsibilities.pdf>
  - This committee is expected to form by mid-March and will meet one to two times per month between March and May. The work will not take too much time. Please reach out to Karla if you would like to join this workgroup.
  - Are any of the department chairs familiar with this document? it is not clear if they are. The committee will bring this document to Graduate Council who will be advised to approve the changes and communicate the final version to department chairs.
  - There is a similar document being developed for advisor advisee relationships. it is important to ensure that the content in both documents complement each other, not contradict each other.

## **Charles Nies on Campus-based Fees, Vaccinations, and Campus Reopening**

- There is still money to support grad students with basic needs. We can reach out to Bavneet Kaur, Jonathan Grady, and Armando Contreras.
- Federal funding from sources like the CARES Act were not available to all grad students. Funds coming from the state have less restrictions.
- The University cannot provide direct resources as part of your work. Graduate students can request financial support to fund these resources not as a “TA” but as a “student.” Regardless of whether graduate students are employed as a TA or GSR, they will receive the same level of support as all other enrolled students.

- Do international students qualify for emergency funding? Some emergency funds have been repurposed to support international students so they can request some of this funding. It isn't automatic like the CARES Act funding though.
- Can you put together some resources for tenants? The ASUCM law clinic is one resource available to all students (<https://asucm.ucmerced.edu/services/law-clinic>). They work with local attorneys to provide free housing support services to students.
- **Campus fees:** You're probably wondering about what the university is doing with your fees. If you remember the Early childhood Education Center fee this was a \$10 per semester fee aimed to directly support the childcare center on campus. Similarly, there is a fee to fund transportation services and other fees for other remote services. Students still pay the same in fees each year, but during the pandemic many of these services have either shut down or continue to operate in a limited capacity. Concerns arose about whether these fees are being utilized in full during the pandemic and whether students should be refunded for services that could not be used at all.
- One of the ideas being proposed is to offer a refund for students regarding any unspent funding. The university partners with an outside agency that does all the accounting of how funds are spent in each unit and how much is left over. That way, when questions arise about how campus departments spend funds, they can be answered using the results of the agency's audit.
- There is no automatic refund mechanism for campus-based fees. This includes student services fees which typically go to a single unit on campus rather than being distributed across different departments one example of this is the GSA. If the fee to be returned is very small, it is cheaper to distribute refunds in the form of a credit.
- **COVID-19 vaccinations:** UC Merced is being recognized as a medical entity, which means UC Merced could host a COVID-19 vaccination clinic. Until recently, UC Merced was being allocated about 100 vaccines per week, all of which were being administered to frontline staff and people active on campus at the student health center. However, the state sent an announcement of Friday about changes to its policy on how COVID-19 vaccines will be distributed. The state entered into a contract with Blue Shield to expand access to the vaccine toward local pharmacies and other medical entities in the community.
- As a result, starting March 15th, UC Merced can no longer offer a vaccination clinic on campus nor will it be allocated new vaccines, expect for those who need their second dose after receiving their first dose at the student health center. Furthermore, all UCs are losing access to vaccines; Merced college is in the same boat as us. Those who are eligible to receive the first dose of the vaccine should consult with their local pharmacies such as Walgreens.

- The state is currently in phase 1B of vaccinations which includes employees in the education sector. Graduate Division recently sent out information from the DoYourPart website indicating that all UC employees (including graduate students who are teaching assistants or student researchers, post-docs, and staff) can schedule COVID-19 vaccine appointments. Charles indicated that “educators” are eligible so they can now schedule for an appointment for a first dose. However, “educators” does not include all employed graduate students in general, GSRs in particular. This raised some questions about whether employed graduate students in general are eligible right now under current guidelines.
- The language on the Merced County website indicates that phases 1A, 1B, and 1C under county guidelines make eligible people who fall under “laboratory workers”, “frontline essential workers sectors”, and “other essential workers” respectively. Not all graduate student researchers are considered essential under state guidelines, yet are employees in a sector with frontline essential workers.
- How can verify that we are eligible? Register on the state (<https://myturn.ca.gov/>) and county (<https://vaccinatemercedcounty.com/>) websites respectively to receive notification about when vaccines will be available to you.
- Do we know when undergraduate students will be vaccinated? Will they have access to the vaccine by Fall 2020? College students in general fall under no later than phase 2C of vaccinations. The Biden Administration has noted that all students could have access to the vaccine in June or July.
- **Fall 2021 reopening:** UC Merced plans to be back in person for the fall semester in a limited capacity. The University is planning to have all discussions to be held in person on campus. Large lectures such as those originally planned to be held in the Lakireddy auditorium may still be remote.
- Will it be mandatory for all TAs to hold their discussions in person? Anyone working as a TA in the fall should be prepared to have discussion sections held in-person.
- All higher education guidelines are set by the state we expect to be in the state’s yellow tier around August or September. Testing will still be held for everyone on campus including all students.
- What if a lot of people don't get vaccinated? Is this taken into consideration as part of the campus reopening plan?
- We understand that remote learning is not the optimal way to teach. While we want to return to in-person instruction, right now the health and safety of all students and staff is our biggest priority.

Meeting adjourned at 5:21 pm.

The next General Membership meeting will be on Wednesday, April 7th from 4-5pm.