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GSA General Membership Meeting Minutes  
May 5, 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)
- Karla Seijas (Solidarity Officer)

**Members of Delegate Assembly in Attendance**

- N/A

**Speakers in Attendance**

- Charles Nies (Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs)
- Chris Kello (Dean of Graduate Studies)

**GSA Updates**

- The GSA was selected as the recipient of the Building Community Award this year!
- We took the time to thank the current Executive Council officer for all their hard work this year and maintaining active collaborations across various departments. The new Executive Council cohort will be starting their term in about a week from now. New officers present in the meeting were asked to introduce themselves.
- The election results have yet to be sent out to the student body. We are still waiting on the Chancellor to certify the results of the proposed referenda before that message goes out. The current stands indicate that the referendum is likely not going to pass. However, we do have some updates where parts of the results are certain. The constitutional amendments have been approved by the general membership; the result being that an Undocumented Affairs and Social Media & Graphic Design Specialist will be added to the ranks of the Executive Council.

## Updates from Charles

- Charles has congratulated the GSA and a couple students for being recognized at the Student Leadership awards last week. The GSA has been recognized as the student organization of the year! Ritu, the GSA's International Affairs Officer, has received the Steve and Mia Kang Leadership Award! Kinsey has received the Carol Tomlinson Keasey Award!
- Shayna, the GSA President, won UC Merced's GradSlam competition and will be representing the campus at the UCOP GradSlam finale.
- We want to start off with a question that was sent to us shortly before this meeting stared. Is there any place on campus where one can access clean drinking water without having to buy bottled water at the Pavilion and the campus bookstore? The pandemic has made it impossible to find area on campus that have water fountains. The Pavilion is the closest location for most students currently on campus.
- Charles noted that the university must follow higher education guidelines set by the state of California, and part of the guidelines required the university to restrict access to drinking fountains. All the water fountains on campus since the start of the pandemic have been covered in caution tape. Starting on June 15th, the higher education guidelines will shift and become far looser, allowing the university to allow access to water fountains again.
- The university has plans in place to resume in-person learning in the fall semester. Small classes and discussion sections will be fully in-person. Larger lectures may continue to be held online following state guidance. The Lakireddy auditorium is one of the largest lecture halls on campus, yet under upcoming guidance the room may not be used at full capacity. Regardless of what the outcome of classes will be, students are anticipating a full return to campus in the fall. Everyone will still have to wear masks on campus and maintain the CDC's recommendations of staying 3 feet apart from others.
- Our vaccination clinic will be continuing on-campus operations until September. It can offer 500 vaccines in a single day.
- The campus is offering temporary housing for international students through August while they search for a permanent residence. ASUCM has successfully granted additional support to the Law Clinic, which can offer advice for renter's assistance to all students, including graduate students.
- The university also plans to bring in between 2300-2500 new fist year students, the largest incoming class in the university's history.

## Updates from Chris (4:12pm)

- Update on incoming international students: There was a small subset of students who had to defer admission due to travel bans and visa issues. As the virus becomes more controlled, visa offices are starting to reopen.
- We received a record number of new applicants, more than 30% from last time, resulting in an incredibly competitive application pool this year. In a third-party report on graduate programs across the country, Engineering and Political Science programs are in the upper half of the ranks. Despite financial challenges, all Ph.D. students were funded this year.
- There were a couple rounds of funds dispersed as part of COVID relief plans. In these rounds, international students were not eligible to receive these funds. Chris has announced that another round of funding will include all students, including international students. To circumvent eligibility issues for international students, the university has pooled additional resources to ensure international students are able to receive some set of funding.
- Updates on equity, diversity, and inclusion: the university has put together a new fellowship: The Chancellor's Fellowship for Inclusive Excellence. With the support of Graduate Division, the fellowship will be able to support 4 students.
- The Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity includes Dr Berhe and Larisa as the GSA rep. They plan to submit a paper on 10 Simple Rules for Building an Anti-Racist Graduate Program.
- Merced county is now in the red tier, which allows the university to move forward with parts of its reopening plans. Those with a need to work on campus can request access to single occupancy spaces via a form.
- The UC announced a couple weeks ago sent out a proposed policy that would require anyone who plans to be on campus to have received a COVID vaccine. Has this policy become final? Not yet. The proposal must be open for review for at least 30 days before it can become final. The proposal states that an acceptable vaccine must have emergency use authorization by the FDA. Anyone can go to their MyHealth portal to upload their vaccination card to verify that they satisfy the policy. People may also apply for a medical exemption.
- What will happen to students who had their progress delayed during the pandemic? Graduate Council put a policy in place last year stating that graduate groups that state a normative time to degree can adjust normative times at their discretion. As such, graduate groups have the power to decide for each of their students individually.
- Who should apply for COVID relief funding? The short answer is everybody. However domestic students will be getting funds from a different source compared to

international students. There were restrictions that brought this on, one of which was to have a FAFSA on file. For this new round of funding, if no FAFSA is on file, one can submit an attestation. This is how international students can access COVID relief funding now.

Meeting adjourned at 4:57 pm.

This was the last General Membership Meeting of Spring 2021. New meeting dates will be announced at the start of Fall 2021.