

GSA Newsletter



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What is the GSA Solidarity Officer?

Karla Seijas [kseijas@]

Solidarity Officer



The Solidarity Officer position is a newer position within GSA, going on its second year. The role of the Solidarity Officer is to assist graduate and professional students with academic grievances and be aware of the appropriate individuals or agencies across our campus community who are best to assist students with their concerns. The Solidarity Officer will not contact agencies or individuals on the student's behalf. They will, however, provide students with resources that may be available for the situation they are experiencing. An important component of this position is confidentiality. Students are assured no records of their grievances will be maintained by the GSA and are ensured no personal information is disclosed. The Solidarity Officer also serves as a communication channel between the GSA and UAW 2865. I look forward to working with all graduate students and professional students to connect them to available resources.

President's Remarks

Shayna Bennett [sbennett3@]

President



With winter break almost upon us, I can not help but look back upon the semester. The past few months have been both busy and exciting, and every day I am grateful for the dedication of the officers I work with in the GSA. This semester has been one of great accomplishment. The team pulled off an amazing selection of events including Trivia nights and social hangouts. We are now busy putting together the Spring calendar. Look for it in January! Our goal of restarting talks with the administration is underway. EVP Zunaira is leading the conversation and she will soon meet with TAPS to discuss improved bus routes for graduate students during COVID-19. Our collaborative efforts with concerned parents regarding privatization of the ECEC were met with overwhelming support.

Administration have begun contacting current parents to discuss the situation, and we are pushing for a campus wide town hall before the end of the semester. Legislative Affairs Officer Betsabel joined the team earlier this semester. Her position, new as of Fall 2020, is to advocate for UC Merced graduate student interests at the local, state, and federal level. We are very excited to have her. ICO Jordan is doing an amazing job organizing legislative change and recommendation. Proposed changes to the bylaws are on track to be presented to the general membership during the Spring 2021 election cycle.

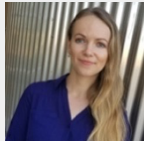
With Spring 2021 right around the corner, I ask everyone to take care of themselves and make time to relax (maybe try the puzzles in this newsletter over a cup of coffee or tea). Please know the GSA is here to help however we can.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter! Special thanks to IVP Benny for designing the amazing layout of this newsletter and ICO Jordan for designing the figures. This newsletter was only possible due to their support.

Racism, Mental Health, & Professional Development During a Pandemic

Larisa Gavrilova [lgavrilova@]

Climate, Diversity & Equity Officer



Addressing racism. One of the GSA's goals is to take meaningful action towards addressing institutional and structural racism. To this end, we worked with the UC Merced Library to provide digital copies of several books addressing issues of anti-Blackness, racism, discrimination, and injustice in America. We have been advocating, both at UC Merced and at the system-wide level, for graduate students to receive stipends for work done on committees for equity, diversity, and inclusion. These efforts have been successful, and for the first time, all members on the Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity will receive stipends this year. In Spring, we hope to offer diversity training for the graduate community.

Mental health care. Another focus of the GSA is to improve mental health care on campus. Graduate students at UC Merced need a more racially diverse staff providing mental health services. We will be pushing for the university to hire a Black counselor on campus who understands the burden of prejudice and can specifically address the needs of Black graduate students.

Professional development during the pandemic. In our efforts to help graduate students keep up with professional development during the pandemic, the GSA has been working with the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETL) to support Teaching Assistants with planning and organizing instruction for an online learning environment. We have been assisting CETL with managing the TA Support Network, a platform for grad students to exchange ideas and discuss issues that matter to students' development as a teacher. For the Spring, we are planning to develop a series of interactive workshops.

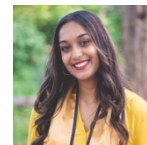
Finally, I and other GSA Executive Council members are actively working with and/or serving on the Valuing Black Lives at UC Merced Task Force, the Chancellor's Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, and Inclusion, and the Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity.

Reminder: Campus Based Fees, \$168.50 are due January 13 at 4:00 PM!

Addressing Transportation Needs

Zunaira Iqbal [ziqbal2@]

External Vice President



As many of us know from firsthand experience, the UC Merced bus transportation system is clearly lacking across several features. From destinations that take over an hour to reach to riding shuttles instead of real buses, our transportation system could desperately use an upgrade. One of the GSA's goals is to start a conversation with TAPS on resolving these issues. We are currently in the works of drafting a letter listing the current problems with our current bus system, what changes we would like to see, and how these modifications will be executed. Luckily, Interim Vice Provost and Graduate Dean, Chris Kello is also passionate about working on the bus system and we plan to work together to tackle this issue. Our plan is to identify where graduate students live throughout the city of Merced and plan routes accordingly.

Involvement Opportunity:

We are seeking a graduate student representative with an interest and/or experience in serving as the student voice for our campus **Basic Needs Workgroup** and at systemwide spaces. Please contact **Taylor Fugere** [tfugere@], our **Academic Affairs Officer**, if interested!



“...If you feel burnout setting in, if you feel demoralized and exhausted, it is best, for the sake of everyone, to withdraw and restore yourself” – Dalai Lama

The Evolving role of the IVP

Benny Nguyen [bnguyen255@]

Internal Vice President



In the recent Fall 2020 GSA election and proceedings, several bylaws and constitutional amendments related to the Internal Vice President (IVP) were voted upon and passed. The IVP changes were two pronged: reduced involvement with the Delegate Assembly (DA) and expansion to new functions, particularly focusing on building relationships between the GSA and graduate student organizations. In the new conception, the IVP will attend DA meetings, assist the Delegate Chair (a position created by these same amendments), and continue to communicate between the Executive Council and DA. The second prong was recently added as the GSA communed about the needs of the student body; I hope to further establish this function in the coming semester.

Graduate student organizations are an enriching, vital component to our graduate community and are sites of important interdepartmental connection. The GSA is deeply invested in supporting these organizations, especially in light of distance and remote learning where opportunities to connect are more difficult. As IVP, I have and will continue to communicate with graduate student organizations about resources that can support their org.'s programming, efforts, and constituents in general. I hope to attend the meetings of these organizations so they can voice any concerns to the GSA directly and in confidence. These relationships will enable collaborations to offer better, more successful programming, thereby benefiting the graduate student body at large. If you, or the graduate student organization you are a part of and/or represent would like to build these relationships, or want more information please reach out!

Spring 2021 Events in the Works

Photo Contests

Trivia Nights

1st year Student Hangouts

Virtual Game Nights

Graduate Student Appreciation Week

Diversity Training

Wondering How to Track Local Elections?

Betsabel Chicana [bchicanaromero@]

Legislative Affairs Officer



Despite being in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, young voter turnout has hit a record high as 10 million young voters (age 18-29) voted early in the 2020 election in the country. Merced county had 117,413 registered voters and 91,817 ballots cast representing a voter turnout of 78.20%. Our new elected City of Merced Mayor Matt Serratto will take office next month, you can review your local election results [here](#).

Matt Serratto was one of the three candidates that interviewed with UC Merced students and had shared his views and mission, which include building community and bringing people together. If you missed those videos see the [“Candidates and Conversations” from the Community Engagement Center](#).

Tired of complaining about how boring downtown is? Get involved in your local politics! Be part of the ongoing effort to create a superior ambiance, distinguished downtown with a strong role in arts, entertainment, and dining options. You can join the council meetings for these topics and more!

The Economic Development Opportunity Fund that contributes directly to the On-Going Revitalization of Downtown Merced has meetings scheduled biweekly. This renovation project now boasts 114 boutique style hotel rooms, meeting space, and multiple dining options. These include the Capitan Hotel, Mainzer Theater, and the Tioga Apartment renovations. Furthermore, there is currently some discussion regarding usage of funds for a grant program to assist local businesses in these times.

Again, I would like to encourage you to join your local politics. The City of Merced encourages its citizens to take an active interest in matters pertaining to their community. You can attend [council meetings](#), or follow meeting notes, agenda, and location details for a variety of issues and groups [here](#).

Travel Awards & Event Funding

Quy Lam [qlam@]

Treasurer



GSA Travel Award. I would like to remind you about the GSA travel awards that you may qualify for. The GSA provides travel grants to offset the cost of attending conferences. We offer an award of \$400.00 maximum to aid 24 graduate students per academic year.

Travel grants will be awarded in 4 cycles per year. The deadlines are February 1st, May 1st,

August 1st, and November 1st. You can visit our website or contact us for more information on when you should apply, and what the application looks like. We will also send emails about upcoming deadlines.

GSO & Sponsored Events Funds. Do you know that you can apply to get GSA fund for your event? This year we have allocated \$2,500 to fund graduate student organizations and \$1,500 for GSA sponsored events. Whether it is a graduate student-led event or club/organization event, we can fund that. Please keep an eye out for our call for applications via email or check our website for more information.

Getting to Know Your GSA

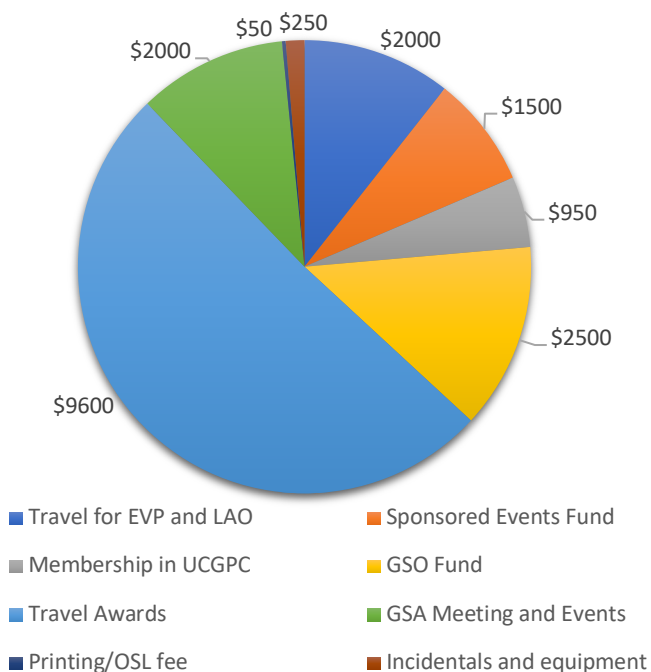
Jordan Collignon [jcollignon@]

Internal Communications Officer



Do you wonder what your GSA elected officials have been working on this year? Are you interested in how you can serve the graduate student population or contribute to the growth of UC Merced? If you answered yes to either of these questions, then we recommend you visit our [website](#) to learn more! One of my roles in the GSA is to maintain the organization's website by including information about official GSA activities, highlighting various resources available to graduate students, and finding ways to make our website more useful to the graduate student population. Updates are made regularly to keep the graduate student population informed on current and upcoming activities including general meetings, fun events, and involvement opportunities. Proceedings of the official GSA meetings are posted to our website so graduate students can follow the progress on our current projects with numerous groups on campus and learn about ways they can contribute to these efforts. The GSA is always open to suggestions for making its website better and more useful for you! If there is something you wish to see on our website, please let me know.

GSA Budget 2020-2021



Campus Resources:

[Academic Counseling \(Maria Nishanian\)](#)

[Basic Needs](#)

[Counseling & Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)

- [Support Groups \(Graduate, International, more!\)](#)

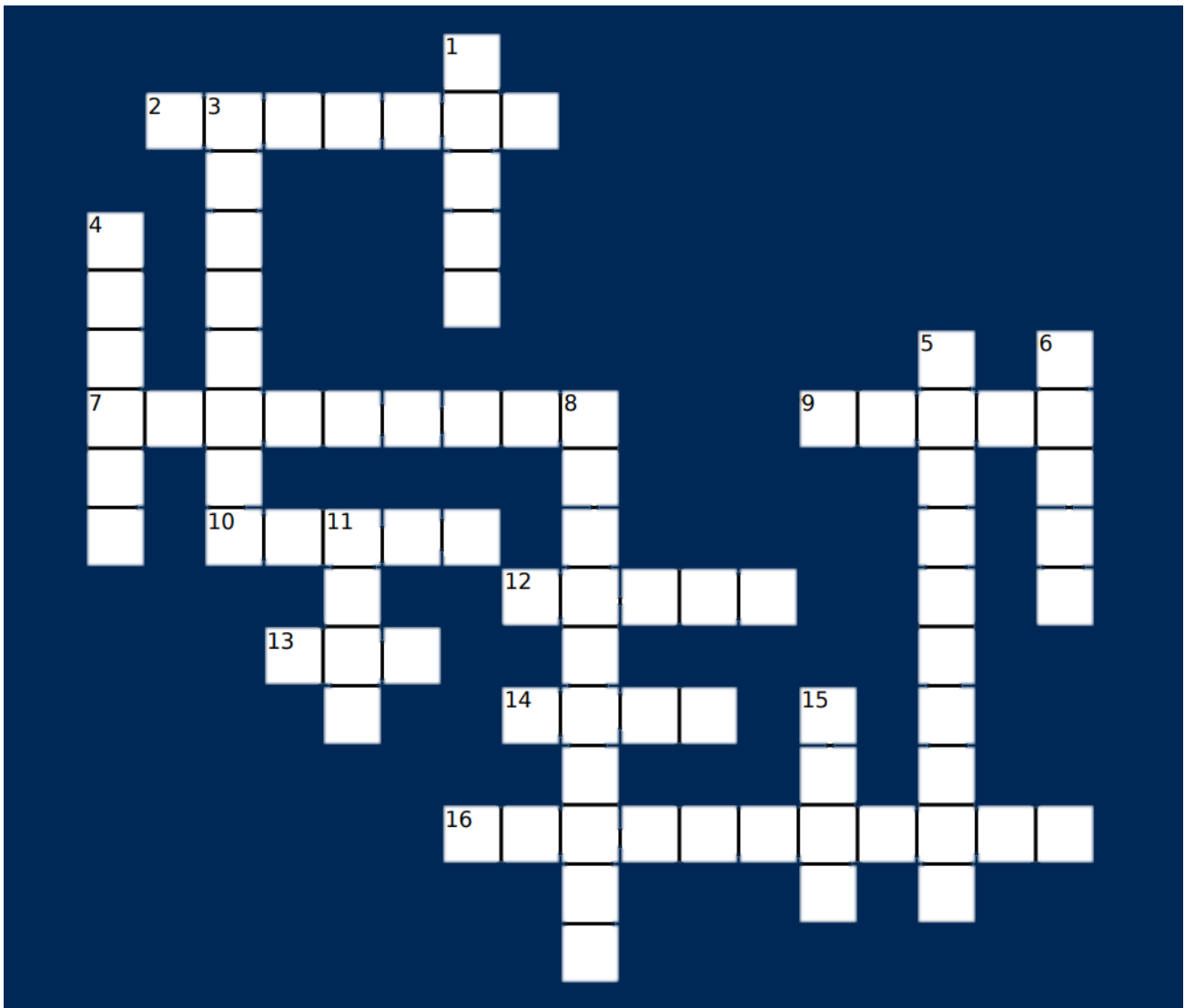
- [Therapy Assistance Online](#)

- [Calm App](#)

[Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education \(CARE\)](#)

[Office of the Ombuds](#)

For any questions or concerns, please reach out to the individual officers [email usernames in brackets] or email gsa@ucmerced.edu



Across

- 2 UC Merced's motto*.
- 7 The name of the UC Merced bus system.
- 9 President _____ is the 21st president of the University of California.
- 10 The name of the UC Merced mascot.
- 12 UC Merced is the _____ research university opened in the 21st century.
- 13 This officer represents UC Merced at external and system-wide spaces such as UC Graduate & Professional Council, abbr.
- 14 This app's premium mediation and relaxation services are available for free for UCM students.
- 16 These animals live in the vernal pools on campus*.

Down

- 1 UC Merced's Chancellor is Juan Sanchez _____.
- 3 This syndrome inflicts many graduate students.
- 4 The animal of the UC Merced mascot.
- 5 UC Merced is located in the _____ Valley*.
- 6 UC Merced is the _____ campus in the UC system.
- 8 This officer connects the GSA and UAW 2865.
- 11 The year UC Merced was established: 200____.
- 15 School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Arts, abbr.

*two word clue, no spaces

Send your completed puzzle to gsa@ucmerced.edu to be entered into a Raffle to win a \$25 Starbucks Giftcard!