GSA, Facilities & Healthcare Standing Committee Meeting 18th September, 2013

Present: Michelle Kriner, Michael Parker, Sarah Bowman, Elizabeth Lang, Kristin Graves, Angharad Davis, Paul Baranay, Tim Altenhof, Chad Marion, Brittany Angarola, Ariana Chao

Apologies: Wendy Xiao, Consuelo Amat Matus

Meeting opened.

1. **Introductions**
2. **Election of positions**

* AD nominated for secretary; no other nominations; carried.
* PB nominated to Member Advisory Committee; no other nominations; carried.
* SB nominated to Student Coverage Task Force; no other nominations; carried, pending confirmation of this semester’s meeting date.

1. **Overview of current projects**

* Facilities
  + HGS Renovations
    - Issue: to ensure that the grad student voice is heard when planning decisions are being made. Nick Torsiello, a member of the F&H Committee, also sits on the renovations committee.
    - Questions about this project to be forward to NT
  + Legal aid
    - As discussed at GSA General Assembly, 18th September.
    - Questions to be forwarded to Faustin Carter.
  + University-Wide Housing Committee
    - MK notes that integrated problem-solving of university housing issues is rendered problematic by a fragmented organisational structure (e.g. various offices are superintended by Dining Services, Facilities, the Yale College Masters etc.)
    - Last year, a short report on this issue was shared with President Salovey, but no further action has been taken thus far. The question was raised of whether the report should be shared with additional parties, e.g George Longyear (Director of Graduate and Professional Student Housing)
    - Further enquiries to be directed to MK
  + Westville Shuttle Line
    - Last year, an ad hoc committee was formed, and a report was submitted in the Spring recommending reforming the committee this Fall.
    - Suggestion as per the agenda of looking into the possibility of partnering with SCSU, which already sends frequent shuttles between Westville and downtown New Haven
    - There being no current information available on the reforming of the committee, no further action was taken.
  + Gym member feedback
    - The GSA/GPSS report on the state of facilities at Payne Whitney Gymnasium was approved, and is being sent to Kim Goff-Crewes (Secretary and Vice President for Student Life) by Lauren Tilton.
    - No further information available at this time
    - MP signalled interest in being a point person on this issue
  + Graduate Access to athletic facilities
    - Eugene and Lesley were working on this; MK to contact and enquire about progress. No further information at this time.
    - MP commented that while the report put forward good ideas, they weren’t all practical for immediate implementation. Further issues remain to be addressed; e.g. postdocs have no access to Yale gymnasium facilities at all, and must either pay an exorbitant fee at Payne Whitney or find membership elsewhere. As well as being an inconvenience, MP noted that this represented the loss of a potential source of income for the Payne Whitney Gymnasium.
* Healthcare
  + Mental health services
    - Following the wrapping up of the ad hoc Mental Health committee upon the completion of their report-writing duties, this issue now sits under the purview of the Facilities & Healthcare Committee.
    - The topic was opened to comment:
      * EL suggested that point people should follow up on the GSA/GPSS Mental Health report, or at least keep an ear to the ground.
      * PB Noted that a report-back function would be useful (e.g. a suggested timeline according to which changes would be made, as well as making time for regular reports and updates by the administration on progress in this area)
      * A further issue is that multiple university bodies are involved with potentially making changes to mental health culture and treatment at Yale (e.g. the health plan, the chaplain’s office) but this process is not visible to graduate students. Question: could this process be made university-wide? Or at least more open/public? PB will float the idea to Lorraine Siggins (Chief of Mental Health and Counselling) who could in turn bring such a plan to the table
      * Ariana suggested that there needs to be more publicity for extant programs, as programs are available that are not widely known about or utilised
      * Concerns on this topic to be funnelled to PB
  + Compliance with Affordable Care Act
    - MK notes that the Yale Health Plan was given an exemption from compliance because it’s not technically insurance; for now, Prescription Plus has been folded into Hospitalization/Speciality, with the University paying the difference
    - MK notes that, for now, the compliance aspect is essentially taken care of; the next issue is making sure that the graduate student perspective is taken into account if further changes are made.
    - The issue of compliance with the ACA is in the hands of the Student Coverage Taskforce
  + Dental Plan
    - In response to the general dissatisfaction with the level of coverage offered by the dental plan, this year up to 80% coverage for fillings is offered, but only at PPO dentists (the lower level tier of dentists covered by Delta). MK notes that this was the best improvement that could be made without significantly increasing the cost of the plan, but stressed the importance of the graduate student body being made aware of the tier/coverage issue
    - MP asked whether there would be a way to make feedback/recommendations about individual dentists operating within the scheme available to students.
      * MK noted that sanctioning particular dentists isn’t practical, but this could perhaps be done informally.
      * PB suggested that student feedback could be incorporated into the lists of available dentists; CM noted that many providers have grades online, and perhaps these websites could be made known or more readily available to grad students, while simultaneously encouraging students to report their own experiences. Brittany suggested that this kind of information could be incorporated into a potential future Grad Yale Station (essentially a student craigslist)

1. **Overview of prospective projects**

* Tax advice sessions
  + Questions/Issues:
    - People who are willing to volunteer their time to give tax advice are needed in order to bring this to fruition, plus event organisation
    - How often should such a program operate?
  + Sourcing volunteers
    - General uncertainty about a way to source CPAs to volunteer for such a scheme. MK noted the presence of an IRS office in New Haven, which might be a useful resource (although EL’s reported experiences don’t necessarily suggest their uniform helpfulness)
      * EL suggested that law students specialising in tax law might be a useful resource; MK noted that historically the law school has been reticent to offer help like this to students. Ariana suggests working with GPSS and asking the Law school senators to put the question to the law school directly.
      * MP notes that there may be issues with liability; would it be more feasible to have students who have done taxes for several years simply hold a panel on common issues? (eg representatives from different circumstances, such as someone filing singly, someone with a family, someone from overseas…)
      * Further complications include the issues of estimated taxes, and relocation from another state partway through the financial year (a problem especially pertinent to 1st year graduate students)
      * Brittany observed that general info sessions are often unhelpful, and there are some resources already available. (e.g. somewhere on the Yale website, but this is not easy to find) MK requested that the links to these sites should be forwarded to the committee
      * EL wondered whether the formation of casual tax working groups might be beneficial; SB pointed out the difficulty of managing this in a way sensitive to personal information and privacy issues
    - Program timing
      * MK noted that it would be best to organise and advertise such a program in a tax-timely manner; e.g. holding 1-2 sessions early in Spring semester.
      * AD suggests possibly working on a survey in order to find out what the common problems are and what kind of help students would find most beneficial; PB noted both the usefulness of surveys and the risk of encountering survey/email fatigue among the student body. MK suggests that this question might be folded into the annual GSA survey; SB suggested that it might be usefully brought up by individual GSA representatives at their department meetings.
    - Point person: MK happy to work on it, but other parties welcome to express interest
* Facilities
  + Improving quality of housing information to incoming students
    - Wendy Xiao interested in holding a housing fair (maybe one for the med school, and another for the main campus); perhaps landlords of the larger apartment buildings in town would be interested?
    - SB noted that this would be of limited value to students moving into New Haven for the first time, and suggested that perhaps more information could be included in preparatory emails
    - WX will organise Med school housing fair as a prototype; possibly to be followed by whole school event in the Spring.
    - Question: How to incorporate the information such a fair would provide in a way helpful to next year’s new students?
      * MP notes the existence of a website that advertises open rooms etc for Yale students, but that the website is generally poor. MK noted that the Yale housing website is also under-utilised, although it includes paid links from landlords as well as general information.
      * Suggestion to talk to the housing office about this, increase the information available on the website, increase usage via publicity (e.g. encouraging students to rate their own landlord), then to include information on this with information packets on student housing distributed to incoming students.
    - MK to maintain contact with George Longyear on this issue
  + General grad housing issues
    - PB noted that students living in graduate housing can no longer have their packages delivered to 420 Temple St (Helen Hadley Hall) and must instead have a P.O. Box
    - The renovation of HGS may include the removal of graduate housing in the building; the question was raised of where the students who would otherwise live in HGS would go under these circumstances.
      * EL noted that HGS has traditionally been of particular use to first year graduate students, and therefore alternative housing located somewhere on campus would be helpful.
  + 24/7 Study space
    - The possibility of opening Bass Library as a 24/7 study space has been raised, but has received push-back from the administration – ostensibly with the concerns that students (esp. grad students) would try to live in any space accessible 24/7, and that students would study too much (health issue) if greater access were available
    - EL willing to act as point person on this issue; will contact Lauren Tilton to find out the best contacts. EL plans if possible to fold in the issue of lack of student space of any kind in some departments (e.g. some departments housed in HGS have no student space available, although space was found for others – History, American Studies – in the last year or so)
  + Classroom reservation software
    - It became apparent that some of the complications arising from the classroom reservation system are the product of another fragmented system: department space, graduate school space, general space etc. are all administered separately.
    - PB noted that that software (website) for looking into general reservable space is poor. (e.g. which rooms are available? How many people do they hold?)
* Healthcare
  + Loss of healthcare coverage during medical leave
    - MK requests that someone look into this issue further: how many students does it affect? Does it change people’s usage of medical leave (eg prevent them from taking it, or using it usefully)?
    - Uncertainty as to whether this issue is within the purview of the Member Advisory Committee, or the Student Coverage Taskforce.
    - SB suggests the option of reduced price coverage through Yale Health being made available to students on medical leave; CM suggests that an option for short-term disability leave (illness, accident etc) that would have the attendant healthcare costs covered might be investigated. PB suggests contacting the Deans, who would better know how far the coverage can be extended in such circumstances
  + Lack of coverage for contact lens exams in vision plan
    - KG noted that, in addition to contact lens exams being unavailable through the vision plan, the current coverage also does not allow for the provision of both glasses and contact lenses
    - MK suggests contacting Yale Health to enquire about what would be needed to institute access to contact lenses and contact lens exams

1. **Additional project ideas**

* Student centre committee
  + MK noted that the possibility of establishing an ad hoc committee regarding a student centre will be mooted in the next GSA General Assembly
* Furniture
  + TA noted that very tall people can encounter practical and ergonomic difficulties with the furniture supplied on campus, AD observed that such situations are unhealthy for the short as well as the tall; general agreement that some provision of furniture options that take these matters into account would be beneficial
  + MP suggested that a greater awareness of these issues could be folded into the prospective HGS renovations
  + MK noted that a member of the Academic and Professional Development standing committee sits on the University Library Committee and would be able to raise the issue of library furniture there. TA to contact Caitlin Verboon (chair of Academics & Professional Development committee).
  + MP notes that other institutions have realised that this is an issue, and suggests that someone look into comparable institutions who have recognised the importance of ergonomics and made adjustments accordingly
* Health and Wellness
  + Sam Southgate and Ariana Chao, McDougal Fellows for Health and Wellness, are planning an event on ergonomics
  + Ariana requested that other ideas for health and wellness programs be forwarded to them in their capacity as Health and Wellness Fellows.

Meeting closed.