GSA Facilities and Healthcare Committee Meeting 13th November, 2013

Present: Michelle Kriner, Paul Baranay, Angharad Davis, Kristin Graves, Elizabeth Lang, Chad Marion.  
  
Apologies: Tim Altenhof, Wendy Xiao.

Meeting opened 8:25 pm

1. **Project updates** 
   1. Graduate Student Space (Elizabeth Lang)
      1. EL met with Dean Pollard to discuss the issue of finding new student space for departments without access to this amenity; unfortunately, Dean Pollard stated that all appropriate vacant spaces were allocated last year, and no more are available.
      2. However, EL’s survey of the GSA revealed that her own department (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations) was the only department to be severely affected by this shortfall; MK pointed out that this the survey results constitutes useful information to have anyway in case new space opens up.
      3. MK suggested that EL might raise the issue of graduate student space within NELC; for various reasons this does not seem like it would markedly more productive than approaches already undertaken.
   2. Tax Advice (Chad Marion)
      1. As per the previous meeting (6th November), CM has contacted Steve Blum, who seems to be very interested in helping out with this issue. Blum is CPA-trained but does not specialise in taxes; he is putting CM in contact with a CPA firm who have potentially offered to make a representative available for a 1-2 hour event early in 2014 (probably late January); CM will hold that conversation to discuss specifics and report back.
      2. MK asked if 1 CPA would be enough, given Faustin’s report of the success of the recent Ask-A-Lawyer session (where 14 attendees kept 3 lawyers busy for 2 hours). CM replied that he envisions the tax advice event to be more akin to a town hall meeting, in which the CPA will give a basic outline of the situation for students, what kinds of expenses can be claimed as tax credits etc.
      3. CM noted that another issue is disseminating taxation information to the grad body in general; perhaps we can see what kind of informational materials the CPA firm uses and use those as a basis for our own informational email or materials
      4. EL commented that tax forms (W2 etc) will not necessarily have been distributed to all students by late January, but in that case students may wish to go through previous years’ taxes in order to identify possible problem spots. CM responded that these forms can be accessed online (and should be available in that form before the tax advice event); however, if this is an issue for multiple people then that may be something worth investigating/addressing
      5. CM suggested that prior to the event, we collect some tax-trouble anecdotes from students in order to help the CPA to tailor the event to common themes and relevant issues.
   3. Graduate Housing (Wendy Xiao)
      1. Postponed until next meeting
   4. Mental Health (Paul Baranay)
      1. PB attended the GPSS/GSA meeting with Ernest Baskin and Ariana Chao, in order to determine next steps following on from the GSA/GPSS Mental Health Report, and to strategise prior to the upcoming meeting with Dr Siggins. (The exact time of that meeting still to be determined). Topics for discussion in that meeting include:
         1. Changes to the Mental Health and Counselling website
         2. A potential publicity campaign to be run in association with the Yale Health Plan
         3. Wait times at MH&C
         4. Advice on creating peer health services for graduate and professional students (e.g. a hotline, or support services operating within departments)
         5. Establishing a plan to meet next semester, with the goal of making the meeting a standing arrangement.
      2. PB reports that the undergraduates involved with the YCC Mental Health Report will also soon be meeting with Dr Siggins, and possibly Kim Goff-Crewes
      3. PB attended the most recent Safety Net meeting, on Friday 8th November.
         1. The attendance consisted of roughly 5 representatives from the administration and 5 students, including a representative from student health, a number of representatives from SHARE, a representative from the chaplain’s office, a representative from the YCC and a representative of a fraternity.
         2. The meeting was productive but very casual, and functioned in terms of conversation and communication, rather than as a policy-making body
      4. PB requested that someone from the committee attend the YCC public meeting on mental health and the YCC report (to be held Saturday 16th November at 3:30pm); AD volunteered to do so and will report back.
      5. PB is drafting an email to Dr Rando in order to enquire about the possibility of incorporating some form of mental health/counselling training into teacher training at Yale; KG will assist with this.
      6. PB reinforced a point made during the General Assembly Meeting; that if a constituent reports to you that they have experienced a significant wait before being seen by MH&C, we should clarify if the wait is occurring pre- or post-intake appointment.
         1. EL commented that this is perceived to be a significant issue in her department, and enquired if Dr Siggins is likely to be open to a timeline for addressing the problem (during which period, for instance, additional staff for MH&C might be hired).
            1. PB replied that there is no timeline at this point, and that next semester might be the time to start applying pressure to the administration to make movement on the recommendations laid out in the report/s. However, he also noted that more staff is unlikely to be the solution, as Yale Health already has a high proportion of psychological practitioners for its health plan compared to other similar institutions. More traction may be possible on the issue of support staff, conducting outreach, and through other avenues such as peer counselling etc.
            2. PB noted that it is important that the GSA be supportive of the administration when they are implementing new plans and ideas, in order to encourage and facilitate this process
      7. PB will be meeting with Member Services at Yale Health to discuss website issues, publicity etc, and that issues can be tackled from that angle also. Note that Sarah Bowman sits on the Student Coverage Taskforce, which is one of the places from which change can feasibly be enacted.
         1. KG re-opened the issue, briefly discussed at other meetings, of potentially improving the way that mental health issues are supported on a departmental level. PB noted that this could take a number of different potential forms (for instance, the undergrads train people in each dorm to act as community educators on these types of issues; would something similar be feasible in graduate departments?)
         2. KG observed that department-specific support personnel might not always be ideal, given that these are professional environments; perhaps that kind of program could operate under a broader umbrella in order to avoid compromising professional relationships
            1. PB enquired if peer counselling would be easier over the phone; KG thought that it was possible that it would be
            2. PB noted that the issue of professionalism is not relevant to the undergraduates, so it is well to remember that adaptations would be needed if modelling a graduate program on those provided for the undergrads
         3. PB reiterated that there are a wide range of opinions as to whom individual graduate students feel comfortable talking to, and suggested that we carry out a survey to assess how people feel about various options in order to move forward with this issue
            1. MK enquired if this might be folded into the annual survey, but PB thought that that might come too late in Spring semester to be useful.
            2. AD enquired if it would be feasible to have a survey ready to distribute by the end of this semester, or the beginning of next semester?

There was general agreement that distributing a survey early in the Spring would be preferable, in order to maximise responses

PB suggested that in formulating a survey we reach out to the office of administrative research to ensure that the survey is well designed, in order to maximise its usefulness

* + - * 1. EL asked if this would be a short survey asking students which kind of localised resources they might find most helpful and/or make use of, or if it would be a comprehensive mental health survey (covering such issues as people’s responses to and experience with MH&C, the time period that elapsed between making contact/intake/seeing a therapist etc)

MK noted that the latter question could be especially useful, given the apparent disconnect between MH&C’s reported wait times and those described by students

EL suggested a question soliciting opinions on potential student hotline etc

PB thought that the main focus of the survey should be what resources students would find most useful, although it could also be helpful to try and sort out the MH&C/student ‘perspective problem’

EL noted that the latter topic could easily be dealt with in one or two questions; MK noted that such a brief addition would be unlikely to discourage survey participants

* + 1. KG described the leaflets created by Student Health that are available at the student writing/resources centre (including hotline numbers etc); she suggested that this kind of resource be made more widely available

1. **Concerns/Ideas from the floor**
   1. There being no additional concerns, the meeting adjourned.

Meeting Adjourned 8:52pm