**GSA General Assembly Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday January 18, 2017**

**HGS 119, 6:30 PM**

Meeting started at 6:46 PM

1. Approval of Minutes

Minutes are approved.

1. Approval of Agenda

Agenda is approved.

1. Department Meeting Reports
   1. Sarah Smaga (MB&B)

Sarah Smaga: 70 people in department, 16 came to the meeting (double the usual attendance! A good mix of older and younger students). There is some concern about advising and mentorship (expectations vis-à-vis the rotation program). Clarified some information about unionization and especially about micro-bargaining units. We also talked about mental health care and how to create a sense of community within the department. Some department-specific issues: faculty hiring this year, sense of isolation for people based in West Campus. Are there students on faculty search committees in other departments? Emilio Salazar: yes, though I am not sure how much they take into account student feedback. Chris Geissler: in Linguistics, the department solicits feedback from students and submits some materials (e.g., CV, statement of purpose) for review to the graduate students. I would encourage that approach.

* 1. Carly Cox and Jennifer Sun (MCDB)

Carly Cox: we have 45 students and 7-8 showed up. The biggest concern is with mental health care (both hours and how long it takes to set up an initial appointment). Everyone likes the new extended gym hours and is excited about the Podcast. About the shuttle: the bus that goes north to Stop and Shop takes too long and might be better as a separate bus line. There is some discussion as to whether we would have options given public transportation. Emilio Salazar: So is the northern limit too far south? Carly Cox: yes, and also the bus takes too long when it goes to Stop and Shop. In general people are very happy. People have experienced very long waits in Specialty Services (Ear, Nose, and Throat), as well as Orthopedics. Wendy Xiao: Yale Health has special slots for athletes, so you could pretend to be one to get it…

* 1. Kang Wei Heng (East Asian Studies)

To be rescheduled.

* 1. Wen Zhou and Jacob Welch (Anthropology)

To be rescheduled.

* 1. Michaela Foster, Fjodor Melnikov, and Lily Zeng (FES)

Lily Zeng: we had 8 students show up out of 60 (abnormally low this time). We talked about intro to GSA, unionization (people want to know more about it). People are concerned about TF requirements (now students must teach a fourth semester regardless of TF10/TF20 levels, with some students grandfathered and some not). So there is a push for transparency and better communication. Right now, people just ask for teaching positions from professors, and sometimes masters students get prioritized and Ph.D. students cannot get enough teaching to fulfill their requirements. There is also concern about diversity in faculty hiring; we want to learn more about this and how we can be involved in faculty hiring and diversity. We also have a new Dean. In addition, FES’s funding is different from GSAS and does not have sixth-year funding, but some people who take longer obviously want this.

Nick Vincent: do you have any indication from your new Dean that there could be a push for sixth-year funding? (This once seemed like a possibility at the School of Public Health, where the incoming dean was excited about doing sixth-year funding, but then that person ended up not coming as Dean.) Lily Zeng: the School is concerned about budgeting, and might be okay as long as budget permits, but the administration wants to keep this not broadly available but more as a back-up option. The incoming Dean is from a natural science background, where it takes less time to get a PhD. Nick Vincent: are there good options from other departments to assign teaching? Carly Cox: MCDB works well by sending out a preference sheet to students. Michaela Foster: Right now, we are just asking for a list of TF positions, because that does not exist yet, and we are asking PhD students to be prioritized. Lily Zeng: we will keep you guys updated.

* 1. Madeleine Chalfant and Nathan Nguyen and (Cell Biology)

Nathan Nguyen: we have 50 students, about 15 showed up. With regard to unionization, we get our information from the GSA. We think that the DGS for cell bio should be stricter with students (to enforce the rule of doing once committee meeting per year; currently, we do not get emails on this). Some people have circulated the idea of asking the PIs to take workshops on mentoring. We feel comfortable about health care and mental health support. A couple of people say that orange lines are really crowded in the mornings, and that the door-to-door shuttles at night take way too long. For finances, all students want to know if graduate students can contribute to 401Ks and retirement funds. Chris Geissler: yes, but only in teaching years. Wendy Xiao: we have asked Dean Cooley to look into these issues before, and she has always come back to us saying that, you cannot, because you are not employees, so many of the payroll things do not happen for us.

Nathan Nguyen: people would also like to have more events at West Campus, which has been expanding. We are thinking about requesting a McDougal Fellow for West Campus. People also want gym classes on West Campus. Wendy Xiao: I think they have gym classes on West Campus. Nathan Nguyen: a student also had problems with going to Yale Health (Mental Health and Counseling) while having a busy schedule at West Campus. Nick Vincent: maybe a provider could go down once a week- can look into this.

* 1. Sebastian Rider-Bezerra (Medieval Studies)

Seb Bezerra: every single student came (all 5)! There are some frustrations in my department. Mainly with the new-ish sixth year funding, which does not stop the clock with grant funding. This does not make sense for humanities and especially for Medieval Studies. My department has two programs (a PhD in Medieval Studies, and a MPhil in Medieval Studies for students in other departments). Now the Dean has interpreted the rules such that the year spent doing the MPhil in Medieval Studies will not count for the clock for normal progress, so people would have to take four courses in a semester and pass normal qualifying exams/work on prospectus, etc. Some students were told mid-year that they had to submit a prospectus. Then the administration told us that there had been a misunderstanding. We came up with the idea that departments like ours are exactly why Yale stands out as an institution, which can afford to support students studying rather obscure areas (Arabic, Coptic, etc.) where it is difficult to get a formal training. The university has not properly considered the impact of some new policies on our department, perhaps because of our small size. There were some concerns with the union (about GSA expressing an opinion), though my department is fully unionized.

Nick Vincent: I really liked Kate Phillips’ opinion on this. When people have less time to devote to their studies of other languages, they tend to retreat into traditional fields, negatively affecting the diversity of disciplines studied in the graduate school. Seb Bezerra: and that means everyone studies Western Europe. Wendy Xiao: how many people has this affected? Seb Bezerra: everyone in my department. The sixth-year funding is only for chronological sixth year, so if we take one year with external funding, then we do not get a seventh-year funding. In History, graduate students do an archival year, so everyone loses one year of funding. Laura Brown: so before this policy, you would have all five years plus external; now not all five years are necessarily guaranteed. Andrew Vielkind: for example, I was thinking about applying for an external fellowship this year, but my chair basically said no because I still had some UDF left. Overall, the issue is that the university has a very strict idea about how long a humanities PhD takes. Art History, e.g., takes at least 7 to produce good scholarship and dissertation. What we really need to discuss is time to degree. Wendy Xiao: a lot of that has been in (somewhat circular) discussion between the administration and departments. There is a proposal on limit on how many students each department can have. Andrew Vielkind: that would be a problem because that would give the chair or DGS incentive to get people out. Everything that Yale is doing is guided by the fact that the administration does not want anyone to take more than 6 years to graduate. This is made more difficult by the fact that applying for jobs in the last year is itself a full-time job. Sarah Zager: in Religious Studies, there is constant confusion about this policy. With external funding, Yale just takes away the external amount from people’s stipends, so that disincentivizes people from applying for external awards. Seb Bezerra: I raised the concern about time to degree with Dean Cooley, and her solution would be to decrease how much we do within the program, and that obviously decreases our marketability when searching for jobs. Connor Williams: Could we do a committee looking into this? Nick Vincent: of course! You can always submit a resolution to start an *ad-hoc* committee. We had Pam Schirmeister come in and said to her that this would disincentivize people from applying for external fellowships, and she just said no, so this would be a good way to gather some data to show that this is actually happening. Chris Geissler: I would be interested in joining this committee, in a department with, I think, the lowest rate of degree. Nick Vincent: I will send you guys a template of a resolution to start an *ad-hoc* committee. Wendy Xiao: perhaps one good way to negotiate this with the administration is to propose for people to stop the clock for one year in which they have to take an external award. Nicholas Curry: can we get data on this? Seb Bezerra: even if this just affects 20 students, the university can fix the problem by rewording the policy without costing anything. Andrew Vielkind: the budgeting administrators factor in that some humanities grad students will not be on Yale’s dime. Another proposal is to get Yale to agree to let students take UDF beyond year 6 (e.g., year 7). The only downside is that this works against time to degree.

1. Discussion on GSA representation

Wendy Xiao: I took a look at rep slots for GSA: right now we have 116 slots (1 rep for the first 40, then a second for 41st student, so on and so forth). Right now we have about 83 reps. This room does not fit this many representatives! This algorithm was made up a long time ago when Yale was much smaller; this has been okay because of vacant spots. I would like to make a housekeeping proposal to increase the number of students each rep represents. If we increase to 50 per rep, then we will have 102 spots; if we increase to 60 per rep, then we will have 92 spots. People can also fill in vacant spots if they are enthusiastic about GSA. Sarah Malkowski: About people filling vacant spots: GPSS has done this, and this year, there are more FES senators because they are interested. Sure, this would sway the representation a little bit, but it would also give people interested in GSA an opportunity to participate. Wendy Xiao: more reps might show up if we have a smaller body. Nick Vincent: also, then we would not have to limit, on some occasions, people’s speaking time.

Connor Williams: I represent History, which is one of the biggest departments on campus. I am not sure how I would respond to my constituents when our voice is reduced. There is also the question of whether we want to represent graduate students or represent graduate students who want to change things. Wendy Xiao: I broke down the ratios of Humanities/Social Sciences/Sciences, and the ratios would not be changed with this proposal. We currently have a greater proportion of science students filling their spots. So giving equal spots to departments does not mean that we have equal representation in departments/grad student body. So we would still have the regular elections twice a year, so we are not taking away spots from anyone, but there would be opportunities for other people to fill the vacant spots if they want). Seb Bezerra: what if people want to take back the vacant slots? Connor Williams: so an analogy would also be: if California does not want to fill a spot, North Dakota should not get it.

Paul Lemler: so what would be the benefit? If the number of reps who will be at meetings will not change all that much, then there does not seem to be much advantage? Wendy Xiao: there would be administrative benefits (in terms of attendance, etc.) and having a more enthusiastic body. Nicholas Curry: to return to a CA-ND analogy, if anyone wants to take back the vacant spots, he/she can just take it back, and the spot can just be added to the max of the assembly? Wendy Xiao: yes, that could definitely be a solution. Carly Cox: can we add a distributional requirement for divisions for at-large reps to protect, e.g., humanities students? Wendy Xiao: as it currently stands, the proposal actually benefits the humanities division in terms of representation and hurts the sciences. Bill Ruff: in general, to have a good debate, we need to have numbers. E.g., if a GSA-at large spot is available, can they vote? I would argue against giving them the right to vote. Nick Vincent: what numbers would you want to see? Bill Ruff: Current positions, unfilled positions, and how cutoff would affect different departments and the three divisions. Laura Brown: two decisions: 1) do we want this body to be completely representative? 2) do we want to decrease the number of people in this room? Wendy Xiao: it would not necessarily be 2, because there are not that many people in this room. Laura Brown: right, streamlining might be a better word. Representative: large departments are very diverse, so we are already trying to represent different tracks.

1. Call for Tax Facts Coordinator

Nick Vincent: Please let me know if you are interested in coordinating the tax facts events. It’s low commitment, and the accountant is already lined up.

1. Concerns from the Floor

Nick Vincent: GPSS and GSA have had a lot of issues getting people on Provost’s committees, and Will from GPSS and I have worked a lot on this. I have more information about serving on these committees and will circulate information.

1. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:10PM.