**GSA General Assembly Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday October 12, 2016**

**HGS 119, 6:30 PM**

Meeting started at 6:44PM.

1. Approval of Minutes

Minutes are approved.

1. Approval of Agenda

Agenda is approved.

1. Comments from the Chair

Nick Vincent: I appreciate everyone’s spirited discussions from last week. I have sent out the GSAS-wide email and have responded to some of the graduate students who emailed me back. Wendy Xiao: Nick has received some not very nice emails (hate mail), so please set the record straight when talking about our meeting and how the discussion went. Nick Vincent: yes, I have received at least one email that I would not dignify with a response. I will leave it at this: it was not a response I would expect from a mature student. Also, the panel is still being discussed and we are toying with the idea of small town hall events around campus because many students are coming to me to ask unionization related questions.

1. Revisiting Common Grounds

Nick Vincent: this is a program technically still running but which we have not advertised because it needs to be revamped. It is a voucher program whereby you can take your advisor out for coffee (8 dollars). It is not very well used, and some of the cafés have expressed that they would not want to participate in it. We could revamp this program, or we could take back the funds for something else. Let’s brainstorm on this issue.

Consuelo Amat Matus (Political Science): why do cafes not want to participate in the program? Nick Vincent: because some cafes have processing problems and have encountered budgeting issues with this program. Non-representative visitor: what is the GSA’s budget and how many people use this? Bill Ruff (Immunology): we have set aside 500 dollars, but we do not have feedback data on how many people use this program, but we do know that 300 dollars are used (roughly) each year. Katie Oltman (Psychology): this means fewer than 40 people use this program. Rachel Love (Classics): so the program is not running right now? Nick Vincent: Blue Dog Café has requested us to not continue with the program when I was PR chair, so we stopped advertising it. So I would like to see everyone’s opinions on whether this program is worth revamping.

Jenn Sun (MCDB): I have used it and it was helpful for when I was rotating (in labs), to see if the PI is someone we could have a conversation with/talk to. After the rotation period, the program seemed less useful. Nick Vincent: an added level of inefficiency is that we have to print out the voucher and go through the treasurer. Katie Oltman: Common Ground does not seem to be fulfilling the purpose of getting faculty mentors and students to communicate. Liz Salm (Neuroscience): we could target this program at first and second year students who might benefit more from the program. Consuelo Amat Matus: we could hand out the vouchers during orientation, for example when we hand out the *Compass* to incoming students.

Wendy Xiao: does the treasurer have to personally approve every single voucher use? Bill Ruff: yes, I had to look at emails of people who applied for the voucher and then get back to them. Fabian Schrey (Economics): it does seem that the logistics is a lot. Wendy Xiao: also, I do not just go to my PI just to say that I have a voucher and would like to have coffee/lunch with you. Mentoring meals, for example, is more of an investment and the logistics makes it feel more worth it. Consuelo Amat Matus: the student could email the mentor that we could have coffee with a GSA initiative.   
  
Nick Vincent: the consensus seems to be that if logistics can be made easier, the program should continue. Melis Laebens (Political Science): another way is to make the program between more advanced graduate students and incoming students who would like to be mentored by them. Laura Brown (Music): I still like the idea of advertising this program and handing out vouchers to incoming graduate students (and make sure they understand how the program is to be used). Bill Ruff: there is still the logistics problem. Chris Geissler (Linguistics): can we keep this program running (since there is interest) by for example, purchasing 5 dollar gift cards from coffee shops around campus or using punch cards from blue dog café. Katie Oltman: is there any safeguard in place to prevent me from taking anyone (e.g., a student) to coffee? Bill Ruff: currently no.

Consuelo Amat Matus: there is already a similar program in political science: there is a fixed budget for incoming students to take more advanced students to meals/coffee, and they can choose when to go. Nick Vincent: let’s try to advertise this to the earlier stage students and see if we can revamp the logistics.

1. Ivy Plus Summit Conference Update

Nick Vincent: Ivy Plus Summit is an annual conference of 8 ivy schools’ and MIT’s graduate student governments. Alex Zhang (Philosophy) and I went for the full conference, and Wendy joined us immediately after her honeymoon. It was enlightening to see where our peer schools stand with some of the important issues (e.g., unionization).

Nick Vincent: University of Chicago petitioned to participate in Ivy Plus conference. The vote was held on Sunday but there was no advance notice to any participants. There was no clear procedure, and the host assumed that the vote would just be by simple majority. Yale was one of the four schools that did not vote for Chicago (the other three being Princeton, Cornell, and Dartmouth), primarily for budgeting reasons. (Penn, for example, has an operating budget of 1.6 million, while we only have essentially 25K for operating budget). This makes it difficult for us to participate in the future, since travelling to Chicago would be a lot more expensive than regional travel. We have submitted a dissent with the other three schools. Wendy Xiao: yes, we exhausted our budget by going to Brown, even with travelling together and using the blocked hotel rates.

Laura Brown: just to check: Ivy Summit has no charter or bylaws? Nick Vincent: yes, that is correct, and this is why the voting procedure was challenged by us and the other schools. I am also mentioning this because some people think that the general assemblies of the Ivy Plus group should vote on whether Chicago should join. Bill Ruff: just to clarify, the budget was 1000 dollars, and airfare to Chicago alone would cost that much. Nick Vincent: some student governments with larger operating budgets have offered to pay for schools with smaller operating budgets, but we do not want this to be the solution. Jacob Derechin (Economics): why not take the money? Wendy Xiao: the concern is that the general assemblies/ treasurers/ administrations of those schools would not approve of this.

1. Project Proposal to Discuss GSA Involvement

Nick Vincent: this proposal will probably fall under PR; Fabian has a proposal. Fabian Schrey: this project aims to see why some departments are underrepresented in the GSA and why they are less interested in participating in GSA. We could go through election results, department meeting reports to see what practices could be beneficial for increasing GSA representation in those less represented departments. We need a few volunteers on this project. Alex Georgescu (Physics): in Physics, we have representation, but we do have some challenges. Nick Vincent: this project will not be work-intensive, but it will provide insights important for our successors.

Michael Giannetto (Engineering): I would be interested in working on this program. I am from engineering, where we are represented by the entire school, rather than by actual departments, so I am not entirely sure if every department is indeed being represented. Nick Vincent: about this – the executive board has talked about this matter and I will give you an update.

Consuelo Amat Matus: this is a great idea. In political science, we organize a meeting with the DGS and the incoming students to talk about the work GSA does, and this has been helpful. One challenge I have encountered is that many activists in my department are involved with GESO and too busy to also participate in GSA.

Katie Oltman: is this a departmental problem (e.g., one single department is not eager to participate) or a year on year problem? Nick Vincent: both, from anecdotal evidence. Liz Salm: that’s right, and this is a good grooming opportunity for new GSA reps.

1. Tax Facts Event Organizing

Joey Schmitt (Astronomy): we have an event where an account comes in and gives graduate students advice on tax filing. It is usually a one-time event (he has agreed to come this year; probably to be held in January). This is my last year on GSA, so if there is a volunteer to take over this, that would be great.

Nick Vincent: we have lower attendance tonight because it is the second meeting in a row, so if someone is interested, s/he should email Joey and me. Jacob Derechin: one thing from last year is that the accountant did not really understand our stipend situation and was not as helpful. Nick Vincent: maybe we should come up with questions here in general assembly and send them to the accountant to prepare? Joey Schmitt: we did it last year, but the questions were submitted a little late. Nick Vincent: let’s do it earlier this year! Katie Oltman: also, the accountant cannot actually give tax advice. Joe Lewnard (Public Health): Harvard has a helpful FAQ on their graduate council website, so perhaps we could get the accountant to confirm this kind of information. Liz Salm: Yale tax office has information and examples on stipend tax questions; they just cannot answer direct questions.

1. Comment on the Committee of Renaming

Nick Vincent: we attempted to hold a vote of acclamation during a previous meeting. We will talk about the committee on renaming also on October 26. But the short summary is that this committee is not going to change their composition because 1) its composition was careful and 2) the committee has already started its work. Wendy Xiao: right, and the composition of the committee is not meant to be representative of every single university affiliate. The blue collar workers have petitioned to add representation.

Jacob Derechin: so the committee has met for three times? Any updates? Wendy Xiao: yes, the committee has met in August, September, and October so far. What I have heard from some of the panels and listening tours is that many underrepresented students feel uncomfortable at Yale, and renaming one building would be helpful. The committee is tasked to establish principles for renaming, and we should keep this in mind before the Beverly Gage visit. Nick Vincent: Wendy has actually sent out a list questions to the general assembly, and we will probably resend them. Katie Oltman: I was actually at the panel last night, and Wendy did a great job responding to some of the tense questions. The committee has a very difficult task, and I think Wendy has been great.

Consuelo Amat Matus: what is meant by that the committee is carefully crafted? Nick Vincent: the reach of the committee is far, with alumni, faculty, and students, and so selections and composition have been done very carefully. David Deleon (English): how many underrepresented minorities are on this committee? Wendy Xiao: there are at least three underrepresented minorities (one student, with two others), but this is to my knowledge (obviously I cannot just ask people about their race). Consuelo Amat Matus: does each member have a vote? Wendy Xiao: the committee is not voting, but rather there is a deliberation process, and the committee chair drafts a report. Jacob Derechin: is the final report approved by a vote? Wendy Xiao: the process is not by vote, and everyone wants the same thing (principles on renaming), so the committee will not just randomly go with the opinion of one person rather than the other, when there is disagreement.

1. Concerns from the Floor

Nick Vincent: we will take our assembly photo next meeting, so if you want to look nice, dress nicely (or not, if you do not want to). It will take place in the GPSS Senate Room, so please bring your government-issued ID.

1. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at about 7:40 PM