**GSA General Assembly Meeting Agenda**

**Wednesday November 9, 2016**

**HGS 119, 6:30 PM**

**Meeting started at 6:38 PM**

1. Approval of Minutes

Minutes are approved.

1. Approval of Agenda

Agenda is approved.

1. Center for Teaching and Learning/ Course Evaluation Changes Discussion with Scott Strobel

Scott Strobel (Deputy Provost for Teaching and Learning): I want to give you some information about CTL. Two years ago, we created the Center for Teaching and Learning, which was composed of several organizations, including the Graduate Teaching Center. CTL is currently housed in HGS in a temporary space, but we will move it across York Street to Sterling Memorial Library, in a 25,000-sq-ft space. The library staff has been moved to Science Park. So both the graduate teaching and graduate writing centers (together with other CTL functions) will be housed in a beautiful and fantastic space. We will have an open house in early January, which I welcome you to attend. This centrally located space will allow us to serve the entire university, not just the Faculty of Arts of Sciences. Jenny Frederickson has more detailed information on CTL but could not come to the meeting tonight.

Scott Strobel: another project I am involved in is with teaching evaluations. This project started in 2003 with transfer from a paper evaluation system to an online evaluation system. Over the past 13-14 years, we have had much better response rates, partly by withholding grades before students respond to the evaluations. Less attention has been paid to the forming of actual questions. We also had not thought much about the role of bias in evaluations. The committee looked at the literature and found the importance of narrative responses. One of the keys to the bias issue is to frame the questions in such a way as to make them feel like partners in a course rather than consumers in a course. Matching numeric questions with narrative questions, and putting narrative questions first, are also a good way to deal with bias (so that students can think about their experience before assigning a number). But narrative questions about TA performance only have about a 20% response rate, so graduate students are not getting information as helpful as it can be. That is why we are thinking about adding a numeric component – to get a better response rate, and to get graduate students more feedback.

Scott Strobel: then the question of access comes up – who would see this? Of course, the graduate student teachers will see them. DUS, DGS, and the chair of your committee/mentors would also be able to see them because they are involved in your training. A separate issue is how to get a sense of what the number means, so we will provide information about the overall performance of other students in the same department. Some academic jobs also require applicants to show some of these numeric evaluations.

Sarah Zager: clarification question: will the current system of separate faculty and student evaluation will preserved? Scott Strobel: yes. Katie Oltman: in my experience, either students who loved me or students who hated me would respond to the TA questions. So with the numeric grade, I might get a bad score because students who have not enjoyed the course will disproportionately affect my numeric score. Is there a way, for example, to put this into context by showing that the students also did not like the course in general? Scott Strobel: the faculty, including the DGS/DUS, will be able to see this contextualizing information.

Melis Laebens: What are the questions, specifically? Scott Strobel: Two current questions: In what ways was X effective as a TA, and in what ways can the teaching be improved? The proposed question with numeric metric: What is your overall assessment of X? In the email about teaching expectations, faculty are supposed to visit sections, and I would advise graduate students to encourage their faculty mentors to come to make sure they get some feedback. In the CS 50 course where undergraduates are TAs, the sections are recorded, and the level of engagement with this is the highest I have ever seen. Each recorded section is evaluated.

Fabian Schrey: In the current system, the instructor can insert or come up with new questions for students to answer. Some professors have found this very useful, but many people do not know about this feature. Do instructors get an email notifying of this possibility? Scott Strobel: yes, there is a blank question (with a character limit) that instructors can fill in. Yes, instructors get emails about this and this feature will still be there. Lucy (American Studies): Many women instructors get lower evaluations – is there anything you have done with the new system to prevent this? Scott Strobel: right – we cannot wholly prevent this from happening, but there is some information relevant to this at the beginning of the survey. Joe Lewnard: in many quantitative, scientific courses, the evaluations are affected by the difficulty of the class. Is there a way to ensure that the course has to get rated at a certain level? Scott Strobel: I cannot disagree with that experience, but I have not encountered recommending/placing numeric level on a course evaluation. There is a healthy skepticism of numbers at Yale. Also, we can always compare the numbers among similar courses (e.g., courses with similar difficulty, enrollment, etc.).

Pratima Gopalakrishnan: I have got mostly good feedback but also some hysterical comments. I was wondering if you are open to the possibility of framing the suggestions in a more cognitive way (i.e., instead of just saying that implicit bias is bad). Scott Strobel: right, I should clarify that the relevant information given at the beginning is not just that implicit bias is bad. While we cannot avoid all bias, the faculty will also be able to see the evaluations in contextualized ways. Pratima Gopalakrishnan: right – I think my point is that we could make it a pedagogically useful tool (I have been a writing TA, and it is helpful to have suggestions about how to give feedback and suggestion). Scott Strobel: yes – that is a good thing that we can incorporate into the survey.

Liz Salm: there are many different kinds and levels of TF (grading, leading a lab section, a humanities discussion section, etc.), so is there any way of distinguishing them in the survey? Scott Strobel: I would love to do this, but there are challenges. One way is to designate the course as writing (WR) or lab (LB), etc. Rep (did not get name): is there a way to get feedback on teaching mid-way through the semester? Scott Strobel: there actually is a way to get feedback, in the current system, at the midterm point. This kind of midterm feedback is very useful for instructors who will only teach the course once, or who will not teach the same course for a while. Toomas Laarits: For me, it is actually a surprise that students filled out the responses. Also, I do not get an email about the evaluation responses, though there is a difficult way to access it online. Scott Strobel: it could be that the responses are sent to the faculty who are then expected to pass them onto the TAs. But you really should get an email notification about this.

Scott Strobel: one proposal. We discussed an idea of having people serving as TAs for the course themselves comment on the course. Then the faculty members will get some information about the experience of the TAs of the course. But obviously anonymity will be difficult for courses with a small number of TAs. Katie Oltman: right- you would only get reinforcing feedback because if the TA does not feel good about the course, he/she might just not write it down. Fabian Schrey: if the TA has negative response about the course that he/she feels comfortable putting it on paper, then they can probably just talk to the professor about it. Pratima Gopalakrishnan: but it still seems helpful to have the option to give this feedback to the faculty. Nick Vincent: I see both points, but perhaps in some subset of courses (e.g., one course I was a TA in) it is useful to have the option.

Michael Cohen: is this just for undergraduate students or also for professional students as well? Scott Strobel: I am working on it! The ultimate goal is to get this to all G&P schools. Nick Vincent: one last question: how is this going to be implemented? Scott Strobel: the faculty voted on this last Thursday and this is approved. So we will definitely implement this in Spring 2017 and summer courses, if not this semester. There will be a review in 3 years.

1. Resolution F16-004: Revision to the by-laws regarding the Elections Committee

Nick Vincent: Katie will introduce a resolution. This is a revision to our bylaws, so we will not vote on this until the next meeting.

Katie Oltman: in the resolution, I propose that we get rid of the elections committee and just appoint the vice-chair as the elections chair. This is our practice anyway. I am not trying to take away democratic freedom from the assembly. If someone has a concern, he/she can ask for a committee to be convened. But we do not need this superfluous committee. Wendy Xiao: the reason we had an elections committee is that we did not have an electronic elections system. The downside is that there will not be automatic oversight for the elections, but other people do see the elections/vote data. Melis Laebens: has there ever been a challenge to elections? Nick Vincent: no to my knowledge. Jacob Derechin: there are many other aspects of the bylaws that might be problematic. For example, Nick (chair) is not an *ex officio* member. Liz Salm: I intend to introduce a resolution about this in the spring semester. Chris Geissler: does Wendy support this? Wendy Xiao: if you support it. Nick Vincent: the voting process has been much more streamlined.

1. Informational town halls on graduate student unionization

Nick Vincent: Liz Salm and Patrick Dunn are planning information town halls on graduate unionization. Liz Salm: we have been trying to gather some information: about the process of NLRB, possible outcomes, as well as history of graduate unionization at Yale. The idea is that, after a vote has been called, we will hold informational town halls on Science Hill, central campus, and the medical school. We will start with brief information presentation and then leave time for Q and As. Nick Vincent: a lot of questions people are asking about include striking, union dues, etc. So these town halls could say: we do not know, but here is the information about what happened in other institutions, how the NLRB process works, etc. Melis Laebens: Could we invite a labor lawyer to talk about this? Liz Salm: We have talked about the possibility of inviting the labor law professor at Yale to talk about this. Also, Patrick has done a lot of research, including reading many NLRB cases, on this. Sarah Smaga: is this targeted at voting departments? Liz Salm: we may not limit it to voting departments: the idea is to get several sessions done on Science Hill/central campus/med school. Nick Vincent: many science students just want more information because they do not have access to what is going on. Chris Geissler: if this is hosted by GSA, there might be problems because GSA has taken positions on this. Liz Salm: even before we took positions, some did not want the GSA to say anything negative about graduate unionization. But we can talk a lot more about pros and cons in more nuanced manners now that we have taken nuanced stands. Connor Williams: I would strongly recommend hiring a labor lawyer if we have the money. Nick Vincent: or get them to do pro bono work. Sarah Zager: I just think there’s a huge problem because GSA has taken a stand, and you can’t try to pretend to be neutral and present information when you have taken a stand. Liz Salm: the point is not to present us as a neutral body, but to get information circulated to graduate students in both voting and non-voting bodies. Sarah Zager: I just think you can’t do it authoritatively if you’ve taken a stand. Nick Vincent and Liz Salm: GSA reps who are pro-local 33 are also encouraged to participate and share their voice. Laura Brown: GESO/Local 33 has held their own sponsored town halls, and the students who attend the GSA town halls will surely take into account that they are getting information in the context of our positions. Sarah Malkowski: if you have suggestions or opinions, please talk to Liz and Patrick!

1. Transit and security survey introduction

Emilio Salazar: the transit and security committee has been developing a survey, and we are at a stage to share this survey. Some of the questions include when/where/how students are traveling, and this will hopefully produce data that will be helpful for advocating certain changes to the transit system. We would like the GSA reps to send this out to their constituents after we circulate the survey. There will be some incentive provided (e.g., Amazon gift card). Wendy Xiao: is there housing information on the survey? Susan Pratt: we do not have housing questions on this survey – it is hard to see where we should fit them in the current transit survey; we will have a FHC-specific survey later on.

1. Collecting information for Graduate Student Experience project

Liz Salm: we are trying to look at graduate student experience at Yale. Our ultimate goal is to get a sense of faculty harassment on graduate students. Our initial goal was to do a survey on this, but we did not have a good way of extracting specific-problem information from the survey. So right now, we are thinking about holding informal sessions with graduate students about ideas on mentoring (what is acceptable and what is not). So we would like to know if some GSA reps are interested in/comfortable with incorporating some broad questions about mentorship in department meetings.

Toomas Laarits: is the idea to ask people if they have been harassed? Liz Salm: no, the aim is not to share personal stories but to get a sense of expectations/acceptable conduct of mentorship. This might also be helpful in seeing different perceptions across divisions. Nick Vincent: we are also thinking about doing this because we want to avoid the survey (for reasons already mentioned) and the focus-group path (because there are a lot of institutional obstacles to focus groups: PIs, confidentiality training, etc.). Fabian Schrey: can we put this into a qualtrics survey or a document so that people remember these questions when they actually hold the department meetings? Nick Vincent: we might incorporate a small qualtrics survey in addition to the one page summary to department reports this year. More information on this later. Jacob Derechin: if the idea is to get information about the extent of harassment, then survey format makes sense, but if not, then no. Nick Vincent: many of our projects take several years, and these framing questions will be very useful—keep in mind that this project is in the very earliest stages.

1. Call for CTF readers

Kevin Regan: we have 15,000 dollars to give out, and the cycle ends tomorrow. Currently no one has signed up, and we need 2 humanities/2 social sciences/2 sciences GSA reps to referee about 25-30 applications each (depending on how many applications are submitted tomorrow). My email is [kevin.p.regan@yale.edu](mailto:kevin.p.regan@yale.edu) and please reach out to me if interested. This should not take too much time (evaluation and 45-minute-ish meeting). This will probably take place the week after thanksgiving.

Ben Rushdeteyn, Fabian Schrey, and Steven Paniagua have volunteered.

1. Concerns from the Floor

Nick Vincent: our next meeting is in three weeks

1. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:57PM.