



**Semester Report, Fall 2016
Yale Graduate Student Assembly (GSA)**

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I. Introduction

The Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) has moved toward a projects-based approach to advocacy in the 2016-2017 academic year, while still focusing on four main areas: Facilities and Healthcare, Academic and Professional Development, Transit and Security, and Public Relations. This approach has enabled us to tackle projects that bridge these areas, allowing for a more interconnected approach to advocacy.

The GSA is also in the process of exploring better ways of communicating with its constituency. Students often express concerns of “information overload” from frequent and repetitive emails. We are attempting to play with new ways of communicating information, including updating and redesigning our website and launching a podcast. This semester report is one component of these new communication efforts.

For more information on the GSA, or to get in contact with your departmental representative or GSA leadership, please visit our webpage at gsa.yale.edu.

II. GSA Unionization Resolutions

After having extensive, intense, passionate, informed, and balanced open discussions in September and October, the GSA passed three resolutions related to graduate student unionization.

Ultimately, the GSA approached the topic of unionization as a three-tiered progression, first discussing and addressing graduate student unionization in general (Resolution F16-001), and then discussing separately the current efforts by Local 33 (Resolution F16-002), and finally the micro-bargaining unit voting approach currently being petitioned for by Local 33 (Resolution F16-003). Each resolution was initially presented to the Assembly as a blank slate, with the option to remain neutral, to oppose, or to support the issue at hand. Following intense and lengthy discussion, each resolution was amended and voted on individually.

In summary, the GSA voted to remain neutral towards graduate student unionization (45 yes, 10 no, 2 abstain), to oppose graduate student unionization efforts by Local 33 (37 yes, 26 no, 3 abstain), and to oppose the current micro-bargaining unit strategy, whereby only those within nine petitioned departments would have the opportunity to vote on unionization (44 yes, 17 no, 2 abstain). You may notice that there exists variability in the total number of votes cast for each resolution. Some representatives refrained from casting any vote, and some representatives were not present for all three votes.

From this process, we also learned that many students feel they do not have enough information about graduate student unionization in general or about the specific efforts currently happening at Yale. The GSA began pursuing a variety of ways of gathering and sharing information about graduate student unionization, so please look out for events and further communication on this topic over the course of the spring semester.

III. GSA Podcast

We will be launching the GSA Podcast (Yale GradCast) in the spring semester of 2017! We will release episodes at least once per month for the duration of the semester, although sometimes we will release extra episodes on topics of special or timely interest. The purpose of the podcast is to provide information to GSAS students about issues and resources related to student life, education, and professional development. We will attempt to share information in such a way that multiple viewpoints on any issue we explore can be given their fullest articulation, subject to time and resource constraints. You can check out the podcast, and listen to our first episode at <http://gsa.yale.edu/podcast>.

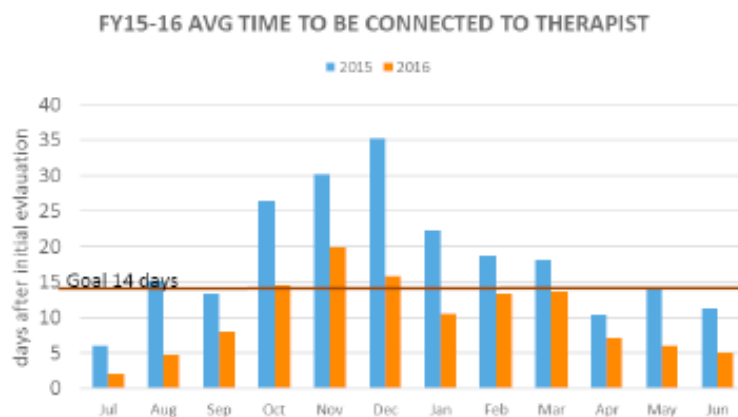
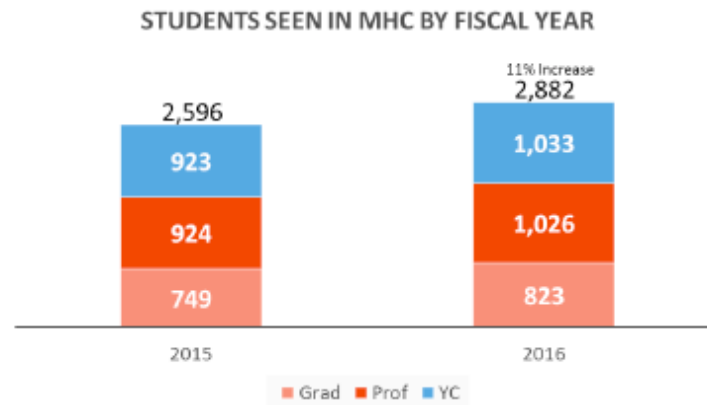


If you would like to give us feedback on the podcast, want to get involved, or if you have ideas about topics we should explore, please send an email to project coordinator Alicia Steinmetz (Alicia.steinmetz@yale.edu) or to gsa@yale.edu.

IV. Mental Health and Counseling

In the past two years, the following initiatives were undertaken to improve student experience in Mental Health and Counseling:

- 1) Dr. Howard Blue was appointed Deputy Director of MHC with a range of duties including a focus on diversity and diversity training.
- 2) MHC added 2.5 FTE clinical psychologists in the 2015-2016 school year, which helped to reduce waiting times for the start of therapy despite an 11% growth in demand (see Students Seen in MHC by Fiscal Year and FY15-16 Avg Time to be Connected to Therapist, below)
- 3) Dr. Blue and colleagues worked to increase connections with cultural houses, forming relationships with the leadership, and making plans to increase student awareness of culturally sensitive MHC resources this year. Mental Health fellows are being appointed to each cultural house.
- 4) With growth in staff, 40% of the 2016-2017 clinician group are members of diverse populations (African American, East Asian, South Asian, Hispanic).
- 5) Renovations at 55 Lock Street were completed over the summer to provide four additional offices for new MHC clinicians including psychology and psychiatry positions to be recruited in the 2016-2017 school year.
- 6) MHC created an electronic secure appointment scheduling system to facilitate scheduling without the need for telephone tag. This system is being piloted and should be live throughout MHC by January 2017.
- 7) The Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Committee met monthly and worked on agendas concerning communication, clinical access, diversity, and the initiatives listed here.
- 8) In collaboration with the Student Advisory Committees, the Student Web Portal (<http://yalehealth.yale.edu/students>) was revised and the MHC webpage (<http://yalehealth.yale.edu/mentalhealth>) extensively rewritten and simplified in spring 2016.



The wait time data shown above (provided by MHC) is the time between a student's very first appointment and the next appointment marking the start of 'ongoing therapy.' The wait times listed under 2015 and 2016 refer to academic years. For example, the 2016 data cover July 2015 through June 2016. Overall, wait times have improved going from the 2014-2015 to 2015-2016 academic years.

V. Graduate Housing and Work Space

The GSA has long been concerned that housing prices are increasing at a rate that is glaringly disproportionate to the rise in our graduate student stipends. In response, the Facilities and Healthcare subcommittee is in the process of producing a comprehensive report on the issue. The goal is to provide aggregate data on the New Haven rental market, prices of Yale-owned apartments, number of graduate students, and average stipends. We then hope to analyze these data in order to make recommendations to Yale on approaching this problem.

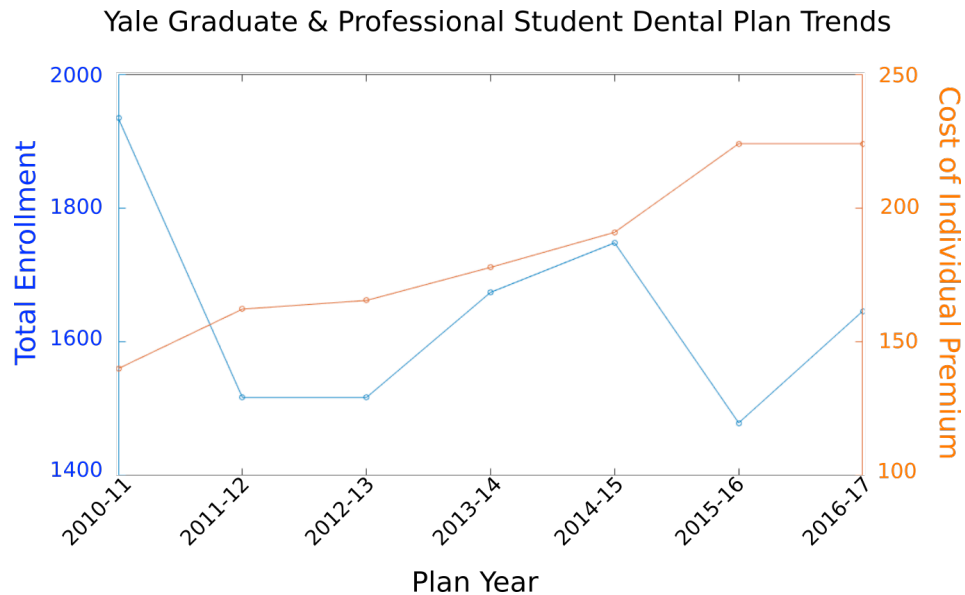
In addition, we will advocate on behalf of all students to have access to work spaces that fit their needs. Based on a 2013 survey, we found that 56% of respondents had personal office space/lab space and 97% of those students had 24-hr access to the space. Our goals are to assess whether graduate student work spaces are suitable for students' research and productivity, as well as to identify spaces that fall short of students' needs and expectations. The main effort is currently to focus on Engineering and then expand to the specific concerns of other departments. A survey on

this issue (specifically in Engineering) will be sent out at the beginning of the spring semester, so if you are in Engineering, please look out for this survey!

VI. Student Dental Plan

Based on a May 2016 survey, we found that approximately 50% of those who responded reported that they did not have dental coverage, and 67% of those students reported cost as the main deterrent. We also heard confusion and frustration from many students about the changes to the dental plan, including cavities no longer being covered under the plan until the second year of coverage. Because the plan is opt-in, many students will not seek care until they already have a dental problem, meaning that there is very high usage coupled with low enrollment. As the cost of individual premiums continues to rise, we cannot guarantee the insurance provider stable enrollment numbers, making it difficult to negotiate a beneficial plan for students.

Our goal is to work with GPSS, Yale Health, and Delta Dental to create an opt-out dental plan to increase the number of participants in the plan. This would allow us to increase the benefits and/or decrease the cost of the insurance premiums.



VII. Child Care

Over the summer, the GSA compiled a child care report, calling for expanded child care facilities in New Haven, as well as the establishment of a need-based subsidy. The report was well-received, and we are continuing to work to make sure this issue remains in the spotlight through our interactions with Dean Lynn Cooley, other administrators including the Provost, and the McDougal Center.