

# GSA General Assembly Meeting

Wednesday, October 30th, 2013

Meeting begins at 7:11pm.

1. **Approval of the Minutes**
  - a. Approved.
2. **Approval of the Agenda**
  - a. Approved
3. **Deep Dive: Facilities and Healthcare** (Angharad Davis)
  - a. Michelle could not be here, so Angharad is representing her.
  - b. Last week we talked about Space, now we're going to talk about these three issues.
  - c. Housing (Wendy Xiao - wendy.xiao@yale.edu)
    - i. Wendy is the GSA's representative on the university housing committee.
    - ii. Wendy reports that the first problem we're facing (as graduate students) is that there's not a centralized place to get good information for new students or students thinking of moving off-campus. There is a Grad Housing Office (GHO) website that has landlord ratings, but the GHO seems unaware of the perception that it's not user-friendly. Working on improvements to the website.
    - iii. Another idea is a housing fair. Wendy reports that she is currently working on a pilot housing fair for the medical school.
    - iv. Graduate/Professional Housing committee convened last week; reviewed current state of affairs. Next meeting will focus on solving problems.
    - v. Three big new apartment buildings being built around New Haven in the next year/few years; two downtown and one in East Rock.
    - vi. Some of the idea is to continue renovations to on-campus housing.
    - vii. Other issues include mandatory dining plans, and the difficulty getting housing exactly where on campus you want it.
    - viii. Questions
      1. Ankit Disa: is there a way to post that you're looking for a sublettor on the graduate website?
        - a. Don't think so, but YaleStation/GradStation may have this functionality.
        - b. Lauren: there is an option to post on the grad housing to post about sublettors, but it's very unclear and Lauren got an email that she needed to pay to do it, but she shouldn't have had to.
      2. Plans to reach out to first-year students?
        - a. Lots of people want more information about living off-campus as first-years.
        - b. Sam Sackeroff: Sense that the information about off-campus isn't necessarily reputable; that it would be unsafe, that it would hard to sign a lease.

- c. Ankit: Start with the Compass or Yale Graduate Handbook that already has information on finding housing.
  - 3. There is some discussion about students at visiting weekends, tour guides not feeling comfortable (or being allowed) to say which neighborhoods are safe when asked.
    - a. Suggestion of showing the heatmap of where graduate students currently live.
    - b. Approaching the issue from the angle of students talking to other students may be more tenable.
  - 4. Angharad: Please send additional comments to Wendy via email.
- ix. Mental Health (Paul Baranay – paul.baranay@yale.edu)
  - 1. Paul summarizes the recent meetings and developments in the past month-plus. He and Angharad have met with one of the authors of the Yale College Council’s mental health report, as well as with representatives from Mind Matters (undergrad mental health advocacy/awareness group). There was also an article about both reports (GSA/GPSS and YCC) in the Yale Daily News on October 15. A follow-up meeting with Dr. Siggins (chief of Mental Health and Counseling) is scheduled for late November or early December.
  - 2. Angharad explains that the YCC report addresses many of the same issues but from a more humanistic perspective and how students interact with those resources. They focus on the holistic issue, and have similar suggestions for improving MHC as in our report. One difference is they put a lot of emphasis on peer resources (not as relevant for G/P students) and on the positive assistance offered by college Deans and Masters, which G/Ps don’t have access to. We’ve been discussing whether we could/should expand the role of the DGS so they have some kind of authority or training in this pastoral support realm.
  - 3. Q&A
    - a. Colton: Our DGS changes every year. Seems like a good idea to have someone in our department, but doesn’t seem like the right support system to have to support in someone new every year.
    - b. Kathleen: Conflict-of-interest in confiding with DGS; might want a neutral/third-party source.
    - c. Xue: BBS has access to ombudsperson. Could this role be the person we’re looking for?
    - d. Kyle: Agree with the concern about DGS not necessarily being the right person, ombudsperson for within the department makes sense. For personal issues, finding a way to instigate conversations with the whole department about creating a culture within the department. Idea of having more than one person you can go to.

- e. Wendy: everyone in the MD/PhD program is assigned a faculty advisor; sometimes a pain to check in with them; could be a model.
  - i. Angharad: We may do a survey in the near future to analyze these options and whether they have succeeded or failed in the past.
- x. Tax Advice (Chad Marion – chad.marion@yale.edu)
  1. As graduate students, we have to file our own taxes. There are lots of concerns and issues, such as for students who are married or have children, and students who file taxes in multiple states. Also a question of what tax breaks we are eligible for.
  2. Two proposed solutions.
    - a. Ask-a-CPA sessions, modeled after our Ask-a-Lawyer sessions
      - i. Group question-and-answer sessions
    - b. Soliciting our tax office for additional updates to the website
      - i. They did update it in the past academic year, they have some samples of how to file your taxes
      - ii. May work with the tax office to secure some kind of free tax software or negotiating a discount with local CPAs throughout the greater New Haven area.
  3. International taxes are also complicated and a separate concern.
  4. One specific question we have from the floor is if anyone has past history of working with the tax office.
    - a. One representative mentions that they had to file taxes in 3 states last year, and mentions that TurboTax is impossible to figure out on your own even when you pay for it.
    - b. Amy Mount: Please don't call it Ask-a-CPA because international students don't know what a CPA is.
- d. If you have more feedback, please send us email or come to one of our meetings, 7pm next Wednesday in the HGS Common Room.

#### **4. Reports**

- a. Steering Committee (Brian Dunican)
  - i. We now have the list of all departments with fewer than 10 responses that won't be getting a specific feedback.
    1. There was a hope we could see some of this data, but they're not totally comfortable with it because of how easy it is to resolve responses into individuals.
    2. One of the scholastic deans will be writing a more narrative report for these departments to complement the division- and school-wide reports. That may yet be a while coming since he just got the data last Friday.
  - ii. Talked about how undergraduate courses, specifically languages—you can apparently get undergrad grades (e.g. A-F) for undergrad courses.

- iii. A group of department chairs and DGS's are looking at the number of people admitted into each department.
      - 1. Slots haven't been changed since 1992. This may or may not become controversial, but things seem to be going well for now.
      - 2. Report expected in early spring.
    - iv. Sometime in November, we'll have the opportunity to present the GradStation proposal to all of the student life deans.
  - b. Transit and Security (Sachi Inukai)
    - i. Some of us went to downtown New Haven; proposal to change streets to two-way instead of one-way; generally seems like there's support. 10 streets identified to be changed.
      - 1. <http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/uploads/1wayto2way.pdf>
    - ii. Hope is to simplify bus routes, bike lanes. No budget associated with the plan yet. Trying to implement it in collaboration with the City Signaling Project(?)
    - iii. Questions
      - 1. Will there be a vote on this?
      - 2. Parking?
        - a. Plan is to keep all the current street parking, and put in bike lanes, and make things two lanes...in some areas they may need to change sidewalk width, but they've been assuring people no parking will be taken away.

## 5. Appointee for the Minority Advisory Council (MAC)

- a. Questions
  - i. How often do they meet?
    - 1. Brian: Probably no more than one or two times a semester.
- b. Nominations - one student
  - i. Michela Paganini (Physics).
    - 1. Approved by acclamation.

## 6. Call for November CTF readers (Brian Vlastakis)

- a. Being a reader means you're partnered with someone else and will read about 20 applications. About a 5-hour commitment. Have dinner and discuss the disbursement of funds. Good opportunity to see what good and bad recommendation letters look like. Restrictions: can't be applying for this cycle, and can't be a reader two times in a row.
- b. Looking for 6 readers, ideally spanning all divisions.
- c. Scheduling is flexible; cycle ends November 1. For the first two weeks you'll be reading on your own and/or with your partner; dinner/get-together will be the third week of November.
- d. Volunteers
  - i. Heidi Lam (Anthropology), Benjamin Evans (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology), Bryce Maxey (Spanish and Portugese), Marisa Rubio (Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry), Samuel Sackeroff (History of Art), Sara Sanchez-Alfonso (Linguistics)

**7. Concerns from the floor and announcements**

- a. Elihu Day: Wednesday, Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>, 12-4pm, McDougal Center Common Room, HGS
  - i. Brian: Basically an outreach program to the alumni donors; it's not soliciting for money but actually just thanking them for money they've already donated.  
There will be snacks.
- b. Two sets of flyers: Ask-a-Lawyer and Common Grounds.

**8. Adjournment**