

GSA General Assembly Meeting
Monday, October 14th, 2019
6:00PM, Watson Center (60 Sachem Street), Room A74

Meeting began at 6.01pm

I. Approval of minutes

Minutes were approved.

II. Approval of agenda

Agenda was approved.

III. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative: Working Time (Guest Speaker: Denzil Streete, Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Development and Diversity)

Denzil Streete gave a brief overview of DEI initiatives and resources on campus, and pointed reps to belong.yale.edu as a repository for all of these resources. He shared some of his own professional and personal background and asked reps for general feedback on their experiences related to climate and diversity on campus.

John Gonzalez (Biological and Biomedical Sciences): A perspective from the sciences. The demographics in our program need attention in relationship to DEI, but sensitivity training is also required for faculty and staff. A lot of our leadership are not doing the strongest job when it comes to recruiting. This may be a GSAS priority, but if it is not taken up by leadership, it will continue to be an issue. **Nicolle Rosa Mercado (Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry):** I know OGSDD staff travel a lot to drive more diverse recruitment. But it may be helpful to have a greater variety of initiatives, such as summer research programs and more undergraduate-focused initiatives to feed the pipeline. **Elena Adasheva-Klein (Anthropology):** The diversity of the graduate school needs to be looked at holistically. Not just diversity among students, but diversity in the faculty body and administration. **Megan Kelley (Neuroscience):** It seems to me that GSAS' approach to diversity avoids actively confronting Yale's role in establishing protocols and systems that were designed to enforce segregation. A more active confrontation of history would produce stronger policies and better language around this issue.

Denzil Streete: Yale is constantly working on initiatives, though we have a lot of catching up to do. University of Michigan, for example, just established a \$3-million HBC pipeline (though how the resources will be used is not yet established). Recruitment is only the beginning. We have to find talented students wherever they are, and we invest significant time and energy in doing so. I'm currently running an online bootcamp with 474 students. We are working on the application process: how do you get recommendations, and how do you draft a statement of purpose? The real question is how we level the playing field. This year, for the first time, the diversity statement will be mandatory. Our current efforts are driven by analysis of what's happening in departments: students from under-represented groups often

have the same experiences as other students, but they speak about them in a different way and departments can fail to identify strong candidates. We are ensuring that everyone is given the same information so that students who have been previously overlooked by faculty will be considered seriously.

How can GSA help with this process? Things move forward at Yale when students are the ones driving change, so your current Assembly-wide initiative is important. We will be running a campaign to invite students to share how they define diversity in their own personal and departmental contexts. With the help of the GSA we'll distribute posters with tear-off sheets asking for student responses; we'll host a town hall on December 9th at 3pm. OGSDD will support you to start conversations in your departments.

Max Scalf (Cell Biology): Will the tear-off sheets also be available electronically? **Ethan Perets (Chemistry):** When will the posters be available? **Denzil Streete:** On the 28th of October, and we can also share the template electronically.

Denzil Streete outlined four levels at which reps can think about diversity: faculty hires, recruiting students, department climate, and administration.

Existing faculty can be educated; we can change dynamics that govern who is being hired. A model conversation for the department would ask both:

1. How are defining diversity?
2. What can we do as students to increase diversity in the four categories above?

If you lead a conversation, you can divide your larger group into small groups that will each talk about this at one level, and groups can discuss:

1. What are the current issues?
2. What is the way forward?
3. What role can I play?

Everyone is qualified to lead these conversations.

The Assembly worked in four groups, which then reported on their conversations.

Aritra Ghosh (Astronomy): In terms of faculty hires, the role that students are allowed to play seems critical. If students could be involved--perhaps at the early stages, if involvement in final decisions is not possible--this would make a big difference. **Denzil Streete:** Some departments already involve students in this way (including Linguistics, Public Health, Germanic Languages and Literatures, Slavic Languages and Literatures, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology). Sometimes departments don't know what peers are doing; GSA is a space where reps can gain information to share with departmental leadership.

Devan Solanki (Chemical and Environmental Engineering): Do all students feel qualified to be on those committees? **Denzil Streete:** You don't have to be an expert on the subject matter. All students can

help identify candidates who have strong interpersonal skills and connect well with students. Students also know to ask different questions, because their perspective is different. **Marisha Evans (Linguistics)**: Before we had representation in hiring, some decisions were made in direct opposition to students' interests. Since students have been involved, we've made two hires who are beloved in the department. **Nicolle Rosa Mercado**: We're the ones taking the classes. We know what gaps in knowledge the faculty have as a group.

In terms of student recruitment, we discussed the lack of information that underrepresented minorities might have about the recruitment process, and ways to increase their access to resources. **Denzil Streete**: Important to highlight that diversity may involve more than underrepresented groups. It could involve recruiting people with industry experience. It could involve recruiting scholars working on regions that have had less focus historically in the department, even if the department is diverse demographically. **Ryan Petersburg (Physics)**: We talked about engaging prospective students while at conferences. Encouraging more candidates to feel that they are qualified to apply to Yale. It would be great to be able to give application fee waivers or other support. **Nicolle Rosa Mercado**: We shouldn't forget that conference attendees represent a subsection of students who can afford conference attendance. **Denzil Streete**: That's right. But if you are at a conference and need help with recruitment, reach out to me. I can provide information, resources, and application fee waivers.

Ethan Perets (Chemistry): We discussed the moves made by various departments at Yale, and by other universities, to get rid of the GRE. Can OGSDD provide fee waivers for this exam? **Denzil Streete**: Not for exam, but for everything within our own system. In terms of the GRE, 25 departments dropped it last year, with more to come, hopefully. **Anri Chomentowska (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology)**: Our department has dropped it, but GSAS website still says it is required for applications to Yale. **Denzil Streete**: This has been updated. **Maria del Mar Galindo (English)**: English was already considering dropping its GRE, but students provided research and data to drive this forward more quickly. **Denzil Streete**: Some departments are piloting hiding scores from faculty readers even if the requirement still exists. As a GSA rep in your department, don't underestimate what you can do. You can come up with a game plan, including various ideas of what areas or policies you can tackle to move your department into the modern age. If your department hosts visits that don't match up with diversity preview days, ask why. Three-fourths of departments don't respond to the OGSDD call to do this. There is lots of low-hanging fruit. When students begin to organize, departments can give this more attention than an administrative call to action.

The culmination of this GSA- and OGSDD-led effort will be a Diversity Town Hall on 9th December. We hope students will come and discuss their thoughts on diversity freely, with students leading the conversation and administration mostly listening. We'll start taking RSVPs in November and I hope we'll need a large auditorium-sized room in the end. In the spring, we can take what we collect this semester and turn it into a very forceful statement that states why we think diversity is important and what we are doing to achieve it. We'll identify tenable goals in the short, medium, and long-term. There are already updates to diversity-related material on the GSAS website, going live on December 1st.

Devan Solanki: Do you have any advice for those of us who might be considered part of an “over-represented” minority? **Denzil Streete:** Creating space for individuals to speak--all individuals--is a huge part of the challenge. We try to open several spaces for conversation, and you can do the same in your department. In this way, we can avoid singling out voices and have constructive outputs from the group as a whole.

I want to highlight a few events: tomorrow, October 15th, a The Marginalized Professor Is In event, focusing on the job market. On Wednesday the 16th, there will be a STEM mentoring event, and on October the 28th, a Mentoring 101 seminar.

Da’Von Boyd (Political Science): I want to highlight that while you have told us that power is in our hands, there is often very little room for graduate students to influence conversations in departments with strict power differentials between faculty and students. It’s not clear what accountability mechanism graduate students have to hold professors accountable. What resources are there? **Denzil Streete:** Come to OGSDD and talk to us about it. There are levers that can be pulled strategically to support change, in coordination with GSAS, but we need students to come forward. If there is a toxic environment in your department, we need to know. We try to ease the pressure of individuals reporting; you can also talk with trusted faculty in your department if they exist. Some departments are already on our active radar.

Lucy Armetano (Psychology): We’ll check in on the conversations you hold in your department at our penultimate meeting of the semester, on December 2nd. You can hold these conversations physically, by email, or by collecting anonymous feedback. You can also point students to the anonymous feedback form on the GSA website. **Denzil Streete:** We’ll also plan to produce a report from the GSAS-wide effort.

IV. Resolution F19-001, Graduate Student Voices in Selection of the Next Provost

Ethan Perets (Chemistry, Parliamentarian) provided brief background on the resolution process. He highlighted that resolutions are not binding for the administration, but express the general opinion of the voting members of the Assembly. Because resolutions are not binding, ambitious language can be appropriate and necessary.

CJ Rice (History): I’m proposing this resolution because of how central the Provost is to the running of the University. As per Yale’s own language, “The provost is Yale’s chief educational and administrative officer after the president. The Office of the Provost oversees academic policies and activities university-wide. ...” Moreover, the Provost “has direct oversight of all academic support units, holds institutional responsibility for the allocation of resources, and chairs the University Budget Committee.” It is, in essence, one of the most important jobs at Yale; consequently, the office of the Provost and who fills that role is a matter of paramount concern for graduate education. To that end, I propose a resolution that urges the University administration to meet with the GSA General Assembly to solicit feedback on graduate student perspectives on the search and to include student representatives on any and all committees involved in selecting the next provost.

Nicolle Rosa Mercado: I'd like to propose a friendly amendment that we ask for divisional representation. **CJ Rice:** I accept this amendment. **Devan Solanki:** Is divisional representation too specific an ask? **Nicolle Rosa Mercado:** We may as well make a specific request at this early stage, and open conversation.

The resolution passed with a vote of 48 for, 1 against, and 1 abstention.

V. Elections

- A. [GSA Steering Committee](#) (Social Science representative)

Jacob Derechin (Sociology) was elected by unanimous consent.

- B. [OCS Student Advisory Committee](#) (one representative)

Jacob Spies (Chemistry) was elected by unanimous consent.

- C. [Advisory Committee on Resources for Students and Employees with Disabilities](#) (two nominees)

The election was tabled by unanimous consent.

- D. [GSAS Disciplinary Committee](#) (one representative per division)

Humanities: **Kristen Herdman (Medieval Studies)** was elected by unanimous consent.

Social Sciences: **Tyler Hayward (East Asian Studies)** was elected by unanimous consent.

Sciences: **Carson Bryant (Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry)** and **Max Scalf (Cell Biology)** were nominated.

Carson Bryant was elected by 24 votes, with five abstentions and 15 votes for Max Scalf.

- E. [GSAS Grievance Committee](#) (one representative per division)

Humanities: **Burt Westermeier (History)** was elected by unanimous consent

Social Sciences: **Eleanor Sealy (Statistics)** was elected by unanimous consent.

Sciences: **Max Scalf (Cell Biology)** was elected by unanimous consent.

- F. [Advisory Committee on Community Policing](#) (one representative)

Zach Michielli (Architecture) was elected by unanimous consent.

VI. Dean's Emergency Fund discussion

CJ Rice (History): I'll give brief background before we take this up at the next meeting. We have heard that people might be having a hard time accessing the emergency fund, and are gathering information on what people know about the Fund and what experiences they have had with it. I've provided a template for reps to gather information by email (it's on the GSA Shared Drive). I will be gathering information by

an anonymous Google form as well. **Ethan Perets**: Can all reps use this Google form? **CJ Rice**: This would likely be too much data for one person to deal with. **Lucy Armentano**: Students can use the anonymous feedback form on the GSA website; you can point them toward this. **Devan Solanki**: This would help protect privacy, as it wouldn't be department-specific. Small departments would have trouble keeping feedback anonymous.

VII. Resources Spotlight: Bulldog Safety Card

Lucy Armentano provided brief background on the Bulldog Safety Card: students can text “yalesafe” to 444-999 to receive the Bulldog Safety Contact Card, which includes all of Yale's Emergency Services numbers.

VIII. Miscellaneous

Ryan Petersburg (Physics): Jenette Creso, the Facilities and Healthcare Chair, wanted to let reps know that F&H has an upcoming meeting. An email will follow. **Meaghan McGeary (Experimental Pathology)**: T&S also has an upcoming meeting. **Megan Kelley**: The Service Committee will need support distributing boxes for the Annual GSA/GPSS Holiday Toy Drive. **Andie Berry (English)**: If reps would like access to the information gathered by students in the English Department on GRE Testing, they can contact me (andie.berry@yale.edu).

Meeting adjourned at 7.41pm