
Minutes of the General Assembly Meeting on October 8, 2008

The third regularly scheduled meeting of GAPSA General Assembly was convened on October 8, 2008 at 7:36 PM in the Terrace Room in Cohen Hall.

Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum

Present were: Andrew Rennekamp, Alejandro Hagan, Christa Heyward, Nikki Thorpe, Alexandra Kotsovos, Christina Arlt, Jessica Kim, Esther Agbaje, Natalie Williams, Sarah Smith, Susan Haas, Carla Cue, Leslie Warden, Tim Shokair, Wenting Li, Stephanie Milk, Allison Sullivan, Jill Harrison, Christie Chavez, Chrissy Caggiano, Heather Curl, Stephanie Wujcik, Maher Zamel, Olga Shebonova, Omar Khan, Jason Parris, Yoonjee Kim, Lynn Yang, Lee Solomon, Margaret Fleetwood, Kenny McKinley, Johanna Busch, Elise Stuggan, Esther Pinkston, Kathleen Mechler, Corbett Brown, Esther Pinkston, Jonathan Lukens, Tom Byrne, Karuna Patil, Brian Cheyne, Aleksander Baranski, Gregg Gilbert, and Maria Yuan.

Quorum was declared.

Approval of the Minutes from Prior Meeting

The changes to last meeting's minutes put forth by GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp were unanimously approved.

Reports

Chair's Report

GA Outing Recap

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp thanked all GAPSA members for a wonderful time at the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts General Assembly Outing. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this event will be held again in the future. Mr. Rennekamp thanked Vice Chair for Student Programs Christina Arlt and Vice Chair for Operations Sarah Smith for organizing this event. Photographs from the outing are now up on the GAPSA website. Mr. Rennekamp thanked Vice Chair for Communications Alexandra Kotsovos for updating the website. On the website there is an updated version of the GAPSA Handbook in a pdf format. Mr. Rennekamp suggested General Assembly members pick up a hard copy version of the GAPSA Handbook but noted that it is updated frequently on the GAPSA website. Minutes from past GA meetings and Executive Board meetings are now up on the website.

Meeting with Associate Provost Andy Binns

Mr. Rennekamp stated that the GAPSA Executive Board met with Associate Provost Andy Binns and laid out a tentative agenda for the year at this meeting. These meetings with the Associate Provost occur twice a semester. The meeting with President Amy Guttmann will occur next week.

First Vice Chair's Report

First Vice Chair Alejandro had nothing to report.

Vice Chair for Professional Students' Report

Vice Chair for Professional Students Mat Abramsky was not present for his report.

Vice Chair for Research Students' Report

Vice Chair for Research Students Jonathan Lukens had nothing to report. GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that pending confirmation by the General Assembly, GAPSA representative Leslie Warden will serve as the Deputy Vice Chair for Research Students.

Vice Chair for International Affairs' Report

Interim Vice Chair for International Affairs Natalie Williams stated that the election for the Vice Chair for International Affairs will occur later in the meeting. Ms. Williams thanked everyone for their help. Ms. Williams stated that she will be meeting with the Director of International Scholars next week and the International Advisory Committee at the end of October.

Vice Chair for Equity and Access' Report

Vice Chair for Equity and Access Esther Agbaje congratulated Jonathan Lukens, the new 2008-2009 Vice Chair for Research Students elected during the Research Council meeting earlier in the evening. Ms. Agbaje reported that all University Committees had been filled except for the PennInTouch Refresh Committee. This committee is important in that it deals with PennInTouch, the system that tracks student transcripts and billing. Ms. Agbaje stated that the Pluralism Council will be meeting on October 16th and if any member would like to attend to let her know. GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that the Schools of Design, Law and Wharton are still missing representatives on the University Council. If a University Council representative is not selected from amongst each school's GA representatives, then the school government leaders will be asked to select a University Council representative.

Vice Chair for Student Life's Report

Vice Chair for Student Life Nikki Thorpe stated that the GAPSA Townhall meeting will occur on October 22nd at 6pm. Ms. Thorpe stated once a new location is finalized then a flyer will be distributed. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Townhall meeting will probably be located in Bodek Lounge of Houston Hall immediately following the University Council meeting. This Townhall meeting will be part of a multipronged, focusing on housing this year. Mr. Rennekamp asked the General Assembly representatives to notify their school government leaders of this meeting to help with publicity.

Vice Chair for Finance's Report

Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward stated that this Friday the GAPSA Finance Committee will be reviewing the student groups' fall requests for funding. Ms. Heyward stated she will present these numbers at the next General Assembly meeting. Ms. Heyward announced that Gabrielle Wong, a PhD student in the School of Medicine, will serve as the Deputy Vice Chair for Finance. The Finance Committee will be meeting from 5-7 pm on Friday on the second floor of the Graduate Student Center.

Vice Chair for Social Activities' Report

Vice Chair for Social Activities Jessica Kim stated that the recent Phillies game, Barrister's Happy Hour and Dock Street Happy Hour were all successes. The School of Arts and Sciences happy hour is tentatively set for October 23rd and the location is being confirmed. The Social Activities Committee chose October 30th to be the date for the Annual GAPSA Halloween Party held from 10pm-2am at Fusion Grill and Social Club. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Halloween Party is a GAPSA tradition and encouraged everyone to attend. Tickets to the November 1st trip to Atlantic City are currently on sale at the Graduate Student Center.

Vice Chair for Student Programs' Report

Vice Chair for Student Programs Christina Arlt stated that the Terror Behind the Walls trip was a big success. Both the Linvilla Orchards trip and the second Schuylkill River Kayak Trip are sold out. The Student Programs Committee is currently organizing more events.

Vice Chair for Communications' Report

Vice Chair for Communications Alexandra Kotsovos had nothing to report.

Vice Chair for Operations' Report

Vice Chair for Operations Sarah Smith had nothing to report.

Ad Hoc Committee for the Campus Climate Survey

GAPSA representative Lee Solomon had nothing to report.

Ad Hoc Committee for GradFest

First Vice Chair Alejandro Hagan stated that the GradFest Committee will give a presentation later in the meeting.

Follow-up Questions

There were no follow-up questions from the Assembly.

Special Election

GAPSA Representative Omar Khan was selected the new 2008-2009 Vice Chair for International Affairs.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

Approval of Deputy Vice Chair for Finance and Deputy Vice Chair for Research

Mr. Rennekamp stated that Gabby Wong will serve at Deputy Vice Chair for Finance and Leslie Warden will serve as Deputy Vice Chair for Research Students. There were no objections to this.

Motion to Further Fund GradFest out of the GAPSA Surplus

First Vice Chair Alejandro Hagan stated that GradFest began two years ago and is still young in terms of event planning. Graduate and professional students wanted to have an annual event similar to the undergraduate students' Spring Fling event. At the time, an event similar to this did not exist. Instead of having separate events at each of the graduate and professional schools, GradFest brings together all graduate students for a day. In the past there have been GradFest events such as Quizzo, happy hour, picnic food, and other events. Celebrating with GradFest is an appropriate time to also celebrate the end of the academic year. Mr. Hagan stated that the GradFest Committee this year is dedicated and dynamic and hopes to organize different events and expand GradFest09's schedule. In the past, 1000 graduate students have purchased tickets for GradFest. Mr. Hagan stated that it is important for the graduate and professional schools to help with GradFest publicity so even more graduate students will attend. Mr. Hagan showed a GradFest08 video, which will also be available on the GAPSA website.

Mr. Hagan put forward a motion that "GAPSA will match dollar for dollar the amount that the GradFest09 Planning Committee fundraises during the 2008-2009 academic year, up to \$12,000."

With this commitment from GAPSA, the GradFest Committee could then approach the administration for funding. In the current state of the economy, it would be too difficult for the GradFest Committee to fundraise \$40-50,000 on its own. GAPSA representative Tim Shokair asked what would occur if the committee raises more than \$12,000. Mr. Shokair asked would the GradFest Committee require the total \$12,000 stated in the motion. GradFest Committee member Ty-Quyen Nguyen stated that this funding would help for next year's GradFest Committee. Mr. Shokair noted that last year the General Assembly voted to help fund GradFest after the fact since the allotted budget ended up coming up short. Vice

Chair for Finance Christa Heyward stated that GradFest was funded through the Student Programs budget. Mr. Hagan stated that it is important for the funding to be in place before the GradFest event and not after the event has occurred. This is so the GradFest Committee will know exactly what its budget is.

Mr. Rennekamp stated that in order to discuss a motion, this motion needs a second. GAPSA representative Henry Friedman seconded. Ms. Heyward stated that the GAPSA funding of GradFest09 would come from the GAPSA surplus, which totals about \$149,000. GAPSA representative Heidi Khaled noted that if the GradFest Committee is only able to raise \$6,000 then it would require the full \$12,000 from GAPSA. Ms. Khaled asked why \$12,000 is not automatically given by GAPSA to the GradFest Committee. Mr. Hagan stated that the GradFest Committee still must be honest and work hard to fundraise for GradFest. This creates value for the students that attend. The administration is pleased when the students fundraise for events and fundraising gives the GradFest Committee more leverage. Mr. Friedman stated that the matching funds motion is appropriate and noted that the motion does not prevent GAPSA to giving a lump sum in the end once GradFest funding has ended. Mr. Friedman asked whether the fundraising amount includes vendor fees, donations or any money that they collect. GAPSA representative Chrissy Caggiano suggested comparing funding amounts given by the administration to Spring Fling and to GradFest. Mr. Hagan stated that every student pays the General Fee and the Undergraduate Assembly receives funding for Spring Fling out of the General Fee. The Undergraduate Assembly thus has a larger budget for Spring Fling than GAPSA has for GradFest and the administration does not favor one event over the other. GAPSA representative Jason Parris asked what type of fundraising is involved. Mr. Hagan stated that corporate sponsorships are the major part of fundraising, with different levels of donations. Mr. Hagan stated that \$20,000 was raised last year. The GradFest Committee will work with the Office of Business Services to pinpoint key sponsors. Ms. Arlt asked if the GradFest Committee ends up asking the administration for a \$15,000 match, why doesn't the committee ask GAPSA for a \$15,000 match. Mr. Hagan stated that the amount asked from GAPSA should not be too small or too large. GAPSA representative Susan Haas asked about the structure of the motion, whether there would be included a maximum liability for GAPSA and for fundraising. Ms. Haas asked if GradFest would not be held if a certain threshold of funding is not attained. Mr. Hagan stated that the benchmarks presented are from past GradFest numbers and the GradFest Committee is researching consolidating events and cutting costs. Mr. Hagan stated that there would be no ultimatum and there is no amount at which the committee would decide to not hold GradFest. The committee is committed to organizing and holding GradFest. Ms. Haas asked if the committee would approach GAPSA later for more funding. Mr. Hagan stated that besides this current motion, there is no plan to approach GAPSA for more GradFest funding. Mr. Friedman noted that Mr. Hagan previously stated that there will be no provision to prevent the committee from approaching GAPSA later for more funding. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the committee is counting on corporate dollars and administration funding to help hold GradFest. Mr. Rennekamp stated that if these sources of funding do not work out then the committee may need to approach GAPSA again for more funding. GAPSA representative Corbett Brown suggested reviewing past GradFest events to discern which were not well attended and cut these from the GradFest schedule. Mr. Hagan stated the GradFest Committee will post the GradFest Follow-up Surveys to figure out what aspects of GradFest08 worked and what did not and the reasons for these. Mr. Hagan stated that this year is a critical year for GradFest so it can prove itself to become a Penn tradition. Mr. Rennekamp called the motion to question. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion on GAPSA Focus Issues for 2008-2009

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp proposed that the General Assembly consider focus issues for the 2008-09 academic year. These issues would include what topics the Executive Board should discuss with the administration and what the Standing Committees will pursue. GAPSA representative Henry Friedman motioned and GAPSA representative Lee Solomon seconded. Mr. Rennekamp stated that if any member has a specific focus issue to let the Executive Board know. The Executive Board previously did some follow-up from last year on pertinent issues for graduate students. However, it is important to understand what the General Assembly deems important. GAPSA representative Maria Yuan stated that in Wharton, students are unsure of what GAPSA is and what its goals are. Ms. Yuan asked what issues GAPSA can affect, change, and see results. Mr. Rennekamp clarified stating what GAPSA is able to accomplish. Vice Chair for International Affairs Omar Khan stated that for international students finding jobs during school is difficult. There exists work-study programs for undergraduate international students but no for graduate international students. Mr. Khan stated that there is no easy way to contact international alumni.

Ms. Heyward asked how many students are aware of the GAPSA weekly emails and if there are any problems sending these emails to the schools' listservs. Ms. Kotsovos asked if the School of Engineering is continuing to have problems sending these emails as there have been difficulties in the past. Mr. Khan stated that he has been receiving the GAPSA weekly emails but they have been arriving late. GAPSA representative Olga Shebanova stated that it is not possible to get ahold of all the engineering students email addresses and the engineering administration is resistant to this. Ms. Shebanova stated that if an engineering student does not sign up for a specific listserv then he or she will not receive the GAPSA weekly emails. Mr. Rennekamp stated that he and Mr. Hagan will look into this issue. Ms. Kotsovos stated that each school has a different email setup. GAPSA representative Leslie Warden stated that the School of Arts and Sciences had in the past a similar problem and SASgov approached the administration to gain access to the student listserv. A Representative from Wharton suggested holding an email address drive where the GAPSA representative goes to the school and motivates students to sign up. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this would be a good idea and will follow up on it. Ms. Heyward stated that there used to be on the GAPSA website a tab for students to add themselves to the GAPSA listserv. Ms. Kotsovos stated that she is currently working on this but students will only be added to the GAPSA weekly emails and not the monthly all-school emails. Mr. Parris stated that GAPSA committees should be discussing this as it is not efficient to discuss this as an entire body.

Mr. Friedman stated that transportation is also an issue and that Penn Transit discontinued the Octobus. However, a stop on the Penn Transit route where the Wawa used to be located on 20th and Locust is now a corner by an abandoned building, which used to house a Wawa store. Mr. Friedman stated that this is not a safe location for the bus to stop. Mr. Friedman stated that Penn Transit must be alerted to what is useful to the students. This issue would be useful for a Student Life committee to discuss but it is important for the entire General Assembly to support this issue. Mr. Rennekamp stated that there are a variety of avenues to interact with Penn Transit. The most efficient way to implement an idea is to tie these issues into the larger Penn Compact and sustainability as the University is eager to resolve these issues. GAPSA representative Wenting Li stated that the Penn bus is never on time and the bus schedule is inaccurate. Mr. Rennekamp stated that there is a new Penn Transit GPS tracking system for the buses and information on this is up on the GAPSA website. Mr. Rennekamp encouraged feedback on this issue. Ms. Agbaje asked if there exists a phone application for this. Mr. Rennekamp said to call 898-RIDE. Ms. Agbaje stated that the

person answering the phone does not give out that information. Ms. Thorpe stated that the next phase for Penn Transit is to put a GPS screen at each stop. The funding for this system is already in place but now the system needs to be implemented. Proxy Elise Stuggan stated that the shuttles run infrequently and are not much faster than walking. GAPSA representative Stephanie Wujcik asked what the goals of the administration are. Mr. Rennekamp stated that sustainability and access are at the top of the university compact.

Mr. Rennekamp went on to explain the main focus of the Penn compact. The administration is concerned with Penn being accessible for people who would like to be Penn students. This includes financial aid and international students as well. The administration wanted to engage globally and locally and establish university presence abroad. Travel grants fit into this goal. By engaging locally, Penn interacts with Philadelphia in a positive way, including working with local business owners. Diversity integration and increasing access and integration of knowledge are also included in the Penn Compact. Penn is a large university and can tend to be disjointed. By increasing the flow of knowledge between schools and programs, this will set Penn apart from its Ivy peers. GAPSA is proof of this as it is the best integrated graduate school government compared to its peer institutions. President Guttman is also committed to environmental sustainability. This includes transit, bike use, and public transportation use. The Office of the Provost is concerned with any issue that is academically focused. This includes interdisciplinary awards, academic event funding, and travel grants. If GradFest can have more of an academic focus, the Office of the Provost will be more interested in helping fund GradFest.

Ms. Haas stated that the Annenberg School of Communication has a large number of students with children and that diversity could include access for people with families. In the Penn Compact, there is no mention of families. Hutchinson Gymnasium was closed so that dependents can no longer access a free gym, and now a Penn student cannot obtain a Penn Card for their dependent to ride the Penn bus without the Penn student being with them. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this is also an important issue and a forum for people with dependents should be created. Ms. Haas noted that these students will not be able to attend the GAPSA Townhall meeting as they have families. Ms. Haas suggested holding a digital Townhall. Proxy Margaret Fleetwood noted that it is important for GAPSA as a student government to help these students have a voice. Masters programs also have students with families and a digital Townhall would be appropriate. These students cannot obtain funding if they do not have a student government helping them get access to funding. By having better representation, these students will see a more fair distribution of funding. GAPSA representative Yoonjee Kim stated that in Chicago there is an agreement between the schools and the transit authority to provide access to public transportation. Ms. Thorpe stated that GAPSA has actively been pursuing this issue. There already is a 20% discount on transit passes, 10% provided by Penn and 10% provided by SEPTA. SEPTA will not sign another agreement due to the fact that there are several other universities in the Philadelphia area. The implementation of this initiative would be up to the Penn administration. But providing more of a discount on SEPTA passes would detract from Penn Transit ridership. Mr. Friedman stated that some students have families and it would be appropriate to create a committee specifically for familial concerns. Mr. Rennekamp stated that a committee could be created if someone would be willing to chair it. Mr. Rennekamp stated that it is important to think about what should be proposed before a motion is made. Ms. Haas stated that the average graduate student age is rising and the Campus Climate Survey would be an important place to gather information on this issue. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this could be a component of the survey. Mr. Rennekamp stated that by creating a committee for familial concerns would not be confining the issue to a committee. This committee would make

recommendations to the General Assembly, and then the GA acts on these recommendations and this is how GAPSAs functions.

This issue will be placed on the Executive Board agenda. Ms. Heyward stated that anyone can suggest issues that GAPSAs should address on a school-wide level. Ms. Haas stated that people with ADD are on the verge of dropping out and lowering the university graduation rate. Ms. Heyward asked if this would be specific to the Research Council. Mr. Rennekamp asked if this issue would be specific to the individual schools.

Mr. Rennekamp stated that last year speakers were invited to talk to the General Assembly but this year time should be spent on what the General Assembly believes is important. If any representative would like someone to speak on a specific issue there are resources on campus to do this. GAPSAs representative Leslie Warden asked to invite the Director of the Graduate Student Center, Anita Mastroeini, to discuss what groundwork has been laid for students with dependents. Mr. Friedman suggested discussing the fate of the postal lands and who owns it. Ms. Heyward stated that there are no plans for the postal lands to contain graduate student housing.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.