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## **Minutes of the Research Council Meeting on October 8, 2008**

The third regularly scheduled meeting of GAPSA Research Council was convened on October 8, 2008 at 6:22 PM in the Terrace Room in Cohen Hall.

### **Special Election**

GAPSA Representative Jonathan Lukens was elected the new 2008-2009 Vice Chair for Research Students.

### **Research Council**

Vice Chair for Research Students Jonathan Lukens stated that if any Research Council member that would like to serve as the Deputy Vice Chair for Research Students to email him. Last year, one of the duties of the Deputy Vice Chair for Research Students was to take minutes during the Research Council meetings. Mr. Lukens stated that he would be in charge of travel grants. Mr. Lukens asked the Research Council members to notify him of the issues each school's student government is concerned about. This is important to prioritize advocacy issues in this upcoming year.

### PhD Exit Survey

Mr. Lukens stated that the PhD exit survey results are left over from the previous year and asked what the status of this survey was. GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that during the meeting with Associate Provost Andy Binns the answer to this question remains the same – that the Office of Institutional Research is still compiling the data. Institutional Research is a division of the administration that reports to Joann Mitchell Vice President of Institutional Affairs. There is 10 years' worth of data that have not been compiled yet. The Office of the Provost has been focusing on the National Research Council data instead of the PhD Exit Survey. Since 2005, the NRC has been compiling PhD program information from different institutions and should be released within the next few months. The Office of the Provost has said that Institutional Research has been short staffed and is now working on the PhD Exit Survey. The data from this survey will be presented to the Graduate Council of the Faculties but there is no definitive timetable detailing when this will occur. Mr. Rennekamp also stated that the Office of the Provost has argued that when the NRC data is released then the data from the Exit Survey will not be needed as similar information will be included in the NRC data. Mr. Rennekamp pointed out, however, that the NRC program categories do not completely line up with Penn's graduate program categories. Mr. Lukens asked in what format the Exit Survey raw data is currently in. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the data is most likely formatted in an Excel sheet as the survey is filled out electronically. Mr. Lukens stated that there are several Research Council members who can analyze the raw data from the survey. Mr. Lukens asked who the contact person is in the Office of the Provost. Mr. Rennekamp stated that it is Karen Lawrence. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this issue must continually be brought to the attention of the Office of the Provost. GAPSA has not asked that information contained in the Exit Survey be made public ; it would remain confidential.. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the administration should be aware of the survey's value in discerning which graduate programs are not meeting standards. One of the functions of the Graduate Council of the Faculties is to review academic programs. There would be no reason for the Graduate Council of the Faculties to ignore information contained in this survey. Mr. Rennekamp suggested speaking to Institutional Research directly since the Office of the

Provost only collects the data. Mr. Rennekamp suggested holding a meeting with VP Joanne Mitchell since the NRC data collection and processing is mostly completed except for the evaluation methodologies. Mr. Rennekamp suggested that the Research Council draft a statement concerning the importance of the PhD Exit Survey and the use of the past 10 years' worth of survey data. GAPSA Representative Lee Solomon asked if Institutional Research analyzed the first Exit Survey data and never analyzed later years' data. Mr. Rennekamp stated that he was unsure of this. Mr. Lukens stated that he has heard that the remaining data is raw and unanalyzed. Mr. Rennekamp stated that it is not sensible to create a survey and not analyze the data gained from it. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the raw data should be a good data set. However, the data does not include information concerning PhD students who dropped out and left the University before completing their programs. The PhD Exit Survey is called a "requirement for graduation" but this isn't enforced. Proxy Margaret Fleetwood noted that the PhD students from the School of Medicine do not complete the PhD Exit Survey. Ms. Fleetwood stated that in order to have all graduating PhD students complete the survey, something should be withheld to prevent graduation. Mr. Lukens stated that the survey needs to be updated. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Research Council can move forward with recommending updates for the survey, which could be made to the Office of the Provost. GAPSA representative Leslie Warden stated that the survey is completed when PhD students are happy since they are graduating and there may be a bias. Ms. Warden stated that there should exist surveys for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year PhD students to complete. These extra surveys may also contain information on students that potentially could drop out of their programs in the near future. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the NRC data should contain attrition rates. However, when the NRC information is finally released, it will be at least 4 years old. The University paid a great deal of money for the NRC data which may not even be current once it comes out.

#### Travel Grants

Mr. Rennekamp stated that the deadline for Research Travel Grant applications is this Friday, October 10<sup>th</sup>. The GAPSA website stated that the deadline was October 3<sup>rd</sup> but since previously there did not exist a Vice Chair for Research Students, the deadline was changed to October 10<sup>th</sup>. When the new GAPSA website was unveiled, the deadline date was stated incorrectly as October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mr. Lukens asked what the usual turnaround for travel grant application approval is. Mr. Rennekamp stated that approval of travel grants should be completed by the end of October. Mr. Lukens will send out an email to the Research Council members to schedule a meeting to review travel grant applications. Mr. Rennekamp stated that he was unsure of the current number of completed travel grant applications.

#### Vice Chair for Research Students Notice of Absence

Mr. Lukens stated that he will be absent on November 19<sup>th</sup>, as it will be his birthday. In addition, Mr. Lukens will be absent at the end of January.

#### Students with Dependents

Mr. Lukens stated that last year issues concerning students with dependents were ranked in the Research Council priorities. Mr. Rennekamp stated that at the first Research Council meeting the accepted proposal for the new Family Resource Center was given out to the Council members. The money has already been allocated for this center, which will not be a day care center, but a place where parents can visit. There will be play areas and breast feeding areas. The dependent cannot be unsupervised at this center but a babysitter may take

the dependent to the center. The center will also be a place for co-op networking with other parents. The issue with the Family Resource Center is not funding the funding but rather finding a location. The center location must fit many criteria in that it must be in a safe location with an elevator and stroller accessibility. There are also high standards to which a child's play area must meet. The center must also be located in a central area on campus. There are many groups on campus competing for limited space. As of now, the University has not been able to designate space for the Family Resource Center. The GAPSAs Executive Board has been continually asking the administration about this issue. The Research Council could list ideas for a location. The other issue is that if a location will be in a named space, it has a specific donor contributing to the location, and a location will be found more quickly. The Family Resource Center does not have a specific named donor backing the project. The FRC will also be partly managed by the Graduate Student Center, so the FRC location must be close to the GSC. The idea is to use currently existing space, not to construct a new building. GAPSAs has wanted the FRC location to be in the GSC's basement. However, the basement of the GSC is currently occupied by the Office of the Chaplain as the Religious Activities Commons. The RAC location must also meet specific standards and requirements, such as hand washing facilities and a quiet area. The RAC would need a space for large groups. The Office of the Chaplain has stated that the GSC basement is the ideal location for the RAC. GAPSAs representative Leslie Warden asked if this issue is germane to the Research Council discussion. Mr. Lukens stated that this issue should be backed by the entire General Assembly. GAPSAs representative Tim Shokair asked the number of graduate students with dependents. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the exact number is unknown but self reporting by graduate students shows 3% of graduate students with dependents. However, this number may be larger. Mr. Shokair suggested researching to determine the percentage of research students with dependents versus the percentage of professional students with dependents. Mr. Rennekamp stated that Princeton University changed their endowment spending policy and currently it spends a large amount of money on its student parents. However, Princeton does not have many graduate students enrolled. For Penn to compete with Princeton, Penn would need to spend more on its graduate students. Mr. Lukens stated that a Penn graduate student's stipend may only cover child care expenses and nothing else. Mr. Shokair stated that this is a large issue for students with dependents but a small issue for those students without dependents. GAPSAs representative Susan Haas stated that there are many dependents enrolled at the Penn Alexander School. Ms. Fleetwood stated that if graduate students with dependents received more funding or facilities, more graduate students with dependents may apply and enroll at Penn. Ms. Warden stated that this issue is not only confined to PhD students. Ms. Warden stated that people may be willing to go back to professional school if resources for their dependents exist. Mr. Lukens stated that it would be more effective if the General Assembly collectively represented this issue.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00pm.

Submitted by

Sarah Smith  
Vice Chair for Operations