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## **Minutes of the General Assembly Meeting on November 19, 2008**

The fifth regularly scheduled meeting of GAPSA General Assembly was convened on November 19, 2008 at 7:33 PM in the Golkin Room in Houston Hall.

### **Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum**

Present were: Andrew Rennekamp, Alejandro Hagan, Mat Abramsky, Christa Heyward, Nikki Thorpe, Christina Arlt, Jessica Kim, Esther Agbaje, Omar Khan, Sarah Smith, Susan Haas, Carla Cue, Leslie Warden, Tim Shokair, Wenting Li, Stephanie Milk, Allison Sullivan, Jacob Uriel, Alexander Balloon, Swathi Madaiah, Raffaele Turco, Frankie Arvelo, Lee Solomon, Jacqui Simonet, Johanna Busch, Kathleen Mechler, Corbett Brown, Liz Noll, Karuna Patil, Henry Friedman, Anthony Willis, Maria Yuan and Matt Walters.

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.

### **Special Presentation by Anita Matroieni, Director of the Graduate Student Center**

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp asked if there were no objections to move the presentation by Anita Matroieni, Director of the Graduate Student Center, up on the agenda. There were no objections.

#### Grad Student Center Resources for Student Families

Ms. Mastroieni stated that her presentation's topic concerns resources available for students with children. The website has changed its name from Students With Dependents to Students with Children as this was confusing to international students. In the past, resources were available for students with parents in elder care, but studies showed that the numbers of students utilizing these services was minimal. In addition, students without children were attending events intended for students with children. The name change will eliminate this confusion and make it clear what resources are available. The new website contains two sections, one for events and one for resources. The website's first page describes the program. There is also a listserv for students with children. In the Upcoming Events section it states that there is a brunch and playdate for students with children on the first Saturday of every month. This past Saturday students brought three infants and three toddlers. Most students bring their partners and some bring the grandparents. Ms. Mastroieni is encouraging all students with children to attend GradFest. Also on the website is a link to ongoing events on campus, such as weekly events at the Women's Center. At the bottom of the Events page is a list of family friendly things to do on campus and Philadelphia. The Website's Resources page lists all resources available on campus. One of the resources is the PennCard Office. Ms. Mastroieni stated that if the student's partner obtains a PennCard then he or she can access the libraries on campus. There are also lactation rooms and changing stations on campus and the website lists these locations. There is also a section on health insurance and

how to enroll children. This is not covered on the stipend if the student is in a PhD program. There are no specific recommendations for health insurance on the website. Also on the website is information on health care, student health services and childcare. The Penn Children's Center has a waiting list of approximately two years for students, faculty and staff. The website lists other options such as West Philly day care centers and other facilities in Pennsylvania. Housing issues are referred to the Office of Off Campus Services. On the website is a list of schools in the area and parenting resources such as the Grad School Mommy Blog. At the top of the Resources page, there is a link to the University's Childbirth Policy which was recently expanded to include fathers and adoptions.

#### Penn Transit Options for Student Families

A spouse or domestic partner may use Penn Transit if they obtain a Penn Card; otherwise, they must accompany the Penn Student, as up to two guests may travel with the student. GAPSA representative Susan Haas stated that she went to the Penn Card Office to ask questions and discovered that no Penn Cards are given to dependents unless they join the gym. Ms. Mastroieni stated that this is true. Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward stated that this depends upon how old the child is. Ms. Haas stated that in order for a dependent to receive a Penn Card and not join the gym, the student's department must sponsor the child. Ms. Mastroieni stated that it did not seem appropriate to give a child a PennCard as the child's picture will change over the years. The picture must reflect who the child is. Ms. Mastroieni stated that if the child is older, it will create issues. Ms. Mastroieni recommended that the child should join the gym. Ms. Haas also stated that there is no after school care and if the child wants to take the Penn Transit bus home, he cannot do this by himself. Mr. Rennekamp asked the reason the policy concerning children and PennCards changed. Ms. Mastroieni stated that the Director of the PennCard Center stated that the student cannot prove that the child is their own. People were either abusing the system or there was too much potential for system abuse. Ms. Haas suggested that the parent's picture could be put alongside the child's photo on the PennCard. Ms. Haas noted that the policy change is penalizing everyone for potential abuses. If the students focus on the safety issue, then it is to Penn's advantage as the cards will identify the children. Ms. Heyward stated that the PennCards will help separate out the students' children from other children on campus.

#### Penn Gym Options for Student Families

Ms. Mastroieni stated that Hutchinson Gym is free for students, staff and faculty, but spouses must pay \$150 per year for gym access. Ms. Mastroieni noted that a PennCard is required for access and the cost is less than paying for access to Pottruck. Ms. Haas stated that Hutchinson Gym used to be the only place graduate students could take their kids swimming for free. Ms. Mastroieni stated that children at Hutchinson are not a priority and the pool at Hutchinson Gym is now closed. Ms. Mastroieni stated that she spoke with the membership office and discovered that access to this gym is not free for everyone anymore, including students' children. Ms. Haas noted that for children under 5 years of age were admitted for free. Ms. Heyward asked what the policy is for children at Pottruck. Ms. Mastroieni stated that there is a membership fee for children to access Pottruck and a PennCard is required. Mr. Rennekamp asked the reason the policy is changing at Hutchinson. Ms. Mastroieni stated that it is most likely a revenue issue and Hutchinson is in need of repairs. The long term plan for Penn is to construct a nanatorium on east campus. This would be similar to the one in Beijing, but this will not be built for many years. Ms. Haas asked if it would be worth advocating to include in this future plan that students with children 5 years of age and under could use the facility under the parents' memberships. Ms. Mastroieni stated that she

believes children under 5 years of age can access Pottruck for free. Ms. Mastroieni stated that any policy put in place will be independent of the building but it would be important to begin advocating now and to raise questions as the facility is under construction. Ms. Mastroieni stated that the PennCard policies can be addressed now and that she could discuss these issues with the PennCard Office. Ms. Mastroieni noted that the PennCard Office is part of Business Services, which is a revenue generating entity. Ms. Haas stated that if the on campus daycare service is inadequate what other options are available.

#### Childcare Service Options for Student Families

Ms. Mastroieni stated that the on campus service is crowded but is a wonderful facility if the student can wait on the two year waiting list. Ms. Haas stated that the West Philly day care facilities do not meet criteria of funding and safety. Ms. Haas asked why there is no recognition or advocacy for Penn in West Philly. Ms. Haas noted that there are empty storefronts in West Philly and these could be turned into better after school care options. Ms. Haas noted that Saint Mary's only accepts children up to age 5. The amount of available after school care is a large factor when students with children are deciding to come to Penn. Ms. Mastroieni stated that Penn employees have also been advocating this issue, as the two year waiting list not only applies to students but faculty and staff as well. Ms. Mastroieni stated that since Penn acquired the postal lands, she has attended Townhall meetings and advocated for a second additional daycare center. Ms. Mastroieni stated that she is unsure if this will progress. Ms. Haas stated that this request is backed with statistics. Ms. Mastroieni stated that two years ago Human Resources conducted a large study and the daycare resources for faculty and staff are woefully underserved. If the students' data is included then the situation is even worse. Ms. Mastroieni noted that questions concerning children cannot be asked when students are applying to Penn, so no comprehensive data exists. The Graduate Student Center conducted its own voluntary survey and 400 students reported that they had children who were minors and another 120 students reported that they were planning to have children before graduation. Ms. Haas stated that many parents are not answering surveys as they are too busy. Ms. Mastroieni stated that she has submitted the numbers obtained from the survey but requiring an answer from students concerning children is a privacy issue and there is no appropriate way of assessing the entire population. This cannot be conducted through Health Services either. Ms. Heyward stated that at Harvard, the exact percentage of parents filling out its surveys as one of the questions asked if the student had children. Mr. Rennekamp noted that this survey was conducted after the students were admitted. Ms. Mastroieni stated that Penn conducts an Exit Survey of PhD students and this gives a snapshot of students who progress this far in their studies and who will actually graduate.

#### Graduate Student Center Building Renovations

GAPSA representative Henry Friedman asked if there are any renovations planned for the Graduate Student Center. Ms. Mastroieni stated that there will be installed an ADA approved push button for wheelchair entry into the Graduate Student Center's side door. This addition will be completed in the spring. Ms. Mastroieni noted that there were many renovations last year and that GAPSA helped fund this.

#### **Special Election**

Natalie Williams was selected the new 2008-2009 Vice Chair for Communications.

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## Reports

### *Chair's Report*

#### Proposed Speakers for GA Meetings

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp displayed a list of proposed speakers for the remaining General Assembly meetings. Mr. Rennekamp noted that the issues to be discussed were previously voted upon. The schedule is tentative, however, from February onward and is subject to change based on speaker availability.

#### General Assembly Meeting on December 17<sup>th</sup>

Mr. Rennekamp entertained a motion to cancel the General Assembly meeting on December 17<sup>th</sup>. Vice Chair for Equity and Access Esther Agbaje motioned. GAPSA representative Lee Solomon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### *First Vice Chair's Report*

First Vice Chair Alejandro Hagan had nothing to report.

### *Vice Chair for Professional Students' Report*

Vice Chair for Professional Students Mat Abramsky had nothing to report.

### *Vice Chair for Research Students' Report*

Vice Chair for Research Students Jonathan Lukens had nothing to report.

### *Vice Chair for International Affairs' Report*

Vice Chair for International Affairs Omar Khan stated that the International Council is focusing on three areas: employment, financial aid and cultural integration. The Council is formulating plans with specific goals concerning these issues. Mr. Khan stated that he hopes to achieve these goals by April 2009.

### *Vice Chair for Equity and Access' Report*

Vice Chair for Equity and Access Esther Agbaje stated that the Pluralism Council will be meeting tomorrow night at 7pm at the Graduate Student Center.

### *Vice Chair for Student Life's Report*

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Daily Pennsylvanian Housing Article

Vice Chair for Student Life Nikki Thorpe stated that there was a housing article in the Daily Pennsylvanian opinion section and that she and Mr. Rennekamp were interviewed for it. The article ran on November 13<sup>th</sup> and the author did a great job in discussing graduate student housing issues.

Landlord Survey

Ms. Thorpe stated that the Landlord Survey was posted yesterday on the GAPSA website and encouraged everyone to give information on their current living situation. Many people have been submitting surveys and the GAPSA website was even overloaded for a short period of time due to this.

*Vice Chair for Finance's Report*

Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward had nothing to report.

*Vice Chair for Social Activities' Report*

Vice Chair for Social Activities Jessica Kim stated that the first GAPSA formal event will be the Black and White Formal, held this Friday at Miss Tootsie's from 8pm-2am. Tickets are still available, which will include admission and a plentiful buffet of soul food. Ms. Kim stated that the Wine Pairing event sold out again, despite obtaining extra tickets. Ms. Kim stated that due to this event's popularity, she will explore the possibility of holding another event in January.

*Vice Chair for Student Programs' Report*

Vice Chair for Student Programs Christina Arlt stated that the tree planting event with UC Green was a success with over 100 people from West Philly attending. There will be another tree planting event next semester. The Dinner at Roy's was also a success. On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, there will be an event where students will cook meals for children and families at the Ronald McDonald House between 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> on Chestnut Street. Ms. Arlt stated that students can sign up for this by going to the Events page of the GAPSA website and clicking on the Graduate Student Center link. The trip to see Hairspray on December 4<sup>th</sup> has sold out. There will be an ice skating event on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup> and will cost \$4.

*Vice Chair for Communications' Report*

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that any pictures of GAPSA events should be sent to Vice Chair for Communications Natalie Williams at the [gapsa.pr@gmail.com](mailto:gapsa.pr@gmail.com) address to be posted on the GAPSA website. Mr. Rennekamp also informed the Assembly that the Executive Board, acting on behalf of the Vice Chair for Communications, had approved \$1,000 to be spent on GAPSA T-shirts as part of GAPSA's ongoing publicity campaign.

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*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 had nothing to report.

**Follow-up Questions on Reports**

None

**Follow-up Actions on Reports**

Approval of Appointments to the International Student Council

Mr. Khan stated that the International Council had 10 seats when he was elected. Since then, Mr. Khan has decided to add five more seats and currently three of these extra seats have been filled. Ms. Heyward stated that there seems to be an overrepresentation of Wharton students on the International Council. Mr. Rennekamp noted that Wharton is a large school. Mr. Khan stated that Wharton students enjoy participating on the International Council. Ms. Heyward asked if potential members simply apply to join the council. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this was part of the survey of all committees. Ms. Agbaje stated that she sent International Council information and applications to interested students. Ms. Heyward stated that former Vice Chair for International Affairs Anne-Katrine Arnold wanted to ensure that there was representation from many schools. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the current International Council members have enough school representation and that the Council will thrive with interested members. Ms. Heyward noted that the School of Engineering has many international students yet there are no engineering students on the International Council. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the International Council is new and students may not yet be aware of its existence. GAPSA representative Henry Friedman stated that every member is a Penn student. Mr. Rennekamp stated that one member is actually an American student but was educated internationally. This student is from the FELS School of Government. Ms. Heyward noted that FELS is part of the School of Arts and Sciences. Mr. Friedman motioned to approve the listed council appointees. GAPSA representative Tim Shokair seconded. The motion passed with two opposed.

Approval of Appointments to the Pluralism Council

Ms. Agbaje presented the list of Pluralism Council appointees who are from different schools and applied over the summer. Ms. Agbaje stated that the representatives from

underrepresented groups on campus are not yet finalized. The names listed are the students on the Pluralism Council. Ms. Heyward noted that she should be included on this list as she sits on the Diversity and Equity Council. Mr. Rennekamp stated that Ms. Heyward's name should be included in this list. GAPSA Representative Alexander Balloon asked if the students, since they applied over the summer do not attend meetings what the course of action is. Ms. Agbaje stated that she would discover the reason for members not attending and will remove any who repeatedly do not attend. Mr. Balloon motioned to vote on the displayed list of Pluralism Council appointees including Ms. Heyward's name. Mr. Friedman seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## **New Business**

### Resolution concerning Resources available for Students with Children

Mr. Rennekamp entertained discussion concerning the Students with Children presentation. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the GA can propose specific actions for GAPSA. Ms. Haas stated that several years ago Ms. Mastroieni spoke to parents at Annenberg and the same answers were given then. The response seems to be that there is nothing that can be done. Ms. Haas stated that she would not like to see GAPSA take that stance. Mr. Rennekamp noted that Ms. Mastroieni was stating that there was nothing that she could do, however GAPSA has more influence and can accomplish certain things that University staff cannot. Ms. Heyward stated that GAPSA could draft a resolution to have the University consider day care options in the Postal Land (PennConnects) construction plans. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this would be appropriate. Ms. Haas stated that it is possible that the University is not willing to obtain accurate data but that GAPSA could create a resolution to obtain data on students with children. Ms. Haas asked if GAPSA could also obtain data on faculty and staff. Ms. Heyward stated that the original survey in question was in fact a GAPSA survey. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this issue refers back to GAPSA possibly conducting a Campus Climate Survey issue. There is no survey that reaches the entire graduate and professional student population. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the information might also be obtained at the school level. Ms. Haas asked if there is another option. Mr. Rennekamp stated that GAPSA could again run a students with children survey, but this would be a self-reported system and neither GAPSA nor the University administration can force students to disclose whether or not they have children. Mr. Balloon noted that there is an immediate need for childcare on campus and someone needs to make the decision to solve this issue. Mr. Balloon asked to decouple the issue of childcare from the Postal Lands (PennConnects) development, as it is a long term project. Ms. Haas stated that in the long term, this coupling would be ideal. However, in the short term the University has the power to decide to whom to rent store front on the street level. Ms. Haas suggested that the University subsidize income forgone and create a day care center from a vacant store front. However, this will require advocacy and time. Mr. Rennekamp stated that GAPSA should not have the attitude that nothing can be done concerning this issue. GAPSA also should not have to come up with a precise solution, but rather draft a resolution stating that the need is there. Also included in this statement could be the issues of the PennCard and the gym situation. Ms. Haas stated that there should be a group on campus who can come up with ideas and to demonstrate that there are viable options. GAPSA Representative Stephanie Milk stated that several years ago, a Vice Provost within the University [editorial note: the Vice Provost's name has been censored] attempted to address this issue but it was discovered that spouses of international students were providing child care services under the table. She did not want to take this opportunity away from them as they cannot work and earn money. Ms. Haas asked if the names and addresses of

these people could be made public. Mr. Friedman asked if there is an organization for faculty and staff concerning this issue since it is a problem from them as well. Mr. Rennekamp stated that such an organization does exist; the Faculty are governed by the Faculty Senate and the staff are governed by the Professionally Paid Staff Assembly (PPSA) and the Weekly Paid Staff Assembly (WPSA). Mr. Friedman suggested working with these organizations and combining the efforts as it is a common issue. Mr. Friedman asked if this issue could be brought up with the Facilities and Campus Planning Trustees Committee. Ms. Thorpe stated that the Trustees should not be the first place to bring up this issue, but the issue certainly falls under Student Life. Mr. Rennekamp stated that a GAPSA resolution should be created before approaching the Trustees. Mr. Friedman suggested sending GAPSA representatives to these other organizations so that the issue may be pursued jointly. Mr. Rennekamp stated that typically GAPSA interaction with the Faculty Senate is through the Executive Board members. Mr. Rennekamp stated that it would be useful if the General Assembly determines the goals before approaching the Faculty Senate. GAPSA Representative Jacob Uriel suggested drafting a resolution encouraging the Faculty Senate to take similar action, have the University solve the problem and respond to the situation with a timetable. Mr. Uriel stated that this is not the first time this issue has come up. Mr. Uriel suggested that GAPSA create a statement in writing and vote on it. Mr. Uriel recommended Ms. Haas to create the statement. GAPSA Vice Chair for Student Life Nikki Thorpe motioned that she, GAPSA representative Jacqui Simonet, and GAPSA Representative Susan Haas jointly draft a resolution and send it to the General Assembly. Mr. Balloon seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the discussion was tabled.

#### Resolution Concerning Bag Checks in Van Pelt Library

Mr. Uriel suggested GAPSA draft a resolution concerning the requirement in Van Pelt Library of a student opening his or her bag upon leaving. Mr. Uriel noted that this is not required at Fisher Fine Arts and that Van Pelt has machines to detect if books are being stolen. Mr. Uriel stated that the security guards require students to open their bags but the guards don't look inside the bag. Mr. Rennekamp stated that Mr. Uriel should draft a motion to present to the Assembly.

#### **Announcements**

Mr. Friedman announced that he attended the Penn Transit meeting and if anyone has questions concerning this to speak with him.

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.