
Vice Chair for Equity & Access January 2009 Report

Introduction

The Vice Chair of Equity & Access is the coordinator of graduate and professional student representation on campus. The Vice Chair is also the convener of the Pluralism Council. This year the council has sought to make diversity at Penn a more visible aspect of graduate and professional student life. The GAPSA Pluralism Council is meant to be the forum where representatives from a variety of student groups can meet to discuss issues that pertain to their specific constituencies. The goal is to ensure that underrepresented students of different ethnicities, sexual orientation, or non-traditional students feel welcome and comfortable on Penn's campus.

Pluralism Council Membership

Members of the Pluralism Council come from all of the 12 graduate and professional schools. The majority of council members are also part of an underrepresented graduate student groups. The most visible groups on campus are Black Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (BGAPSA), Latino/a Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (LaGAPSA), Asian American Graduate Student Association (AAGSA), LGBT Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (Lambda Grads), Six Directions (Native American Students), Muslim Student Association, and Parents @ Penn.

Goals and Achievements

By November all of the university committees that offered graduate student seats had been filled. Graduate and professional students are represented by students from all of the 12 graduate and professional schools, a balance of men and women, and as much diversity representation as possible.

As Pluralism Council is beginning to lay a foundation for future years, it is one of our objectives that we reach out to as many underrepresented students as possible, especially at the beginning of their Penn life. The idea is to ensure that students are aware of the different affinity communities to which they could belong if they so desire. We also want to be a forum where we can make students aware of the services available on campus.

We plan to outreach to students first and foremost through the web. We have asked and received support from at least five of the 12 schools to inform their diversity populations about Pluralism Council. This will include sending messages on our behalf or behalf of the student groups in order to reach a wider audience. Outreach efforts will also encompass developing a one stop diversity webpage. Before entering Penn, many students search Penn's website to get a better understanding of graduate and professional student life. The GAPSA website does a great job of listing events and contacts within the General Assembly that students can access. The Pluralism Council would like to see a webpage developed that guides students towards different diversity destinations for graduate students.

In order to make the Pluralism Council a more visible part of GAPSA, we are looking to develop a signature event to take place in conjunction with the rest of the GAPSA community. Part of that will include a Grad Club Day at the beginning of the year to be a physical display of what we will offer on the web. For the spring 2009 semester, we hope to have a part within GradFest09 to showcase the different cultures and student hubs through a variety of shows that all students can visit during the festival.

By meeting these objectives we will lay the groundwork of making diversity at Penn more interactive and more inclusive. We begin by supporting the underrepresented groups through advocacy with the university administration and, if possible, additional funds. Yet we also want to be sure that each of these student groups also interact with each other in a positive and supportive way. Already certain leaders are taking that initiative by having multi-group activities, such as the 2008 Election Night Watch Party, where BGAPSA, LaGAPSA, Lambda Grads, and AAGSA came together to watch the historic 2008 Presidential Election. In order to be more visible not only do we need to contact new students early, but we must also keep them engaged.

Budget Update

As follows is the budget allocated to the Pluralism Council by GAPSA. It also shows how much we have used to this point in the year. We have two upcoming events currently planned: Ice Skating and GradFest09 – Showcase. For the Showcase we plan to support student groups with some funds as they prepare for their part of GradFest09. This should see the rest of the money used appropriately this year.

GAPSA Pluralism Council	Budgeted	Allocated	Spent
General Expenses	\$4500	\$3000	\$100

Submitted by Esther Agbaje, Vice Chair for Equity & Access