

**VISION STATEMENT FOR A  
GRADUATE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE**

Presented by the  
**Graduate and Professional Student Assembly**  
Cornell University

Presented to the Cornell Community  
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# INTRODUCTION

## What is the Graduate Community Initiative?

The Graduate Community Initiative is a vision presented to our University by the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly to address critical issues in graduate student life at Cornell. We propose that it is time for Cornell University to actively and meaningfully discuss what kind of graduate student community we would like to foster on campus. Employing an integrated and proactive approach, the Initiative brings interconnected elements together in conversation, moving away from reacting to individual problems and towards proposing innovative, global solutions. Such a Graduate Community Initiative will enable Cornell to direct, support, and protect undertakings that nurture a cohesive graduate and professional student community, with an emphasis on improving graduate students' quality of life at Cornell.

## Why a Graduate Community Initiative?

### The Need

*Graduate students—one of the most diverse and intellectually engaged constituencies on campus—lack an overall sense of community. This leads to a systemic disengagement that undermines Cornell's academic goals.*

**Graduate students make up a third of the student population at Cornell**, with over 6,000 enrolled in Ph.D. and professional programs from the Law School to Art History, from Development Sociology to Veterinary Medicine. Grads are also **the most diverse population of students** at Cornell, representing not only every ethnic group within the USA but also almost every country on the planet. Grads teach a wide variety of classes, often have more direct **hands-on relationships with undergraduates** than professors do in their roles as Teaching or Research Assistants or Freshman Writing Seminar Instructors, and fuel the many labs at Cornell from the Life Sciences to the Nanotechnology Center.

Yet, it is a sad fact that **graduate and professional students alike feel disenfranchised from the wider Cornell community and undervalued by the university as a whole**. While undergraduate facilities, residences, financial aid, and student services have prospered in the past few years, graduate and professional students remain on the edge of campus concerns. Several deeply interconnected issues compromise the quality of graduate student life, and may even build antagonistic relationships between students and university departments. For example, Maplewood housing complex, once conceived of as a temporary residential unit, is at the end of its life-span, and the allocation of units in Hasbrouck to undergraduate students threatens the survival of this family-friendly international community. Lacking adequate housing on campus and averse to run-down Collegetown, grads are high-volume users of public transit and purchasers of costly parking passes to accommodate their commutes, which often occur at odd hours of the day and night.

**Infrastructure to support exchange among graduate students is also lacking**. On a social and intellectual level, grads tend to stay siloed within their departments or schools, and professional students are even further distanced from central interactions in largely self-sufficient buildings on the fringes of campus. The Big Red Barn, the Graduate Student Center, is suffering from its own success, bursting at the seams in spite of its renovation 10 years ago. Lacking a well-equipped central

space on campus or a strong residential presence, graduate students remain a disparate community, remaining in their labs or libraries, or in their professional schools, especially if they are as remote from Central Campus as Weill Medical College, Qatar -- or even the Vet School.

## The Precedent

**The last several years have seen a dramatic shift in the undergraduate experience at Cornell.** Embracing the Residence Life Initiative, the university has successfully implemented a long-term vision for undergraduate quality of life, engaging students and faculty members, and changing the campus landscape for the improvement of the undergraduate residential experience. While not yet complete, both the physical plan of the campus and undergraduate life have been radically and positively transformed. And as we move forward with the implementation of our **Comprehensive Master Plan**, including its recommendations for redressing the issues of graduate student housing and a student center, it is time that Cornell engages in a discussion about the kind of community that graduate and professional students need, and what kinds of physical, social, and academic changes are required to bring this vision to fruition

**Several of our Ivy League peers have already taken this approach to their Graduate Student body.** In 1991, Harvard University constructed its Graduate Student Center, the first of a suite of buildings among Ivy peers (including Cornell's own Big Red Barn). Yale's McDougall Graduate Student Center is considered an example in the field, combining a beautiful Gothic Revival building, outstanding resources from career assistance to mental health support, a late-opened café and space for student organizations. Institutions from the University of California, Irvine to University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to Boston College have come on board with proposals for student centers that serve a wide range of graduate student needs, while the University of British Columbia has undertaken a building program of integrated housing units along the 'College' model established by Oxford and Cambridge. As an overall approach, Dartmouth University has instituted a Graduate Life Initiative to turn the university's attention to this small portion of its population, including housing, transportation, and a community center as their primary goals.

## The Benefits

While we cannot predict the future, it is clear that **the benefits of a Graduate Community Initiative are manifold and deep.** Integrating this diverse, intellectually exciting community into the wider whole at Cornell can only serve to **energize our campus**, from undergraduates to faculty to staff. Fostering connections between graduate students across schools and fields promotes not only **lasting friendships but also business and academic relationships** that may only strengthen with time. A corpus of graduate student alumni could prove to be **generous donors** to Cornell University, perhaps choosing to give money to the institution that supported this stage of their intellectual development over their undergraduate institutions. Finally, the Initiative will facilitate **recruiting and retaining** outstanding scholars, researchers and citizens from around the world not only at the graduate level, but the undergraduate and faculty levels as well.

Aside from the benefits of implementation, there are benefits in Graduate Community Initiative's **integrated, interdisciplinary approach** to problem solving. Graduate student issues – such as crises in housing or parking – are often dealt with in piecemeal fashion as they arise without a view for the bigger picture of graduate student life and community at Cornell. However, each of these pieces of the puzzle is interrelated to the whole. A systematic vision for graduate student life at Cornell could tackle and resolve many of these issues at their core. Such an approach would benefit the entire

campus community and significantly improve graduate and professional student life at Cornell to be on par with, if not exceeding, that at our peer institutions.

## Our Vision

Today we present a **shared vision**, collaboratively achieved by the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly of 2006-2007. The core ideas were developed over the course of the year, including a dedicated retreat in January of 2007, and a sustained discussion at the Council of Representatives meeting in February. The document itself has been co-authored by several Assembly members to represent these conversations.

This document has three parts:

**The first is three requests of the University** which should be at the core of our discussions over the next few years and which we hope the University will move swiftly to implement. On the next page we outline these three requests and describe them in more detail in subsequent pages.

**The second part is a collection of issues that, while not specifically a part of the three requests, ought to be considered in conjunction with these requests.** The issues represent ‘The Chronicles’: those concerns which remain constant in graduate student life and which we hope an integrated approach to graduate community may help to resolve.

**The final part of this document is a conversation** that we hope will ensue upon its release. On the one hand, we welcome comments from our constituents, our advisors, and our administration on the specifics of its recommendations. But on the other hand, we hope that this document will begin discussions in earnest around the issue of graduate student life. The GPSA looks forward to fostering this discussion in the years to come with all interested parties, from Trustees to professional students, from Ph.D. candidates to the President’s Office.

## I. THE VISION

### Open Doors: Towards a Graduate Student Center

- *That Cornell invest in constructing an **expanded Graduate Student Center** that can better accommodate and foster both academic and social interactions among Graduate and Professional Students.*

### Open Hearts: Career Resources for Graduate Students

- *That Cornell focus and develop a **Graduate Resource Center**, co-located with the Student Center, that brings together career resources for graduate students and their families*

### Open Minds: Integrating the Graduate and Professional Student Community

- *That Cornell explore options for **integrating the graduate and professional student experience**, taking interdisciplinarity a step further by expanding possibilities for cross-departmental collaboration and student development.*

## Open Doors: Towards a Graduate Student Center

*That Cornell invest in constructing an expanded **Graduate Student Center** that can better accommodate and foster both academic and social interactions among Graduate and Professional Students*

There has been a recent national trend for universities with a graduate & professional student population to build and renew graduate and professional student centers. As the population of graduate students grows statistically younger, many students are including quality of life as a basis for their decision to attend a particular school in addition to the quality of an academic program. Therefore, with a rising demand for graduate student services, we propose that an effective student center at Cornell should:

- Provide a centralized space for graduate life initiatives, including career and family resources, mentorship and teaching workshops, and cross-departmental communication.
- Increase cross-departmental socialization with such recreational facilities as a shared common room, a bar and pool tables, as well as space for official events such as lectures, workshops, and meetings.
- Meet graduate programming demands with flexible multipurpose spaces available to various graduate and professional student organizations.
- Provide a centralized office space for graduate and professional student leadership, including the GPSA, club offices, and graduate intramural offices.
- Enhance the sense of graduate and professional student identity on campus, improving mental health and general well being, thus encouraging retention rates and degree completion.
- Provide resources and services currently lacking such as multipurpose rooms, a place for study, recreational space and extended food service hours.

Universities around the United States are seeking to improve the quality of life for graduate and professional students with extensive programmatic offerings through a central graduate student center. The Dudley House at Harvard, for example, runs a comprehensive set of programs to address all aspects of graduate life. On the pragmatic side, it hosts a monthly dinner that allows graduate students to network with distinguished members of the Harvard and Boston community and learn from their practical experiences. However, it also is the hub for the Dudley Orchestra, Chorus, and Jazz Band, as well as hosting numerous literary, film, art, and other social events. The McDougall Center at Yale hosts a Graduate Teaching Center with numerous programs to help graduate students become effective teachers, thus benefiting both the graduate students and the undergraduates they will instruct. Its facilities also address both the professional and personal needs of graduate students; it has a meeting space capable of seating 100 people and providing access to advanced audio-visual equipment, as well as a game room well-stocked with numerous board games and foosball to allow for stress relief. As a final example of the growing trend, the University of Pennsylvania Graduate Student Center provides numerous spaces for graduate student events, ranging from rooms that can accommodate 60 people down to small intimate settings. It hosts language chats for students wishing to practice foreign languages, organizes public service events, is home to the graduate-undergraduate mentoring program, and serves as a single unified resource for students to turn to when they have questions ranging from navigating the university administration to living in Philadelphia.

Cornell's current graduate and professional student center, the Big Red Barn, is a well-loved institution among the graduate and professional community. Yet despite this success it simply does not have the resources to provide the level of support that these peer institutions provide, and thus it places Cornell at a disadvantage in attracting the best and the brightest graduate and professional students. Indeed, the Barn is currently not meeting the needs of Cornell's graduate and professional student population. For example, it is too small to accommodate more than one special graduate event at a time. Nor is it structurally designed to serve the variety of purposes graduate centers at other campuses serve; it is in fact a single room barn. While this adds to its charm and to graduate students' affection for the building, the size, services, and structure of the Barn are too constricted to meet the community needs of the Graduate and Professional Student Body. When coupled with a programming demand for the Big Red Barn at *three times its current capacity*, this results in graduate student organizations being turned away with inadequate alternatives. These organizations must resort to holding events and meetings in academic facilities which are ill-suited to their needs, thus further restricting graduate and professional students to the scholastic parts of campus. There is no social alternative. This was made starkly clear when this past February the Barn closed for a month due to structural problems. Many organizations were forced either to cancel their events or to move them at the last minute. Even the most consistent social outlet for graduate and professional students, Tell Grads It's Friday (TGIF), was canceled because there was no alternative space available to hold this uniformly well-attended weekly event.

The provision of a graduate and professional student center via substantial physical improvements to the Barn or elsewhere on campus could provide several meeting spaces and multipurpose rooms, one of which may serve as a place for study and/or other recreations. Thus, such a center could host multiple events nightly while also serving as meeting space for several organizations. Technology improvements are also essential. The Barn does not have appropriate technology for multimedia presentations, film showings, or video/teleconferencing. A sound system, televisions, projectors and storage space are a must. Flexibility is important in design and center planning; thus, such a center could be one of the first places on campus for accommodating a mid-sized event (400-800 people).

Moreover, an expanded graduate and professional center could greatly improve the physical and mental well-being of its student body. For example, graduate and professional students are often on campus outside typical course hour blocks, and campus cafeterias usually close down by nine at the latest. Therefore, we propose extended food service hours at the Barn allowing provisions for graduate and professional students through midnight. As well, the inclusion of a reading lounge and a recreation space in the center would give graduate students a place to go when they need a break to re-energize before returning to the lab or library but cannot take the time to return all the way to their homes. Finally, given the overwhelming success of TGIF in bringing together graduate students, and with many international students lamenting a socio-cultural gap in graduate activities, we propose a pub which will serve a variety of domestic and international beer and wine. This would provide an excellent multicultural and cross-departmental atmosphere for social interaction.

This new Barn would not only serve as the center of graduate and professional student life, but would also serve as a nexus between graduate students and other members of the Cornell community. Having an active pub on campus would bring faculty to interact with their students on a more personal level. Graduate and Professional Students could also hold advancement nights at the Barn where graduates students would share a drink with senior undergraduates looking for advice on how to pursue advanced study. The new Barn would be a centralized resource center to answer graduate students questions about where on campus – and in Ithaca – to go for their myriad of professional and personal needs.



Indeed, this expanded Barn would be a hub of services for graduate students. In addition to potentially hosting a career center and offices for programming staff, it could provide office space for the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, which serves as the voice of the graduate and professional student body to the administration and the rest of campus. Each professional school student government organization has office space; so does the undergraduate Student Assembly and many other student organizations. The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA), however, does not, making it increasingly difficult for our organization to maintain a solid foundation. A Graduate Student Center could serve as a central meeting place for the elected graduate and professional leadership as well as a place to hold office hours for other graduate and professional students. Allocating a centralized and available meeting space for graduate and professional student life would make the GPSA better able to represent our student body and give a strong, known presence to our leadership.

An improved Graduate & Professional Student Center would have impacts far beyond the ability to host events. Providing a home for graduate students across campus, a sacred space and a functional space to support lively interactions among students, can improve the mental health and general well-being of graduate and professional students. Furthermore, higher quality students and researchers will not only be attracted to Cornell but will emerge from Cornell, reflecting the quality of both graduate and professional student education and university efforts invested in its well-being. Graduate and professional students may be more likely to stay in their programs of entry and may improve timing of degree completion. Such a social environment would encourage students to build and maintain connections between and among diverse cultures and fields of study.

## Open Hearts: Career Resources for Graduate Students

*That Cornell focus and develop a **Graduate Resource Center**, co-located with the Student Center, that brings together career resources for graduate students and their families*

Graduate school provides an opportunity to hone one's intellect, exercise one's creativity and develop critical thinking skills necessary for success in a variety of disciplines. With ample information and career resources, the world should be full of opportunity for graduate students who emerge from Cornell. As part of the Graduate Community Initiative, the GPSA proposes that the university create a Career Resource Center for Graduate and Professional Students. The center's mission should be two-fold: to provide career services for students and their partners during their time in Ithaca, and to smooth the transition between graduate school and the workplace. Specific examples of such career services could include:

- Increasing academic career resources for graduate students including workshops on how to give job talks, post-doctoral grant processes, how to write grant applications, giving academic papers, composing book manuscripts, and similar topics of importance.
- Exploring opportunities for matching graduate student spouses with career resources in the Ithaca area. Many students choose not to attend Cornell because their spouses are unable to find employment in the local area. While we recognize that this is a priority with faculty hires, some consideration must be given to incoming graduate and professional students.
- Expanding information sources and online matching services for temporary and summer internship positions for graduate students. This would truly benefit graduate students who lack work experience yet who are considering a non-academic career trajectories. Such options also eases the recruitment process for employers from New York or other, more distant, cities.
- A series of workshops and panel discussions to address graduate students' needs for academia and industry, such as Resume/CV building opportunities, in the form of seminars and one-on-one meetings with counselors.
- Access to extended alumni database for job related consultation and networking. If the graduate students get strong support during their job searching process at Cornell, they are more likely to carry on the tradition by helping out future students. They also tend to be loyal alumni and generous donors to the University.
- Legal advice capable of advising international students, as well as domestic students wishing to work abroad.
- An entrepreneurship program that will help build the local economy and keep graduate student talent in the area. The Johnson school, Hotel School and Applied Economics and Management already has successful model in place. The next step would be to extend the practice into all the relevant fields and make Cornell a fostering land for entrepreneurship.
- Expanding the "Cornelltrack" website, which currently focuses on undergraduates, to include Ph.D.'s and Masters' students.
- Working with best practices from the professional schools to maximize career-matching, and conducting a career survey among the newly graduated PhDs for suggestions towards our career service.

The current career services for graduate students are limited, dispersed, and not widely publicized. The University Career Service Office in Barnes Hall mainly serves undergraduates' needs. This is well reflected from their brochure statistics, their resume samples, their career related counseling and the campus-wide job fairs. And while they have made significant strides towards improving services for graduate students in the recent past, this information is difficult for graduate students to access. While many professional students are well served by their local program offices in their professional schools, research and Doctoral students find it difficult to locate the services they require with respect to both professional and academic career paths.

The Director of Graduate Student Life in Caldwell Hall assumes the responsibility of graduate student-focused career service. However, the job requires far more attention than the current position's workload permits. Other Ivy League Institutions such as Columbia have multiple full-time positions for simply their graduate career services. At Cornell, in contrast, there is only one person who handles not only career services, but is also responsible for new student orientation, graduate student life and crisis management. This current resource allocation is not optimal to cover graduate student needs.

Career services are often provided by the individual schools and colleges. The Veterinary College, for example, puts on an annual Career Connections Forum, where students get to meet over 50 different practices and even interview for jobs or internship opportunities. Johnson School, Law School, Engineering College, ILR School and other professional programs as well as the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences have their own career resources. Best practices could be adopted from these already excellent programs. However, PhDs in Arts and Sciences, Physical Science and Humanities are left uncovered. Their training is mostly focused on academia, but relies almost exclusively on their department to develop their marketable academic skills. If students want to look into alternatives outside academia, they face an information asymmetry. They do not know how to find internships; they may not have the right connections to gain access to industry; they do not have enough experience to assess which path is optimal for their career development. If proper information is provided through career services, counseling and job fairs, their transition into both academic and nonacademic careers could be much smoother.

Finally, a large number of graduate students are married, and the decision to move to Ithaca significantly impacts their spouses. Relocated partners are at a loss in terms of finding jobs at Cornell, in Ithaca, or in the surrounding area. Many are unable to work due to visa constraints but cannot find fulfilling volunteer opportunities in the community. Some find positions in New York City or elsewhere, meaning lengthily weekend commutes and marital strain during an already stressful period. A large number of accepted students simply choose not to come, choosing institutions in larger cities to optimize their spouse's career potential. While we recognize that this is a problem for faculty recruitment as well, no current services exist to help ease graduate student spouse's transitions to the Ithaca area.

The best possible career outcome for graduate students is dependent upon the provision of career services and field specific training that focuses on graduate student needs. We strongly believe that these needs are distinct and unique from the needs of the undergraduate population. For that reason, the development and provision of career services should be specific to the graduate student population.

# Open Minds: Integrating the Graduate and Professional Student Community

*That Cornell explore options for **integrating the graduate and professional student experience**, taking interdisciplinarity a step further by expanding possibilities for cross-departmental collaboration and student development.*

Cornell's most outstanding professors are famous for their interdisciplinary engagement: computer scientist Graeme Bailey is a concert-level pianist, Mars Exploration Rover scientist Steve Squyres credits his acting training for developing his science communication skills, and Nobel Laureate chemist Roald Hoffman has followed his internationally acclaimed play, *Oxygen*, with poetry and regular Science/Art events in New York. Indeed, this kind of well-rounded interest in other fields and the cross-departmental collaboration it inspires can be taken as one of the healthiest indicators of a University's commitment to interdisciplinary and open-minded exchange. It also encourages students and faculty alike to achieve balance in their lives and take advantage of the extraordinary opportunities and people that Cornell offers, even while achieving excellence in their own fields.

Graduate students, however, are certainly not expected and often not allowed to take advantage of such opportunities on campus. While program requirements vary, grads are rarely encouraged to participate outside of their major and minor field departments. Rather, the demands of their research or their advisors may hold them to a particular lab, library or project, without support or encouragement for intellectual and personal breadth. While some departments have an intellectual interest in common that might encourage collaboration, in some cases internal exchange is compromised, for example, between a department's Masters' students and their Doctoral candidates: this is especially the case in the Professional schools.

The Graduate Community Initiative proposes that Cornell University could be the place where the open-minded, well-rounded and engaged graduate student is attracted, retained, and supported. Building on the strengths of the established disciplines and programs at Cornell, we suggest exploring overhead policies that can develop this kind of community and encourage exchange both on the level of the department and at the level of the university. We submit the following suggestions for exploration and discussion:

- Construction of graduate student housing communities along the college model to develop interdisciplinary scholarly communities: these may be self-sufficient units or co-operative townhouses centered around a community center and dining hall with a lecture series or some other activity of broad intellectual appeal.
- Better communication between departments indicating 'what's on' across the campus that might be of interest to students in other fields; this is especially important where fields might overlap in interest.
- Better leveraging of international student skills, languages, and value to the campus. An enormous proportion of graduate students are from other countries and this must enrich the domestic experience, instead of always requiring foreign students to adapt to local customs and values.
- Development of mentorship networks among and between graduate students, undergraduates and faculty: for example, increasing positions for graduate student residence advisors in

undergraduate residence halls, establishing mentorship roles for non-advising faculty, and supporting this kind of exchange among the community.

- Broad-based teaching workshops for grads that incorporate best practices from various fields, such as Chemistry or Veterinary Medicine. This should include support networks, courses on “teaching science”, for example, and the possibility of earning a Teaching Certificate upon completion of workshop courses.
- Academic and professional job training for graduate students, perhaps as optional workshops with certificate status. Such workshops must be at times when graduate students can attend.
- Incorporating or increasing the value of committee members from minor fields to reduce the advisor’s role as an ‘occupational hazard’
- Investigating ways to credit graduate students for extracurricular activity to encourage or at least support some breadth: i.e. participation in a club or sport, achieving foreign language proficiency, studying abroad, taking a class in another department, or taking up a leadership role on campus
- Supporting events and activities that encourage social cohesion such as:
  - Inter-departmental socials
  - The annual Grad Ball
  - Brown-Bag luncheons
  - Coffee hours
  - TGIF and Grad Night Out
  - Movie nights
  - International Food Tasting
  - Grad-targeted alternative engagements: especially non-alcoholic or family-oriented events.

An expanded Student Center could easily provide a location for many of the above-mentioned programs. The most significant of the above points, however, is sustained attention to graduate and professional student housing, which we will discuss in more detail in the following section. Attractive facilities with multiple options for communal living (apartments, townhouses, etc) and central spaces that promote interaction, whether a dining hall or a gym, will provide an environment for students from across campus to forge meaningful relationships outside of their schools. The GPSA is heartened by recent attention from Campus Life with respect to revitalizing graduate and professional student housing: we hope that this issue will remain on the table and we look forward to continued collaboration with relevant departments as they evaluate different models for the graduate and professional residential experience.

## II. BROADER ISSUES OF CONCERN

The following are brief summaries and reference points for issues to keep in mind while addressing Graduate Community. These are long-standing issues of concern to graduate and professional students across the board (known as “the Chronicles”), and have come under scrutiny in a variety of surveys and other activities both in the GPSA and in external departments. Note that these issues are highly interdependent and require considering graduate and professional students sometimes alongside faculty, sometimes alongside staff, and sometimes with undergraduate students, depending on the context.

### Housing

The success of the Residence Life Initiative has demonstrated how attention to residence facilities can dramatically transform the student experience. Study space, social space, communication infrastructure, adequate exercise facilities, dining and other services can support and enhance a vibrant community of scholarly and interpersonal exchange. An opportunity exists to transfer these valuable lessons to the graduate residence experience.

Many of Cornell’s peer institutions recognize the need for graduate and professional student housing to provide affordable, convenient and accessible housing to Graduate and Professional students. These institutions offer housing for as many as 70% of their Graduate and Professional students, yet Cornell only offers 14%. There are complaints that these locations are not full, but this does not indicate a lack of interest, but rather lack of adequate facilities. While families are well-served by the exemplary Hasbrouck Housing Complex, other students who wish to live in campus housing are faced with the old-fashioned dorms of Schuyler (a twenty minute walk from campus), or the dilapidated Maplewood Housing Complex, featuring low lighting, cramped quarters, and minimal atmosphere. It is no wonder that such a small proportion of students choose housing and of those who live in Maplewood the first year, very few if any choose to return. And graduate housing communities that are somewhat successful are vulnerable to the whims of external departments: Hasbrouck will be hosting up to 90 units’ worth of undergraduates this coming year by order of Campus Life, and the Law School recently took over a large number of Hughes Hall units for faculty offices.

Cornell must move swiftly to prioritize housing for graduate students. The ease of access to near campus housing can help mitigate stress on the community’s transportation, allow students easy and timely access to their academic needs, build vibrant communities that foster support for graduate and professional students, and help international and many first year students become integrated to the Cornell community, without the stress of finding an apartment (note that 64% of contract holders for graduate student housing in 2006 were international students). Not just any housing will do: the Ithaca community has made up for Cornell’s insufficiencies and local landlords already house grad students in Fall Creek, and lower Collegetown. Cornell must be able to compete with these local options with attractive, affordable units, well-equipped community centers featuring gym equipment, dining hall options, and outstanding programming. Living in on-campus housing is currently an option that grads are discouraged from taking, but attention to grad student needs and community building can go a long way towards changing this trend.

*Refer to the Graduate and Professional Student Housing Census 2006 for more information.*

## Transportation & Environment

The GPSA was closely involved in the recent Transportation and Environmental Impact Statement survey, which was issued as a referendum to our constituents: that 50% of graduate students responded shows the high priority and dissatisfaction associated with transportation. According to the T-GEIS results, “an overwhelming majority” of both undergraduate and graduate students alike (at least 70% of grads) believe there should be *no restrictions on graduate student parking permits*, while undergraduate permits should be restricted. In addition, the large majority believe that the ratio of parking spaces to the Cornell community is too low. Indeed, Transportation is almost certainly the number one issue of concern, frustration and even anger that Cornell graduate students face on a daily basis: nothing can make the most docile graduate student turn hostile like Transportation.

The vast majority of graduate students rely heavily on public transit. Indeed, the implementation of the free bus pass for incoming students as of 2005, while far-sighted on the whole, is seen by most grads to have missed the most significant community of need: most senior graduate students who have spent \$200 of their stipend every year for bus passes feel neglected and slighted by Cornell while their more junior colleagues may ride for free. Regardless, this transit on which graduate students rely so heavily does not always suit their needs, but is rather built around a staff workday time-table to support broader ridership trends. As a result students who live in Maplewood over the summer are often without transit to the campus, students who work odd hours in the lab can easily miss the last bus home, and students who live even farther out are simply without option. Thus students with difficult class, lab, or library schedules often choose to drive to campus occasionally at night or on weekends to satisfy their schedules. The elimination of visitor parking spaces in central campus for short-term needs and the extension of reserved lot parking hours has proven detrimental to graduate students.

Undergraduates rarely drive to campus as they live in residences or close by in neighboring Collegetown. But graduate students live farther away from campus – whether down the hill in Fall Creek, up the hill in Varna, or even in outlying districts such as Dryden or Freeville. The cost of parking is prohibitive: grads must pay the student rate of over \$650 for a yearly pass, which yields only the most basic privilege of parking in B-Lot on the edge of campus, requiring a bus commute to central classes. Many students whose studies and work-related duties require irregular hours are adversely affected by this policy. For example, veterinary students pay this fee every year, as their program demands that they be in animal surgery within 15 minutes of a call, day or night. Residents in campus housing with cars must pay the same amount just to park near their unit. A large number of students instead choose to commute into an Ithaca lot – at Pyramid Mall, or on the Commons – and take one of the regular shuttle buses to Cornell from there: after all, a bus pass is cheaper than parking on campus.

At the same time that graduate students require adequate parking options, they also care passionately about the environment and want to do their part for creating a sustainable campus. But in spite of this consistent interest in alternative transportation solutions, no currently-extant solution eliminates the need for feasible graduate student parking. Transportation and Parking Services’ general policy over the past few years seems to be one of general suppression of parking on campus. Although grads consistently vote in favor of flexible options, particularly when their schedules are erratic, Parking does not seem to trust graduate students to choose these options when needed and appropriate. But why should there be a reduced fee for staff or faculty who choose to carpool, while grads must simply split the cost of the higher-priced student permit, especially when grads are the most likely group on campus to carpool? Why are there no options for sliding scale parking permits for occasional use, particularly mitigated by such factors as weather-permitting biking or the purchase of

a transit pass? Why not reserve a special number of day passes for graduate students in need, open more central metered parking, or open a graduate student night lot? While grads consistently chose flexibility, options such as books of passes or occasional lots or ridesharing, and believe that restrictions on graduate student permits should be loosened and fees reduced (note that \$650 is, to a graduate student, constitutes a significant restriction), these suggestions have fallen on deaf ears.

*Refer to the Transportation and General Environmental Impact Survey for more specific information on graduate transportation needs and attitudes.*

## **Child Care**

Though a minority of graduate students has young children, Cornell must recognize the need for support of these students. Currently, childcare grants are available to graduate students, but fees can be high and prohibitive and time away from research is costly. Cornell is also opening a new on-campus child-care service, with space for the children of graduate students – something that many of its peer institutions have already done. However, Cornell is still lacking in some areas – policies for family-related leave are unclear at best, and students have expressed concerns about the availability and cost of childcare services.

Addressing the needs of those students with children for childcare and other family-services will allow for a diverse graduate student body, as graduate students will not feel the need to choose between attending Cornell and the needs of their families. Including graduate students' families in the mix requires such actions as: the formalization of a university-wide policy on family leave for graduate students; instituting a sliding scale for child care service payments and ensuring that relevant grants keep pace with expenses; and securing care for emergencies and non-traditional hours that reflect graduate student needs and schedules.

*Refer to the GPSA's 2005 Pay and Benefits Survey for more facts on grads and childcare.*

## **Diversity**

**Graduate students are the most diverse student population at Cornell.** Women make up approximately 45% of the community, although they are under-represented in Engineering and the Johnson School of Management. About a fifth of graduate students are minority, under-represented minorities and permanent residents. And in the graduate school, 43% are international students, with 18% international enrollment in the professional schools, representing over 115 countries worldwide. On the one hand, this presents exceptional opportunities for diversifying and enriching our campus community were this group of students to be better integrated with general campus life. On the other hand, however, broad-scale policies with the American experience solely in mind will breed discontent among international grads. Whatever policies are put in place under the Graduate Community Initiative must respect, reflect, and enhance the benefits that such a diverse population brings to the Cornell community.

*Refer to the latest Annual Report on the Progress Towards Diversity and Inclusion, and the ISSO's Annual Statistics Report for more details.*



## **Mental Health**

Stress-related mental health issues are the most common complaint among the graduate and professional student population, with good reason. Graduate students may be thrown into a research environment with little preparation for or feedback on their project or performance. The ‘self guided’ nature of their study may mean that they rarely see their advisors. Engineering and science students are cordoned off in small labs sometimes with less than ten students, and find few opportunities to meet others in different fields. Professional students face an intimidating admissions process and an intensive, competitive environment: law students are even pitted against each other in forced grade curves. Graduate and professional students alike often find that they lose their self-sufficiency as they must shoulder income cuts, take out enormous loans, and subject themselves to the whims of their advisors, who may wield extraordinary power over their academic careers. Finally, the majority of graduate and professional students move to Ithaca from afar. They therefore lose their support networks even as they must manage their families and relationships from a distance or relocate their families to the local area, where jobs for spouses are scarce and daycare an expensive prospect. It is no wonder that rumors abound about the higher rates of suicide among graduate students, especially those living in Maplewood Housing Complex.

Rotating CAPS counselors from Gannett have been extremely successful at mediating many of these difficulties. Such counselors visit the professional schools and the International Students and Scholars Office to hold regular drop-in counseling hours at those locations where graduate students feel most at home, or where it is convenient for them to attend in their busy schedules. This program should be extended and supported in more locations on campus. However, in each of these cases, a highly successful pro-active strategy has been the reinforcement of some kind of graduate community. This may be the strengthening of a cohort mentality through shared activities, or it may be the presence of advisors and staff who can lend a friendly ear to these students through difficult times. It is our hope that strengthening community support for graduate students will alleviate some of the sources of situational anxiety and depression on campus by showing grads that someone cares about them, that resources are available to them, and where to go for help.

*An excellent article on graduate student mental health can be found in the Journal of College Student Development (2006) 47:3, 247-266.*

## **Professional Schools and Satellite Campuses**

The graduate student experience is further fragmented at Cornell by the large number of students in professional programs, who often remain segregated from the rest of campus due to shortened degree times, specialized requirements, and self-sufficient buildings. Professional Students are more likely to have been undergraduates at Cornell, and are thus more interested in participating in events like Slope Day than the rest of the graduate student body. However, exposure to services for undergraduates does not necessarily translate into integration into the graduate student community.

For example, the Johnson Business School is by and large self-sustaining, with a rich social life complementing a rigorous academic environment. While many Johnson students take classes outside of the School, they barely scratch the surface when comes to exploring the wealth of resources available to them as students of Cornell University. But despite Johnson students’ tendency to primarily focus on life within the MBA program, many have a strong desire to experience University life outside of the Johnson School and meet graduate and professional students from other programs. A handful of Johnson students attend events held at the Big Red Barn and other University activities, but this number is not significant and could greatly be improved. Due to the fact that the Johnson

School itself has so much to offer, many students fail to recognize the opportunities available outside the business school.

This experience in the Business School is by no means unique: students in the Law School are similarly fragmented from the rest of campus, with an almost self-sustaining college environment complete with residence hall. However, upper class law students (2nd and 3rd years) are particularly anxious to make connections with students outside their insular school. This interaction is difficult to facilitate since they are institutionally cut off from the limited social activities promoted by the Graduate School. For example, law students (along with business and veterinary students) are not subscribed to the weekly emails listing activities at the Big Red Barn. Nor do they receive notification of the campus wide orientation events. Because the law school is on the south end of campus and most law students live in Collegetown or other places south of campus, many students are not even familiar with the buildings on the rest of campus. When combined with the intensity of their short, three year program, these challenges make it difficult for law students to integrate with the rest of campus, despite a strong desire to do so. A comprehensive plan to integrate the graduate community could provide an institutional method of access for law students.

The students in the College of Veterinary Medicine are even farther removed from central campus, rarely if ever venturing beyond the Dairy Bar. In contrast to other Graduate and Professional students, most veterinary students live in locations like Varna or Dryden, and thus transportation is a perennial concern. In addition to tuition and the cost of driving to surgeries, parking passes are considered an outrageous but required additional cost. Although their tenure at Cornell is the longest of Professional students, the last year and a half are in clinical rotations where they barely have time for friends and family, let alone venturing to the Big Red Barn. Therefore, unlike the Law students, it is important for them to be able to make connections with new people in the first few years. Again, these students are isolated from the rest of campus, and any attempt to bring other students in contact would be well received.

In addition to the Professional Schools, many graduate students are based on satellite campuses, such as Weill New York, Weill Qatar or the Agricultural Experimental Station in Geneva. In these cases, many aspects of graduate student life are managed and negotiated separately from those of the Ithaca-based campus because community life on these campuses varies greatly from that of Ithaca. There is little that connects these students to their peers in Ithaca, whether a regular bus service, an exchange program, or shared events. Opportunities for interaction between medical students at the Weill medical schools and researchers in Ithaca would be particularly welcome.

When broader graduate issues are discussed at the main campus, these satellite campuses are often overlooked and as a result, students there are not provided the same standards of service. For example, under the current Health Insurance provider (Chickering), the city of Geneva, its General Hospital and the healthcare facilities at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, are considered outside of the first tier coverage area for medical services. As a consequence, those students who live in Geneva and its surrounding areas must commute to Ithaca for routine and emergency medical services. Such issues raise important questions as to how or if to integrate central campus services across satellite campuses.

In sum, Professional School students would benefit greatly from improved dissemination of information regarding University-wide graduate and professional school events, and opportunities for them to integrate with the wider community, whether commuting to central campus from the Vet School or from Weill New York. The abbreviated tenure of most professional students makes it crucial that they are aware of the resources, social outlets and Cornell's graduate and professional student culture from day one.

## **Graduate Students and the Wider Community**

Unlike the Professional Schools, graduate students are usually isolated from each other but not isolated from the greater Cornell community. Grads teach undergraduate classes, lead seminar discussions, and supervise labs, such that even Seniors may not have much contact with professors but have had their most meaningful education experiences at Cornell with their graduate T.A.s. In addition, graduate students perform much of the laboratory or library work that supports professors across campus, where they often work alongside research staff or other employees. However, in each of these cases a power relationship exists that can place the graduate student at a disadvantage. Research Ph.D.'s do not pay for their education but are rather employees of the university, and their services are scattered across campus bureaucracies that may not always match our needs or communicate with each other. Further, graduate students are among the most economically disadvantaged students on campus, and often feel like second-class citizens to Cornell undergraduates. Finally, many graduate students struggle with their advisors and committee members and feel that, in a situation of strain, they have little recourse other than to leave their programs. As mentioned above, on the Professional Student side the isolation from the outside community is extreme, leaving them with little contact with undergraduates or external faculty or staff.

An excellent way to adjust this balance is to provide graduate and professional students with a variety of ways to build positive relationships with other campus constituencies. Attention to mentorship opportunities are particularly important in this regard and must be expanded campus-wide to include programs for graduates and undergraduates. And just as grads may serve as residence life advisors, mentors, club advisors or coaches to undergraduates, there are many ways to encourage better faculty-grad communication through workshops, social events or sharing departmental best practices. Support and training for research and teaching assistantships will prove invaluable to giving graduate students the skills and confidence they need to succeed. Such an atmosphere of exchange shows how attention to graduate and professional student community need not compromise our students' integration with the rest of the Cornell family. Rather, co-ordination and collaboration between different campus constituencies, from a place of strength, can foster the kinds of interactions that encourage growth, sharing of experiences and life-long learning.

### III. NEXT STEPS

The GPSA does not propose to know exactly how these ideas must be resolved, juggled, and implemented. However, we recognize the value of dialogue and look forward to the conversations and action that ensue. In particular, we recommend the following immediate courses of action:

Step 1. Create a Graduate Community Initiative Working Group consisting of members of the GPSA and all interested University parties, including:

- Vice President, Student and Academic Services
- Dean of Students
- Dean of the Graduate School
- Director of Graduate Student Life
- Director of Graduate and Professional Student Housing
- Director of the Big Red Barn
- Representatives from student life divisions in the Professional Schools
- Representative from Transportation, and from physical plant.
- Representatives from the GPSA
- UA Graduate Representatives
- Graduate Student Elected Trustee

Step 2. Consistent with peer institutions, create a Division of Graduate Student Life or Graduate Student Affairs to centralize resources addressing the social, academic and career needs of graduate and professional students in collaboration with their fields. Note that this Division's location must be clearly articulated with respect to the Graduate School, the Dean of Student's Office, and Campus Life.

Step 3. Initiate public dialogues with graduate and professional students and faculty in conjunction with the GPSA around these ideas to move from discussion to development to implementation.

Cornell is at a crossroads with respect to its graduate and professional students. It is our hope that the University will choose to seize this moment and initiate the kind of dialogue and action that will inject a sense of excitement, engagement and community into our student body.

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