

GPSA Mid-Year Report December 2008

The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) hit the ground running in the fall, thanks to our members' dedication to campus governance. With many members carrying over from the previous academic year, the Assembly met for a team-building and priority-setting retreat at the Cayuga Nature in early September, before official meetings began. The Assembly remains passionate about the Graduate Community Initiative (GCI), and its visions were re-emphasized in three resolutions passed in November. The Assembly is also looking internally during this non-Activity Fee-setting year, and is conducting a budget and charter review. The first two sections of this report describe these foci. The final two sections look to the future, describing some University cost-saving measures and Ivy Summit 2009, which Cornell will host in October.

I. Resolutions

The Assembly passed three resolutions in November. Background on the resolutions, the resolutions themselves, and actions subsequent to their passing are summarized below.

“R.1: Regarding Health Care & Health Insurance for Cornell Graduate Students Studying at Geneva” stems from the third vision of the GCI – Integrating the Graduate and Professional Student Community. Integrating the community is difficult for various reasons, but one is campus separation. Graduate students studying at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY rely on the GPSA for representation to the administration, but because of distance, often do not know how to make their voices heard. In an effort to bridge the communities, GPSA officers and members of the GPSA Student Advocacy Committee (SAC) visited their fellow students in Geneva in August. Members learned that a concern of Geneva students was health insurance coverage, given their distance from Gannett. Thus, SAC made it a mission to learn more about the Student Health Insurance Program, as it relates to Geneva students, and found that outlined procedures related primarily to Ithaca students, both in published material and in information relayed over the phone by Gannett personnel. R.1 specifies a timeline for having publications updated with correct information – in time for the next academic year – and requests continued cooperation between Gannett/the Office of Student Health Insurance and the SAC. Sharon Dittman, Valerie Lyon, and JoAnn Molnar have been helpful throughout this time of learning, and in their response to R.1, stated that its goals are compatible with their own. This action is on-going but has been successful to-date.

Housing is emphasized in the GCI as a “broader issue of concern” and is also discussed in the third vision as a means of unifying the graduate and professional student community. Unfortunately, on-campus housing is an annual concern, especially in light of increased undergraduate and transfer student requests which encroach on graduate and professional student space, and understood undergraduate enrollment increases further threaten that space. Hence, **“R.2: Regarding Graduate and Professional Student Housing at Schuyler House, Thurston Court, and Hasbrouck Apartments”** was passed to emphasize the Assembly's commitment to the issue. GPSA officers met with

Campus Life administrators throughout the summer and fall to discuss alternatives to housing undergraduate students at Hasbrouck Apartments, since this “solution” resulted in outrage and discomfort among graduate and undergraduate students alike in the recent past. Through the resolution, the GPSA maintains a stance that Hasbrouck and Thurston Court should remain for graduate and professional students only, but makes a compromise that Schuyler House may be used for transfer students, if necessary. The resolution also supports reconfiguring Hasbrouck apartments and contracts to better suit the needs of the more than 140 graduate and professional students turned away from on-campus housing last year. The GPSA has worked with Joe Burke on this effort, and one stride forward has already been made. Next year, contracts will be available for two non-related graduate and professional students to live in Hasbrouck apartments, but on-campus housing for graduate and professional students will remain on our sights.

Finally, “**R.3: Regarding Communication with Graduate and Professional Students**” further emphasizes the desire of the GPSA to establish communication with the entire graduate and professional student body. The opt-in GPSAINFO-L listserv now has over 1,400 graduate and professional students subscribed, but this is still a shortfall of approximately 4,600 students. While we understand the issues of privacy and “email overload”, it is the GPSA Communications Committee’s desired duty to educate the entire constituency on issues of campus governance and the Activity Fee. GPSAINFO-L is an environmentally-friendly and low-cost method of doing so. At present, committee members are discussing with Tommy Bruce and Graduate School administrators ways to broaden subscription, but this, too, is unfinished business.

II. Budget and Charter Review

Because our charter does not specify procedures for setting the GPSA budget, the Funding Policy Committee spent much of the fall semester developing a budget, which the Assembly approved in November. The final budget puts revenue from the Activity Fee at par with operational, committee, and special project spending. Included in special project spending are funds for Ivy Summit 2009, which Cornell will host in October. This is discussed in more detail in Section IV.

In December, an ad-hoc Charter Review Committee was formed and consists of a representative from each GPSA internal committee, as well as other GPSA representatives. This committee is tasked with verifying that the Charter is up-to-date according to resolutions passed, with discussing the current visions of the GPSA and whether the Charter suitably delineates these visions, and with developing procedures for setting the budget, since, as noted above, such procedures are not specified. This committee will report back to the entire Assembly in the spring semester.

III. University Cost-Saving Measures

The GPSA supports the University administration’s efforts to pinpoint and implement cost-saving measures, given unsteady economic times. In December, the Council of Representatives contributed the following suggestions:

- Draft and publicize a list of scientific instruments/machinery/services that are available on campus. Graduate students in the physical and biological sciences described work that they have out-sourced to other universities or private laboratories only to later learn that it could have been done at Cornell for cheaper.
- Consolidate printing services in one, central campus location.
- Lower thermostats one degree or more (barring temperature-sensitive rooms, laboratories, etc.)
- Bring more food and coffee vendors to campus, which adds to diversity of choice, enhances community-building, and could provide rental revenue. This revenue could then be applied to Cornell's carbon-neutral commitment.

IV. Ivy Summit 2009

Every October, members of the GPSA attend the Ivy Summit, which brings together graduate and professional student governances from the Ivy League. In 2008, Harvard hosted the three-day event, and five members of the GPSA were funded to attend by the GPSA and Graduate School. The Ivy Summit consists of discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities with others similarly dedicated to campus governance.

Ivy Summit hosting rotates among the participating universities, and 2009 is Cornell's year to host. The GPSA looks forward to this opportunity to showcase Cornell – its commitment to campus governance, its rich history in the Ivy League and as the Land Grant University of NYS, and its beautiful location. Planning is already well-underway to make this a successful event, with much cooperation from the Graduate School. As previously mentioned, the GPSA has already dedicated funds from its budget to this event, and the Graduate School has also been financially supportive. Nonetheless, a conference such as this always requires significant funds. While the GPSA understands current economic hardships, we would welcome and appreciate additional financial support from other University “pots” dedicated to student programs. Again, we in the GPSA are eager and enthusiastic for this opportunity to showcase Cornell as an outstanding institution for graduate and professional students, and we wish for others in the Cornell community to share in our excitement.

Thus describes the efforts of the GPSA through the fall semester 2008 and visions for 2009. Doubtlessly, other issues will come before us that we don't yet anticipate, but we look forward to those challenges and the continued success of graduate and professional student governance, in cooperation with the other Assemblies, with administrators campus-wide, and of course, with our graduate and professional student constituents, whom we serve.

Respectfully submitted,
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President, GPSA