



Cornell University
Graduate and Professional
Student Assembly

Cornell University Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Minutes of the March 1, 2021 Meeting

5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

- I. Call to Order
 - a. D. Dunham called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM
- II. Announcements
 - a. D. Dunham noted that the GPSA was seeking a judge for the Three-Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition taking place on March 18th and directed members to contact him if they were interested.
 - b. Next, D. Dunham reminded members of the Charter amendment that was adopted (via GPSA R9) that would extend voting membership to committee chairpersons and noted that it had not yet been accepted by President Pollack so for the current meeting, committee chairpersons could not vote.
 - c. Lastly, D. Dunham informed members of upcoming elections at the end of the semester with officer elections (President, Vice President, VP of Operations, and VP of Communications) scheduled for the last GPSA meeting on May 3rd. Additionally, the elections for all committee chairpersons, except for Appropriations and Finance, would be taking place on the May 3rd meeting. The elections for voting members in the Graduate School would take place on April 12th.
- III. Roll Call
 - i. *Present* [15]: M. Balch, R. Barankevich, M. Cantar, M. Chatterjee, H. Cole, M. Drescher, C. Duell, M. Keefe, C. Liu, T. Luttermoser, R. Maloney, C. O'Connor, C. Ohenewah, A. Presher, P. Vinhage
 - ii. *Absent* [10]: C. Anklin, H. Bidigare-Curtis, A. Cirillo, C. Day, J. Dotzel, N. Gonzalez, K. Laurent, J. Levin, S. López, M. Welch
- IV. Approval of the Meeting Minutes
 - a. Monday, February 15th, 2021
 - i. The meeting minutes were **approved** unanimously.
- V. Vacancies and Elections
 - a. UA Representative – *No Nominations*
 - i. D. Dunham noted that the UA met every other Tuesday from 4:30pm to 6:00pm and the next meeting would be 3/2/21 so any elected member would need to attend that meeting.
 - b. Masters-At-Large Voting Member – *No Nominations*
 - c. DISC Chairperson – *No Nominations*
 - i. D. Dunham noted that DISC was the last committee that needed a chairperson and emphasized the importance of filling it. He noted that the chairperson did not need to be a GPSA member and directed members to



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reach out to any officer on the Executive Committee if they had questions about the role and responsibilities.

VI. Breakout Session by Division

- a. D. Dunham prompted members to discuss on how they believed the GPSA should use its reserve funds to benefit Graduate Students in light of the fact that students were still submitting an Activity Fee and the lack of in-person programming.

VII. New Business

a. Resolution 13: Donating to the Access Fund

- i. D. Dunham noted that last Fall, there had been a provision in the Internal Budget that had set aside \$2,200 for supporting the home technology needs of Graduate Students. In the meantime, the Executive Committee had learned from administrators of the Access Fund that \$12,000 was distributed last Fall to Graduate Students to cover needs such as emergency travel, technology, emergency medical expenses, and other personal needs. In addition, the administrators had noted that the money set aside by the GPSA would be welcomed by the Access Fund. Therefore, the purpose of the resolution was to officially put the money towards the Access Fund. However, the money would not be used only for technological expenses, but for any kind of emergency expense Graduate Students needed.
- ii. D. Dunham also noted that there had been questions from Graduate Students about why the student Activity Fees still needed to be paid despite not being spent on any actual organization expenses.
- iii. C. Duell noted that the Physical Sciences Division had discussed the time lines for distributions and asked about the speed with which funds were being distributed and what the process was for distributing them from the Access Fund.
- iv. D. Dunham noted that he did not know the exact amount of time it was taking for distribution but stated that it should be relatively consistent with the time from the beginning of the pandemic. Additionally, he stated that an issue that could be in the process was that not a lot of Graduate Students had directly benefited from the Access Fund since the amount given to Graduate Students was \$12,000 with each student taking out a maximum of \$500.
- v. A. Pandey stated that the \$2,200 was appropriated by taking approximately \$100 from each committee's budget and setting it aside with the intention of determining if there were funds leftover after the semester was over and more money could be donated.
- vi. D. Dunham asked how much money the GPSA had on reserve outside of the \$2,200 to know whether or not the current \$2,200 amount could be added on.

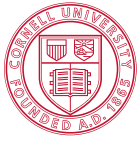


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- vii. M. Chatterjee noted that with more time having passed since the beginning of the pandemic, it was likely that fewer people would need support with things like travel leaving a lot of money unused in the Access Fund and asked if unused funds would be returned to the GPSA.
- viii. D. Dunham responded stating that since the \$2,200 was essentially a donation, it would not be returned to the GPSA. He also stated that it would be best for the GPSA to donate the \$2,200 since it had already been appropriated and could not be used for anything else. Afterwards, the assembly could discuss how the reserve funds should be used.
- ix. C. Duell echoed D. Dunham stating that the \$2,200 should be donated now since it had already been appropriated for that purpose with reserve fund discussions following later. It would not make sense to discuss donating the \$2,200 unless the discussion was about adding more to it immediately.
- x. A. Pandey asked if a discussion could be had with the chairs of different committees right now to see if they had more funds they could relinquish.
- xi. D. Dunham stated that it was definitely an option if the committee chairs wanted to amend the resolution to increase the funds. He added that the funds could always be increased but not decreased because it was already appropriated. Additionally, funds could always be appropriated on an ongoing basis.
- xii. D. Dunham moved previous question on the motion and C. Duell seconded the motion.
- xiii. The resolution was approved 12-0-3.

VIII. Reports of Officers and Committee Updates

- a. Executive Committee – K. Krishnan
 - i. K. Krishnan noted that the committee was currently talking about time to degree extension and the ITAP. D. Dunham added that he would be giving a report to the Board of Trustees meeting on March 19th and directed members to contact him if they had any particular topics that they wanted mentioned in the report.
- b. Communications – K. Krishnan
 - i. K. Krishnan noted that positions for elections were being advertised and asked members to message her about how they found out about GPSA. D. Dunham added that if any members were transferring their positions or their organization had a new EBoard, to make sure members knew that they had to attend the GPSA meeting.
- c. Operations – M. Chatterjee
 - i. M. Chatterjee mentioned that since the last meeting, the chairperson position for the Student Advocacy Committee had been filled by D. Kent with the first meeting scheduled for Wednesday. M. Chatterjee added that



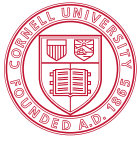
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the committee would serve as a forum to discuss issues that mattered to students.

- d. Finance – C. Steingard
 - i. C. Steingard stated that the committee had taken on a Vice Chair and the next committee meeting would be Tuesday March 2nd. Additionally, the committee was also working on a resolution that would be introduced to the general assembly at the next meeting. The resolution would amend the guidelines since alcohol could no longer be distributed. Lastly, C. Steingard noted that the committee had enough members currently and did not need any more.
- e. Appropriations – A. Pandey
 - i. A. Pandey noted that she would plan to send an email to the chairs after the current meeting and at the end of the semester to ask committee chairs if the had leftover funds that could be donated to the Access Fund.
 - ii. D. Dunham asked if A. Pandey could give an update on what the current GPSA budget was and how much money was in reserve to which A. Pandey responded yes.
- f. DISC – *Vacant*
- g. Faculty Teaching – C. Duell
 - i. C. Duell noted that the call for nominations for the Faculty Teaching, Mentoring, and Advising awards would be going out shortly.
- h. Programming – K. Laurent
 - i. No Updates
- i. Student Advocacy – D. Kent
 - i. D. Kent noted that the first meeting would be Wednesday at 5pm.

IX. Open Forum

- a. P. Vinhage stated that since the Access Fund was not utilized as heavily, if there was any way for members to contact their constituents to get their input on how they would like to use the funds.
 - i. D. Dunham stated that a survey could always be sent out or members could go back to their departments and organizations to find out if they knew about the existence of the Access Fund, if they had used the Access Fund and what their experience was with it, and whether they thought there was a better way that the funds could be used to deal with the issues impacting Graduate Students.
- b. C. Liu asked if there was any way to get reimbursement for event planning beyond its initial allocation. C. Liu stated that the Greater China Business Club had organized the Lunar New Year Celebration last week at the Johnson School and during the event noticed that more had been spent beyond the initial budget leading to the organization paying everything out of pocket.



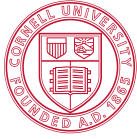
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- i. D. Dunham stated that it could be done through a formal motion and that it did not need to be a written resolution.
 - ii. K. Krishnan asked if the organization had exceeded how much it had received in total from the GPSA or just exceeded the amount budgeted for the event.
 - iii. C. Liu stated that the expense was a surprise and the organization had not received anything from the GPSA.
 - iv. K. Krishnan stated that from her understanding the first step would be to communicate with the FC since the organization still had the money and the FC would see if money could be moved around. The only reason the full GPSA would get involved was if the club had exceeded their entire monetary allotment.
- c. K. Krishnan asked if any Graduate TA's had managed to get vaccinated so far because she had heard of instances where undergraduates were able to book quicker appointments as opposed to Graduate TA's teaching in-person.
- i. P. Vinhage stated that he was teaching in-person for the semester and had not been able to setup a single appointment anywhere.
 - ii. D. Dunham stated that he knew some people had been able to sign-up but did not know what the actual numbers were.
 - iii. K. Krishnan informed members to let the GPSA know if they heard of other students having issues with signing up for appointments so the assembly could look into it.
 - iv. M. Chatterjee noted that the assembly could work on trying to spread the word that anyone teaching in-person was eligible to get vaccinated and as a community coming up with a transportation service or even asking the University since the vaccination sites were all in bigger cities like Syracuse, Albany, and Rochester.
 - v. D. Dunham asked if Cornell were still petitioning the state to administer vaccines on campus and if that would resolve the issue stated by M. Chatterjee.
 - vi. K. Smith stated that the discussions were definitely underway but there was no specific timeline for it.
 - vii. N. Danev noted that currently the state did not have any plans for bringing more vaccination distribution sites to Tompkins County and Ithaca so unless the University could influence the state or the county, there would not be an increase from the allotted 1000 vaccinations per week at Cayuga Health Center. N. Danev stated that it would take either more advocacy on Cornell's end to bring more vaccines closer to students or doing what M. Chatterjee and K. Krishnan suggested of bringing students to vaccination sites.



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- d. T. Luttermoser stated that a few of the Graduate fields in Life Sciences had been communicating to students that TA funding was very limited for next year with students facing multiple issues. T. Luttermoser stated the students were being delayed and needed more money because of the pandemic, departments were stating that they had fewer TA lines available with those receiving TA lines being drastically overworked. T. Luttermoser that he did not know if this were a widespread issue and asked if the GPSA could send out short surveys asking students if their department had communicated that it expected to have fewer TA lines and seeing how widespread the problem was.
 - i. D. Dunham stated that a survey could definitely work to find out the range of the issues but noted that the issue would be in developing the survey to be very objective so concrete results could be ascertained.
 - ii. R. Barankevich echoed T. Luttermoser's sentiments noting that he was not the only person with a department struggling with this and that it was a major issue that needed to be addressed.
 - iii. M. Eisenlord also echoed the sentiments of T. Luttermoser and R. Barankevich.
 - iv. M. O'Leary echoed T. Luttermoser's statements about how overworked instructors were, particularly in the Literature's in English. M. O'Leary noted that she was witnessing how seriously and profoundly people were experiencing burn out because of the immense pressure to commit and perform the additional hours of unpaid labor because of the lack of accounting.
 - v. T. Luttermoser added on to the previous statements and commented that many people were having problems with work 25-30 hours despite only having to work 15-20 hours for their TAs and when they were referred to their DGS or the Graduate School, they would be told to deal with it since everyone else also had to work these longer hours.
 - vi. M. Eisenlord pointed out that the decision to decide not to work past the set TA hours had implications for undergraduate students that needed help and the decision was a difficult one to make.
 - vii. D. Dunham stated that this was an issue that the GPSA needed to get answers on and emphasized the competing pressures between the University and Teaching Assistants.
- e. D. Dunham asked members what they thought was the best way to discuss funding for time-to-degree extensions and bring the necessary change.
 - i. T. Luttermoser stated that the best course of action would be the one that would cause higher bodies in the administration to move to action and stated that the Graduate School would have a better idea of what courses of action would work best.



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- ii. D. Dunham said that one of the most effective ways to bring about change was to have a written resolution, not necessarily adopted, but could be brought into meetings and conversations to be discussed. D. Dunham added that an idea he had was to start writing a resolution addressing the issue and task a committee with working with different administrators to discuss the resolution. He added that tasking would be more effective than writing a resolution and passing because that would just go to the administration without giving the GPSA to have a conversation.
- iii. K. Krishnan mentioned that another option that had been mentioned was to reduce tuition.
- iv. D. Dunham stated that the topic would be best discussed by the Student Advocacy Committee and then have those interested to meet in a smaller group to bring forward an idea that could be discussed and voted on by the general assembly.
- f. K. Krishnan asked how easy it was for students to switch labs within their departments noting that this was related to having additional funding for students who might want to switch labs in between but were afraid to do so because they would lose funding.
 - i. M. Chatterjee highlighted the importance of the issue. M. Chatterjee also noted that in one of the Executive Committee meetings with Student-Elected Board of Trustees representative, both the former and present had brought up the idea of the Graduate School having a transition pool of money to support Graduate students for a 10-Week rotation while they were transitioning so they would not have to leave the program.
 - ii. D. Dunham stated that another Executive Committee Discussion point was what could be done to prevent situations leading to students having to transfer labs. An option for doing this would be to have people more advanced in their degree talking in a private way to people earlier on about the quality of relationships they were having with their advisors.

X. Adjournment

- a. The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Auriole C. R. Fassinou
Clerk of the Assembly