

Cornell University University Assembly

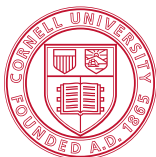
Cornell University Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Minutes of the October 12, 2020 Meeting

5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

- I. Call to Order
 - a. D. Dunham called the meeting to order at 5:30pm
- II. Roll Call
 - i. *Members Present:* A. Bidjarano, M. Cantar, M. Chatterjee, H. Cole, P. Cole, N. Danev, C. Duell, D. Dunham, M. Keefe, K. Krishnan, K. Laurent, S. Lopez, T. Luttermoser, M. Schoeffler, E. Schoenly, M. Sturgeon, P. Vinhage, M. Welch, H. Xu
 - ii. *Members Joined after Roll Call:* H. Bidigare-Curtis, R. Maloney, C. Ohenewah
 - iii. *Members not Present:* R. Barankevich, K. Beras, E. Call, A. Cirillo, J. Dotzel, K. Masters, A. Sontag, D. Wang,
- III. Introduction of Dean Kathryn Boor, Dean of the Graduate School
 - a. D. Dunham introduced Dean Boor serving as the new Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Education. In her position as Vice Provost for Graduate Education she would serve as an advocate for graduate education and oversee the graduate student experience as a member of the University leadership team. During her two terms as the Dean of CALS, she oversaw a record growth in undergraduate applications and prioritized retaining and recruiting top faculty. Some of her key achievements at CALS included launch of the School of Integrated Plant Science in 2014, building partnerships with New York State and the USDA, Helping to amplify a coalition of scientists from Cornell in an initiative for digital agriculture in 2017, and championing active learning in the classroom.
 - b. Dean Boor Noted that she wanted to be as accessible to Graduate students as they wished her to be and was delighted for an invitation to the meeting. Dean Boor also noted that she completed her PhD at UC Davis where she was the field of microbiology representative for the UC Davis equivalent of the GPSA and was familiar with what the GPSA was trying to achieve.
- IV. Approval of the Meeting Minutes
 - a. Monday, September 14th, 2020
 - i. A member moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and approved.
 - b. Monday, September 28th, 2020
 - i. A member moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and approved.



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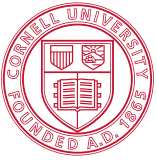
V. Elections

a. Appropriations Chair

- i. N. Danev stated that the Appropriations Chair would serve as the chair for the Appropriations committee which works in all aspects of the GPSA student activity fee including reviewing the GPSA Byline Allocation Procedures, the GPSA Eligibility Criteria and Obligations for Byline Funded Organizations, the GPSAFC Funding Guidelines, and GPSA Internal Budget. The duties of the Appropriations Chair would include reviewing the policies and procedures for setting the activity fee but since that occurred last year, it would not be necessary for this year. The Appropriations committee would also need to coordinate with the Student Assembly to determine deadlines for the preliminary byline applications in April and the final byline applications in September in the fall of non-fee-setting years. N. Danev also noted that the time commitment would usually be less than five hours per week.
- ii. A. Pandey was self-nominated for the position. A. Pandey noted that she was from BMCB (Biochemistry, Molecular, and Cell Biology) and had served as a class representative for approximately 3 years (currently a 3rd year PhD student). This semester, she had also joined the BMCB GPSA as an officer and was looking to be more involved with student activities this semester.
- iii. D. Dunham asked the OA to send out the poll for voting and noted that he believed only voting members were eligible to vote.
- iv. C. Duell moved a point of order and stated that he was under the impression that for these elections, any member (including field representatives) could vote as well.
- v. A member of the assembly stated that C. Duell was correct and that any member could vote.
- vi. A. Pandey was elected as the chair of the GPSA Appropriations committee by a vote of 27-2.

b. Vice President of Internal Operations

- i. N. Danev stated that the VP of Internal Operations would also serve as the chair for the committee of Operations and Staffing which is charged with appointing Graduate and Professional students to committees staffed by the GPSA. The committee would also be charged with maintaining and updating the GPSA Charter, Bylaws, and any other relevant documents. The duties of the chair would include organizing meetings at least once a month, maintaining an accurate list of all committee appointments for the GPSA,



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maintain communication with committee appointees and chair, coordinate committee reporting procedures, chair general meetings in the absence of the President and EVP, and serve on the Executive committee. The time commitment would range from 5-20 hours per week with the bulk of the work in the Fall.

- ii. M. Chatterjee was self-nominated for the role. M. Chatterjee noted that he was a 4th year PhD student in Genetics and Genomics and was currently the Student Advocacy chair in the GPSA. M. Chatterjee also noted that he was passionate about filling the position and continuing to serve on the GPSA because of the issues of inequity that had been heightened by the pandemic. He would want to serve as a voice for Graduate Students in communicating with University leadership/administration.
- iii. M. Chatterjee was elected as the VP of Operations by a vote of 35-1.

VI. Presentations

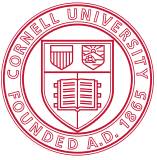
- a. D. Dunham – Overview of GPSA Objectives 2020-2021 (see attached “GPSA State of the Campus” PowerPoint on the OA website)
 - i. D. Dunham noted that the Ivy+ Summit had been held over the past several days and one of the events on Saturday had included a presentation by him on the state of the campus. D. Dunham stated that he would like to go over the main points of the presentation to give a brief overview to new members on the role of the GPSA and the Executive team’s objectives for the year. The Executive committee hoped that GPSA members would not only attend meetings but become involved in the committees as well. D. Dunham noted that all of the GPSA standing committees were chaired but that did not necessarily mean they would not need additional help from members and without the standing committees, the GPSA would be unable to do its job.
 - ii. M. Chatterjee asked a clarifying question and stated that while D. Dunham’s presentation touched on a lot of topics, he assumed that the points of the presentation would be explored over the next year.
 - 1. D. Dunham responded in the affirmative and stated that the reason he did not want to get into one particular topic was because he wanted to give more time for open forum to hear from the assembly about what was most important for members.
- b. N. Danev – International Teaching Assistant Program (see attached “GPSA ITAP” PowerPoint on the OA website)
 - i. N. Danev presented on the International Teaching Assistant Program (ITAP) and told members that it was a program founded in hopes of



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supporting international* graduate students to be successful in their work as teaching assistants (TA's) at Cornell. N. Danev noted that the program, created a boundary between TA's and international graduate students without explaining what international meant and stated that he did not think there was anything different between being a regular TA and an international TA. Additionally, a score in the 95th percentile on the TOEFL would be needed to be exempt from the ITAP test, and this percentile requirement was not a requirement at any other Ivy League or peer institution. The GPCI (Graduate and Professional Community Initiative) had a section on the ITAP and restructuring it. Demands from graduate students in the GPCI included having an appeals process and waiving requirements. Other notes from the GPCI on the ITAP included the fact that the ITAP was not focused on academic field and placed pressure on students prior to the start of their program with delayed results leading to stress. N. Danev stated that his proposal would be to send out a survey to all graduate students in ITAP, collect personal experiences and testimony from students, then schedule a hearing with the head of ITAP at a future GPSA meeting. The goal would be to summarize survey responses and have an open discussion after which, the GPSA could send a resolution to President Pollack. N. Danev noted that he did not intend to work on this alone and was planning on working with the International Student and Diversity committee but other GPSA members were welcomed to get involved if they wished to.

- ii. D. Dunham stated that he was in a program with lots of international students and had not heard of ITAP before and asked N. Danev how he knew that public opinion on ITAP was low?
 1. N. Danev said that the GPCI had included it as a core issue for international students from the previous work of GPSA members. N. Danev also noted that as an international student himself, he had to take it and had reached out to his program about how it made him feel along with the implications it carried. He stated that he had learned from his program administrators that the issue of ITAP had consistently been brought up to them. From the GPCI, it could be gathered that there was a general sense of dissatisfaction with the ITAP but there seemed to also be a general sense of lack of information about it as well. N. Danev noted that he did think it would be useful to have further discussion about it as well.
- iii. K. Krishnan stated that there was also a lot of documentation (visible through the GPCI) of the student discomfort associated with ITAP.



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- iv. D. Dunham asked if N. Danev was proposing for the survey to be sent out now and what objective he had for members today.
 - 1. N. Danev stated that if there were any objections to him sending out a survey. The GPSA had a right to send out 1 email per month to the entire graduate and professional student population so he was hoping for the survey to be included in it when it would be sent out. Additionally, N. Danev stated that he was hoping to reach out to Dean Boor to see if the Graduate School could forward the survey as well. The survey was made in Qualtrics, approached the topic in a non-bias way, anonymous, and used levels of agreement and disagreement with 'I' statements related to ITAP.
- c. D. Dunham – Ivy+ Summit Report
 - i. D. Dunham shared his thoughts and review from the Ivy+ Summit. He noted that there were 3 main sessions that the Executive team attended, and he wanted to share his impressions on some of the other topics that were a concern for different universities. One of the common threads that came up was the issue of qualifying exams and the gender bias and pass rate. Another university was able to collect data that determined that women were much more likely than men to fail their qualifying exam. The university worked to assess that issue and provide bias training for faculty to alleviate the disparity. A second major issue was affordable housing with many universities finding that new housing projects were going to be unaffordable with many making resolutions to demand change. In terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion, there was discussion on resources for different traumas, improving admissions for different underrepresented groups, and transitional funding making it easier for people to move to campus, transparency and communication of resources, and diversity initiative grants. In terms of the COVID-19 response, there was discussion on apps that were coordinating billing access and medical testing, providing technology for students going remote, and funding extensions for students in their final year. On the topic of community building, there was discussion on Slack channels that could narrow their focus to subgroups on campus. There was also discussion on online programming and orientation and figuring out how to have an effective orientation program. Additionally, there was discussion on maintaining Graduate common areas with many universities not having a common area like the Big Red Barn so they would need to think of other ways to hold communal activities to address the concern of mental health and isolation. The summit also had a mental health session that found that



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physical and mental well-being had worsened during the pandemic. The ongoing initiatives that were discussed included centralizing and coordinating health facilities, integrating the aspects of medical and psychiatric care, increasing the number of medical and mental health staff, increasing funds to mental health and counseling, extending the coverage to leaves of absence, and increasing the degree of representation among the providers. The last presentation that D. Dunham addressed from the summit was that of international student affairs. Some topics discussed included resolutions asking the university to address legal challenges to different visa policy rulings, getting involved in writing a public comment, and hosting immigration lawyers that could answer questions about the visa format. D. Dunham noted that they were looking for members to attend two of the remaining sessions.

VII. Breakout Session by Division

VIII. Reports of Officers and Committee Updates

- a. N. Danev suggested to D. Dunham that since there were no committee reports to share, to skip the committee updates and allocate more time for the open forum.
- b. D. Dunham agreed and noted that the committee orientation meetings had not been held so he did not believe anyone had held any meetings yet so it would be okay to skip the update. D. Dunham noted that he would meet with the committee chairs this upcoming Thursday (10.15.2020) and any chairs that would be unable to make it could schedule a separate meeting with him.

IX. Open Forum

- a. D. Dunham conveyed to the assembly that the open forum was a chance for any member to address the assembly on matters they would like to talk about it.
- b. N. Danev rose to a point of order and stated that members need to raise their hands to be added to the speakers list with speakers list being exhausted 3 times before the open forum discussion would be closed unless there was a motion to suspend Robert's Rules of Order.
- c. L. Kenney, a UA representative for the GPSA, informed the assembly members that the UA was holding their internal elections tomorrow (10.13.2020). L. Kenney reminded assembly members about the proposed amendments to the campus Code of Conduct which would encompass all students, including graduate and professional students. L. Kenney also noted that public commenting was open on the code and the University Assembly would be talking with President Pollack and the University Council about the code in the following week.
- d. C. Duell asked if there were division chairs and what sort of prompts there might be during division breakouts.



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- i. N. Danev rose to a point of order and stated that there was no prompt for this particular breakout and that division members will appoint their division chair who is typically a voting member.
 - ii. D. Dunham noted that usually, there would be a question to motivate breakout room discussion or share feedback from the division's constituents to voting members present in the division.
- e. K. Laurent, chair of the Programming Board, provided a brief update on the programming board and stated that the committee had put together a poll to gather ideas for events.
- f. T. Luttermoser stated that some individual departments (EB and Plant Pathology specifically) had been able to provide funding for home technology and ergonomic needs. The division had discussed the fact that this funding would be important especially as the pandemic broadened so the GPSA should do something to keep those funds in place. Additionally, T. Luttermoser noted that the process for TA sick leaves was unclear as well as funding regarding leaves of absence. T. Luttermoser emphasized a concern regarding health insurance premiums being covered during a leave of absence so that students on leave of absence, particularly those on health leave of absence, are not faced with increased healthcare costs, and that it would be important to make sure that this is true or to advocate for making it so.
- g. J. Pea informed the assembly members that UA would be electing committee chairs tomorrow and was looking for graduate and professional student representatives to sit on those committees as well.
- h. K. Krishnan mentioned concept of compensation for executive committee and/or committee chairs because of the work that was done. K. Krishnan noted that involvement would not be as equitable since it could discriminate against those that had to hold part-time jobs and consider child care.. Additionally, K. Krishnan stated that she would try inviting individuals to the GPSA Slack since there were members not on it. And the Slack was a great place to continue the division conversations. The DISC (Diversity and International Student Committee) would also be holding an event on 10.20.2020 from 12-1:30pm as part of the Building Allyship event.
- i. N. Danev informed the assembly about a new visa regulation that was being proposed by the government on which public commenting was open. The new proposed law puts limits on the length of stay for students without visas. Previously international students were allowed to stay without strict end dates as long as they were complying with the visa requirements. Under the new law, most students would only be able to stay for 4 years which was shorter than the length of most PhD degrees and those born in select countries (mostly Middle Eastern and African



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countries) would only be allowed to stay for two years. N. Danev informed the assembly that the process to reapply after the visa would expire would also be challenging and expensive so the proposal would greatly affect the experience of international students and overall quality of education and science in the U.S.

- j. D. Dunham followed-up stating that members should be aware of the commenting process that does exist.

X. New Business

a. Appointments

i. GPSA Liaison to the Student Assembly

1. N. Danev conveyed to the assembly that the GPSA needed to send a representative to the Student Assembly (SA). The SA meets once a week for 1.5 hours.
2. C. Ohenewah was self-nominated for the position. N. Danev motioned to appoint C. Ohenewah to the position. There were no objections and C. Ohenewah was appointed by the executive committee to serve as the GPSA Liaison to the Student Assembly.

XI. Adjournment

- a. N. Danev moved to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Auriol C. R. Fassinou
Clerk of the Assembly