



Cornell University
Graduate and Professional
Student Assembly

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MINUTES
Graduate & Professional Student Assembly
May 2nd, 2016
Bache Auditorium, Malott Hall
5:30 – 7:00 P.M.

I. Welcome and Introductions

R. Walroth welcomed everyone to the last meeting of the GPSA for AY 2015-2016. He called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

1. Introduction of voting members, 1 min.

Voting Members Absent: J. Veintimilla

II. Approval of the Minutes

Minutes were approved as printed.

III. Presentations

1. Joint Presentation from Dean Knuth, Provost Kotlikoff, and CGSU Members – 35 min.

A CGSU (Cornell Graduate Students United) representative started the presentation by stating the University has been meeting with CGSU as a way to set up rules of engagement in the likelihood that the graduate students unionize. He stressed the importance of transparency in the matter. University position is that the decision is up to the graduate students and they have the resources to make an informed decision. Dean Knuth took over the presentation to provide context for the matter, which was followed by a 10-minute presentations from CGSU members and then a joint statement read on behalf of both parties.

National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) governs labor relations in the private sector including at Cornell University, a private school. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) administers NLRA. NLRB is currently dealing with cases where graduate students at schools, such as Columbia University, are trying to change the current labor law so they can be declared employees. The current labor, called Brown, law states graduate students are deemed to be students rather than employees. NLRB revision due to the Columbia case will probably be accepted sometime before the fall. Under the current law, since graduate students are not employees they do not have the right to unionize and bargain collectively but the interpretation can change.

In the past, Cornell University decided along with Cornell Association of Student Employees to hold elections and thereby allow students to decide if they wish to be represented by a union. Students decided 2:1 in an election in October 2002 against unionizing. A union consists of agents that represent a specific group of employees called a bargaining unit which negotiates with the employer on behalf of the unit and establishes terms and conditions of employment. If there is an election in favor of the unit, it determines who will be part of the bargaining unit.

If Brown is overturned, the University administration will publish a more detailed statement explaining the basis of the University's belief that a union is not a necessity for graduate students during their academic program. While Universities agree on this matter, federal matter does not require separation of unions and academic programs and there is an uncertainty about the line separating the two. If Brown is overturned, there will a secret ballot election based on a simple majority. All those in the bargaining unit will be represented in the union. A mutual agreement was read later which will "promote respectful relationships and enable students and enable them to make their own decisions about graduate student unionization in the event Brown is overturned by the NLRB."

Jacqueline Frost, a CGSU representative, began the presentation on behalf of the organization. She shared her personal background and explained being unionized is about being resourceful. It means sharing in the process of deciding the conditions of daily livelihood. Private university unionization is growing with NYU, Columbia, Harvard, and others. Both CGSU and the University agree the interpretation of the NLRA by the NLRB is likely to change in the near future. She believes federal law is equipped to deal with graduate workers. She said CGSU believes in a democratic process where the University is legally obligated to sit at the negotiating table.

Another CGSU talked about the distinction between the GPSA and the CGSU. GPSA is part of the shared governance and has authority to make recommendations on policies that comes in the form of resolutions. GPSA's role is advisory and the body has the purview to discuss a lot of topics to communicative to the administration. GPSA is a representative body. CGSU has a narrow purview; its goal is to obtain a legally binding contract for the bargaining unit that covers labor conditions. The broader life issues of graduate students are not the goal of the organization. CGSU is also a democratic body and are subject to voting approval by the entire membership, not representatives. He would like to focus on collaboration between CGSU and the GPSA.

Jesse Goldberg, a member of GPSA and CGSU, read a joint statement from the University and the organization. "Since mid-December, Cornell Graduate Students United and Cornell University have been working on developing a Union-University conduct rules and recognition election agreement that will serve as a common guide for the Union and the University as CGSU's campaign to be the collective bargaining representative for Cornell's graduate student assistants continues. Although discussions are still ongoing, negotiating teams representing the University and the Union hope to soon be able to reach a tentative agreement. If that happens, CGSU's negotiation team would bring back a tentative agreement to be deliberated and voted on by the Union's membership following its internal democratic process.

A guiding shared value that has carried the Union's and University's negotiations forward is that the decision to join CGSU belongs to graduate students alone. We respect graduate students' choices. Cornell and CGSU are committed to working together to ensure that our community's environment remains one in which the conditions for graduate students to make their own decisions about unionization without intimidation are achieved. Our negotiations have been setting a positive tone based on our shared values of dignity and respect for each other. We recognize there is a strong possibility that the National Labor Relations Board may soon overturn current case law to consider private university graduate student assistants to be employees under the National Labor Relations Act. In anticipation of this likely scenario, we believe that by proactively building a productive and considerate working relationship between the Union and University now, such a relationship will carry over into negotiations regarding a collective bargaining agreement if a majority of graduate student assistants selects CGSU as its representative.

We are proud of the work we have done to-date and we look forward to the work ahead. The Union and the University are committed to building a relationship that is aligned with Cornell's core value of being a "collaborative, collegial, and caring community" [1] as well as its roles as a leader in labor relations education and as the land grant university of New York State." (<https://cornellgsu.org/2016/04/20/cgsu-and-cornell-administration-in-talks-over-conduct-for-unionization-effort/>).

Dean Knuth explained that if there is a union of graduate students, GPSA would not have the liberation to have conversations about conditions of employment. T. Snider asked what forces a private institution to separate academic programs and unionization if this is a scenario that is working for public schools. Dean Knuth said there does not exist a defined line between academics and unionization for employees. Another student asked about the difference in unionization effort in the present versus in the past in 2002. J. Frost said that all things are negotiable at the bargaining table between the two parties. What CGSU wanted was something that was specific for conditions in the present and desired a large degree of autonomy. A major concern of the organization now is coming up with something that works for everyone, not just for a specific organization. Provost Kotlikoff said there have been discussions that the efforts are similar. There will a presentation of students who disagree with unionization and they will have a chance to explain their opinion. A student asked what happens if the negotiations are not going anywhere. J. Frost said what is happening right now is entertaining how to handle the negotiations table to prevent such a scenario. Dean Knuth clarified that all students part of the bargaining unit, regardless of how they vote in the election for the union, will be represented by the union. J. Frost added the scope of bargaining unit is up for debate as well. J. Goldberg said all graduate students are welcome to voice their opinion in the CGSU, even if they are not included in the bargaining unit. A student asked about the positive aspects of unions. Dean Knuth talked about the deals the Columbia University union negotiated with the administration. T. Bollu asked about the difference between CGSU and advocacy by the GPSA. J. Frost said CGSU is not a representative body and the administration is legally obligated to discuss the topic at hand with the organization and they cannot walk away from the negotiation unless mutually agreed. All terms discussed will be mutually negotiated.

IV. Reports of Officers and Committee Updates, 5 min.

- 1. Executive Committee:** Maplewood Development meeting at BRB on May 10th at 5:30. GPCI career services working groups looking for volunteers for focus groups.
- 2. Operations:** Annual report detailing work done in external committee coming up.
- 3. Appropriations:** No updates.
- 4. Faculty Awards:** Christopher Barrett and David Lin won faculty award.
- 5. Finance Commission:** Finished work with budget allocation.
- 6. Student Advocacy:** No updates.
- 7. Diversity and International Students:** No updates.
- 8. Programming Board:** GradBall is on Saturday, 8-12. Event is sold out. Wine Tour is May 10th and still have tickets.
- 9. Communications:** No updates.

V. New Business, 30 min.

1. GPSA Resolution 9

Addressing clarity in admissions offers. Clarified distinction between lecturers and TAs. Suggest changes to be made to SCESS Faculty Handbook. Proposed amendment to include mention of “Admissions Letter Best Practices” in the resolution. Amendment passed with a vote of 15-0-0. Motion to call the vote on the amendment itself that passed with a vote of 15-0-1. Discussion opened on the resolution. Several members expressed it would be wise to push off the resolution to the next semester since letters have been sent to students for 2016 summer and the change would be implemented for next summer. T. Snider asked who’s purview the admissions letter is under – D. Knuth said it was under graduate field (grad school entities), departments provide funding, not admission letters. Dean Knuth clarified that a template does exist.

Motion to change the number of the resolution to 9 from 10, passed with a vote of 10-0-6.

Catherine believes it is important to include a clause stating whom the resolution should be sent to, and Jesse Goldberg proposed the amendment for resolution to be sent to Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Field Assistants in all graduate fields. Amendment passed with a vote of 12-2-2. Jesse Goldberg added he is thankful to the Student Advocacy Committee of the work they have put into the resolution over the semester. T. Snider offered a point of information to call for preference vote and the vote was 7-4-4 on the resolution. Motion to withdraw the resolution from the floor that failed with a vote of 6-0-9. Motion was brought back to the floor. Motion to hold a poll on the resolution that passed with a vote of 9-2-3. Motion to call the vote on the resolution that passed with a vote of 11-0-6.

2. GPSA Resolution 9

Motion to amend the number of the resolution to 10 from 9 that passed. Resolution passed with a vote of 14-0-3.

VI. Elections, 20 min.

Everyone at the assembly is eligible to vote.

1. **President:** Explicitly chairs meeting, spokespersons of GPSA, chief advocate of GPSA, 10+ hours of work/week, facilitate conversation between assembly and administration. N. Rogers nominated himself and introduced himself - VP Operations, liaison to Faculty Senate. Has a vision for GPSA and the executive committee. Vote by acclamation that passed.
2. **Executive Vice President:** T. Bollu nominated Nate Stetson - Going for advocacy and transparency. Talked about his work ethic. Vote by acclamation that passed. S. Hesse won the position by vote of acclamation.
3. **Vice President for Operations:** Select people to serve on external committees and then getting reports from them. Position tabled to the next meeting.
4. **Vice President for Communications:** T. Bollu nominated Manisha Munasinghe. S. Hesse said responsibility includes working with programming board and director of communications. A. Molitoris was nominated. M. Munasinghe wants to focus on rejuvenating the role by increasing accountability between voting members and field members. A. Molitoris would like to expand programs, have an open line of communication.
5. **Counsel to the Assembly:** R. Walroth is the counsel to the GPSA.
6. **Student Advocacy Committee Chair:** A. Loiben won the Chair position.
7. **Graduate and Professional Student Programming Board Chair:** Responsible for planning inter-school mixers and Grad Ball. A. Molitoris was nominated to serve as Chair once again. She won by a vote of acclamation.
8. **Faculty Teaching, Advising, and Mentoring Award Committee Chair:** Casey nominated herself and won by a vote of acclamation.
9. **Diversity and International Students Committee Chair:** Madhur won the position of chair by a vote of acclamation.
10. **General Committee of the Graduate School Representative:** Aravind Natarajan won the position of chair by a vote of acclamation.
11. **University Assembly Representatives (2):** Ekarina was nominated and Nate Stetson nominated himself. Jacqueline Frost was nominated. Nate withdrew his nomination. J. Frost and Ekarina won the position by a vote of acclamation.

VII. Open Forum, 4 min.

BRB Advisory Board is considering changing the location to a coffee house and there will be a coffee-tasting event on May 10th. G. Giambattista thanked all members for their work for the assembly and Annie for her work as student-elected trustee.

N. Rogers adjourned the meeting at 7:24pm.

*Sincerely submitted,
Aastha Wadhwa*