

PROPOSAL FOR A GRADUATE STUDENT CENTER

Prepared by the Graduate Student Government, in collaboration with
the Office of the Vice President for Campus Life and the Graduate School
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While graduate students focus much of their time at Princeton on their academic lives, the quality of their social lives greatly influences their graduate student experience. Currently, graduate students primarily socialize in their departments or, if they live on campus, in their housing units. But they are limited in the social programming available on central campus.

There is a need for greater campus-wide graduate student interaction at Princeton. Graduate students often feel isolated from one another and from the campus at large. While the graduate experience is admittedly one that is primarily department-specific, we should still work towards fostering a distinct graduate student identity among Princeton's students. Graduate students should feel that they belong to a coherent graduate student body and that the graduate student population is an important component of the greater University community.

With this in mind, we ask that the University consider establishing a Graduate Student Center on central campus. Compared with our peer institutions, Princeton is the only one that does not have (or have plans to build) a graduate student center. This center would serve to bring prospective students, current students and student organizations together in a location that would be equally accessible by all students. Importantly, its presence on central campus would emphasize the importance of the graduate student community to Princeton University.

In this document, we describe the current status of and existing challenges with graduate student life at Princeton. We then identify solutions to address these needs, including a detailed vision for a Graduate Student Center.

CURRENT STATUS OF GRADUATE STUDENT LIFE

Every week, graduate students can attend many events specifically geared to the graduate population, organized by one of the groups described below. However, most social programming either occurs at the housing units or off-campus (e.g., daytrips to local sights).

Graduate School Office of Student Life

The Graduate School's Office of Student Life, led by Dean Joy Montero, organizes and coordinates social programming throughout campus. Assistant Dean Lisa Schreyer and Community Programs Coordinator Tara McCartney help organize and publicize graduate student events. They coordinate major off-campus trips (e.g., trips to Broadway) and on-campus events (e.g., Spring and Fall festivals). In addition to the programs organized directly by these administrators, the Graduate School runs the Community Associates program, which pays a handful of graduate students to help further expand social options, both on- and off-campus.

Graduate College

Together with the Graduate School, the Graduate College House Committee coordinates social programming at the graduate dorm, the Graduate College (GC). In addition, the Debasement Bar (the graduate student bar) and Procter Hall (the graduate dining hall) are housed at the GC. Because of the size of social spaces at the Graduate College, many of the largest graduate events are held there (i.e., social hours, barbeques, the GC Formal Dance). Many graduate students live in the GC in their first year at Princeton. For all these reasons, the Graduate College is probably the major social hub for graduate student life. However, it's located more than half a mile from the center of campus (i.e., Frist Campus Center).

Graduate Student Government

The GSG is the primary student organization that holds social events on central campus. The GSG regularly holds three events on central campus each year: the fall Wine and Cheese to begin the school year, the spring Valentine's Day Dance, and a summer Frolic at Frist barbeque. These events typically attract 300-500 graduate students; the summer barbeque also draws many non-graduate students because it is held on the Frist lawn. The GSG also runs the Events Board, a group of students and administrators who provide event planning advice and funding for all graduate student organizations.

Other student organizations

As of October 2007, there are fifty-one graduate student organizations registered with the Graduate School (see <http://gso.princeton.edu/studentlife/organizations/>). These organizations run the gamut of being advocacy, cultural, and other special interest clubs. This list also includes the residential committees that organize social events at their respective housing units.

CURRENT CHALLENGES WITH GRADUATE STUDENT LIFE

Interaction with campus community

During their time at Princeton, graduate students spend most of their time in offices or at home. As a result, they do not often interact with students outside their department, they have little involvement with the University at large, and they do not often participate as alumni after they graduate.

"In-between" spaces for students

Outside of their offices, graduate students do not have many places to go between their various on-campus duties (e.g., research, taking classes, teaching, mentoring). In addition, there aren't many places for graduate students to meet their spouses/families and for spouses/families to meet each other.

Hub for student information

There isn't an easily accessible place to specifically communicate with graduate students -- for posting University resources or policies, flyers for graduate-student events, ride-sharing possibilities, or childcare services.

Hub for prospective students

When prospective graduate students visit during recruiting weekends, current students cannot easily introduce them to the graduate community or explain what graduate student life is like at Princeton; we typically have to drive recruits to the Graduate College, a practice that demonstrates how far student life is located relative to campus.

Social programming needs:

Cohesive student life

The graduate population is extremely diverse. Princeton boasts close to 50% international students. Graduate students are also entering school at different points in their lives; for example, some students decide to start families while at graduate school. Social programming should reflect the diverse needs, interests and backgrounds of our student body.

Varied location of student events

Current social programming is largely limited to events held at the housing units or off-campus. As a result, students don't have many opportunities to meet students at other housing units and other members of the University community. In particular, many social events occur at the Graduate College, but most students are not GC residents. In addition, while Princeton houses many of its students in university housing, approximately 25% of students live off-campus. Therefore, off-campus students do not often attend social events.

Space for student events

Graduate student groups often organize events using venues located at the housing units -- namely, the Graduate College common spaces, the Butler Community Room, the Hibben-Magie Common Room, and the Lawrence Community Room. However, the Graduate College is the only space that can hold large events (i.e., for several hundred students). Even when organizations can secure a space, they are often not ideal for the event being organized. There is high demand for large dance spaces, with quality wood flooring and good sound systems. This is particularly important for social dance organizations that need space for weekly lessons. When groups turn to venues on central campus, they face heavy competition -- especially for spaces like the Carl Fields Center. The situation will worsen in coming years, with the planned demolition of Butler Apartments.

Space needs:

Space for student organizations

While the Graduate Student Government shares an office in Frist with the Undergraduate Student Government, most other graduate student organizations have no access to office and storage space. This makes it difficult for student leaders for a number of reasons: organizations do not have a regular place to hold meetings; students rarely meet other student leaders to compare notes on event ideas and planning; officers often have to store club equipment in personal areas; and, since most organizations do not have mailing addresses, students have to use their personal contact information when conducting club business.

Facilities for students to work

Since office space varies by department, some graduate students -- particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences departments -- do not have flexible study space to prepare for precepts, conduct their research, and write their dissertations. While this is a significant issue affecting the quality of

student life, we are unsure as to whether this is an issue that is better addressed on the department level.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Short-term:

Expand and publicize existing social spaces to graduate students and student organizations.
Consolidate graduate student information online.

Intermediate-term:

Designate a graduate center in Frist.

Long-term:

Create a Graduate Student Center on central campus.

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

Solutions already in place:

Campus Club

Campus Club, opening in the fall of 2008, is a space designated for both undergraduate and graduate student populations. One of its missions is to help develop a unified student identity. Because of this, it will help improve graduate student interactions with undergraduates, but may not be as effective in bringing together the graduate population *per se* -- especially since some graduate students may not be interested in or comfortable with socializing with undergraduates. The Club will importantly provide additional event space on central campus. If the Club's common spaces included a quality wood floor and an integrated audio system, this would address one of the major complaints we get from student organizations about the quality of current event space.

Carl Fields Center

The Carl Fields Center will be relocated and re-open at its new location in the fall of 2009. Again, if the plans for the new social space included a quality wood floor and an integrated audio system, this would provide additional event space.

Hibben-Magie Common Space

The Graduate School is currently working to improve the Hibben-Magie common space. They are making a special effort to make sure that the space will be family friendly. This is important because the other major family friendly common space, the Butler Apartments Community Room, will be gone upon demolition of the Butler Apartments.

Small-scale solutions:

Improve online resources

There is no unified hub for graduate student information online. For academic information, students may access the Graduate School's website. For social information, the Office of Student Life's weekly e-mail bulletin and the Point website are useful. While information is available, it is spread out over a number of different sites and is therefore not easily accessible. It would be helpful if there was a single website for graduate students to access academic and social information and to link up with other students electronically.

INTERMEDIATE-TERM SOLUTION: GRADUATE CENTER IN FRIST

Smaller scale graduate center in Frist Campus Center

Frist Campus Center hosts a number of smaller centers, including the Davis International Center, the Women's Center, and the LGBT Center. A graduate student space could be similarly incorporated into the Frist Campus Center. Since the long-term proposal for a Graduate Student Center (below) is quite ambitious, this intermediate solution is more easily done on a shorter time scale. This space would mainly address the practical needs for providing space for student organizations and for consolidating information for students.

Proposed programming and physical facilities:

Since this space is based off the ideas for the larger center, please look below for more details.

Reception area

When students enter the space, there would be a welcome desk located near the door. During the day, someone from the Graduate School's Office of Student Life could staff the desk. There would be a large bulletin board nearby to post information.

A flexible meeting and social space for graduate students

Off the reception area, there would be a meeting space for graduate students. This space could be reserved by student organizations for modest student events (approximately 50 students). It could also be used for relaxed conversation at other times.

Office/storage and meeting spaces for graduate student organizations

There would be limited locker space for student organizations' materials. One or two offices and a meeting room would also be available for graduate student organizations.

Facilities recommendation-Meeting room (occupancy: 10 people), Office space (occupancy: 2 people), Lockers for organizations

LONG-TERM SOLUTION: GRADUATE STUDENT CENTER

Graduate Student Center

We envision that the Graduate Student Center would ideally be a stand-alone building. This center would cater to graduate students, their spouses and families, and research associates (e.g., post-docs). On occasion, it could also be used to recruit prospective students and for graduate alumni. It would bring together the graduate student community across departments and provide programming space for graduate student organizations. It would also serve as an information hub for issues relevant to graduate students. The center should be a flexible space that allows for both daytime and nighttime uses by the graduate population.

Important qualities:

Accessible

Accessibility is important to maximize student use of the space. To be accessible, the center should be located within easy walking distance, as determined relative to office/department spaces, not relative to housing. Given how many graduate students have cars, it would also be important that an adequate number of parking spaces are located nearby.

Visible

Visibility is important for prospective students, new students, and graduate alumni. To be visible, the center should be publicly identified as the Graduate Student Center on maps and tours.

Central

Centrality is important to bridge the gap between graduate students and the rest of the campus community, bringing the graduate student community into the University campus. To be central, the center should be located on main campus (not across the street).

Proposed programming and physical facilities

Outdoor programming:

Outdoor patio space

We need more venues for outdoor socializing aside from the Graduate College and Butler Apartments. Normally, this outdoor area would be used as a relaxation space for quiet reading and conversation. On occasion, it could be reserved for outdoor events. This space would be ideal for receptions for student organizations, the APGA-GSG organized career mixers, barbeques and concerts.

Facilities recommendation-Shade and full sun spaces, area that could accommodate tables/chairs (similar to the Murray-Dodge courtyard)

Indoor programming:

The following features are organized in order of importance:

Office/storage spaces for graduate student organizations

Because the center would be located centrally, it would make sense for certain graduate student services to be housed here. There would be a handful of offices that would serve this purpose: one office could be used by the Graduate School's Office of Student Life staff (e.g., the Community Programs Coordinator), other offices could be shared by graduate student organizations. This arrangement would help student organizations easily communicate with Student Life staff. Offices should also contain locker space for organizations to use for storage.

Facilities recommendation-Office space (occupancy of each: 2 people)

Offices would contain 1-2 desks and some bookcases each.

Meeting spaces for graduate student organizations

Most graduate student organizations do not have a regular meeting space. To help graduate student organizations with their event planning, there should be comfortable meeting rooms available by reservation. When they are not being used to conduct organizational business, they could be used by students as additional studying space.

Facilities recommendation-Smaller rooms (occupancy of each: 20 people)

These additional rooms would have tables and chairs.

A flexible meeting and social space for graduate students

We need a large space for relaxed conversation and low-key studying that could be used by graduate students, their families, and academic collaborators. This space could be regularly used as an additional venue for the International Center's English Conversation program. This space should be located on the main floor and contain bulletin boards for Graduate School and graduate student organization announcements.

On certain days, this space could be reserved by student organizations for one large event -- or, if the room can be broken down, for many smaller events. This space would accommodate many types of programming -- such as the APGA-GSG organized career mixers, dancing lessons, dances, concerts, and wine and cheese events. Most events involve food, so there should be a place to store food before it is served.

Facilities recommendation-Main lounge space (occupancy: 500 people*)

This large room should have comfortable sofas, small tables, and chairs. Furnishings could be moved easily. This room could also be broken down into two smaller rooms (similar to the Frist Multipurpose Room). The room should have quality hard wood floors and be equipped with audio capabilities. Food and beverages (including alcoholic) could be consumed in this space.

Facilities recommendation-Catering kitchen

This room should be attached to the main lounge, with the option of opening a counter.

*Occupancy for spaces on central campus most used by graduate student organizations: Carls Fields Liberation Hall (400 people), Frist Multipurpose Room (three rooms the can hold 360 people each)

Media room

Graduate students often gather to watch movies or television programs. Given the high percentage of international students in the graduate population, there is high demand for comfortable spaces to watch international sport events.

Facilities recommendation-Media room (occupancy: 75 people)

This room would have a large screen TV or projector with full A/V capabilities, comfortable couches and chairs.

Alternative facilities recommendation-The main lounge space could contain a large screen TV or projector with full A/V capabilities in one corner.

Dedicated study space for graduate students

So that studying and quiet conversation can occur even when there is an event in the main lounge space, it would be nice if there were a separate study room.

Facilities recommendation-Study room (occupancy: 30 people)

The study room would have many windows and contain comfortable couches and chairs, larger tables, and computers.

Locker space for graduate students

If this issue is not already being addressed on the department level, a limited number of lockers could be designated for student use. Priority should be given to students who do not have office or lab space elsewhere in the University. This space could be modeled after existing lockers for Woodrow Wilson school students in the basement of Robertson Hall.

Additional aspects

Graduate student organizations should get priority for reserving the space.

All graduate students should have year-round, 24-hour prox-access to the building.