



Minutes

GSG Assembly Meeting

May 11, 2016 5:45pm

Joseph Henry Room, Jadwin Hall, Princeton University

The meeting is called to order at 5:55pm.

April Minutes

William Smith (Politics Rep) motions to approve the April 2016 Assembly Meeting Minutes. Michelle Frazer (AOS Rep) seconds. The motion passes unanimously.

McGraw Center - Course Evaluations

Present: Frederick Hughson (Molecular Biology), and Jeff Himpele (Director of Teaching Initiatives and Programs at McGraw)

- Council was charged by the Dean of the College to undertake a review of the course evaluation system. It is currently collecting input from faculty, students from this and other campuses, and reviewing literature.
 - Purpose of today's discussion is to gather input to add to responses to survey sent to GSG Assembly.
- Graduate students are unique in that they are both students and instructors. Both perspectives are important.
- Only 27% of survey respondents said they paid attention to course evaluations when choosing courses, but almost 60% felt that course evaluations should be mandatory in graduate courses. What's the reason for the discrepancy?
 - Not aware that the website with existing course evaluations existed
 - Course evaluations maybe not useful
 - Jeff: how many were unaware that you can access this system while choosing courses?
 - 15-20 unaware
 - Vivian Chang (WWS Rep): Is there an online system to view evaluations? (Only aware of a paper version in WWS)
 - Yes
 - Is it known what fraction of graduate courses have course evaluations?
 - No
 - Jeff: Is making course evaluations mandatory a good thing?

- Angelina Sylvain: One important consideration is to be able to ensure confidentiality (graduate classes are small, and instructor might be a student's advisor or collaborator).
 - Elspeth Green (English Rep): Applying course evaluations for small seminars might not be as relevant. It seems that a different kind of evaluation should be required.
 - Many of the courses students take are required by their departments - popularity of the class is irrelevant.
 - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): In my department (EEB), almost all courses are mandatory (and many students are highly discouraged from taking additional courses). I would personally never look at the system.
 - Laura Bustamante (Neuroscience Rep): In neuroscience there is a core course that everyone has to take, but there is a committee in the department that updates the course every year - Professors are interested in getting that input, but there is an internal way of doing this. Not clear how this could interface with a global system.
 - Jonathan Balkind (GSG Communications Director): The pie charts (link to the course evaluation) do not turn into a clickable button, so it does not look like a link.
- Jeff (follow-up on confidentiality issue): If you knew that your comments for a small course would be private such that only other students, the DGS, or the Dean could read it, but not the instructor him/herself, would that be enough confidentiality?
 - The head, or DGS, might also be the instructor.
 - Michelle Frazer (AOS Rep): It would change what I would say, but there are instructors who want to hear this feedback, so there should also be a way to provide it.
 - Michelle Frazer (AOS Rep): Many of my department's courses are jointly taught by two professors, but score seems to be aggregated (and teaching quality might differ greatly):
 - Jonathan Balking (GSG Communications Director): In addition, sometimes the system asks for your thoughts on one preceptor (the one officially assigned to the section), but students might have had more contact with a different one.
- 56% of the respondents said that their own course evaluations were not applicable. What is the reason for this?
 - Jonathan Balkind (GSG Communications Director): I was an AI, but was not listed as a preceptor, so the results were not applicable to me:
 - Julia Wittes: Most of us only teach a precept once, and receive feedback at the end of the semester. Feedback would only have been useful if it came during the

course.

- Angelina Sylvain: There is a tendency on campus to devalue teaching - students are specifically told that course evaluations do not impact success as a graduate student. This is something to keep in mind.
- Would more granular feedback be more useful (as opposed to a single comment box)?
 - (Time allocated for discussion reached, Assembly motions to extend discussion by 5 minutes - motion passes unanimously)
 - Genna Gliner (GSG Facilities Chair): I also did not precept, but have been an AI several times, so did not receive any feedback. Maybe the system could have a dropdown menu with all the AIs and students could pick the ones they want to evaluate?
 - Katja Luxem (Geosciences Rep): I generally did not find that having many checkboxes was useful
 - Elise Myers (LGSA): If it was something that was really easy to do, like a scale, that would be nice. If it's only three or so different scores, it might be useful
 - Yuan Shi (Plasma Physics Rep): I think that's already in the system
 - Fred: I think there is only a number per evaluation
 - Elspeth Green (English Rep): I remember getting several numbers
 - Vivian Chang (WWS Rep): I filled out a complete response for each person
 - Michelle Frazer: Do you know how much attention these course evaluations get?
 - Students complain that faculty can get terrible reviews and still not act on the information
 - Katja Luxem (Geosciences Rep): Advice I got from senior graduate students was that if students ask for an extension or a better grade, you should give it to them, and that will get you good reviews. This goes against people's teaching philosophies.
 - Olivia Guayasamin (EEB Rep): Some students have reflected very sexist views on course evaluations
- There will be one more quick email sent to Assembly so they can reach out to McGraw with additional suggestions and feedback.

Vacating inactive representatives

- Only one inactive rep (Civil and Environmental Engineering), who will be sending a new rep
- Several vacant seats
 - GSG Exec will send out calls for new reps to these departments
- If anyone is moving, let Akshay Mehra (GSG Vice-President) know, so that we are aware

of who's taking over.

Recruitment

- Furniture drive:
 - 31st of May and 1st of June
 - Need volunteers from 3-7pm on the 31st and from 10am-7pm on the 1st (4 tents)
 - In the past, this has been a good opportunity to get good furniture and clothing
 - This year everything will be free (University wants to further encourage recycling)
 - Sign-up sheet will be circulated, and anyone who is interested should sign up
- Summer BBQs
 - Every Wednesday starting June 6.
 - Looking for performers: if anyone wants to perform or knows someone who does, they should email Mattias Fitzpatrick (GSG Social Chair) at mvwf@princeton.edu
- Graduate Student Center Initiative
 - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): Looking for help with this initiative, either through a focus group or by getting more involved with events, locations, and layout for this type of center
 - Reach Mircea via email at mircea@princeton.edu
- GSG Summer Party
 - Party will be held on June 4th
 - Bradley O'Brien (GSG Special Events Officer): Will be asking for (paid) volunteers to help with sign-ins, giving out wristbands, drinks, etc.
 - Will send out email with official call

Executive Committee Summary

- Reorientation Event in the Fall:
 - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): something that we have discussed with the graduate school.
 - The goal is to reintroduce students with the professional development offices (like McGraw, Career Services, Writing Center, Keller Center for Entrepreneurship).
 - Want to have an event similar to a careers fair, but with student groups that are relevant to professional development (like the data science group, or undergraduate groups that are open to graduate students).
- Noah Apthorpe (Computer Science Rep): would this be at the same time as orientation for new students, or a separate event?
 - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): It would definitely be a Fall event. Is there a

reason for not holding them simultaneously?

- Katja Luxem (Geosciences Rep): I think it would be too much, and we want to target a very different group of students (those who have been here for at least 1 year)

Open Forum

- Katja Luxem (Geosciences Rep):
 - From the recreation committee meetings: Dillon gym is being renovated, and several areas (such as the pool) will be closed at points during the summer
 - Renovations look great
- Hendia Edmund (GSG Health and Life Chair): Will be present at general meeting on Friday. Suggestions and feedback regarding Health & Life at Princeton, especially department-specific issues, should be emailed to Hendia at hendia@princeton.edu
- Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): Will have a joint GSG and University Services meeting in Frist MPR A.
 - Dean Kulkarni will present on strategic plan for the graduate school, so everyone who is interested should try to make it. If you cannot make it, email GSG Exec with suggestions.
- Julia Wittes: Did you invite the Office of the Architect (At USLC meeting, they said they'd be willing to attend). Right now they have had no interaction with students.
 - Will do so.
- Angelina Sylvain: We should convince administration that graduate students' voices are important and should be heard. Recently, at talk with President Eisgruber, he suggested that the reason Board of Trustees has less graduate student representatives is because graduate students donate less, but they don't seem to be considering research contributions to the University (through grants, etc.). We should try to get those numbers and present them.
 - Jonathan Balking (GSG Communications Director): Could go even further and mention technology licensing (they've made many millions of dollars in the past through these, which are mostly graduate student contributions)
 - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): This ties in with trying to get recent graduate alum on the Board of Trustees. The idea is to meet with recent alumni at Reunions and getting an open letter or petition going.
 - Yuan Shi (Plasma Physics Rep): Do you want them to apply?
 - Mircea: We want them to state that they want a recent alum on the board
 - Julia Wittes: Is it possible to think about having an event for graduate students?
 - Would have to talk to APGA, but we might be too late
 - Akshay Mehra (GSG Vice-President): If you have events at Reunions and

you talk to graduate alumni, there is no harm in mentioning the fact that we don't currently have recent alumni on the Board of Trustees. Mention that we are actively working towards this and would appreciate support.

- Bradley O'Brien (GSG Special Events Officer): I think the DBar is having a graduate student mixer doing Reunions.
- Mircea: What level of engagement should we try to go for? Should we frame it as a petition, or as an open letter that might be published as an editorial?
 - Akshay: I would urge against petitioning at reunions, since that might cast us on a specific light. Asking if we can reach out to them might be more useful.

Angelina Sylvain motions to adjourn the meeting. Elise Myers (Latino Graduate Students Association) seconds. The meeting adjourns at 6:38pm.

Next meeting: June 8, 2016 5:45pm