GRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

GSG Assembly Meeting
July 13, 2016 5:45pm
Remote Meeting

Reorientation Event for Graduate Students

In collaboration with the Graduate School, the GSG wishes to organize a "Reorientation Event" as a partner event to the incoming student orientation, designed especially for returning graduate students after the summer. The goal of this event is to introduce students to the various professional and personal development offices on campus, as well as to student groups that are focused on professional development and personal well-being

- Noah Apthorpe (CS Rep): It might be good to include student groups focusing on social events in addition to professional development (e.g. PUMC, Board Games Club, Tango Club, and many others). These groups are usually at the incoming student orientation but don't have a comparable event to reach returning students.
    - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): I feel that including such groups would distract from the event's initial mission. The goal is not to repeat orientation, but to have a targeted reintroduction to offices which focus on skills improvement and professional development. We can, however, think about other ways of making students aware of the other groups involved in student life.
    - Genna Gliner: Agree with Noah. I think that including these groups and their missions definitely fits in with personal well being.
- Olivia Martel (Grad School): This sounds promising. Have you been in touch with Lily Secora directly about this? She handles Orientation and would be the best contact.
    - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): Yes. Planning is already underway but we are thinking of the full roster of groups and offices to invite
- Current centers: Career Services, McGraw Center, Writing Center, Pace Center
    - Vivian Chang (WWS Rep): should add personal development centers (Women's Center, LGBT Center, Fields Center, etc.)
    - We will also invite graduate student fellows from these centers (McGraw Fellows, Career Services advisory board members, etc.) and the new GS Diversity Fellows
- Students:
    - Professional development groups: Graduate Consulting Club, Entrepreneurs Club, Data Science Club, Digital Humanities Graduate Caucus
    - We are considering inviting undergraduate clubs that are open to graduate student members.

- - Currently we are working on inviting the professional [development groups listed on the GS website](#). Are there student groups that are missing from the list worth inviting?
  - Any questions about the event?
    - Elise Meyers (LGSA Delegate): Maybe something else to add to the event could be a "help" guidelines. Basically, it could be a little roadmap of where you should go for certain issues. Sometimes, students don't know that certain issues should go through the DGS vs the chair vs the graduate school vs Ombuds. Or a problem with one channel may make it seem impossible to solve the problem (i.e. not knowing other viable options). Making seeking help more normal and better understood could increase the likelihood that problems are solved earlier on, rather than left to fester. And, while I know this last point is hard, maybe having something that describes the confidentiality of these resources (i.e. what stays with them and what doesn't)
      - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): This is a great suggestion, but I think it falls out of the scope of the original project, which is about making students aware of offices focused on development rather than conflict resolution. However, I like the idea of making and publicizing a road map to explain the different resources available to help students.
      - Elise Meyers: I think that, if the project is focusing on student professional development and personal well-being, this is an absolutely essential topic to cover. I think this gets back to my reason for suggesting this, which is because it's an often ignored problem that can serious repercussions on all aspects of a graduate student's life. A Re-Orientation event, to me, would seem like the perfect place for a reminder and clarification of how you can get help for a variety of issues. A way to meet in the middle on this could be having the roadmap created and making it available at multiple different booths (say those that relate to it, like the graduate school), that would be great. But there should also be offices like Ombuds there for trying to make sure students know where they can go.

Anonymized Feedback on the Academic Graduate Experience

The GSG is interested in partnering with the Graduate School to initiate a school-wide medium to solicit feedback from graduate students on their academic experience, acting as a form of "course evaluation" for thesis research.

- Reason: the academic experience is central to how students feel about their time in graduate school. In spite of everything we do as the GSG to foster community, students who have poor experiences with their advisors or departments are very unlikely to enjoy their time at Princeton. Candid feedback is important to improving the academic graduate

student experience. Students supposedly provide feedback on their academic experience through the re-enrollment form, but this is visible to a student's advisor and therefore is not conducive for candid criticisms. This initiative would let students provide feedback in a structured fashion directly to the Graduate School.

- Does this sound like a good initiative? Pros and cons of gathering this information? Any suggestions for implementation?
    - Joshua Wallace (Astro Rep): We will need to think very carefully about what questions to ask in such a feedback survey/form/whatever. It's very easy for real problems to get hidden in poorly designed surveys.
        - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): I couldn't agree more. We will need to work closely with Provost Jed Marsh on institutional research. I will also try to ensure Assembly can see a draft of the questions before we run the survey. Another consideration is if we should run the survey or if this should fall on the Graduate School.
    - Hugh Wilson: How would feedback effect change in this scheme? Perhaps someone / a group could read the feedback and give advice. The usefulness of the advice will be related to the amount of information in the feedback. Does the feedback need to be anonymous or just confidential?
        - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): I had not considered the possibility of confidentiality without anonymity. I think the easiest way to ensure the survey has an impact is to make aggregate results (e.g. by department, by year) public. For instance, "80% of students in department X report dissatisfaction with advisors." At the same time, we would want to ensure that sub-sampling does not expose anyone for retaliation on a bad review (e.g. "50% of students in their yth year in department X [there are only 4 students] report dissatisfaction with their advisor").
            - Hugh Wilson: I agree that only aggregate information should be made public to prevent retaliation against the providers of feedback. However I think it might also be good to have a confidential way to act on specific cases. I think some departments have piloted the idea of assigning a few faculty an informal advisory role. Students can go to them to ask for advice. It might be a good idea to extend this.
        - Julia Wittes (Molecular Biology Rep): I agree. I think before we spend time planning this, we should be in touch with the grad school and with faculty about how this kind of information could be used to set advisors/departments on a better track.
            - Noah Apthorpe (CS Rep): Yes, including the faculty will be critical for this feedback scheme to enact meaningful change.

Perhaps we could do a parallel survey with faculty to gauge their views on the same questions we ask the graduate students. If the responses generally agree, it would strengthen the recommendations of the GSG. Otherwise it might suggest unanticipated issues to address.
- Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): That sounds like a really great idea, running a concurrent faculty-level survey. We will definitely work closely with the Graduate School on this.
- Yuan Shi (Plasma Physics Rep): Do we know what authority does the Graduate School have over individual department? Can the Graduate School enforce changes if necessary?
  - Daniel Vitek (GSG Academic Affairs): The GS has some authority (e.g. admissions slots) but in this case would probably be very reluctant to enforce changes based on anonymous student feedback.
  - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): I think the best way to frame this is to think that there are a set of interests: GS, department, advisors, and students. To the GS and department (DGS), some metrics (time to completion, placement percentage) are much more important than they are to advisors (who might consider publication impact more important). Such a survey would go some way to showing whether the balance of these forces and interests is beneficial or detrimental to the students. I think public results in particular would increase accountability and prioritize improving the graduate student experience.
- (Anonymous): Obtaining feedback about one's advisors in an anonymous way should be done with care. There are plenty of small deptartments and it could be easy to tell who said what.
  - Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): We are definitely aware of this, and minimizing the potential for retaliation is a necessity.

Call for Volunteers
- Career Fair Organizers: the GSG is partnering with Career Services to build upon the inaugural Graduate Career Fair organized last year. We will assist with outreach to employers to encourage them to register and attend. Last year there were 25 employers present and we could try and double this number this year. We need help with the following:
  - We need volunteers willing to reach out to employers. Interested students should contact gsg@princeton.edu.

- - ■ Reason: employers get excited knowing graduate students are engaged with a career fair and are more likely to attend. There are also a huge number (2,000+) potential employers.
      - ■ Expected workload: we will have template e-mails to send to employers, and and an evolving FAQ's document to help you answer any follow-up questions about the event. Mostly it will be a back-and-forth e-mail.
    - ○ Which employers do you want to see at this career fair? We realize different departments have different target industries.
      - ■ Elise Meyers (LGSA Delegate): Some I've heard of include: environmental consulting companies (e.g. Environ), NGOs (e.g. EDF), national laboratories (e.g. Oakridge, Brookhaven), AAS Fellowships, CDC, NIH, pharmaceutical companies, consulting generally (Exponent - for experts in a given field), science communication/writing jobs, energy companies (not just oil).
        - ● Mircea Davidescu (GSG President): Great recommendations! Thank you! Let us know also if you are interested in helping us reach out to companies (we can provide templates to get people going).
      - ■ (Anonymous): Ask the Graduate Consulting Club about potential employers for the Grad Career Fair. They are bringing in companies for the case competition this year.
  - ● Graduate Student Center
    - ○ We are looking for more volunteers to help with designing a pilot graduate student hangout space which will open in October. In particular, we need help with designing programming, provide feedback on what is missing on campus that a grad student center could resolve, and investigate such centers at peer institutions to inspire our own design. Interested students should contact gsg@princeton.edu.

Executive Committee Summary
- ● Career Services Career Fair meeting (July 6th)
- ● Meeting with Graduate School and Housing (July 7th)
  - ○ This meeting included Lisa Schreyer from the Graduate School, Lisa DePaul from Housing, and graduate students Akshay (GSG VP), Genna (GSG Facilities and Transportation Chair), and Akil (Lakeside Rep). The goal of the meeting was to illustrate examples in which the housing department was falling short in their duties and learn the plan and timeline for filling James Poole's vacancy.
  - ○ In reviewing stories sent in by graduate students, we illustrated that the housing department is missing a system of accountability for managing student complaints

and issues. We encouraged Lisa DePaul to look into options for managing student contacts including keeping an internal spreadsheet and speaking to OIT about developing a ticketing system. She agreed to look into this and we will follow up with them for details.

- When discussing James Poole's vacancy, Lisa DePaul stated that they hope to have the position filled by fall. They have yet to finalize the job description or have a concrete timeline of when the job posting will be up on the HR website. In the meantime - Lisa DePaul has assumed most of Jim's responsibilities and encourages students to reach out to her with any concerns or issues that are not being addressed by her staff. We will continue to follow up with the graduate school and housing staff on the timeline to replace James Poole.
- We are following up this meeting with a meeting with VP Calhoun and next month we will be meeting with Housing, University Services, the Graduate School, and Dean Kulkarni to continue the discussion.

Next meeting: August 10, 2016 5:45pm