Minutes of the General Assembly Meeting on Nov. 18, 2009

The fifth regularly scheduled meeting of GAPSA General Assembly was convened on November 18th, 2009 at 6:00 PM in the Bodek Lounge in Houston Hall.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:32pm.

II. Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum

Present were: Corbett Brown, Lee Solomon, Ashley Goss, Varsha Jain, David Stein, Michelle Jacobson, Jade Palomino, Henry Friedman, David Conklin, Emily Joy Rothchild, Maher Zamel, Tara Liss-Marino, Melinda Nelson‐Hurst, Suzanne Bratt, Gerardo Benitez, Monika Bhagat‐Kennedy (proxy for Bronwyn Wallace), Scott Ordway, Matthew Closter, Cara Bumgardner, Christie Chavez, Lisa Jacobson, Alexandria Mathieu, Rosalyn Daitch, Kimberly Krasnow, Erica Silbiger, Stephen Brady, David Pietrocola, Maria Murray, Majesh Abraham, Ria Varghese, Sven David Udekwu, Joe Friedman, Jacqueline Simonet, Dustin Shilling, Tammer Farid, Will Cho, Danish Nagda, Beth Froh, Margaret Yoho, Tom Byrne, Joanelle Hernandez, Steven Fernandez, Brian Cheyne, Shawn Kumar, Carl Lonnberg, Maneesh Nisargand, Sodany Sor, Kerry Kellogg

Quorum was declared.

III. Approval of the Minutes from Prior Meeting

Motion to approve the minutes from the General Assembly meeting on 10-21-09 was approved by a majority vote. There were no minutes to be approved from the General Assembly meeting on 11-04-09 as quorum requirements were not met and no business was conducted.

IV. Executive Board & Committee Reports

•Chair

Mr. Corbett “Little Caesar” Brown reported that he met with the Chaplain’s office along with other Executive Board members and discussed how to engage graduate and professional students in service opportunities. He also reported that tomorrow the Executive Board will be meeting with Provost Vince Price and Vice Provost Andy Binns to discuss future GAPSA funding and other issues.

•Vice Chair

Mr. Solomon reported his recent successes in securing GradFest funding. WXPN will be donating
prizes, Alumni Relations will be sponsoring karaoke and quizzo, as well as donating prizes and money. Bon Apetit will be providing food for the event and he has been in talks with the Chaplain’s office and WHYY about sponsorship opportunities. He also reported progress on the student life survey, namely that he has a meeting planned with Vice Provost Andy Binns and Stacey Lopez in December to finalize the survey and that he hopes to have the survey sent out through Survey Monkey by January.

• VC Professional Students / Professional Student Council

Ms. Palomino reported that the different subcommittees of the professional student council met. The financial subcommittee is in the middle of streamlining the travel grant proposal submission process. The social subcommittee and leadership subcommittee are working on their first big events.

• VC Research Students / Research Student Council

Mr. Friedman reported that the research council approved funding for the campus climate survey and discussed other issues pertinent to research students.

• VC International Affairs / International Student Council

Ms. Jain reported that the International Council will be organizing an International food and movie night on December 3rd entitled “A movie trip to Bali with GAPSA”. This will serve as a social event to make the graduate students aware of the international council at Penn, address their issues/concerns as well as advertise and recruit for the Peer Mentoring Program. She reported that she attended the ISAB meeting (International Student Advisory Board) meeting where efforts for organizing a similar peer-mentoring program are underway and hopes to get some support from them regarding this. She also reported that earlier last week she was contacted by Iranian graduate students regarding the Visa Reform amendment to be presented at the NGAPS meeting at the University of Nebraska. This was a joint effort from Iranian students nationwide. The reform calls for a change in the current US policy of granting single entry visa to Iranian students. The International Council helped the students with drafting the letter, though in an unofficial capacity.

• VC Equity & Access / Pluralism Student Council

Ms. Jacobson reported that on Friday the UC diversity and equity committee meeting is going to be held so if any relevant issues for discussion should be forwarded to her.

• VC Student Life / Student Life Policy Council

Ms. Rothchild reported that on Monday, November 9th, GAPSA co-hosted, along with the GSC, the Student Health Insurance Forum. Aetna and Student Health representatives were present to answer the questions of 30-35 students and introduce students to Aetna’s online features. She further mentioned that plans are moving forward with the Family Resource Center and to
expect a more concrete update at the next meeting. She also urged assembly members to encourage all their constituents to register their cell phone number with UPennAlert in order to receive text messages and phone calls in the case of emergency. She added that more information can be found at the Division of Public Safety’s website.

• VC Finance / Finance Committee

Ms. Goss had nothing to report.

• VC Social Activities / Student Activities Committee

Mr. Conkin reported that last week GAPSA hosted another successful Late Night Distrito Event with close to 320 people. The Black & White formal is on Saturday evening and close to 300 people have bought tickets. He also reported on December 11th tickets for the La Criox Wine Paring Dinner will go on sale.

• VC Student Programs / Student Programs Committee

Mr. Zamel reported that the Wilma Theater event was last Friday and went well. He noted that the Thanksgiving dinner is coming up next Friday and tickets are still on sale for those students staying in the area. The tickets for the Buddakan dinner are sold out. Tickets for the King of Prussia shuttle are almost sold out. Finally, movie tickets sales have been restructured and will resume again next week.

• VC Communications / Communications Committee

Ms. Sullivan informed the GA about the new GAPSA listserv and explained that instructions for subscribing were available on the GAPSA website. She also encouraged GA members who had not get joined the GAPSA facebook group to do so.

• VC for Operations

Mr. Stein reported that he needed to make a correction to the general assembly teambuilding exercise award ceremony. After receiving the stuffed bear as a token of gratitude for organizing the event, he inadvertently (though quite boisterously) said ”It was me, all me, and no one but me”. That was in fact false, Mr. Conklin was responsible for most of the organizational work. However, he was unable to make the teambuilding event and so Mr. Stein assumed the responsibility of running the event. Mr. Stein apologized for the mistake and submitted the resignation of his entire speechwriting staff.

V. State of the Schools

Annenberg
Ms. Liss-Marino reported that three main issues are being dealt with. She reported that they are working with the new Dean of Graduate Studies to develop a professional development series that will be launched next semester. This series will cover topics such as choosing/submitting/presenting at conferences; finding/applying to post-doc positions; and how to turn one’s dissertation into a book. The hope is develop a template of this series that will be continuously implemented.

She further reported that they have also developed a formal orientation program for post-docs and visiting scholars. Until this intervention there was no real system for identifying all of the post-docs and fellows, and for helping them get to know each other or the Annenberg staff, faculty and student body. This seems particularly problematic given that many of them are international scholars, and it may be especially daunting to move here with little organized information or assistance. A meeting was held with new post-docs last week to try to get a sense of what information or help they might need, and to discuss ways to better organize and introduce them to each other and to the other members of the school. They are working on a permanent plan for implementing these processes whenever new visiting scholars and post-docs join us in the future.

She also reported that the government has been holding a series of Informal social events. They are planning more informal social events open to all staff, faculty and students. They recently had a "potluck and game night" that was a great success, and they have planned monthly happy hours open to the entire school.

Finally, she reported that they have introduced a first-year mentoring program: each year they pair incoming graduate students with more senior students with similar research interests and provide a small amount of money for the mentors to take their mentees out to coffee. These relationships have been very helpful in enabling first-year graduate students get acclimated.

SP2

Mr. Byrne reported that SP2 students have a Positive Mental Attitude (or PMA, best exemplified by the Bad Brains song “Attitude”). They have started a biweekly colloquium that has been successful so far. He mentioned the Winter Essentials drive being held during the first couple weeks of December that the students are running. He welcomed the donation of any new or gently used coats, gloves, legwarmers, etc. Mr. Byrne also plugged an event being organized as a part of MLK day events: a screening of a documentary on Bayard Rustin, the civil rights activist whose story has been mostly buried because he was openly gay. This screening will be followed by a panel discussion on the controversy over LGBT civil rights advancement. He finally reported that the professional students are trying to integrate different programs and have excellent service opportunities in and around West Philly/University City.

Vet

Mr. Fernandez reported that the vet school has weekly happy hours every Friday. First is alumni
sponsored. They also held a SCAVMA club fair to get students involved. He reported that their biggest fundraiser for vet school, the SCAVMA Auction will be held on December 8th. The SCAVMA Holiday party will be held in January this year to avoid GAPSA events. The government is also sponsoring a Teaching Awards ceremony for the second time. They will also be subsidizing the cost to attend the SAVMA conference being held at the University of Wisconsin. Finally they have held a series of meetings, with the school IT department to improve infrastructure, with the Dean to discuss student discounts, with the administration regarding modifying curriculum, and with the student body to discuss student concerns. He also reported that most clubs have been very active, including the Penn Vet Animals Welfare Society participating in the 9th Annual Animal Welfare Judging and Assessment Competition.

Nursing

Ms. Froh spoke for the nursing research students. She reported that they held a “Welcome Back” gathering for current and new PhD students, they also sponsored two Milestone series events, one for first years and one for older students, and a happy hour along with the professional nursing students. They are in the process of endorsing a faculty member for a university award, elected representatives to School of Nursing committees, and preparing to sponsor a table at the MNO Red & White Ball. They will also have another joint happy hour in December, a Winter Potluck in January, continue their Milestone series, and sponsor a Spring Colloquium.

Ms. Yoho spoke for the nursing professional students. She reported that they had held happy hours at Distrito and Mad Mex, and networked with alumni at an event. She reported that they would also be sponsoring a table at the MNO Red & White Ball.

Design

Ms. Jacobson reported that the Design School is currently being accredited by the NAAB, so the PennDesign Student Council and Architecture Department Representatives have been working on evaluating their studio culture policy for the NAAB. They are in the process of making a PennDesign student website, to connect the different disciplines of the school. They also held an open house in the beginning of November where there were approximately 230 new prospective students. In the near future, Ms. Jacobson reported that students would participate in the ULI Competition this January, where the inter-disciplinary competition rewards reach $50,000. She noted that PennDesign students have historically placed in this competition. She also mentioned that the annual Beaux Art Ball will be held in the spring. Most importantly, the PennDesign women's volleyball team is undefeated!!

Regarding individual departments, Ms. Jacobson mentioned that architecture has held a lecture series on Contemporary Architecture, including Fumihiko Maki (architect of the new communications building), and Bjarke Ingells from BIG. Plus, other great architects have visited the school. City Planning is continuing to sponsor a great lecture series, and is planning a future bowling night with the school of education. The Historic Preservation department is performing
site research in NYC, including Ellis Island and Ground Zero. Fine Arts hosted a benefit auction Friday, Nov 20th, where there were bids on contemporary work by the MFA candidates, faculty and alumni, with proceeds benefiting the PennDesign Thesis Exhibition.

**Dental**

Ms. Chavez reported that the Dental GAPSA reps are on Dental School government as well. She reported that there are many changes in the school due to a new dean. The school is going paperless. There are other big changes, especially for older students. Unfortunately the glitches that occur during the transition are of the type that pit students against administration. The students are getting a little exasperated. She reported that the curriculum is fine so concerns aren’t academic, but these concerns not being heard. She appealed to GAPSA for avenues of appeal. To keep moral up, the government has sponsored a battle of the classes, alumni-student connections, and monthly goodies: free pie/fruit/hot chocolate one day each month. There is a formal dance, mixer with temple dental that is planned for the future. Potential future events include tickets for a 76ers game and leadership events. She finally reported there has been limited fundraising because of change of administration, which explains why the Dental School representatives advocated for more money from GAPSA.

**Law**

Mr. Sven David reported that the school was being completely renovated. He added that the Law School ball was being planned, which is the biggest event of the year for the school. A bar review series, mainly centered in Center City, is being held on a weekly basis. There is a thanksgiving food drive going on in the law school.

**Engineering**

Mr. Pietrocola reported on both research and professional issues. GSEG holds monthly happy hours that have been quite successful, the first one in September had attendance of approximately 200 people. Also had a successful event to see the Star Trek exhibit at the Franklin Institute. Currently collaborating with PGWISE on a Christmas toy drive. Future events include subsidizing tickets to 76ers & Flyers games, as well as the Philadelphia Auto Show and other cultural events.

**Education**

Ms. Silbiger reported that this is the first year for the education school and that they finally have a ratified constitution. They held a series of “meet and greet” events for the different divisions of the school. They have also introduced a new conference attendance policy to entice students to attend conferences, offering $100 to subsidize expenses. They are in the process of building a web presence and surveying students.
**Medicine**

Mr. Cho reported for the professional students. He reported that their dean was awarded the highest award for academic excellence. The school-wide formal event was to be held this week with five hours of open bar. It is a very popular event among students. Recently all students have been vaccinated against the flu. They also recently upgraded student lounge space for the first time in ten years. This summer they reached out to other schools to build relationships with colleagues, culminating in a happy hour with medical schools in the Philadelphia area. They are also in the process of upgrading technology resources and fundraising.

Ms. Simonet spoke for the research students. She reported that the main events are an earlier Octoberfest to welcome new students and a holiday party in December. In the spring they are planning a research symposium that will include students from schools from the surrounding area. She explained that a large percentage of their budget goes to merit requests and individual programs within the school.

**Wharton**

Mr. Lonnberg spoke for Wharton students. He reported that morale among the students still high, despite the economy, and specifically much better than last year when there was tension between students and administration. He continued that the two parties worked hard to resolve the tension and it has made a big difference. There was a moderately long discussion in the assembly regarding the ratification of grade nondisclosure for the coming year to prohibit employers from demanding to see a student’s grades. He further reported that similar to the Dental School, the Wharton government is facing a cash crunch. In response they have started a big initiative entitled “Back in Black” to get the school government back on better financial footing. They have also started an initiative to get more interaction between first and second year students: the Wharton cup. They are also looking to resurrect the Wharton yearbook.

**Arts & Sciences**

Ms. Bratt spoke for the SAS research students. She reported that research students work in tandem with SAS professional students for social events. The SASGov assembly meets on a biweekly basis and are working together with career services as well as communicating with sub-departments that are represented within SASGov to better serve students regarding funding/healthcare. She continued that this has resulted in multiple surveys of the student population. She further reported that they are engaged in dialogues with the library and grievance committees. Mr. Brown then unintentionally insulted Ms. Bratt by using an welcomed diminutive version of her name. He was swiftly castigated.

Mr. Closter reported that SASGov is continuing to tackle the ongoing problem of identifying and engaging professional students as these students are spread between masters programs in individual departments as well as larger institutes and programs that aren’t directly tied to
departments. He noted that SASGov is in the process of surveying professional students to identify issues specific to these students.

VI. GA/GAPSA Focus Issues

Mr. Brown broke the GA into six focus groups. After discussing among the groups, the following issues were offered to the group:

1. Improve GAPSA outreach in terms of students’ awareness of GAPSA.
2. Try to improve intellectual property rights awareness among students.
3. Improve density of communal after-hours study space
4. Improve community outreach project resources.
5. Creation of a service/community outreach committee in GAPSA
6. Improving incoming students awareness of limits for dissertation work and realistic graduation goals.
7. Improve students awareness of various university services, such as transit, housing, etc. “info-hub”
8. Improve Grad Student Housing
9. Octo-bus/transit issues
10. Campus lighting and campus safety in general
11. Improve student access to info about classes in other schools for cross-registration purposes.

VII: New Business

Mr. Brown reported that the executive board, by the constitution, is allowed to submit a nominee for the position of deputy to be ratified by the GA. He offered up a slate of deputies to be considered by the GA:

The motion to approve the deputies was passed.

VIII: Announcements

None

IX: Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 pm.