Minutes of the General Assembly Meeting on February 4, 2009

The eighth regularly scheduled meeting of GAPSA General Assembly was convened on February 4, 2009 at 7:31 PM in Bodek Lounge in Houston Hall.

Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum

Present were: Andrew Rennekamp, Alejandro Hagan, Jonathan Lukens, Christa Heyward, Nikki Thorpe, Christina Arlt, Jessica Kim, Esther Agbaje, Omar Khan, Natalie Williams, Sarah Smith, Susan Haas, Carla Cue, Leslie Warden, Tim Shokair, Wenting Li, Stephanie Milk, Jack Higgins, Allison Sullivan, Jacob Uriel, Alexander Balloon, Chrissy Caggiano, Stephanie Wujcik, Carolyn Chernoff, Olga Shebanova, Majesh Abraham, Swathi Madaiah, Yoonjee Kim, Lee Solomon, Jacqui Simonet, Johanna Busch, Jeff Neal, Kathleen Mechler, Esther Pinkston, Joanna Bizgaier, Karuna Patil, Henry Friedman, Aleksander Baranski and Micky Hervitz.

Quorum was declared.

Proxies

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp reminded all GAPSA members to notify via email Vice Chair for Operations Sarah Smith before each meeting if an absence is unavoidable. These notices of absence must be obtained prior and not during the meeting so that a record is kept and the absent person is indeed designating a proxy. An email must be sent to Ms. Smith at least two days in advance.

Approval of the Minutes from Prior Meeting

The changes to last meeting’s minutes put forth by GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp were approved by a majority vote with two abstentions from GAPSA representatives Leslie Warden and Henry Friedman.

Special Presentation and Discussion

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that this meeting’s special presentation will be from Penn Transit, which is a part of Business Services. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the presentation will include information concerning services offered, recent developments and new and future projects. Ms. Barbara Krueger Communications, Mr. John Gustavson, Ms. Mayra Arroyo, and Mr. Ron Ward, Associate Director for Penn Transit were present during this presentation. Mr. Ward stated that the presentation will include
a demonstration of the new GPS system introduced in the fall by Penn Transit. Mr. Ward asked if everyone was familiar with the new GPS system and Mr. Gustavson stated that after the conclusion of the presentation everyone would be familiar with it. Mr. Gustavson stated that the website to access the GPS system is www.upenn.edugps. This website is the main page where new information on weather conditions and transit alerts and delays are updated. The next webpage contains information concerning Penn Transit and the bus and shuttle services. If a student is aware of what service he or she wants, then bus routes and stops are displayed on the website. The student can then track in real time where the buses along that route are located. The student can even see how full the buses are. If the website states the bus is 75% full, then it has only standing room available. If the bus icon is green then the bus is moving and if the bus icon is red then it is stopped. If the bus door opens, then a different icon is displayed. The student can also scroll on the map and mouse over the bus stops for more information. Written schedules are available on this website but construction and road traffic can delay buses, so it is best to check in real time where the buses currently are located. This website can be accessed from a laptop or desktop, or even from a PDA, iPhone, or Blackberry. The buses stop at any traffic light or stop sign.

GAPSA representative Yoonjee Kim asked if there is still a stop at 21st and Walnut Streets as a bus driver stated that the last stop is at 21st and Locust Streets. Mr. Gustavson stated that 21st and Walnut is a stop since the 20th and Walnut stop is not a safe drop off location. Mr. Gustavson stated that the Penn shuttles pick up students at set stops on campus and will travel to non-commercial establishments in the catchment area. The van’s last tracked stop is at Fresh Grocer on 40th and Walnut. Once the van travels past the Fresh Grocer, it cannot be tracked on the GPS website. The A Shuttle route includes transit stops north of Locust Walk while the B Shuttle route includes stops south of Locust Walk. The shuttle ends at Johnston Pavilion. When the East routes are running, the student should look up the East route maps.

Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward asked why the hours for the East route are different from the hours for the west shuttle routes. Ms. Heyward asked if it is more expensive for Penn Transit to send shuttles on the East route as compared to the West route. Ms. Krueger stated when the buses are not running then the shuttles are used. Ms. Heyward asked if more students are riding West that would require more vans. Ms. Krueger stated that Center City is more congested with traffic and that vans would contribute more to the congestion. The buses are used more in Center City as it is easier to travel there via bus than shuttle van due to traffic and time of day. Ms. Heyward noted that the West routes use both shuttle vans and buses. Mr. Ward stated that this is because Penn Transit does not want students to walk more than two blocks to a Penn Transit stop. West Philadelphia comprises a larger area and to keep the walking distance to two blocks, vans alone would not suffice. There are many more off campus stops in West Philadelphia than in Center City.
GAPSA representative Jacob Uriel stated that there is a service gap between when the LUCY bus stops running and Penn Transit begins running if students wish to travel to 30th Street Station. Mr. Uriel asked the reason shuttles cannot travel to 30th Street. Mr. Gustavson stated that the LUCY runs until 7pm and that Monday through Friday Penn Transit runs from 7pm until 3am. The LUCY begins to run again at 7am. Ms. Heyward noted that shuttles are on call after 3am. Mr. Gustavson stated that Penn Transit has limited resources past 3am and that the shuttles cannot go to 30th Street.

GAPSA representative Olga Shebanova stated that many students live near 30th Street and that the East bus used to travel to Market and not to Chestnut Street. Mr. Gustavson explained that the city imposed a sudden weight restriction on the Chestnut Street Bridge. Ms. Shebanova asked if the buses could travel farther with a one block extension. Mr. Gustavson stated that too much time is spent traveling the extra block to Market Street. Thus there cannot be a stop at 2400 Chestnut as the buses must travel straight to 23rd Street.

GAPSA representative Leslie Warden stated that she has called to be picked up from home and had to wait on the corner of Delancey Street during a 20 minute window of time. Ms. Warden stated that since the GPS does not cover off campus and there is no phone call system or honking due to neighborhood restrictions, then there is a safety gap. Mr. Ward stated that the shuttles will honk up until 12 midnight. Ms. Warden stated that she has never heard a horn honk. Mr. Ward stated that some neighborhoods do not permit horn honking or shuttles traveling through the neighborhood. Ms. Warden stated that this did not occur past 3am. Mr. Gustavson stated that when there are limited services, the dispatcher calls the passenger to notify that a shuttle is en route. Ms. Warden stated that she was told by the dispatcher that the shuttle could not travel down this street, so she waited on the corner, and then the shuttle ended up traveling down the street anyways.

GAPSA representative Allison Sullivan stated that there used to be text messaging and a mobile feature for phones that could not connect to the internet. Mr. Gustavson stated that he was unfamiliar with this. In the future, there will be signs posted at the stops with information concerning the buses. The issue is if the signs are stolen or vandalized. Mr. Gustavson checked the Penn Transit website and discovered that there was once a text message feature for Penn Transit.

GAPSA representative Majesh Abraham stated that for undergraduates waiting for shuttles, the dispatcher would give an estimated time of arrival as it is unsafe to be waiting outside in West Philadelphia for 20-25 minutes. Mr. Gustavson stated that no student should be waiting outside for a shuttle. Ms. Heyward stated that sometimes a student is unable to see if the shuttle has arrived. Mr. Gustavson stated that included in the dispatch logs is information for the driver to honk if he cannot see the passenger from the street.
Mr. Uriel asked why there no longer exist rides to 30th Street as this issue needs to be addressed. From 3am-7am a student must hire a taxi as SEPTA does not run during these times. If a student wants to arrive at 30th Street in order to go to the airport or to NYC, there is no service provided between 5am-7am when many flights take off. Ms. Kruger stated that Penn Transit can look into this issue but the process used for requests is to run a pilot program and document ridership. Sometimes these routes are not economically feasible and cannot be sustained. Mr. Ward stated that from 3am-6am Penn Transit operates off of a skeleton crew at the behest of Public Safety as many of the vans at during those times are transporting rides for Penn Police at their request. There is no funding to hire more drivers during that period of the night. Mr. Uriel stated that it is too far to walk to 30th Street and it is not safe to walk there. During Winter Break, some students had difficulty finding a way to get to the airport. Mr. Hagan suggested taking the SEPTA trolley. Ms. Kruger stated that the trolleys run all night long. Mr. Ward stated that his office can take these suggestions into consideration.

Mr. Ward suggested creating a list of requests and submitting this to Vice Chair for Student Life Nikki Thorpe. Ms. Kruger stated that these requests are helpful to Penn Transit to determine where the needs lie and what pilot programs should be run. Mr. Ward suggested using the Idea Web on the Penn Transit website to submit ideas.

GAPSA representative Alexander Balloon asked what the mechanisms for self evaluation and assessment are, including average pick up times, wait times, and new routes, in order to evaluate performance. Ms. Kruger stated that the GPS provides a detailed history that can be verified. All calls to Penn Transit are taped and monitored. The Idea Web on the website is in place for ideas, suggestions, and complaints. Ms. Kruger noted that if a great deal of feedback on a certain subject is received, Penn Transit will address this. Penn Transit also actively educates its drivers and passengers and conducts a yearly survey. Mr. Ward stated that feedback concerning the GPS system is welcomed.

Ms. Heyward thanked Penn Transit for the stop at the Schattner Building on 40th Street. Mr. Ward stated that at every transit stop there is a curbside beacon which students can activate so that they can wait inside for their ride. Ms. Heyward stated that a student is not permitted to enter the Dental School without a dental ID. Mr. Ward stated that this should not be the case and he will follow up on this. Mr. Rennekamp thanked the members of Penn Transit.

Reports

Chair’s Report

Maya Angelou Tickets

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that he met with administrators at the Women’s Center to discuss GAPSA cosponsoring Women’s Week 2009. Only 900 of
the total 1200 tickets are available to the Penn community, as Penn partners within the Netter Center and Penn Alexander School, etc. will be receiving 300 tickets. GAPSA negotiated to obtain one third of the total tickets available Penn community as graduate and professional students comprise a third of the Penn community, not counting the health system. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Executive Board decided to sell half of these tickets online as advance ticket sales and half through the Graduate Student Center. To purchase an online ticket, students must pay an additional processing fee. Mr. Rennekamp asked the Assembly for feedback concerning this issue if the tickets should all be sold online or all in the Graduate Student Center. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the online tickets went on sale February 2nd and the Graduate Student Center started selling the tickets today.

**Students with Children Resolution**

Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Resolution on Students with Children was included in the GAPSA February report to the University Council as well as mentioned during the University Council meeting. The resolution has been met with a favorable response, both publicly and behind the scenes. Provost Ron Daniels had stated publicly during the University Council meeting that the administration is beginning to discuss this issue. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Office of the Provost is interested in this issue and that the Penn Card Office, Penn Recreation, and Penn Transit will be contacted concerning this issue. Mr. Rennekamp stated that he will continually present updates to the Assembly.

**First Vice Chair’s Report**

First Vice Chair Alejandro Hagan stated that at the next General Assembly meeting he and the GradFest Committee will be giving a presentation of what GradFest will entail.

**Vice Chair for Professional Students’ Report**

Vice Chair for Professional Students Mat Abramsky was not present for his report.

**Vice Chair for Research Students’ Report**

Vice Chair for Research Students Jonathan Lukens stated that the deadline for travel grant applications is approaching. Mr. Lukens stated that Assembly members should inform their constituents on how to complete this application. Mr. Lukens stated that there is funding available and that he hopes to fund most applications.

**Vice Chair for International Affairs’ Report**
Vice Chair for International Affairs Omar Khan stated that he had appointed Mr. Ravi Raghavan as Deputy Vice Chair for International Affairs and that he was submitting the name to the Assembly for approval. Mr. Khan stated that Mr. Raghavan was a student in the School of Engineering and has worked with international students in the past and mentored international students seeking employment in the United States.

**Vice Chair for Equity and Access’ Report**

Vice Chair for Equity and Access Esther Agbaje stated that there was some confusion over the GAPSA appointments to the Lindback and Provost’s Teaching Awards Committee. GAPSA has appointed two individuals to this committee, however the Committee has stated that there is only one graduate student representative seat on the committee. GAPSA representative Leslie Warden stated that two years ago she was the only graduate student representative on this committee. Mr. Rennekamp asked how many undergraduate representatives sit on this committee. Ms. Agbaje stated that there currently is one representative although last year’s records state that there were two undergraduate representatives and two graduate representatives.

**Vice Chair for Student Life’s Report**

Vice Chair for Student Life Nikki Thorpe asked the Assembly members to complete the Landlord Survey and to send the survey link to their constituents. The Office of Off Campus Living is attempting one last push to obtain as much data as possible by next Wednesday, February 10th. This data will be collected and used to construct a housing guide.

**Vice Chair for Finance’s Report**

Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward stated that the Finance Committee met yesterday and reviewed 31 applications for non-academic funding. Almost every application received some funding. Ms. Heyward stated that her budget consists of about $13,000 but that her committee would like to be able to fund a total of $16,340 to meet the high demand. Ms. Heyward requested that the General Assembly approve $3,840 in additional funds from the GAPSA surplus to cover the difference.

**Vice Chair for Social Activities’ Report**
Vice Chair for Social Activities Jessica Kim stated that within the next two weeks there will be two upcoming GAPSA sponsored happy hours at the Engineering and Vet Schools.

_Vice Chair for Student Programs’ Report_

Deputy Vice Chair for Student Programs Stephanie Wujcik stated that there will be a 76ers game tomorrow night and tickets are $15. There will be a trip to the Turandot opera on February 25th. On March 20th there will be a trip to the Cezanne Exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. On February 27th there will be a Philadelphia Phantoms hockey game and on March 1st there will be a Philadelphia Kixx indoor soccer game.

_Vice Chair for Communications’ Report_

Vice Chair for Communications Natalie Williams stated that the GAPSA Leadership Retreat will be March 13-14th and applications are due February 20th, and the GAPSA February University-wide e-mail will be sent out soon with this information. Ms. Williams asked for any information to be included in the GAPSA weekly emails.

_Vice Chair for Operations’ Report_

Vice Chair for Operations Sarah Smith had nothing to report.

_Ad Hoc Committee for the Campus Climate Survey_

GAPSA representative Lee Solomon had nothing to report.

_Ad Hoc Committee for GradFest_

First Vice Chair Alejandro Hagan had nothing to report.

_Follow-up Actions on Reports_

_Deputy Vice Chair for International Affairs_

GAPSA representative Carla Cue motioned to approve Ravi Raghavan as the Deputy Vice Chair for International Affairs. Mr. Lukens seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
Finance Committee Budget Request

GAPSA representative Alexander Balloon motioned to approve $3,840 from the surplus to be used to fund the remaining non-academic funding application requests. GAPSA representative Wenting Li seconded. Mr. Rennekamp asked if there was any discussion on the motion. GAPSA representative Chrissy Caggiano asked if this amount comes from the surplus, how much of the surplus remains. Ms. Heyward stated that there is a great deal of money left in the surplus. Mr. Balloon stated that the Finance Committee was selective in approving funding and practiced budgetary discipline. Mr. Rennekamp asked what the total quested non-academic event funding was. Ms. Heyward stated that the total was nearly $36,000 but the Finance Committee would like to fund approximately $16,000 of these requests. GAPSA representative Tom Byrne asked what the maximum amount of funding a group is permitted to receive. Ms. Heyward stated the maximum per group is $1500. Ms. Heyward stated that in the fall five groups were funded but in the spring many more will be funded. The motion passed unanimously.

Social Activities Committee Budget Request

Deputy Vice Chair for Social Activities Tim Shokair and GAPSA representative Henry Friedman distributed a handout concerning the Social Activities Committee budget request. Mr. Friedman made a motion to increase the Social Activities budget allocation by $30,000 to continue holding events throughout the remainder of the academic year. On the top of the handout is a schedule of events that the Social Committee would like to hold and the cost to the students attending these events. The estimated cost to hold these spring events totals $33,720. There remains approximately $4000 in the Social Activities budget which falls approximately $30,000 short of funding. Mr. Friedman stated that two years ago the Social Activities budget totaled $105,000. Mr. Friedman suggested adjusting the budget to compensate for inflation to attain a budget comparable to two years ago. Mr. Shokair noted that the GAPSA surplus is large and suggested bringing social events back to a level that they once were. Mr. Friedman noted that the GAPSA budget and surplus come from the general fee paid by students and there is no reason for current students to subsidize future generations of Penn students. Mr. Shokair asked what current student’s fees are paying for if the student is graduating.

Mr. Lukens asked what an ‘Interactive Social’ entails. Mr. Friedman stated that some of the events do not yet have formal titles. Mr. Shokair stated that this event will help students interact and socialize, but the emphasis will not be on alcohol. Mr. Shokair noted that of the 25 fall events, 23 sold out and the two that did not were new events.

Mr. Hagan asked what measures are in place to cut costs and encourage budgetary discipline. Mr. Friedman stated that cost of admission could be increased. Mr. Friedman noted that the Social Activities committee is always in negotiation to lower event costs. Mr. Shokair stated that more events have been held with less of a budget. Mr. Friedman stated that there is a demand for these events.
Vice Chair for Student Programs Christina Arlt asked if there is a breakdown between schools and students that attend these events. Mr. Shokair stated that this information is not recorded but each event appears to be diverse and well attended.

Ms. Heyward noted that the Social Activities budget request comprises of more than 1/5 of the previous budget. Ms. Heyward asked if the Committee when planning events for the fall was planning to receive $30,000 extra from the surplus. Mr. Shokair stated that the Committee is able to use the remaining budget to plan three or four more spring events and charge more for these if this funding request is not approved. Mr. Shokair stated that even without the extra funding, the Committee has planned more events than in previous years. Mr. Friedman stated that the better attended these events are, the costs increase for GAPSA to subsidize them. Ms. Heyward suggested voting to subsidize $22,000 for the Boat Cruise. Mr. Shokair stated that the Boat Cruise costs GAPSA $7000. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this would be a line item shift. Mr. Friedman stated that this would be to put own a deposit for the Boat Cruise.

GAPSA representative Allison Sullivan called for the question to approve the Social Activities Committee request for $33,270 from the surplus. Mr. Balloon seconded. Ms. Arlt asked for more discussion on the topic. Mr. Rennekamp agreed that there should be more discussion. The motion to end discussion carried with 6 nays. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the motion to approve the budget request as presented is now called to question. The motion passed with 6 nays and 2 abstentions.

Budget Discussion

Mr. Rennekamp stated that at the last General Assembly meeting there was a midyear budget discussion and each Assembly member was asked to review and discuss any specific budgetary issues. Mr. Rennekamp stated that two issues were resolved concerning the Finance and Social Activities Committee requests. Mr. Balloon asked if the surplus were to be spent in its entirety. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this was the Assembly’s decision. Mr. Balloon suggested that GAPSA should not retain any surplus amount. Ms. Heyward noted that the surplus was just reduced by 1/5. Mr. Rennekamp stated that it is the Assembly’s decision on how much of the surplus to spend.

Ms. Heyward noted that if GradFest is to be held this year, then much of the surplus must be given to GradFest.

Mr. Rennekamp noted that there may be requests to fund travel grants from the surplus. Mr. Lukens stated that he has only reimbursed one third of the research student travel grants. Mr. Lukens stated that if he does not spend his entire budget, then his leftover budget may be added to the surplus. Mr. Lukens noted that some students requesting travel grant funding are not saving their receipts, not requesting as much funding, or waiting too long before submitting their reimbursement requests. Ms. Heyward asked if
$300 is enough to make the travel grants worthwhile. Mr. Lukens suggested allocating more funding to the GAPSA-Provost Interdisciplinary Awards. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this is a good idea since this award is for summer funding for an interdisciplinary research project. Any research or professional student may apply and if selected will receive a stipend of $2000 per month for three months. There are six awards but GAPSA could increase the number to eight, as GAPSA funds half of the stipend amount. Mr. Lukens suggested using his unspent budget towards funding more interdisciplinary awards. GAPSA representative Johanna Busch asked if any research could be performed for this award. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the research project must be interdisciplinary can must be one individual performing the interdisciplinary research. If these criteria are not met, then the student is ineligible for this specific award. Mr. Rennekamp noted that GAPSA does not fund any other fellowships, but GAPSA could alter the requirements or create a new award.

New Business

Perfect Attendance Acknowledgements

Mr. Rennekamp rewarded those GAPSA representatives with perfect fall attendance with tickets to the Maya Angelou event. These representatives were Johanna Busch, Corbett Brown, Heather Curl, Tim Shokair and Lee Solomon. Mr. Rennekamp stated that a similar reward will be given at the end of the year for spring attendance.

Removal of a School Representative

Mr. Rennekamp stated that one GAPSA representative had five unexcused absences and the Executive Board has decided to refer this individual to the General Assembly for a vote to be removed from the assembly. If the Assembly votes to remove the individual, then GAPSA will request that the individual’s school government recall and replace the representative. The individual was notified ahead of time and offered the opportunity to provide a defense but was not present during this discussion.

GAPSA Representative Aleksander Baranski asked if this individual was contacted before the Executive Board’s decision. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this individual was contacted, as per the GAPSA Constitution, which requires rigorous terms for the remove a school representative. The individual was contacted at least ten days in advance before putting the individual up for removal in the Assembly. The individual was informed of the possibility of removal and was given an opportunity to appear at this meeting and present a defense. At this point, the Assembly may decide whether or not to remove this individual.

Ms. Warden motioned to request that the School recall this individual from the Assembly. Mr. Uriel seconded. The motion passed with one abstention from Mr. Baranski.
Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:41 pm.