Minutes of the General Assembly Meeting on March 25, 2009

The eleventh regularly scheduled meeting of GAPSA General Assembly was convened on March 25, 2009 at 7:45 PM in the Golkin Room in Houston Hall.

Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum


Quorum was declared.

Approval of the Minutes from Prior Meeting

The changes to the February 18th and March 4th minutes put forth by GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp were approved by a majority vote, and the minutes were approved.

Reports

Chair’s Report

GAPSA Chair Andrew Rennekamp stated that the most recent Report to the University Council is now available on the GAPSA website. Mr. Rennekamp encouraged everyone to view this document as it contains lots of important information. Mr. Rennekamp stated that GAPSA is in the middle of negotiating an increase in funding for student government. Mr. Rennekamp stated that no final number is available at this time. This is due to the fact that the exact budget is not yet known. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this looks favorable not only for this coming year but for the coming three years. Mr. Rennekamp stated that he will announce the specifics when more information is available.

First Vice Chair’s Report
First Vice Chair Alejandro Hagan stated that GradFest is coming up soon and will be held on May 2\textsuperscript{nd}. On April 1\textsuperscript{st}, GradFest advertisements and publicity will begin. Mr. Hagan stated that GradFest pens were made with the logo, date, and website information. Mr. Hagan asked that the Assembly members take a handful and distribute these in lounges, libraries, and anywhere else graduate and professional students congregate.

\textit{Vice Chair for Professional Students’ Report}

Vice Chair for Professional Students Mat Abramsky was stated that the Professional Council has allocated all of the funds for professional travel grants. Mr. Abramsky stated that the Professional Council also had a productive discussion about GAPSA in general and the Professional Council’s role within GAPSA and the Penn community.

\textit{Vice Chair for Research Students’ Report}

Vice Chair for Research Students Jonathan Lukens stated that the Research Council approved funding for the BGSA Academic Symposium. Mr. Lukens stated that for the upcoming year, the Research Council resolved that Research Council funding will remain in accordance with the GAPSA Constitution.

\textit{Vice Chair for International Affairs’ Report}

Vice Chair for International Affairs Omar Khan stated that the International Council is in the process of creating a mentoring program between current and incoming international students. A mentoring kick-off event will occur on April 10\textsuperscript{th} and all international students are invited to attend. The second mentoring program will be between international alumni and current international students. Mr. Khan stated that he received a list of 3000 international alumni from the Office of Alumni Relations, which extended this to the school governments. Mr. Khan stated that if the school governments wish to contact their alumni, they can contact him to set up a meeting with the Office of Alumni Relations. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this must be done carefully and in communication with the school administrators. Mr. Rennekamp stated that most school development offices would love for their students to contact their alumni.

Mr. Khan stated that the International Council met with Student Financial Services and that the Board of Trustees has agreed to a risk sharing model for providing loans to international students. Mr. Khan stated that the University approved this but it is up to the individual graduate and professional students to participate in this model. Mr. Khan stated that so far only Wharton and the Law School have demonstrated interest in this. Mr. Khan stated that if students are unsure of where their individual schools stand on this
issue they should communicate with the schools in order to understand what loan options are available.

Mr. Abramsky explained that the University has decided upon a solution to the funding issue, which particularly affects international students. Mr. Abramsky noted that the individual schools have not signed onto this and it is up to the Assembly members and other students to put pressure on the schools. Mr. Abramsky encouraged everyone to open up dialogue between the schools and Mr. Khan.

Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward explained that a particular bank was about to sign an agreement with Wharton but not the other graduate and professional schools. Mr. Rennekamp stated that there were two issues (1) is finding individual lenders who would lend to different types of students and (2) having each individual schools agree to the terms.

GAPSA Representative Leslie Warden asked if the schools must serve as the other guarantor. Mr. Rennekamp stated that they would share a portion of the risk with the lender.

Mr. Khan also introduced a resolution to the Assembly concerning the Grassley-Sanders amendment to the federal stimulus bill,

*Vice Chair for Equity and Access’ Report*

Vice Chair for Equity and Access Esther Agbaje had nothing to report.

Vice Chair for Student Life’s Report

Vice Chair for Student Life Nikki Thorpe stated that the bicycle and pedestrian awareness kickoff event was held yesterday on Locust Walk. This event was to help raise awareness, by the Division of Public Safety, for both cyclists and motorists. This will promote more bicycle activity on campus. Ms. Thorpe also presented a Housing Report for adoption by the Assembly stated that the discussion would occur later in the agenda.

*Vice Chair for Finance’s Report*

Vice Chair for Finance Christa Heyward distributed a handout with conclusions compiled from the focus group feedback on the surplus. Ms. Heyward stated that the General Assembly recommends that GAPSA maintain a ‘rainy day fund’ which should be no larger than $10,000-15,000. This fund will be separated from the GAPSA operating budget and used as a cushion for needed expenses, which will require Assembly approval
of a 2/3 majority vote. Any amount accruing over this set amount must be reinvested into the graduate student community as the Assembly sees fit. Some ideas included (1) a line item in the next year’s operating budget will be created for discretionary spending on one-time events, (2) equitable dispersal to the school governments, or (3) one time capital expense which will benefit the graduate student community over the long term. The Assembly also recommended that GradFest be an annual expense as a line item in the GAPSA operational budget and should not be funded out of the rainy day fund. The Assembly also recommended that Graduate Student Center Wish List items should also be a line item, as they have been recurring expenses.

One focus group stated that there should be a $70,000 surplus, but this was not consistent with the remainder of the responses. Ms. Heyward stated that most focus groups did not have a firm definition of what constitutes a capital expense and a consensus of what this is must be made before any ‘capital expense’ line items can be created. Ms. Heyward stated that some focus groups believed that the University, and not GAPSA, should fund things like painting of the Graduate Student Center.

Ms. Heyward stated that one group stated that if a line item is overspent one year the amount overspent should be deducted from the following year’s line item. Ms. Heyward pointed out that this does not increase accountability as that Vice Chair may not be around the following year. Ms. Heyward stated that in order to increase accountability, the Vice Chair for Finance and the Finance Committee should monitor GAPSA expenses more appropriately so that the status of the budget will be easily accessible. Ms. Heyward recommended that purchase and reimbursement forms must be signed by the Vice Chair for Finance in order to receive a reimbursement. When the Vice Chairs submit their monthly budgets, the Vice Chair for Finance is one month behind in the status of the budget as the monthly reports are turned in at the end of every month. Ms. Heyward recommended that the Vice Chair for Finance should hold office hours. Also, forms could be submitted in the Vice Chair for Finance’s mailbox so that reimbursements may be distributed on a regular basis. The Finance Committee should be reorganized so that there is more oversight on how money is spent. Ms. Heyward recommended that the Finance Committee receive a portion of the budget to help monitor how money is being spent on a monthly basis. Ms. Heyward recommended holding monthly Finance Committee meetings.

GAPSA representative Matt Walters asked what the plan is for implementing Ms. Heyward’s recommendations. Ms. Heyward stated that she could submit these ideas to the Assembly. Mr. Rennekamp stated that another Assembly meeting could be scheduled or a resolution could be drafted for next week and sent out ahead of time. Mr. Rennekamp stated that there would be little time to discuss this and that discussion on this issue is important. Mr. Rennekamp stated that these recommendations do not have to be a resolution but rather recommendations for the new Vice Chair for Finance. Mr. Walters recommended that the Finance Committee draft these recommendations into a format to be voted upon if not for this year but for next year’s Assembly. GAPSA
Representative Tim Shokair stated that these recommendations can be given to next year’s Assembly and if it agrees with these then it can vote on it next year. Mr. Rennekamp stated that there is value in voting upon these recommendations now as next year’s preliminary budget is currently being drafted and the new Executive Board could use it to formulate its plan for the budget by this September. GAPSA Representative Heather Curl asked if these recommendations will be forgotten by next year’s Assembly. Mr. Rennekamp stated that a resolution would be ideal. Mr. Lukens stated that there is usually continuity between this Assembly and the next year’s Assembly in terms of returning representatives. Mr. Lukens stated that these recommendations are appropriate and that little time remains to vote on this, but making these recommendations known to next year’s Assembly is important. GAPSA Representative Henry Friedman stated that some of the recommendations would be considered Constitutional changes and that there is not enough time in the semester to pass these. Mr. Friedman asked if these could be formally put into the minutes. Ms. Heyward stated that they could be. Mr. Friedman asked for a supplement to the minutes with these recommendations listed.

Vice Chair for Social Activities’ Report

Vice Chair for Social Activities Jessica Kim stated that tomorrow, March 26th, there will be a happy hour event at Devil’s Alley. On Friday, there will be a wine tasting event at Supper. On Saturday, there will be an event at Cavanaugh’s. The GAPSA sponsored Dental School happy hour will be held next week at Smokey Joe’s. The Phillies-Braves game is sold out but the party tickets are still available. GAPSA Representative Jill Harrison stated that the Dental School is participating in Relay For Life and is having an event to promote this. Ms. Harrison stated that this event is open to all graduate and professional schools. GAPSA Representative Christie Chavez stated that this event is separate from the Dental School happy hour.

Vice Chair for Student Programs’ Report

GAPSA Representative Maher Zamel stated that there will be a soccer tournament this weekend. GAPSA Representative Jack Higgins stated that there will be a University Clean Up Day on April 4th.

Vice Chair for Communications’ Report

Vice Chair for Communications Natalie Williams stated that due to an increase in advertising, there has been a larger turnout at GAPSA events. Ms. Williams stated that the School of Engineering is still having trouble receiving the Weekly Emails as the students are working on a voluntary listserv. Ms. Williams stated that next year’s Assembly will be receiving more funding which could be used to send out more monthly
emails. These monthly emails are distributed by the University, and this ensures that all graduate and professional students receive these 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 stated that at the last Assembly meeting quorum was not declared and voting could not be held on the resolution on the Campus Climate Survey. Mr. Solomon stated that this resolution will be brought to the Office of the Provost for review once it is voted upon. Mr. Solomon reintroduced the Campus Climate Survey and its resolution and GAPSA Representative Henry Friedman motioned to adopt the resolution. GAPSA Representative Alexander Balloon seconded the motion.

Follow-up Actions on Reports

Resolution on a Campus Climate Survey

GAPSA Representative Heather Curl asked if Mr. Solomon received any corrections for the Survey. Mr. Solomon stated that any changes to the Survey must be sent to him before tomorrow morning. Mr. Solomon stated that the Survey’s wording may be changed as it is reviewed by several University offices. Ms. Curl asked if this survey includes the comments and changes suggested at the last Assembly meeting. Mr. Friedman stated that this was a friendly amendment. Mr. Lukens spoke on behalf of the Survey and resolution as Mr. Solomon and the Ad Hoc Committee for the Campus Climate Survey put a great deal of work into drafting these documents. Mr. Lukens stated that the Survey is an appropriate instrument and the resolution is significant in setting the agenda for future years of GAPSA. The resolution was unanimously adopted. Mr. Solomon thanked the Ad Hoc Committee for their work on the Campus Climate Survey. Mr. Rennekamp thanked Mr. Solomon.

Resolution on the Grassley-Sanders Amendment to the Federal Stimulus Bill

Mr. Khan stated that his resolution addresses the issue of an amendment to the Federal Stimulus Bill, authored by Senators Grassley and Sanders, which restricts companies receiving TARP funding for students with H-1B visas, which are only available to international students who wish to work in the United States. The resolution is addressed
to the University administration and Pennsylvanian congressmen to lobby against this amendment and others like it. Mr. Khan stated that at least two job offers previously extended to Penn international students were rescinded after this amendment was introduced. This resolution also requests that students be provided with more options as they are unsure how to proceed after this amendment was passed. Mr. Khan stated that students in financial related industries appear to be most affected by this amendment. Mr. Khan stated that this amendment also affects the University as it will prevent international students from enrolling in United States schools if no work is available after graduation. Mr. Khan motioned to adopt this resolution and GAPSA Representative Matt Walters seconded.

Mr. Rennekamp stated that the resolution is well written and though it is unlikely that the amendment will be reversed it is important as a student government group that GAPSA’s make a statement about the amendment. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this resolution will be presented to President Amy Guttmann, who lobbies a great deal in Washington, DC. Mr. Lukens stated that every student at Penn works hard to obtain their degrees, no matter if they are a U.S. citizen or not, and everyone should be given the same opportunities to learn and succeed. Mr. Lukens spoke in favor of the resolution. Mr. Friedman stated that the phrase ‘especially in financial related fields’ should be changed to ‘including in financial related fields.’ Mr. Friedman noted that TARP is financially related but stating ‘especially in financial related fields’ may be misconstrued as GAPSA only focusing on the financial industry. Mr. Rennekamp stated that this is a friendly amendment. GAPSA Representative The resolution was unanimously approved as amended. Mr. Rennekamp thanked Mr. Khan.

2009 Housing Report

Ms. Thorpe stated that the Housing Report was a compilation of a year’s worth of work including meetings with different students and administrators in graduate and professional programs. These administrators helped confirm what the students’ housing needs are. Ms. Thorpe stated that this report includes a recommendation on GAPSA in the coming years with regard to graduate student housing. Ms. Thorpe motioned to adopt the report on Housing. Mr. Friedman seconded the motion. Ms. Warden asked Ms. Thorpe to summarize the report. Ms. Thorpe stated that one of the needs for housing is short term housing, or temporary housing, that the University could either construct a new building or use existing space. Ms. Thorpe stated that this resource could be available to students or guests of the University. Ms. Thorpe stated that she was able to compile data from the graduate and professional schools on what they recommend students should be paying for housing and what this housing actually costs. Ms. Thorpe stated that the report includes what peer institutions are doing and what they have available for campus housing and what it costs. Mr. Balloon stated that this is an outstanding report. Mr. Balloon stated that a management decision is needed, as there is little to no commitment to improving the conditions in Sansom Place. Mr. Balloon stated that this report should
encourage University policy makers to make the commitment to improving Sansom Place conditions. The report was adopted unanimously. Mr. Rennekamp thanked Ms. Thorpe.

New Business

Budget Discussion

Mr. Rennekamp stated that the GAPSA Constitution mandates that the Vice Chair for Finance must draft a preliminary budget for next year and distribute it to the Assembly. This will take place at the Assembly dinner on April 22nd or via email beforehand. Mr. Rennekamp noted that this is not next year’s final budget as it is approved in the fall, however, the more information obtained from the Assembly, the easier it is for the Executive Board to become organized in the summer months and prepare the budget proposal for the fall. Mr. Rennekamp stated that Ms. Heyward will lead the process of obtaining information from the current Assembly.

Ms. Heyward distributed a worksheet that details what was spent so far in FY09. Ms. Heyward asked the Assembly members to break into small focus groups in order to work out numbers for the FY10 proposed budget. Mr. Friedman motioned to amend the agenda in order to discuss the Constitutional Changes prior to the Budget Focus Groups. Mr. Rennekamp stated that there cannot be a vote on the Constitutional Changes as they were not distributed early enough. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the Constitutional Changes could be discussed with the intention of voting on them at the next Assembly meeting. Mr. Balloon seconded the motion. The motion to amend the agenda passes with one nay.

Proposed Changes to the GAPSA Constitution

Mr. Rennekamp stated that many of the proposed changes are to make the Constitution internally consistent and that these do not require detailed discussion. Mr. Abramsky asked for a procedural motion to allow the Chair to highlight the substantive edits and gloss over the non-substantive edits. Ms. Curl seconded the motion.

Ms. Warden stated that the edits were confusing and should be individually placed in the Amendments section. Ms. Warden stated that it was difficult to follow the edits in their ‘Track Changes’ form. Ms. Warden asked if the changes should be included in the Amendments section rather than within the body of the original document. Mr. Walters stated that if the changes were done in this manner, then the document would be even more confusing. Mr. Friedman stated that the original document would be changed once the amendments were included in the body of the original document. Mr. Friedman stated that the original document should remain unaltered until the amendments are passed. Ms. Warden motioned to put the changes into the Amendments section before
Mr. Friedman stated that he was confused and thought the changes to be discussed were already included in the Amendments section.

Mr. Rennekamp stated that this meeting is the last Assembly meeting to discuss the Constitutional changes and there is not time to move the changes to the Amendments section before discussing them. Ms. Warden stated that the original document must not be changed. Mr. Abramsky stated that this is a procedural request. Mr. Rennekamp stated that the changes were included in a ‘Track Changes’ format as this is precedent and that changes to the Constitution were done this way in the past. Mr. Friedman stated that it would be appropriate to discuss the substantive issues now but should the Assembly approve or vote upon anything, each change should be voted upon individually. Mr. Abramsky stated that this could be done but the Council must decide to do this. Mr. Friedman stated that the changes should be included in the Amendments section when the vote is held.

Mr. Rennekamp stated that there is a motion on the table to allow the Chair to highlight the substantive issues. Mr. Abramsky stated that the non-substantive issues can be skipped unless an Assembly member requests discussion of it. Mr. Shokair asked if the changes are being brought as one lump change. Mr. Abramsky stated that ideally the changes would be voted upon as one large change but if the Assembly decides that there should be separate votes, then it can do this. Mr. Abramsky stated that this would be a friendly request to the person bringing forth the Constitutional changes.

Mr. Hagan asked for a point of information. Mr. Hagan stated that the voting on the Constitutional changes will not be held at this meeting and there is no motion to vote on the floor. Mr. Hagan stated that the changes will be discussed at this meeting. Mr. Abramsky stated that if a particular change is decided to be separate then a note should be made of this.

Mr. Rennekamp stated that his intent with these changes was to make the Constitution more simple and easier to understand. Mr. Rennekamp stated that with these suggestions, the Constitution will be made more complex and confusing.

GAPSA Representative Susan Haas agreed with the notion that the Constitution is a historical document and continuity of the historical document is needed. Ms. Haas noted that only a few minutes remain to discuss important topics. GAPSA Representative Corbett Brown stated that there is nothing in the Constitution that states how revisions are made to it. Mr. Brown stated that there should be a Constitutional change on how Constitutional changes are handled in the future. Ms. Warden stated that when she served on GSAC, the Constitution was broken down into pieces and reconstructed with no evidence of why these changes were made. Ms. Warden stated that the GSAC document was difficult to understand and determine where its powers lay. Ms. Warden stated that when the original document is changed then it is difficult to determine what the core of the document stated and previous version must be accessed on a hard drive.
Mr. Walters agreed with Ms. Warden and stated that legislation incorporates changes in documents that may make the document more readable. Mr. Walters noted that if the document is too difficult to read then no one will understand what the intent of the document is. Mr. Walters suggested having two versions of the Constitution, one with the non-substantive wording changes incorporated into the body of the document. Mr. Uriel stated that the concern that the original document will be changed is valid. Mr. Uriel stated that if the Constitution is amended, it will become the new original document. Mr. Uriel stated that functionally GAPSA shouldn’t need the old original document as the new document will be the functional document. Mr. Rennekamp asked to table discussion of the Constitutional changes indefinitely.

Mr. Friedman stated that there are two issues. One is that many of the changes are wording, for example changing the ‘wills’ to ‘shall.’ Mr. Friedman stated that the Assembly should come to agreement that there are two ways to amend the Constitution. Mr. Friedman stated that English language changes do not require references to the Amendments section. Mr. Friedman stated that substantive issues should be included in the Amendments section and that within the Constitution there should be a process to amend the Constitution. Mr. Friedman stated that this issue is more important than moving on to discuss the details. Mr. Friedman clarified and stated that there should be two different types of changes permitted, word changes and substantive changes. Mr. Abramsky stated that the process by which the Constitution is amended is expressly written in the Constitution. Mr. Abramsky cautioned against changing how approval of Constitutional amendments are handled. Mr. Abramsky asked to table this issue. Mr. Rennekamp stated that changing the process by which the Constitution is amended is in itself a change to the Constitution. Ms. Warden stated that under the Amendments section there is a description of how voting occurs. Ms. Warden stated that the grammar changes would be confusing if each were referenced in the Amendments section and that there should be no issue in permitting grammar changes to enter the core of the document. Ms. Warden stated that substantive issues should be listed with the date approved under the Amendments section.

Mr. Abramsky stated that any proposed Constitutional changes must be given to the Chair and must be distributed no less than ten days in advance prior to voting upon them.

The discussion was tabled indefinitely.

Continuation of the Budget Discussion

Ms. Heyward stated that the budget worksheet is to be discussed in small focus groups. Included in the handout are additional line items mentioned previously, the discretionary budget, Graduate Student Center investments and GradFest. Ms. Heyward asked the Assembly to consider the question ‘If GAPSA were able to obtain more funding, how would you distribute throughout the budget?’
Ms. Heyward noted that the Vice Chair of Finance in the past received $80,000 so that it could fund non-academic student groups up to $3500. In the 2006-2007 academic year the Vice Chair for Finance budget was reduced and non-academic student groups are now funded at a maximum of $1500.

Ms. Kim stated that without the Boat Cruise, most events cost $5000-7000 and the school happy hours cost $2000-2500 from the Vice Chair for Social Activities’ budget.

Ms. Williams stated that the Vice Chair for Communications’ budget is used for public relations and maintaining the GAPSA website. Ms. Smith stated that the Vice Chair for Operations’ budget is used mainly for food at meetings, happy hour at POD after the Assembly meeting, and other operational expenses.

Ms. Thorpe stated that she did not spend even $1000 of the Vice Chair for Student Life’s budget, which mainly is used for Student Life Policy Council meeting food. Also, the money is used for the Townhall meeting and any specific Student Life events.

Mr. Hagan stated that the First Vice Chair’s budget is used for the Leadership Retreat and GradFest. Mr. Hagan noted that the inaugural GradFest cost $65,000, last year it cost $46,000, and this year it costs below $50,000. Mr. Hagan stated that GradFest in its current form is not sustainable and it is difficult to rely on fundraising. Mr. Hagan stated that last year funding came from sponsors and this year funding came from the Office of the Provost.

Mr. Abramsky stated that the Vice Chair for Professional Students’ budget was used by the Professional Council to develop programs and $12,500 was spent on professional travel grants and the remainder was spent on academic funding.

Mr. Khan stated that the International Council is relatively new and programs are being established. Mr. Khan stated that in the future the Vice Chair for International Affairs’ funding will be spent on programming.

Ms. Arlt stated that the Vice Chair for Student Programs’ budget is spent on recreational, community service and cultural events and on lunch and T-shirts for volunteers.

Ms. Heyward stated that the Vice Chair for Equity and Access represents student groups such as Lambda Grads, BGAPSA, Six Directions, the Muslim Student Association and other underrepresented students that sit on the Pluralism Council. Funding is used for food and events that these groups hold.

Mr. Lukens stated that the Vice Chair for Research Students’ budget is used to fund research travel grants and for academic vent funding. Mr. Lukens stated that the cap for travel grant funding is $300 and has not been raised in many years. Mr. Lukens stated that many academic events draw students from many schools but their funding is at the
same level and every year the school raises the costs of holding these events. Mr. Lukens stated that these issues must be revisited in order to increase the maximum amount funded. Ms. Heyward noted that there are several line items in the budget that cannot be altered. Ms. Heyward stated that $15,000 is used to fund the Navigation Series, which is a mandatory payment when GSAC ended and merged with GAPSA. The Vice Chair for Research Students’ budget is mandated in the Constitution.

The Assembly broke into focus groups to consider budgetary recommendations. The recommendations were compiled and given to Ms. Heyward.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 pm.