



Cornell University

**Graduate and Professional
Student Assembly**

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GPSA Annual Report to the Cornell Board of Trustees

With many members carrying over from the previous academic year, the work of the GPSA has been shaped by two goals. One is to further the Graduate Community Initiative (GCI) and emphasize its visions through resolutions and actions. The second is to look internally during this non-Activity Fee-setting year and conduct a budget and charter review. This report describes these goals and our outlooks for the future.

I. Resolutions

The Assembly has passed several resolutions so far this year. Background on the resolutions, the resolutions themselves, and actions subsequent to their passing are summarized below.

“R.1: Regarding Health Care & Health Insurance for Cornell Graduate Students Studying at Geneva” stems from the third vision of the GCI – Integrating the Graduate and Professional Student Community. Integrating the community is difficult for various reasons; one is campus separation. Graduate students studying at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY rely on the GPSA for representation to the administration. During a visit to Geneva, GPSA members learned of Geneva students’ concerns over health insurance coverage, given their distance from Gannett. This resolution is a result of those discussions and requests that the Office of Student Health Insurance update their materials, before the next academic year, to specify procedures for students in Geneva. It also requests Gannett to educate phone personnel of proper procedures for Geneva students. Sharon Dittman, Valerie Lyon, and JoAnn Molnar have been helpful throughout this time of learning, and concurred with the goals of R.1. This action is on-going but has been successful to-date.

Housing is emphasized in the GCI as a “broader issue of concern” and is also discussed in the third vision as a means of unifying the graduate and professional student community. Hence, **“R.2: Regarding Graduate and Professional Student Housing at Schuyler House, Thurston Court, and Hasbrouck Apartments”** was passed to emphasize the Assembly’s commitment to the issue. GPSA officers have met with Campus Life administrators to discuss creative solutions for undergraduate and graduate student on-campus housing demands. Through the resolution, the GPSA maintains a stance that Hasbrouck and Thurston Court should remain for graduate and professional students only, but suggested that Schuyler House be used for undergraduates. The GPSA has worked with Joe Burke, Barbara Romano, and Carlos Gonzalez since July, and strides forward have been made. While Hasbrouck will, first and foremost, be a community for graduate and professional students and their families, beyond that demand, new contracts and apartment configurations will allow for single graduate and professional students to also live there. The GPSA, Campus Life, and Graduate School are working to advertise these new opportunities for graduate and professional student on-campus living, and we will continue to monitor this issue.

The third resolution, **“R.3: Regarding Communication with Graduate and Professional Students”**, further emphasizes the desire of the GPSA to establish communication with the entire graduate and

professional student body. The opt-in GPSAINFO-L listserv now has over 1,400 graduate and professional students subscribed, but this is still a shortfall of approximately 4,600 students. While we understand the issues of privacy and “email overload”, it is the GPSA Communications Committee’s desired duty to educate the entire constituency on issues of campus governance and the Activity Fee. GPSAINFO-L is an environmentally-friendly and low-cost method of doing so. At present, we are discussing with Tommy Bruce and Graduate School administrators ways to broaden subscription.

While “**R.4 Regarding the Cornell Academic Calendar**” does not necessarily reflect the GCI, it deserves mention here. Article 2.4 of the GPSA Charter specifies that the GPSA will be consulted on matters relating to the academic calendar. Thus, when faculty in the Education Policy Committee began discussing beginning the fall semester one day earlier, Dean of Faculty, Bill Fry, asked for an opinion from the GPSA. This resolution expresses consent in beginning the fall semester one day earlier.

Because R.5 was withdrawn, the final resolution to overview is “**R.6 Regarding Mental Healthcare for Cornell Graduate and Professional Students**”. The GPSA recognizes the efforts made to improve peer counseling services through EARS (Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service), but we remain concerned that Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) does not satisfy current graduate and professional student need, in terms of resources and personnel. Graduate and professional students are often referred to external providers, but because there is no follow-up from CAPS, it is unknown whether these students are, in fact, receiving the attention they need. Also, split-care (between Gannett and an external provider) is not available. The resolution requests that CAPS develop follow-up procedures for patients referred to external providers and also to consider implementing split-care. The resolution requests that a Working Group on Graduate and Professional Student Mental Health and Welfare be formed as a subcommittee of the President’s Council on Mental Health and Welfare, to elucidate the feasibility of these requests and then put them into action.

II. Budget and Charter Review

Because our charter does not specify procedures for setting the GPSA budget, the Funding Policy Committee spent much of the fall semester developing a budget, which the Assembly approved in November. The final budget puts revenue from the Activity Fee at par with operational, committee, and special project spending for the 2008-2009 academic year.

In December, an ad-hoc Charter Review Committee was formed and consists of a representative from each GPSA internal committee, as well as other GPSA representatives. The committee has been charged with several tasks. First, the committee will verify that the Charter is up-to-date and clear. Second, it will discuss whether the Charter suitably characterizes the current visions of the GPSA. Third, it will oversee the development of working procedures to ensure smooth transitions from year to year. This includes procedures for the Finance Commission – the GPSA committee which distributes approximately \$180,000 of Activity Fee funds to graduate and professional student groups – which will clarify funding procedures and expand funding categories to better serve graduate and professional student groups. Finally, since, as noted above, the Charter does not specify procedures for setting the GPSA budget, the Charter Review committee will oversee the drafting of such procedures. This committee will report back to the entire Assembly in the spring semester.

III. Future Actions, Opportunities, and Challenges

Resolutions: Resolutions which are on the docket for discussion are in support of improved bicycle safety on campus, observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, enhancement of LGBT resources, and partial information suppression on the University's electronic directory.

Social Opportunities: The GPSA continues to provide opportunities for graduate and professional students to interact outside of the classroom. The GPSA Events Committee has cooperated with local businesses to provide several "Grads' Night Out" events, and the biggest event of the year continues to be the Grad Ball, now in its fifth year.

Leadership Development and Ivy Summit: We are excited to report that, in October 2009, the GPSA will host the Ivy Summit Leadership Conference, which brings together graduate and professional student governances from the Ivy League. The Ivy Summit provides discussions, workshops, and networking opportunities for leaders similarly dedicated to the improvement of services for graduate and professional students. Planning is already well-underway, and we are eager for this opportunity to showcase Cornell – its commitment to campus governance, its rich history in the Ivy League and as the Land Grant University of NYS, its beautiful location, and most importantly, its commitment to being an outstanding institution for graduate and professional students. We wish for others in the Cornell community to share in our enthusiasm.

Challenges: Of course, a major challenge to these pursuits is the economic crisis which confronts our university and our country. Despite budgetary setbacks, I commend GPSA members for their dedication and university officials for their commitment to students. I ask for continued consideration of graduate and professional student needs as we move forward.

This report describes the efforts and visions of the GPSA for 2008-2009. Doubtlessly, other issues will come before us that we do not yet anticipate, but we look forward to those challenges and the continued success of graduate and professional student governance, in cooperation with the other Assemblies, with administrators campus-wide, and of course, with our graduate and professional student constituents, whom we serve.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Leinfelder
President, GPSA