

April 23, 2012

Dear President Skorton and the Cornell Graduate and Professional Student Community,

At the end of each academic term, the President of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) is mandated by our [charter](#) (Section 3.02) to prepare a written report to both the President of the university and all graduate and professional students, informing both as to our actions taken over the past few months as well as a preview of what's to come. It is thus my privilege and honor to present the following report. This report should be seen as a companion to the December 2011 mid-year report, which is attached as an appendix.

### **Spring 2012 Resolutions**

To date, the GPSA has adopted seven resolutions, and failed to adopt one resolution, this semester; I will highlight several of them at this point. In Resolution 8, the GPSA responded to a call from the Graduate School to get more involved in the selection of the annual Olin Lecturer. This is a large-scale event which has happened on an annual basis since 1989, and has brought such luminaries as Noam Chomsky, Jane Goodall, and Edward Said to campus. The committee, under the leadership of John Ciecholewski, created a plan to solicit nominations from GPSA members, and then solicit their rankings. This process is ongoing, and a recommendation has not yet been chosen. Given the success of this process, I strongly recommend to the 2012–13 GPSA to form another Olin Lecturer ad hoc committee, and conduct this process along similar lines.

Resolution 10, which was ultimately not adopted, was offered by Vice President for Operations Marquis Hawkins. This resolution sought to amend the Charter and Bylaws to require that all GPSA members either serve on, or find someone to serve on, one or more committees. While it was ultimately the will of the assembly not to adopt this particular approach, committee vacancies, especially on external committees, remains a challenging issue for the GPSA, and one for which there is a continued need for creative solutions.

With Resolution 11, the GPSA unanimously adopted a series of amendments to the Byline Procedures and Criteria. The vast majority of these are procedural: seeking either to clarify the existing process, or to streamline the formatting of the documents. The most significant change was the decision, after two amendments, to adopt language requiring that, in exchange for the \$3.50 from the Activity Fee allocated in the fall, the Slope Day Programming Board continue to allow graduate and professional students to attend Slope Day without the purchase of additional tickets. While language authorizing such tickets was considered and debated, it was ultimately struck from the resolution. This has ensured a lively and vigorous discussion between GPSA leadership and SDPB leadership, and discussion of a compromise will take place at the last meeting of the semester.

Christoffer Heckman, chair of the Appropriations Committee, in consultation with the Office of the Assemblies, developed Resolution 12, which amends the Bylaws to allow clearer oversight by the chair in his/her capacity of treasurer. The resolution, unanimously adopted, creates a clear course of action for expenses that exceed a committee's initial allocation, and ensures that the chair has access to the information he/she needs to keep the GPSA on budget.

Nicole Baran, Executive Vice President, is to be commended for her work in developing Resolution 13, concerning graduate/professional student involvement with the Big Red Barn. Nicole met with several interested stakeholders, including Gail Finan, the director of Cornell dining, and Howard Raskin, the chair of the Mann Library Café Advisory Board, to solicit input and advice. This resolution calls for the creation of a "Big Red Barn Advisory Board," a survey, current operating information, and the possible issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) to "allow vendors to submit proposals and bid to provide the food service at the Big Red Barn." However, due to several vacancies that have arisen in the Graduate School, further action on this points will be postponed until the positions are filled, at least until Fall 2012.

In Resolution 14, authored by the Finance Commission, under the leadership of Mia Tootill, the GPSA unanimously approved a series of amendments to the GPSAFC Funding Guidelines. Mostly these amendments clarify the existing language of the guidelines. Most particularly, the resolution replaced the vague "alumni-related expenses" with the more specific requirement that applications to fund speakers who are Cornell alumni, who graduated within the last five years, be accompanied by a letter of recommendation from an advisor. Second, in keeping with the goal of sustainability, the funding of online publications is now explicitly authorized. Finally, the non-specific "sustained vacancy" language concerning the freezing of field funds was replaced with specific attendance requirements.

Resolution 15 is a response to the hard work of the Faculty Senate's calendar committee which has met regularly for two years and made an extraordinary effort to keep the community informed of its goals, processes, and recommendations. The GPSA particularly supported their recommendation of an additional "mental health break" between the start of the spring semester and spring break, and unanimously supported the passage of the recommendation by the Senate and its approval by the Provost.

### **Trustee Meetings**

Thanks to the hard work of undergraduate student-elected trustee Alex Bores and graduate student-elected trustee Darrick Nighthawk Evensen, there have been significant developments in the relationship between the GPSA and the Board of Trustees. As part of his election campaign, Trustee Bores specifically called for the addition of a third student seat to the Board. In response, a task force was convened—though they ultimately recommended against an additional seat, they took this as a signal that the Board had an opportunity to increase its engagement with the broader campus. As a result, they reached out to me, as President of the GPSA, and Natalie Raps, as President of the SA, to attend their Ithaca meetings. The first such meetings took place on March 8 and 9, and were an unqualified success. Additionally, the Board has also pledged to hold one meeting in the fall and one meeting in the spring with student leaders, beyond the Assemblies.

Also on the topic of student-elected trustees, the GPSA and SA both adopted the language of GPSA Resolution 9. This resolution explicitly recommends to the Board that the practice of alternating eligibility for student-elected trustee—graduate/professional students eligible in even

years, undergraduate students eligible in odd years—be continued. The Board has since accepted this recommendation, and the Spring 2013 election will thus feature undergraduate candidates.

### **Programming Board**

In preparation for 2012–13, its first year as a semi-independent byline-funded organization, the Graduate and Professional Student Programming Board (GPSPB) has had an especially active spring semester. First, I am pleased to report that the transition to advising by the Dean of Students office has been successfully completed, and I am confident that this will enable the GPSPB to more effectively reach out across all constituencies. In Spring 2012, the PB conducted the following events:

- 2/2 Grad's Night Out
- 2/8 Interschool Mixer- Law, CIPA, Ag School
- 2/10 Party like it's 1992- Big Red Barn 20th Birthday Party
- 3/7 Speed Friending
- 3/7 Grad's Night Out
- 3/9 Nerd Nite
- 3/29 Intercollege Mixer- JGSM, Hotel, Social Sciences, ILR
- 4/6 Nerd Nite
- 4/19 Intercollegiate Mixer - Ithaca College vs Cornell
- 4/21-4/22 Volunteer to Plant a Tree for Earth Day
- 4/27 Grad Ball
- 5/9 Study Break at the Big Red Barn

### **Communication**

In Spring 2012, the Communication Committee, under the leadership of Steve An, accomplished a long-standing goal of the GPSA: the ability to email all students on an opt-out basis. The first edition of the GPSA Buzz, a well-written and high quality newsletter-format mailing, went out to 6,000+ students on February 19, 2012. Over the whole semester, the committee produced the following issues:

- <http://www.cornellgpsa.com/buzz/2012-02-03/> (opt-in)
- <http://www.cornellgpsa.com/buzz/2012-02-19/> (opt-out)
- <http://www.cornellgpsa.com/buzz/2012-03-03/> (opt-in)
- <http://www.cornellgpsa.com/buzz/2012-03-16/> (opt-out)
- <http://www.cornellgpsa.com/buzz/2012-04-06/> (opt-in)
- <http://www.cornellgpsa.com/buzz/2012-04-20/> (opt-out)

The opt-out mailings have alternated with opt-in mailings (which reach about 1,500 subscribers) on a biweekly basis. This newsletter was used to good effect to promote events of interest to graduate and professional students, to solicit further involvement in the GPSA, and to call for nominations for the advising, teaching, and mentoring award.

### **Finance Commission**

[waiting on numbers from Mia]

### **Excellence in Advising, Teaching, and Mentoring**

In response to Resolution 7 passed in the fall, the GPSA solicited nominations for the First

Annual Award for Faculty Excellence in the Advising, Teaching, and Mentoring of graduate and professional students. The committee was extraordinarily pleased to receive 30 nomination letters for 15 faculty members. With so many nominations of faculty members who exemplify excellence in the mentoring of graduate and professional students, the Awards Committee faced a challenging, yet exciting, decision. It is a privilege to congratulate the following faculty members as this year's winners:

- Edwin A. (Todd) Cowen, Associate Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering
- Christine D. Smart, Associate Professor, Department of Plant Pathology & Plant-Microbe Biology
- Muna B. Ndulo, Professor of Law, Director of the Institute for African Development

The ceremony honoring these exceptional faculty members will be held Tuesday May 8th, 2012, at 12 noon at the A. D. White House. Deans Sheri Notaro and Tilman Baumstark from the Graduate School will speak before the presentation of the awards.

I strongly call on the 2012–13 GPSA to again create an ad hoc committee for the purpose of soliciting nominations and selecting a winner.

### **National Association of Graduate and Professional Students**

I'm pleased to report that, at long last, the GPSA has renewed its affiliation with the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students (NAGPS). This organization provides a unique opportunity for graduate and professional students to make their voices heard on the national stage. Issues they're currently advocating for include: open access publication requirements for federally-funded research, student loan reform, immigration reform and campus safety legislation. The NAGPS also provides a unique opportunity for information sharing among peer schools nationally, increasing the effectiveness of student advocacy initiatives. A delegation from Cornell (Evan Cortens and Mitch Paine) will attend the Northeast Regional Conference on Saturday, April 21, 2012.

### **The 2012–13 Academic Year**

The GPSA elected a fine group of voting members for 2012–13 at its meeting on April 9, 2012, and will elect its leadership on April 23, 2012. This will be the first year in recent memory that the GPSA has not had a charter mandate to engage in particular activities like charter review and activity fee allocation. As a result, I'm optimistic about the opportunities for progress in effective advocacy on behalf of graduate and professional students at Cornell. I'm hopeful that the Assembly continues its outreach and communication efforts, to ensure a membership that represents the diverse constituencies across campus, and that continued opportunities for engagement and involvement will be sought.

As this is one of my final official acts as President of the GPSA, it remains for me to thank everyone, from field representatives and voting members, to committee chairs and the executive board, for their hard work in the 2011–12 academic year. It's been a pleasure an honor to serve in this position for the past year, and my best wishes to my successor and next year's Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

Evan Cortens

President, Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, 2011–12