**Diversity & International Students**

**Introduction**

Creating a diverse community, one that is inclusive of differences that include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation is critical for a vibrant academic community and also to satisfy one of Cornell’s oldest mottos “Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds.” In this section, we present recommendations for the GPSA and Cornell University as a whole to continue its work building an inclusive and diverse graduate and professional community.

We have separated student issues into four groups. First, we discuss issues affecting international students, students born and raised in foreign countries whose first extensive experience in the United States is at Cornell. Second, we discuss students who are born and/or raised in the United States that share non-European ethnicities, which we will call “Students of Color” (SOC) in this document. We also include a section on gender issues and a section on issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students.

International students and Students of Color account for a majority of Cornell’s graduate student population. According to Cornell’s Diversity and Inclusion website, in 2011-2012, “more than 55 percent of graduate students are foreign nationals, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, African Americans, Asian Americans, or identified themselves in more than one racial/ethnic group [1].”

International students face many challenges when they come to the United States from their native countries. First, language and communication are two very big barriers for international students whose first language is not English. Second, international students must adjust to a new culture and a new society when they come to the U.S. Third, international students must adjust to a new set of laws, such as filing U.S. tax returns annually. Fourth, international students face challenges with finding employment in the United States upon their graduation from Cornell. In order to help with their adjustment to life in the United States and with the barriers listed above, international students rely on the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO).

Students of Color usually have grown up in the United States or another Western country, so usually the adjustment curve isn’t quite as steep as it is for international students. However, Students of Color also encounter many challenges, largely with developing their personal identities. These students are often part of the first generation in their families to grow up in the United States. While these students are able to grow up accustomed to the American culture and society, they must also balance their American life with their other ethnic backgrounds. At Cornell, there are four major graduate student organizations for Students of Color: Black Graduate and Professional Student Association (BGPSA), Indigenous Graduate Student Association (IGSA), Latino Graduate Student Coalition (LGSC), and Society for Asian American Graduate Affairs (SAAGA). Since the last update of the GCI in 2007, all of these four organizations have grown significantly in membership, event production, and visibility in the Cornell community. The centers which support the demographics of these four groups have also grown in a similar fashion.

In 2011, the Graduate School increased support for inclusion and professional development with the hirings of Sheri Notaro, Associate Dean for Inclusion and Professional Development, and Tilman Baumstark, Assistant Dean for Professional Development [2]. Dean Notaro has been instrumental in facilitating collaborations among the four Students of Color organizations and building a more unified community.

The Graduate School and the University should be commended for all of its support and commitment to diversity and inclusion, not just among graduate students, but across the entire Cornell community. This is evidenced by initiatives such as “Towards New Destinations,” the diversity initiatives of colleges and administrative issues, and a system to address bias incidents [3]. We also highlight the recent establishment of the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives, and the New Intercultural Center. We hope that this section of the GCI serves as a guideline for advocacy for a diverse and inclusive community at Cornell and outline areas that can be improved on.

**Objective 1: Increase diversity and representation within the GPSA**

*Rationale:*  The GPSA represents all graduate and professional students, regardless of what they study, their race, color, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation and the GPSA has an obligation to represent students on everything non-academic, including issues specific to diversity and international students. Yet during the preparation of this GCI section, it became apparent that issues pertinent to a diverse community were not consistently discussed by the GPSA. This is in part to the growth of the four SOC groups, support for international students across campus, and various groups supporting gender and LGBTQ issues. We applaud these groups and hope they continue to strengthen in the coming years. This does present an excellent opportunity for the GPSA to partner across campus and engage individual students, and general groups to work with the GPSA on these topics. As such our first objective is the only objective to stem all student groups discussed in this section.

Many of our ivy league peers have addressed the need for more interaction, representation and communication in their respective graduate and professional student councils by creating voting positions designated for specific groups. UPenn’s GAPSA has a Vice Chair of Equity & Access, MIT Graduate Student Council has three at large representatives designated for Women, Minorities, and Graduate Students with Families, Harvard GSAS has an at large representative for international students, Brown University GSC has a vice president of representation and advocacy and a brand new position for an international Grad Student Advocate. We have consistently heard across student groups that to achieve diverse participation a voting stake in the graduate student body is necessary and it seems that our peers agree with this sentiment.

As such we recommend that the GPSA implement its own version of the “Toward New Destination” framework established by Cornell University and support a representation structure that adheres to the four principles of composition, engagement, inclusion and achievement of diverse and international students within the GPSA

Actions:

1. The GPSA should establish a standing committee that focuses on issues relating to Diversity & International students.
2. The committee should be tasked to present to the GPSA annually on its work supporting students of color, international students, gender issues and issues relating to LGBTQ students.
3. The GPSA should strongly consider providing voting membership to one or more representative of this standing committee to encourage broad participation.
4. The GPSA should host an annual meeting for groups representing diversity and international students

**International Students**

**Objective 1: Support careers services for international students**

*Rationale:*  Research nationally has shown that international student well being and success is closely tied with their professional security [5].

Actions:

a. Continue supporting Anne Poduska, and the career resources office in providing support for international students.

**Objective 2: Support the unique mental health needs of the international student population**

*Rationale:* This section is a copy of objective 5 of the Mental Health and Well-being section.

International students make up a big part of Cornell’s community, 44.1% of the total graduate school and 23.9% of the professional schools at Cornell University (13). International students face unique challenges in their scholastic experience at Cornell University and often require mental health support tailored to the international experience. This has been observed across our Ivy League Institutions and nationally (5) . Specifically, at the 2012 Ivy League Summit, a gathering of student leaders across graduate and professional student governing bodies from all the Ivy Leagues and MIT, the keynote presentation focused on the unique mental health and wellness needs faced by international students. The presentation was given by Meeta Kumar, Director of Outreach and Prevention, Psychologist, and Chia-ying Pan, Director, Office of Learning Resources (6). Key themes addressed in the presentation included the different expectations for mental health support, the miscommunication about what counseling and wellness services are for international student, and the incredible success tailoring mental health services to international students has had. Nationally, research has shown a higher incidence of mental health problem in international students students who self report poor advisor-student relationship and a lack of financial confidence (8). We present three objectives that we hope will strengthen the international student community at Cornell.

Actions:

1. Increase focus on international student mental health & well-being. Based on the UPenn model, it seems that dedicated staff will be necessary to overcome the challenges associated with providing strong mental health support.
2. Support workshops for international students that focus on financial security and advisor-student relationships.
3. Collect data on the international student experience in regards to mental health and well-being in the Cornell community to understand the unique challenges of transit from abroad to the Ithaca campus.

**Other objectives discussed that should be evaluated in future years by the GPSA: 1. Address the cultural/social adjustments faced by international students 2: Support the language challenge in academic success for international students 3. Consider establishment international student center**

**Diversity / Students of Color**

**Objective 1: Establish diversity office and officer in every college**

*Rationale:* An important issue brought up by SOC [9] is the benefit of having a dedicated full time Diversity officer to provide support and coordinate activities that create a diverse community. It was outlined that the School of Engineering and the Johnson Business School are models where such dedicated support fosters a vibrant and diverse student community and that this has increased the retention and experience of diverse students.

Action:

1. Ensure a dedicated diversity officer and office is present in every college at Cornell University.

**Objective 2: Continue supporting centers for students with diverse backgrounds***Rationale:* The four Students of Color organizations, listed in the Introduction above, all work with centers dedicated to students of the demographics that the four organizations serve. SAAGA works closely with the Asian & Asian American Center (A3C), housed at the Intercultural Center at 626 Thurston Avenue. The A3C has been invaluable in creating a community for Asian and Asian-American graduate students by supporting programming and increasing the graduate student presence at the A3C. SAAGA also works closely with the Asian American Studies Program for academic collaborations and film screenings. LGSC works closely with the Latino Studies Program. IGSA works closely with the American Indian Program.

Actions:

1. The University should continue its support of these centers that support Students of Color. These centers are invaluable resources for all Cornell students. Through their educational and social programming, they help the Cornell and Ithaca community learn more about different cultures and backgrounds, which help create a more inclusive community. In addition, the BGPSA currently is an independent, student-driven organization with no center support. The University, GPSA, and BGPSA should all work in concert to identify further suppo

**Objective 3: Address the cultural/social adjustments faced by diversity students**

*Rationale:* Many Students of Color are part of the first generation in their families to grow up in the United States. While growing up in the United States help Students of Color with knowing American culture and society, these students must balance their American way of life with the native ethnicity of their families and genetics. It is a struggle for Students of Color to balance life in a predominantly Caucasian country with practicing their native ethnicities. While growing up, Students of Color experience different levels of emphasis on their own culture and the embracing of the American culture from their parents.

Actions:

1. The University should continue promoting inclusion and supporting a community where it is safe for all members of the Cornell and Ithaca community to observe their own. Part of this action can involve the Actions recommended in Objective 1.

**Objective 4: Response to bias - support graduate and professional student perspective**

*Rationale:* The University currently has an online system for reporting bias incidents [4]. However, it is not well publicized among graduate students. In addition, many graduate students are not made aware of social justice events and activities, such as the Assembly 4 Justice.

Actions:

1. Increase communication to graduate and professional students regarding the bias reporting system and opportunities to get involve in social justice events and activities.

**Objective 5: Increase support for 1st generation students**

*Rationale:* There are many graduate students who are not only the first members of their families to attend college, they are the first in their family to attain an advanced degree. Without the firsthand knowledge from their own family members, these students often do not have the sources of advice for journeying through their graduate careers.

**Other objectives discussed that should be evaluated in future years by the GPSA: 1. recruitment vs retention and experience 2. university wide diversity conference**

**Gender issues**

Cornell women in graduate and professional degrees at Cornell are an important minority group, and the GCI recognizes the unique challenges they face in navigating higher education. In Spring of 2012, the GPSA passed Resolution 10 [14] to Support Women’s Development. This resolution called on University administration to strengthen professional development and support for women in all graduate programs. Acknowledging the difficulties that women face in managing work/life balance as well as broader social expectations of career and family, the GPSA has asked the University to provide more programming for and linkages across women’s groups across campus. The GCI recognizes the steps that administration has already taken in response to this resolution, but realizes there are multiple areas where women’s inclusion and celebration is important.

Women at Cornell are a heterogeneous group including women of color, international students, and students in traditionally male-dominated field. In any sort of programming or action taken through the recommendations of the GCI, it is critical to understand the unique pressures women at Cornell may face. While bias in the professional and academic world is recognized, there are multiple other areas where women may not be receiving full support. For instance, graduate women may feel that concern for bias incidences and sexual assault is geared primarily towards the undergraduate population. Greater inclusion of graduate and professional women in outreach programs can increase the level of support Cornell offers all of its students. In other areas, such as family services and international programming, the University should take steps to think about how to reach graduate women specifically. The GCI hopes that the recommendations offered in this document will help administration think more critically about the specific needs and interests of graduate women.

**LGBTQ Section to come**

**References:**

1. [**http://diversity.cornell.edu/who-we-are**](http://diversity.cornell.edu/who-we-are)

2. [**http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/news/new-graduate-school-hires-increase-support-inclusion-and-professional-development**](http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/news/new-graduate-school-hires-increase-support-inclusion-and-professional-development)

3**.** [**http://diversity.cornell.edu/commitment-to-inclusion**](http://diversity.cornell.edu/commitment-to-inclusion)

4. [**https://www.hr.cornell.edu/diversity/reporting/bias\_response.html**](https://www.hr.cornell.edu/diversity/reporting/bias_response.html)

5. J Hyun, B Quinn, T Madon, S Lustig (2007) Mental health need, awareness, and use of counseling services among international graduate students. *J Am Coll Health* 56(2):109-118. [Link](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17967756)

6. Presentation at the 2012 IVY League Summit, a meeting of graduate and professional student leaders from our ivy league peers. Presentation title: Promoting Academic Wellness among Golkin International and Graduate Students, given by Meeta Kumar, the director of Outreach and Prevention at Penn’s Counseling and Psychological Services, and Chia-ying Pan, Director, Office of Learning Resources, UPenn.

7. Meeting with Sheri Notaro

8. Meeting with Nsombi B. Ricketts

9. Meeting with Black Graduate and Professional Student Associations (BGPSA), February, 2013

10. Town Hall on Diversity, March 6th 2013

11. Meeting with director of ISSO, Brandan O’Brien

12. Dine & Discuss: Sense of Community, February 27th, 2013

13. <http://www.isso.cornell.edu/about/stats12-13.pdf>

14. Resolution 10, GPSA, 2012

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