Graduate Student Assembly

End of Semester Report

Fall 2017
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Introduction

Fall of 2017 saw a number of long term GSA initiatives come to fruition. The following report will highlight in great detail the work that has been done by the various standing committees.

Our achievements this semester have been varied and impactful.

We worked with the Dean’s office to introduce a long sought-after change to the Doctoral Student Family Support policy. The new policy allows for more flexible of spending support funding as well as broadening the number families that eligible to generous aid provided. This policy was the direct result of the GSA Childcare Report published in 2016.

We collaborated with the transit office at Yale to introduce much needed improvement to the shuttle service. We lobbied for the extended operating hours for certain lines as well as collaborating on the release of a new transit app TapRide that greatly facilitated the use of the system as a whole. The Orange Shuttle Line will now run all day rather than break for several hours during the day.

We supported the efforts to introduce Bystander Intervention Training to a number of departments. We believe in the importance of this training in developing an environment where people feel empowered to counter all forms of harassment in the workplace and beyond.

We succeeded, in collaboration with Graduate and Professional Students Senate, in organizing a robust opposition to the suggested Graduate Stipend Tax suggested by congress. Our efforts were part of a nationwide movement that ensured that the dangers of this policy were well publicized. The pressure generated from this campaign ensured that the policy was not adopted in the final tax policy passed by Congress.

There has been a quadrupling of conference travel funding available to graduate students.

We still have a lot more to do. In the coming semester we will be fighting for a number of new policies and programs, among them:

- The creation of a university wide Ombudsman Office
- Ensuring student access to mental health and wellness resources
- Collaborating with the Office of Career Services to implement career services that serve the greatest number of GSAS students.
University-Wide Advisory Committees

GSA elects representatives to serve on various committees organized by the GSAS Dean, the President, and the Provost to advocate on behalf of graduate students. These committees include the following:

- University Wide Housing Advisory Committee
- Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility
- GSAS Executive Committee
- Mental Health Advisory Committee
- Wellness Committee
- Advisory Committee on Resources for Students and Employees with Disabilities
- Carbon Offset Taskforce
- Digital Humanities Committee
- Advisory Committee on Library Policy
- Human Subjects Committee
- Transit and Security Committee
- University Wide Committee on Sexual Misconduct
- Student Wellness Advisory Groups
- Student Advisory Committee for the Secretary and Vice President for Student Life
- Teaching and Learning Committee
- University Wide Academic Calendar Committee

The GSA Steering Committee also meetings biweekly with Deans Lynn Cooley and Richard Sleight to have ongoing conversations about graduate student affairs.

Conference Travel Funding

GSA has traditionally distributed $60,000 per year in conference travel funding to graduate students. These awards were merit and need based and decisions were made from reading groups convened by GSA. Starting this year, due to GSA advocacy, there has been a four-fold increase in total conference travel funding available to graduate students. The MacMillan Center has put forth $120,000 per year for all humanities and social sciences doctoral students presenting on an international topic. The GSA CTF budget has been doubled to $120,000 as well for students who are ineligible for MacMillan awards. Due to this increase in funding, all awards are made as long as students are in good standing. Pre-candidacy students are eligible for up to $500 whereas post-candidacy students are eligible for up to $750. Students may apply for funding each year. A few additional limitations may apply and will be posted on the GSA Conference Travel Fund website ctf.yale.edu.
Academics and Professional Development Committee

The Academics and Professional Development Committee (APD) works on a broad range of issues that relate to the academic training of graduate students at Yale, the university resources that make this training possible, the university climate in which this training takes place, and the opportunities and resources the university provides to prepare students for competitive careers after completing their studies. This year our main projects are focused on graduate student funding, the implementation of Title IX bystander intervention training across departments, ways to foster healthier advisor-student relationships at the university, and the growing effort to prepare students for diverse careers.

Funding Issues for Graduate Students

This subcommittee is currently assessing the ways in which the existing funding structure affects graduate students, with special attention given to the availability and implementation of sixth year funding. Right now, there is a perception that the current policies discourage applications to external fellowships, M.Phil. programs, and other research opportunities, as the clock to degree completion does not stop for these programs. Additionally, this subcommittee is investigating the reported negative effects of the one-in-one-out policy on funding. The subcommittee is working to collect data from departments throughout GSAS, with a particular focus on those departments that report unusual funding situation or have particular concerns about funding and time to degree. Given that department programs often differ in language, teaching, and coursework requirements, we are currently assessing how the current policies in place support or challenge students across disciplines.

Bystander Intervention Training (Title IX)

At the end of last academic year, a number of GSA representatives approached APD with a proposal to implement a bystander intervention training program, developed by the Title IX Office, across departments in GSAS. The training program aims to teach graduate students how to effectively intervene as a bystander in cases of potential sexual harassment or discrimination, in both academic and non-academic settings. A subcommittee of APD is working in collaboration with the university’s Title IX Office to hold these training sessions across departments and assess the effectiveness of their implementation. By next summer, the subcommittee will produce a report to both the GSA and Title IX Office with their assessment of the program and suggestions for improving this and similar trainings for all graduate students.

Diverse Professional Development and Career Advising for All Graduate Students

The Academics and Professional Development committee is working closely with the Office of Careers Strategy (OCS) at Yale to continue to design and implement career services that serve the greatest number of GSAS students. One primary project this year aims to bring in Yale GSAS alumni from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds to talk with current GSAS students about their career paths. We are also focusing on providing GSAS students with professional development training for diverse careers outside of academia, which has historically
been discouraged in many departments in GSAS. In many cases the resources for this career training already exist within OCS, so one of the goals of this subcommittee is to assess how to better expose graduate students to those resources.

**Advisor-Student Relationships and Faculty Conduct**

Over the past two years, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) Senate has worked to reassess issues of faculty advisor conduct and outline procedures for handling misconduct. While the GSA welcomed this assessment, we felt that the report did not provide sufficient guidelines for day-to-day advising of graduate students nor sufficient resources for graduate students facing minor or moderate issues with their advisors. We created an APD subcommittee to outline students’ expectations of advisor conduct and to provide suggestions on how the university can promote healthier advisor-student relationships and mitigate issues that do arise. The subcommittee has surveyed how other universities have dealt with related issues over the past few decades and is currently working with members of the FAS Senate to draft a set of mutually acceptable guidelines in graduate student advising. The subcommittee will also provide the university with suggestions on additional administrative resources that can be provided to graduate students who find themselves in unhealthy advisor-student relationships.

**Facilities and Health Care**

**Graduate Housing**

We are very excited about the progress being made on the new Graduate dorm going up. There has been concern that when the new building opens and HGS closes, graduate students will permanently lose 87 beds (the Hall of Graduate Studies has 169 beds and the new 272 Elm St. building will only have 82 beds), we have been told that Yale is committed to replacing all 169 beds to be lost.

Moreover, we have been working on writing a housing report to analyze the cost of housing versus the stipends graduate students receive. Below is an excerpt from our Executive Summary:

Graduate students at Yale are faced with an increasingly tight rental market. From 2010 to 2015, average graduate student stipends grew at an annual rate of 2.2%, while median rents in parts of New Haven—such as East Rock—increased at a rate of 5% per year. Housing costs at Yale-operated apartments and dorms over the same period were in line with stipend increases [Yale-owned housing increased at a rate of about 2.6%]. However, the supply of these housing facilities has not kept up with the increase in the graduate and professional student body. Similarly, housing stock in New Haven neighborhoods with a large share of graduate students has stayed flat.

We believe that these findings make a strong case for further action by the Graduate School. In the short run, we recommend changes to the way Yale-owned housing is assigned to applicants, and potentially converting current College overflow housing to graduate housing.
In the long run, we believe the Graduate School should consider building more student housing. This effort could be used to provide graduate students with more study and social space on campus.

**Mental Health Focus Groups**  
(Funding from the Wellness Grant, cosponsored by GSA and the Wellness Committee)

This project was designed and proposed in 2015. It’s goals are the following:

- Explore mental health and wellness issues among Yale PhD students
- Identify key areas of poor mental health and wellness within each GSAS division
- Develop strategies for improvement using a variety of campus resources

There are two phases to the project. The first phase was to carry out six focus groups, 2 per GSAS division (i.e., Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences). We would then analyze the results of the focus groups and continue on to phase two, which was to write a survey based on the results of the focus group sessions, and disseminate this survey to the entire Yale PhD population. At the conclusion of this, we would analyze all data and write a report on our findings that included our recommendations for improvements that could be made. At this point in time, we have concluded all six focus group sessions and are now reviewing the transcripts from those sessions.

**Mental Health & West Campus:**
Mental health care access at West Campus is difficult due to its distance from the Yale Health Center in New Haven. We are working on trying to ameliorate this. Our goals are the following:
- Engage with graduate students at West Campus
- Research mental health at satellite campuses at other universities
- Continue to discuss this issue with mental health advisory committee/discuss possible solutions
- Look at possible solutions: expanded hours of mental health care at main campus (allowing more flexibility for appointment times), remote appointments over phone.

**Graduate Student Work Space**

We are working on assessing the adequacy of graduate student work spaces (office and lab). There is some concern that not all graduate students have access to adequate work spaces, and so we hope to identify the spaces that are problematic along with division/department-specific concerns. Based on 2013 survey results, it was found that only 56% of respondents had a personal office/lab space, and of those, 97% had 24-hr access to that space.

While there are some impending future improvements (e.g., a sizeable number of humanities students will receive dedicated work spaces in the future 320 York St. building), there will still be certain departments where students will not be able to have access to such work spaces. We are now developing a survey to better understand the current scope of the problem.

**Dental Insurance**

Graduate & Professional Students have had a dental insurance plan provided by Delta Dental since 2010. The plan operates primarily as a preventive and diagnostic plan, though a fillings
benefit can be utilized after one has been enrolled in the plan for at least twelve consecutive months. In short, the plan is expensive for what it offers, and it has been extremely difficult to negotiate with Delta Dental.

Improving dental is a top priority for us, and we are currently seeking resolutions/alternatives in addition to finalizing a report to be submitted shortly.

We are releasing a detailed report on Dental Coverage to submit to the administration for improvement of the graduate student dental plan.

**Schwarzman Center**

GSA has been advocating for a student center open to all students on campus for many years. We compiled a report in 2014 with GPSS and YCC. We also sent representatives to the Schwarzman Committee that was formed in 2015. Our reps helped to write the Schwarzman Committee Report, especially the sections on the needs of graduate students. GSA leadership participated in the selection of the new director of the Schwarzman Center, Garth Ross.

**Transit and Security Committee**

The Transit sub-committee is responsible for improving how graduate students move around at Yale and in New Haven both within the Yale Transport System and on bike as well as by car or on foot. The committee has a close and very good working relation with the heads of Yale Transit. The subcommittee constantly reviews patterns of movement around campus and how these can be optimized. The subcommittee regularly publishes a Transit Report. Further the subcommittee is responsible for reviewing biking infrastructure in New Haven as well as outreach to the student community.

The Security sub-committee works closely with Yale Security Staff, Yale and New Haven Police to increase security across campus both within building and on the streets. The sub-committee monitors the official police log and sends a representative to the CompStat meetings of Yale and New Haven Police. This committee further works on pedestrian safety and security and in that capacity the subcommittee nominates a representative to the Transit Safety Committee of the Yale Office of Environmental Health and Safety.

The Lab-Safety sub-committee works with the Lab Safety officers in the Natural Sciences to increase safety at the workspace for graduate students in these fields.

**Recent accomplishments**

**Transit**

In 2017 the transit committee completed two high-priority projects as well as worked on several other improvements to student life in other areas of transport.
Orange Line Service

Due to the continued rise of the graduate student population living in East Rock there is increased demand for transportation from East Rock to campus. The biking infrastructure in East Rock, especially on Orange Street, is not as developed as many graduate students would consider appropriate. As a consequence, many graduate student residents in this area rely on the Yale Shuttle System for transportation. The Orange line, however, was not in service between 11am and 4pm. Planning with the committee Yale Transit introduced a one shuttle service during this timeslot.

While this is a step in the right direction the Transit sub-committee continues to work on this project and develops a detailed plan for a fixed schedule service on this route. Currently there is no fixed timetable and the service is not reliable enough. Graduate students run the risk of missing a shuttle which would mean a 50 min wait time for the next shuttle. Therefore the new service is currently under-utilized. Given the high demand for the service we are confident that a small change to the implementation of the new service will have a large impact on the user experience.

TapRide App

In October 2017 Yale Transit introduced the TapRide App which allows Students to self-book the Yale door-to-door shuttle. This was a long awaited service that the transit committee lobbied for. Most work of the committee was in the planning phase running up to the introduction of the app where the committee worked closely with Yale Transit to plan the features the App should have and how to best address concerns of the graduate student community while keeping the complications of the app and changes to the Yale Transit system to a minimum.

We are currently in the soft roll-out phase and re-evaluate the App as we get more feedback from users.

Shuttle Infographics

The Transit Committee often receives 'complaints' from graduate students not due to a poor or missing service on part of Yale but due to the fact that some services, features and rules of Yale transit are not sufficiently known or advertised to students. To counteract this, the transit committee produced a bill of rider's rights and responsibilities. To publicize these unknown rules and services the transit committee produced a set of Infographics with Printing and Publishing which are currently displayed in shuttles on a rotating basis. We hope that in the future we will also display the Rider's Bill of Rights and Responsibilities directly in the shuttles.

2017 Transport Survey

The main basis on which the transit committee selects its priorities are the direct reports of elected representatives to the General Assembly as well as the data from the Transport
Survey. The 2017 survey focused on the location and transport habits of graduate students, in particular the survey collected data to estimate the demand for biking on different routes in New Haven. The GSA strives to promote a sustainable future and as part of that we want to promote biking. In order to allocate resources of building biking infrastructure (Bike Racks, Repair Stations, Cycle Paths) efficiently this survey collected comprehensive movement patterns at different times of day / the week across New Haven. Further this survey includes reports on perceived safety across campus. The Report on this Survey is forthcoming in December.

Security
In 2017 the Security Committee through their representative on the Traffic Safety Committee of the Yale Office of Environmental Health and Safety worked on the installation of pedestrian security features around campus such as the Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFBs) at the York Street Crossing near GPSCY as well as on Sachem Street near the Health Center. Ongoing and future projects and priorities

Transit
The Transit Committee is focusing on three main projects, improving the biking infrastructure being the main priority.

Biking

The Transport Survey showed that graduate students are very willing to bike, even for longer commutes, as long as the route they need to travel on is safe and there is a sufficient infrastructure at their destination to securely store their bike. During this year the committee wants to work on specific recommendations to improve the biking environment in New Haven, which will have the added effect of also relieving pressure of the transit system. In addition, we receive increased reports of accidents due to cyclists on pavements which we also hope to reduce by improving cycling on road ways.

The main improvement that the committee currently considers is a visually and spatially separated bike lane on Orange St and/or Whitney Ave including a special bike turn signal. Other improvement include covered bike racks, encouraging private investments in biking vending machines on campus, as well providing safety equipment to new students at matriculation (reflective stickers etc.).

These improvements in the physical infrastructure could be potentially supplemented with a car-free day (potentially at the same time as another event such as spring-fling, graduation or the New Haven Run, where many roads are blocked for part of the day anyway) as well as a campaign for the new incoming students.

CT Transit

The need of graduate students for transportation is vastly different to that of undergraduate students. This is mainly due to their living and working situation. As graduate students live and cook in off-campus locations there is an increased need for transportation to a range of
supermarkets and other shopping facilities for graduate students. Currently only downtown and Stop and Shop are served by the Yale Shuttle System.

A group of representatives looks into the possibility of Yale joining the UPass System of CT transit. This would allow Yale Students to use CT Transit at less or no cost. This would in addition serve the long-term GSA objective to continue to increase the relations between the Graduate Student and the New Haven community. Currently there is somewhat of a stigma attached to using CT Transit. Our survey showed that CT Transit is underutilized despite the growing demand for transportation outside the town.

Rethinking Shuttle Lines

A third team focuses on the continued improvement of Yale Shuttle Lines. As demands as well as cost and environmental concerns change the shuttle lines need to continuously be re-evaluated. In particular, the new implementation of the all day orange line will be adjusted to graduate students' needs. For example, the team is currently planning on having a more predictable schedule for the orange line as opposed to a continuously circulating shuttle.

Security

The Security Committee is focusing on several projects this term, with the below being the two main projects.

Improvements of Blue lights

Across Campus Yale and New Haven Police operate Security Access Points (Blue Lights). These are continuously maintained to enable students to call for help at any time even without access to a mobile phone. Without reducing to capacity to serve the community in that way the blue lights can be used in other ways. These ways are analyzed by one committee team. One possible avenue that they investigate is to advertise using the blue phones to call safe rides in case a mobile phone is not available.

Building Access

We are working closely with Yale Security to allow Graduate Students a wider access to at least the main hallways of other Yale Buildings. In emergency situations it is necessary to be able to enter a building to feel safe and wait for help.

Public Relations Committee

Design

This semester in the Design Group, we have approached a few tasks that will hopefully have wide-ranging impact on the connectivity of the graduate school as a whole.
Streamlining Feedback
We will be implementing a "comment box" over the winter break that will be embedded in the GSA website. It was developed by Joel Ong using google sites and will allow all GSAS students to share their thoughts and concerns directly with the GSA. (If we can show the page that you've created, that would be a great visual for the group.)

Developing our Social Media Presence
Over the next few months, we will be growing our social media presence. We are attempting to become reclaim the unused @yalegsa instagram account in order to add another facet to the humanity of the GSA for students who don't understand our role. The first multi-media podcast will be an Architecture Tour of New Haven featuring an interview with DGS Alan Plattus from YSOA. He has been doing this tour for the incoming master's students for a generation and has kindly agreed to take us on a virtual tour of campus.

Highlighting Student and Faculty Achievements
Once the Instagram, Facebook Live, and Snapchat channels are ready, we will be adding a few semi-regular series. So far, the Yale version of Humans of New York (Elis of Yale... name needs work) will feature graduate students and their stories. We are also considering a nomination process for this that would allow people to submit if we have problems getting people to sign up.

Media
Gradcast has released five episodes so-far this semester, and several more are in the works. Our current target is releasing some sort of new content around every week or so. One primary focus this semester is building content and developing best practices -- we have a production guide in progress and we're going to be doing more production training as we go along.

Campus Conversations: In this series, you'll hear from professors and grad students on campus about cutting edge research, captivating creative work, and new ideas.

Happenings: This series is focused on cool things happening in and around the New Haven.

The World at Yale: Long form episodes focused on Graduate Student and Faculty involved with global and international affairs.

Outreach
We hope to netter integrate GSA/members in the NH community, utilize the human resources to effect positive change and streamline the process to make it easier for members to join these causes. In that spirit the outreach subcommittee worked to integrate different opportunities for collaboration into one comprehensive list.

In Fall of 2017 we held a fundraiser for Hurricane Maria with support from the McDougal Center, GPSCY, GPSS, and various New Haven businesses to raise over $3200 for the hurricane effort.
Going forward this will work be continued by the newly established Service Committee:

**Pals tutoring:** Provide tutoring in reading, writing and math for underprivileged populations.

**Days of service:** Work with local NPO’s four times a year on various initiatives

**VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance):** Assist low income residents to prepare tax returns

**No Closed Doors (NCD):** Resume/cover letter writing, interview preparation, job search and preparation, public benefit apps

**Advocacy Team:** The Advocacy Team is a branch of YHHAP dedicated to addressing hunger and homelessness at an institutional level. Duties include researching, drafting policy recommendations, and weighing in on pending legislation related to our mission. Works directly with New Haven’s Homeless Advisory Commission