Graduate Student Senate
Senate Meeting
Friday March 1 2013
Campus Center 904-08

Minutes

Present:

Officers: Hongmei Sun, Garth Schwellenbach, Robin Anderson.
Staff: Ghazah Abbasi, Matt Ferrari, Adina Gianelli, Srinivas Lankala.
Others: Yang Gyeltshen (Center for International Education), Garrett Gowen (Student Government Association), Gabriel Schmitt (Student Government Association), David Vaillancourt (Associate Dean of Students), John McCarthy (Dean of the Graduate School), Kumble Subbaswamy (Chancellor).

Hongmei Sun called the meeting to order at 2.04 pm.

Kristen Edwards moved to approve the minutes of the last meeting and Travis Gagen seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Robin Anderson presented an update from the Finance Committee and said there were 2 funding requests from Student Artists Graduate Association (SAGA), and the Language, Literature and Culture Graduate Students Organization (LLC GSO). He added that the Finance Committee recommends that the Senate approve both requests. Kristen Edwards moved to approve and Jared Starr seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

Hongmei Sun presented an update on the Student Trustee election; she said the issues at stake include working with SGA for increased representation of graduate students on the Board of Trustees. Robin said that he sat on the SGA election commission that oversees the election but as a non-voting member. He added that nominations are open, but that the nomination process is lengthy and a student needs the signatures of 250 voters to be a nominee. The nomination process ends March 4. Robin encouraged grad students to nominate themselves. The election itself would be held in two weeks through Campus Pulse.

Hongmei announced the schedule for the GSS elections, and said the process starts March 25. She also announced that there is a need for one more member on the Elections committee. Garth Schwellenbach further explained the timeline, process and work of the Elections committee. Travis asked how to get the word out to which Garth responded that it would be through the usual route of e-mails and flyers and Robin added that senators
are also expected to spread the word among their constituents. Ghazah Abbasi expressed interest but urged the senators present to nominate themselves. David Vaillancourt said that service on the elections is a way of giving back to the graduate community and a strong elections process gives greater legitimacy to the GSS in the eyes of the administration. Dani O’Brien and Daniel Morales nominated themselves, and Ghazah withdrew. Travis moved to elect Dani O’Brien and Daniel Morales to the Elections committee and the motion was seconded. With 22 in favor, both were elected unanimously.

**Funding and Progress committee:** Ghazah presented an update on the work of the committee in the last month, and announced the tentative schedule of open house sessions in SBS and HFA schools and interviews with students; Ghazah and Abby Templer from GEO have examined data on graduate student numbers available from OIR; this data from OIR is available to everyone and Ghazah encouraged senators to look at it.

**Health Council:** Ghazah presented an update on the last meeting which discussed restarting SHAB to provide student oversight, and an update on the new building for UHS. Adina Gianelli presented an update on the UHS advisory board which only had one meeting so far and said she will have more substantial updates for the next meeting.

Hongmei introduced Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy. The Chancellor said he was here to mainly answer questions, and he will speak frankly about financial and other issues affecting graduate students and the university at large. He described several types of challenges facing the university: the first was fiscal, where the financial situation had changed because of the decline of the social compact that once existed between the university and the state; he said the university was exploring ways to keep tuition revenue (mainly undergraduate). He said changing demographics, changes in the academic and research job market and the technological issues in education (in the form of the rise of MOOCs and online education) are other challenges facing the university. He added that one of the unique advantages of UMass was the strong union protections that graduate employees have through GEO, which in his view is one of the strengths of the campus.

Bradley Bolin asked about plans for internationalization and global programs. The Chancellor said that internationalization means several things including training graduates to work in a globalized environment. He added that our international undergraduate population is only 2%, which is too small. He also said that the primary limiting factor in increased international recruitment is housing, unlike the case for a big city campus. He said graduate scholarship and research has always been international by nature but the challenge is to increase opportunities and international exposure for undergraduates.

Matthew Ryder asked about the measures to increase STEM enrollment. The Chancellor responded that STEM fields are complex, dependent on job market and available research funds, and that there is an overall shortage but some kinds of engineers and scientists are underemployed or unemployed. He added that at UMass we have a relatively good STEM representation.
Hongmei asked if this talk of challenges meant that we should be prepared for some funding cuts or changes, especially in humanities?

The Chancellor said there is an overall budget crunch in the state and that’s not news. He added that the state’s revenue shortfall has meant that UMass has a $2 million cut in its allocations, and that healthcare costs have also increased at the same time and current levels of expenditure are difficult to sustain. But he disagreed about any special cuts to the humanities and said there are no biases at UMass between sciences and humanities, although public discourse about research may focus more on the sciences.

To a question about priorities from Faune Albert, the Chancellor replied that student success and completion is his top priority. He said that PhDs at UMass take 8 years on average to finish, and we have to ask if that is the best thing in terms of the job market and the optimum use of their time. He added that supporting research is another priority since it is research that separates us from other liberal arts colleges. Other priorities were making our case to the legislature, proving our direct benefits to the commonwealth, increasing efforts at internationalization and building up the Honors College.

Ghazah said that time to completion is indeed a concern and asked what practical steps were being to reduce the time to completion of PhD students, in terms of coursework or exam requirements. The Chancellor replied that we cannot cut quality by making it easier in terms of coursework or exams. He said that a review of graduate programs was underway that will address the time to degree among other things. Reorganizing graduate programs is the most immediate way to deal with it, and he said the faculty is currently engaged in this review. He said other measures under consideration include more graduate fellowships through fundraising and making graduate program needs central to faculty hiring.

The Dean of the Graduate School, John McCarthy requested to speak and said there were many reasons for the lengthy time to degree: these include curricular reasons, which the Graduate School is addressing through working with the departments. In terms of funding as a factor in time to completion the Graduate School is trying to work out additional funding through reorganizing the university fellowship program that is currently ineffective. He said that one measure being considered is to ask deans of schools and colleges to mach the Graduate School’s half-a-million dollar fund for fellowships.

Veronica Golden asked if there are any alternatives to funding solely through Teaching Assistantships? She pointed that History has a time to degree of 10 years. The Chancellor agreed that we should get away from the view that graduate students are mainly teaching assistants, which English and other Humanities programs have long held, and we may see a move towards full-time lecturers to replace graduate TA/TOs.

To a question from Matthew Ryder about administrative bureaucracy, the Chancellor explained that the size and scale of UMass neccesitated several layers of administration for effective decision-making, because the collective at UMass is too large, unlike small
liberal arts colleges. He added that the university needs teams of experts in their field to stay on top of specific issues such as compliance, etc, and to occupy positions broad enough to be able to speak responsibly to the public and the legislature on behalf of the whole university.

Matt Ferrari asked what the Chancellor’s views were about the Wellman document. The Chancellor replied that he was not aware of the nature of the document. On being informed about the Trustee policy on governance, the Chancellor promised to look into it and assured the Senate that regardless of the document he was strongly committed to shared governance mechanisms and added that in a large university context such mechanisms were very important for effective decisions.

The Chancellor concluded by saying that he did not intend to be pessimistic but to lay out the issues ahead in a frank and open manner.

Hongmei thanked the Chancellor and Dean McCarthy for coming to the meeting.

Announcements:
- Robin announced that applications for line item funding from GSOs will be accepted from March 4 through 29th.
- Adina announced that day care on campus is available from OFR, GSS, GWN. This is currently only available in the DuBois library and is intended to act as a form of childcare for student parents who may want to spend the day studying in or using the library.
- Matt Ferrari announced that the Dissertation access survey had had a good response so far the responses were being considered by the relevant committee of the Graduate Council.
- Hongmei announced the upcoming Student trustee elections and invited one of the candidates present, Garrett Gowen, to speak. Garrett introduced himself and stressed his focus on issues of accessibility, accountability and a focus on humanities as much as STEM departments. He added that he will make sure that the Wellman document ideals are implemented in campus governance.
- Robin announced a Higher-Education Advocacy day in Boston. He also reported that there was a solution to deal with a problem with a certain prescription drug RESTAT that number of graduate students. Faune added that GEO stewards were also collecting information about the prescription drug problem and urged senators to get students to contact them as well.
- Hongmei announced that GSS is planning a bowling party at Spare Time Northampton on April 13. She invited senators to join the officers in the UPub after the meeting.

Xueting Jiang moved to adjourn and Brenda Muzeta seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 3.35 pm.