

GSO Advocacy Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 26, 2021 at 6pm (Zoom)

Chair: Patricia Arias Hunt (GSO President-Elect)

Present: Lexy (Incoming Kinesiology Rep), Sarah (GSO Immediate Past President)

Actions taken since last meeting

- Meeting with Dean Farmer-Kaiser (Patricia, Sarah, Liz present) yielded an invitation to present GSO's Advocacy Report in May to faculty through Graduate Council and Graduate Faculty meetings, meaning Advocacy Report needs to be finalized
- Attendance of ~20 UL students at NAGPS South Central conference where they heard from UNT and Arkansas State GSCs on activities they have undertaken over the last year (monument to recognize their University's occupation of native lands, donation to funding program to assist international students who are often excluded from most forms of financial aid, donation of funding to campus food pantry, negotiation of purchase of application to help students with visual impairment navigate around campus, assisting D/deaf students in interactions with campus police, etc.)
- Meeting with two former graduate student leaders from University of Kentucky (Sarah, Scott, Victoria M., Destinee present) on how to increase visibility of GSO, how to move toward activism, how to develop more internal roles to cultivate good future executives, importance of transition documents, the need for a vision for GSO through a values statement and strategic plan, etc.

Discussion Points

- Patricia shared screen to show Advocacy Report and summary in progress
 - Need to write a preface to better frame the reading experience, a few small aesthetic or minor word changes
 - Discussion of GSO's Objectives for 2021-2022 should really stem from GSO's values, which are as of yet undefined. The website, constitution, and bylaws offer some guidance on three pillars ("advocacy, funding, communication") but our funding wording really tends to favor heavy "traditional" research programs, not necessarily all students. In the absence of a true values statement, GSO Advocacy Report can proceed with the Objectives that it has defined for 2021-2022 because they are grounded in nearly a hundred hours of conversation with graduate students and administrators, but a future task of the Advocacy Committee could be to craft a values statement?
 - Values statement potential keywords: support, community, care
- Internal roles to Advocacy Committee
 - The roles should fulfil a "what's in it for me" void that matches interested grad students with areas they are passionate about
 - Ideas (to fill current gaps or address known concerns):
 - International Student Advocate
 - ideally some crossover with International Student Council Board?
 - international students may feel more comfortable coming forward to an intl student peer who they trust will keep their confidentiality than to a large student government organization
 - Parent Advocate
 - ... as in, grad students who are parents
 - night social activities make attendance difficult for parents
 - professors are not always understanding of students who are parents, particularly of younger children
 - other university GSOs have helped students develop care networks during pandemic to share in babysitting between parents (students could get 1 hour alone to Zoom or do research while another parent/grad student helped their child with homework, for free)

- Diversity & Inclusion Advocate
 - ideally some crossover with organizations like GLASS, NAACP, Black Student Association, ENGL dept's antiracism reading group, etc.
 - would be great to get linked with Campus Diversity, James Jackson Community of Scholars, and/or Grad Council's Diversity & Inclusion standing committee
- Health, Safety & Wellness Advocate
 - survey results from FA20 showed students were worried about their personal health – what will change in FA21 with the return to more in-person? will grad students have a say in their working conditions (un[der]insured)?
 - possibility to get a seat at the table in a safety or mental health committee on campus?
- Employment Concerns Advocate
 - some students have confided in their GSO reps that they are being overworked
 - encourage time tracking for research and teaching assistants?
- Community Leadership Advocate
 - need for a student to fill the role of inspiring Dept Reps to be excellent leaders and peer advocates through ongoing training and support
 - training to help foster supportive communities within departments and championing peers in situations where it may not be happening organically online (celebrating fellow students' wins, presentations at conferences, sharing resources, etc.)
- These roles within Advocacy Committee could be set up provisionally until Bylaws can be adopted to reflect this?
- "Advocate" roles would have power to hold discussions with concerned students and report back to the Advocacy Committee regularly for accountability; anything needing escalation would have to be run through the Committee. Ideally Dept Reps first would fill these roles, then open vacancies up to interested grad non-reps and the Advocates would seek the feedback of non-reps in their discussions. (Need for election/appointment procedure/terms?). Good way to train future reps and future execs.
- Segmenting Communications Committee:
 - graphic maker vs. social media manager?
 - need for Events Coordinator to identify programming that GSO could tag on to from other student organizations / campus offices
 - we've encouraged grad students to go to other student orgs for social events (GSO cannot do it all), but some are reporting they feel like they're just for undergrads. help with a grad offshoot of existing student orgs?
- Segmenting Funding Committee:
 - ??! maybe each committee member specializes in a different funding opportunity?
 - need to diffuse decision making and awareness of what an application requires to a larger group of people since we will need a new treasurer at end of fall 2021.
 - putting non-execs on the GSO shared email to access student applications seems ill-advised, but maybe once the application materials have been downloaded to Dropbox the committee members could get "view" access to evaluate apps then report their findings on the applications at Funding Committee meeting?
- How does GSO want to conduct Advocacy in the future?
 - In the past, Executives have sent any concern directly to Dean Farmer-Kaiser, which robs grad student peers of collaborative problem solving
 - Some problems are *not* GSO's to fix and should be escalated to an administrator, but the student should feel seen and heard by GSO
 - Strongly worded letter writing is a big thing in other GSOs. Where would these be published (separate page on website)?

- Rethinking the Organization structure / meetings
 - Need for separate meetings for Funding appropriations vs. Bylaw changes?
 - At the very least there is a need for a separate meeting (maybe before fall) just to get rid of wording in the Bylaws that refer to paper applications
 - How much can the Organization really accomplish meeting just three times a semester for an hour?
 - If there are regular committee meetings, happening on a rolling basis (something every week), this might spark quicker movement on important issues as they arise
 - If GSO had more regular meetings, or at least more regular events, it would make time for dialogues like “ask me anything” with University administrators, inspiring leadership speakers, etc.
 - Can funding vote be done online pre-meeting and confirmed during the meeting (suggestion from a staff member who is a former GSO exec from several years ago)?
 - Visibility at dept events / engagement during GSO meetings: Zoom backgrounds to encourage cameras on
- Can strengthening GSO be a grad student’s special research or capstone course?
 - At one point in fall Sarah had talked with Dr. Khey about using GSO funding to pay to build/populate a Moodle course by GSO for grad students to help them succeed, fill professional development gaps in some departments, etc.
 - Idea to re-explore? “UNIV 100 but for grad school”

Action Items

- Patricia and Sarah will finalize and submit Advocacy Report to Dean Farmer-Kaiser to share with graduate faculty; post to GSO’s website
- Proceed with defining “Advocate” roles for fall?
- Patricia and Sarah will schedule a meeting (before Executives’ Transition Retreat) with Dean Farmer-Kaiser to understand how her office understands the role of GSO and what support they will be willing to offer in 2021-2022
- In summer 2021 or fall 2021, craft a Values statement for GSO. Research what other GSOs have done.