



## **GSS Meeting Minutes**

**August 30, 2021**

**5:30 - 6:30 pm in Student Union 169 (and Zoom)**

Senators Present: Refer to Appendix

Ex-Officio Members Present: Dixie Thompson, Millie Cheatham

Guests Present: Abigail Brumfield, Claire Donelan

### **1. Call to Order (George Fields)**

The Graduate Student Senate meeting was called to order by Chairperson, George Fields, on Monday, August 30, 2021 at 5:30 pm.

### **2. Opening Comments & Introductions (George Fields)**

The chairperson reviewed the order and guidelines of the senate meetings:

- Chairperson will moderate the meetings
- Members should raise their hands and wait to be recognized by the chairperson before speaking. Begin by identifying yourself with your name and voting number for the minutes.
- For everyone's safety, masks are currently mandated for the duration of the meeting. Please maintain your distance and follow common safety protocols. We will follow UTK and CDC guidelines during our meetings.
- We will follow Robert's Rules of Order for our meetings.
- We will utilize QR Codes and Google Forms to record meeting attendance. This allows us to maintain accessibility and security guidelines.
  - Attendance will be taken at the beginning and end of each senate meeting to verify quorum and participation.
  - The QR Code will be provided during the session (a link will be provided to the Zoom audience).

- Members should log in with their UTK NetID and password for their attendance to be valid.
  - If you will be represented by proxy, send their name and email in advance to [gss2@utk.edu](mailto:gss2@utk.edu) so that we have it on record. (If someone attempts to mark attendance or vote using someone's number and they are not on file, it will be counted as invalid).

The Chairperson introduced the Executive Team:

- Hunter Hammock, President
- Mohamed Al Sager, Vice President
- Samaneh Morovati, Technology Officer
- Igor Bernardi, Legislative & Steering Committee Chair
- Davis Carter, Annual Fundraiser Committee Chair
- Ashley Browning, Equity & Diversity Committee Chair

### **3. Overview of Senate Meeting Rules & Procedures (Hunter Hammock)**

Due to the current situation with COVID19, we recognize there may be challenges to the way we have typically operated. While in-person participation is encouraged (and provides unique opportunities for networking) we want to make sure that all departments are represented equally (whether the senator is a distance learner or may have health concerns). With that in mind, a Zoom option will be provided for the year to senators that are not able to attend in person.

Hunter shared the meeting guidelines and senator expectations:

- Zoom specific guidelines:
  - Links will be sent the day of the meeting so that those with health concerns or distance learners can attend.
  - Turn video on and mute yourself the entire time (unless acknowledged to speak).
  - Video must be on so that we can verify the identity of each Zoom senator, and ensure attendance/vote security.
  - Your attendance/vote(s) will not count if our technical officer cannot verify your identity on Zoom via video, name, and net id (logged into zoom with UTK email). In addition, your name must have your voting number preceding it (e.g. 17. John Smith). Contact [gss2@utk.edu](mailto:gss2@utk.edu) for technical issues or troubleshooting during the senate session.
- Proxies:
  - Every senator must have a designated proxy, must be on file for attendance and vote to count.

- If your proxy is attending for you, they must be on file and you must notify us in advance in writing. They will use their name, their UTK ID, your voting number, and check the box indicating that they are proxy.
- Senator expectations, for both in person and on Zoom:
  - Full participation.
  - Come prepared.
  - Spread the word about GSS to other grad students and participate in social media campaigns.
  - Be a leader for your constituents; lead by example
  - Discuss issues with your department and bring them forward.
  - Participate in committees, committees are the workhorse of GSS.
  - Senators must be present for all senate meetings. If you are not able to attend, you must notify us in writing that your proxy will attend. We expect all senators to actively participate. Two unexcused absences will result in dismissal from your senate seat, and we will be required to contact your Department Head/DGS to secure a new person to fill your seat.

#### **4. Guest Speakers**

We are happy to have several guests with us this evening who will share information about their respective areas:

- **Dr. Dixie Thompson, Vice Provost & Dean of the Graduate School**

Dr. Thompson welcomed everyone; good to be together in person and hope to be able to continue that way as much as possible. It has been a busy summer in the Graduate School! Some of the highlights:

- **Welcome Week Preparation & Activities:** We had two great orientation sessions in August; record numbers attended both the new grad student and GTA orientations, in addition to a campus community fair for grad students. Hunter and Mohamed were very instrumental in helping plan and orchestrate those events. We also celebrated the start of fall with a fun kickoff where hundreds of graduate students and family members were able to meet one another and just enjoy a relaxing evening with dinner at the Knoxville Zoo. There will be many more engaging events and activities planned for the coming year, and we look forward to seeing you there.
- **Stipend Increases:** Over the summer we did the legwork to get a million more dollars into the hands of grad students this fall. Thanks to the Chancellor and Provost who supported this initiative, we were able to increase the minimum wages of GTAs up by 20% this year.

- Enrollment this fall is up, which is great! We have a large class this year; part of that because of international deferrals due to COVID last year. In addition we are seeing our online programs continuing to grow, so we are experiencing record numbers of grad and professional students here in the volunteer family.

This will be an exciting year, and I look forward to being the #1 advocate for graduate and professional students on our campus!

- **Abigail Brumfield – Interim Assistant Director for Outreach and Initiatives in the Dean of Students Office**

Abigail shared that a lot of her job is going out and letting people know about the Dean of Students Office and all it has to offer.

Happy to be here this evening; in the past worked very closely with the Graduate Student Senate, and now is a graduate student, as well--so it is an honor to be invited tonight. A couple of highlights from the Dean of Students Office:

**Big Orange Pantry:** We just opened the Big Orange Pantry in Fall 2020, and the response from both the community and our students has been wonderful! Word of mouth in the Grad Student community has been great! We are open 18.5 hours a week (4 days per week). In addition to offering both perishable and non-perishable pantry items, we also have “ready to go meals.” We have partnered with the UT Culinary Institute, and with Sustainability and Vol Dining to recover food from many dining facilities on campus. Delicious items that are available for you to partake of!

**Other Initiatives:** Abigail shared QR codes for information on the pantry (<https://dos.utk.edu/big-orange-pantry/>) and mentioned there are other initiatives, like KnoxChop that has a food truck, that are available on campus. You can also volunteer to help with the pantry, and we would love to have you join us!

- **Claire Donelan, SGA President** (UG student body president).

Claire shared that she is excited to be here tonight and looks forward to a great collaboration with GSS this year! Graduate students are welcome to come to SGA meetings which are biweekly on Tuesdays starting August 31 (@ 6:30 pm) in Haslam 304. Two events that we have coming up:

- **Voter Registration Tailgate** –Saturday, September 18<sup>th</sup> on the HSS lawn. Lots of free stickers, swag, etc. If you want to volunteer, let us know. Bring ID and get registered to vote.
- **Smoky's Closet** – business and professional attire you can take. If the hours they are open don't work for you, let them know and they will try to arrange a time to get you in there. We also accept donations of good quality professional clothing. Currently open 2 days a week, and located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the student union near the GSS office.

## 5. President's Report (Hunter Hammock)

- **Introduction:** Hunter shared an introduction to his background and current career path. He was a senator last year, and is excited to be back this year in the role of president. He & our vice president, Mohamed Al Sager, have had a chance to meet over the summer and discuss the initiatives and concerns that are facing our graduate student body.

GSS represents over 6,000 students, and is the official voice on their behalf to the leadership on campus. Along with 1-2 senators from each department, we will deliberate policies and move things along to the administration. My experience has shown them to be very open and interested in the needs of our graduate students, and we want to make sure that we can relay those topics to them.

- **Goals for GSS this year include:**
  - Providing opportunities for social reconnection. We are looking forward to providing students with opportunities for socialization/interaction. Hunter encouraged senators to lead those initiatives in their departments, as well.
  - Being an advocate for wellbeing. Mental, physical, and financial health are all important aspects, and we want to provide opportunities for students to prioritize these issues and improve their well-being.
  - Keeping our finger on the pulse of grad students so we can relay that information to the administration. We want to seek out ways to keep our graduate students productive and connected!
  - We also want to achieve 100% senate filled seats this year. We have some departments that are not represented, and it is important that all students are represented and that all perspectives are considered for informed debates and decision making. Currently we have about 70 seats

filled out of 95, but it is early in the semester and I'm hopeful we can achieve full representation.

Hunter encouraged the senators to see the work they are doing as an opportunity to give back to UT and pass the torch to the students rising up behind us.

- **Bylaws and Constitution:** Hunter encouraged senators to take time to read these and become familiar with them. They are posted on our website: (<https://gss.utk.edu/legislation-and-initiatives/>)
- **Senator expectations:** The primary expectation is active participation. You are the connection between the students in your department and the administration. Your role as a senator is extremely important, as you are their voice on the UT campus.

Relay all information to them; let them know about our initiatives and encourage them to get involved so that they have those opportunities for reconnection and building a social network in the months ahead.

Provide support and a sense of belonging to your constituents; make sure they know that you are here to advocate on their behalf. Help build a community within your department. We want to build a strong network of student leaders and volunteers across campus!

Let us know what their needs are. Each department on campus is unique; help us understand what the students in your area are concerned about, what their experiences are.

- **Updates & Current Status of GSS:** Hunter reiterated that recent events were a great success and provided opportunities for our graduate students. Welcome week activities were well attended (orientations, community fair, and the kickoff at the zoo). Other important items to note:
  - **Travel Awards will be online soon.** We are in the process of looking at how the funds can best be allocated and developing the process. When that goes live, help us get the word out to your students
  - **We have executive team and committee positions open** and we encourage you to apply! Committee assignments will be given after this first meeting, and senators will meet once per month with your committee chair. These committees are the workhorse for GSS, and

your continued involvement/participation is vital for the success of each committee.

Hunter concluded his remarks with encouragement and thanking everyone for the privilege of serving in this position. All of the work we do as graduate students is vital for the campus and the university, and for our careers, as well. We look forward to working together with you, using our skills and talents to make this a productive and successful year for our student body.

## 6. Vice President's Report (Mohamed Al Sager)

**Introduction:** Mohamed shared an introduction to his background and current career path. He recently earned his Masters degree at UT and is now pursuing a PhD in Electrical Engineering. This is his first year in GSS, and is looking forward to serving in this capacity.

Mohamed shared how much he and Hunter are committed to working alongside senators to make an impact at UT. The role of GSS is very vital and important. We are the voice of the graduate student body; the mediator between students and leadership at UT.

- **Connecting with Students in Your Department:** Each senator is the voice for the graduate students in their department and has an important role to play. He encouraged senators to engage with the students in their departments: have town halls, conduct surveys, and host open discussions. Get to know your students.
- **Executive Team:** Mohamed urged the senators to consider applying for the open positions on the executive team. Interviews will be held soon. There is much work to be done, and the more help we have, the more we can achieve.
- **Social Media:** Senators are encouraged to support GSS by participating in social media. GSS has both Facebook and Instagram accounts. Follow us, and share the information posted.
- **Ad Hoc Committee Ideas:** Last year there were ad hoc committees that did a lot of great work; so if you have ideas for this type of committee or an issue that we need to be aware of, let us know. Later in this meeting we will have an open discussion, and we would like to hear from you...then or even after the meeting. Reach out to us.
- **Events:** We have been brainstorming about events that we can hold for graduate students, and would love to hear ideas from you, as well. Some of the items we have discussed include:

- Social meetups around Knoxville or UT
  - Poster Competition
  - 3MT
  - Awards Breakfast in the Spring
- **GSS Website:** Semineh Morovati is our technology officer and has done a great job with the website (<https://gss.utk.edu/>). Please take time to look at it and give us feedback. The roster of senators is there, as well. If there are discrepancies, let us know.
  - **Departmental Representation:** If your department should have two representatives and you are the only one, let us know. We want to achieve 100% filled seats this semester.

Mohamed closed his comments by sharing that GSS is a great platform that allows us to improve the experience of our graduate students. We are looking forward to a great collaboration together, and encourage you to reach out to me and Hunter at any time. The GSS office is upstairs in 372 (student union); let us know if you would like to stop by and we can arrange to be there. Make sure to say hi if you see us on campus! Let us know how things are going for the students in your department!

## 7. New Business (George Fields)

- **GSS Calendar:** The calendar is available on the website; we will meet monthly. Our next meeting is Sept 23 in this same room.
- **Student engagement events: GSS is partnering with the Office of Student Engagement to offer several free events for Graduate Students:**
  - **Grad Night at the Tennessee Smokies 9/9/2021**
  - **Grad Student Trivia Night at Fieldhouse Social 9/22/2021**
  - **Ghost Tour of Old City 10/21/21**
  - **Grad Night at Main Event Fun Center 11/17/21**

Remember to provide ideas for professional and social events as Mohamed just mentioned, and help us to brainstorm and relay any ideas you have about networking.

- **Executive Team and Committee Chair Position Availability (Hunter Hammock).** Hunter shared the positions currently available on the executive committee:
  - Secretary,
  - Travel Awards Chair,
  - Programing and Events Chair,



- Zoom Moderator,
- Photographer(s),
- Social Media Director,
- Treasurer,
- Graduate Student Well-Being Chair (ad hoc),
- Four GSS Justices (Judiciary Committee),
- GSS Travel Awards Chair, and
- GSS Advisory Committee Chair

If you are interested in serving in one of these roles, please submit an application (see the link on the email with agenda).

- **Voting Procedures (Hunter Hammock)**

Hunter shared that the executive board has decided to utilize Google forms to facilitate voting. Benefits include:

- Ability to track UT Net ID, to verify votes from each senator, Central Authentication System
- Proxies can be tracked this way as well
- Voting number ensures each senator has one vote
- Voting can be quickly drafted and administered
- Ability to verify invalid votes, if any

Please note that this requires senators to be logged in with their netID. This means you must notify us in writing in advance of the meeting if a proxy is voting for you. They must then use their netID and put their name, and indicate they are acting as a proxy. Not following this procedure will invalidate any voting and/or attendance submissions.

A system test vote was conducted.

Which ice cream is better: chocolate or vanilla? The winner was vanilla with 57.4% of the vote. There were no issues with the test vote or recording of results.

- **Approval of Minutes (April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021)** – This item was moved to the next meeting so that everyone will have an opportunity to review the minutes before voting whether or not to approve.
8. **Open Floor Discussion (George Fields)** – This session is an open floor discussion to brainstorm GSS initiatives. We want to generate as many ideas as possible, so this is just a time to be creative! We will not get into specifics or debate, this is just to generate ideas.

- **Zac Hyder, ELPS, #41** – Suggested the possibility of a fundraiser 5K; registration would cover the cost of the event, a t-shirt, and a donation to the charity we run for.

To help generate additional ideas and assist with the brainstorming session, George offered 3 questions to consider:

- a. How do we improve social conditions during Covid?
  - b. How can we advocate for student health/wellbeing.
  - c. What types of issues do you foresee coming to the surface now that we are transitioning back to in-person classes?
- **Caitlin Hensley, HCB, #53** – Shared that with the possibility of a new variant rising, there are many concerns. There is concern about the zoom links for classes. While there is the encouragement to be here on campus, but graduate students have a lot going on, more than UG. People in my cohort have children, care for elderly parents, unable to be vaccinated, or part of a vulnerable population. We want to make sure professors are just as prepared as last semester to provide those zoom links for classes. (We see issues with people thinking they are recording when they are not; causing missed classes from students needing to attend virtually.) Some are not offering live videos, but we have students who are having to be out due to the variant, we want to see help with making sure people are on board with that.
  - **Ashley Browning, Sociology, #32**  
Important for us to continue to make connections with DOS and other resources available on-campus and in the community; making those more publicized; using social media more this year to let students know what is available, and let that be a sounding board for students to get in touch with us as to what they need and what they want, as well.

Ashley also gave mention to the lunch program sponsored by the Dean of Students. It allows students to network with faculty or other staff members on campus. They can have two free lunches on campus with those they are choosing to network with. As we are coming together, we need to think of not only socialization opportunities, but professional development, as well, and making sure students are aware of them.

- **Dean Thompson** – The Dean of Students also hosts an event called Rocky Topics to discuss areas of concern with large groups of people. We will advertise those dates and topics through our social media, as well.

**COVID Relief Funds:** Dr. Thompson also mentioned that there will be another round of federal support for COVID relief. Read that message carefully when it comes out later this week. Students will need to file a FAFSA to qualify. Some

money will be based on need; but there is another part of the funds that will be available to students who had graduation delayed due to COVID (perhaps delayed data collection, or inability to complete internships, etc.). There will be an application to apply, so when you start hearing about the American Rescue Act (also called HEERF, Cares Act, etc.), note that it is money available for you. Make sure you are taking advantage of those opportunities.

**Opportunities to Connect with Dean Thompson:** Dr. Thompson shared that she wants to connect with graduate students! Whatever way is best...invite her to come to your departmental student meetings, or perhaps a seminar where your grad students are. Let her know if it would be helpful for her to have office hours on Zoom or in the Graduate Commons! She wants to hear from you and have opportunities to connect with you. You may contact her through [gradschooldean@utk.edu](mailto:gradschooldean@utk.edu)

### **Closing (George Fields)**

- Attendance taken – results recorded
- Group Photos – If you can, stay with us a few minutes to take a group photo both in the room and then in front of the student union. (Masks are required here.)
- Feel free to have refreshments and network, but we do need to be out of here sharply at 6:30 so another group can come in. You may continue in the hallway or in front of the student union.
- Motion to adjourn was made by Caitlin Hensley, HCB, #53. Second by Kat Capstick, Information Sciences, #37. No dissensions. Motion passed.  
**Meeting adjourned at 6:30 pm.**

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Next Meeting: Thursday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 at 5:30 pm in SU 169

## Appendix: Senator Attendance

### GSS Session 1

08.30.21

Department by College	Voting #	Name	Present
Architecture	1	Rachel Crosslin	NO
Landscape Architecture	2	Mary Beth Robbins	YES
Anthropology	3	Brigid Ogden	YES
Anthropology	4	Jordan Schaefer	YES
Art	5	Alissa Walls	NO
Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology	6	Bethany Campbell	YES
Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology	7	Logan Dunn	YES
Chemistry	8	Trevor Wilson	YES
Chemistry	9	Elizabeth O'Connell	YES
Earth and Planetary Sciences	10	Kaitlyn Guavey	YES
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	11	Nicole Lussier	YES
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	12	Nate Gibson	YES
English	13	James Shepard	YES
English	14	Karen Noorwood	YES
Geography	15	Victoria Haynes	YES
History	16	Jason Jonson	YES
Life Sciences	17	Alexandra Teodor	NO
Mathematics	18	Evan Habbershaw	YES

Mathematics	19	--	N/A
Microbiology	20	Sean Callahan	NO
Microbiology	21	--	N/A
Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures	22	Sara Rico-Godoy	YES
Music	23	--	N/A
Music	24	--	N/A
Philosophy	25	Anne Merrill	YES
Physics and Astronomy	26	Igor Bernardi	YES
Physics and Astronomy	27	Ben Thornberry	YES
Political Science	28	George Fields	YES
Political Science	29	Jeremiah Muhammad	YES
Psychology	30	Jane Kim	YES
Psychology	31	Rebecca Skadberg	YES
Sociology	32	Ashley Browning	YES
Theatre	33	Rachel Darden	YES
Advertising & Public Relations	34	Dusty Bryan	YES
Communication and Information	35	Lily Joy Crosby	NO
Information Sciences	36	Jessica Barfield	YES
Information Sciences	37	Kat Capstick	YES
Journalism & Electronic Media	38	--	N/A
Child and Family Studies	39	Wendy McLean Cooke	NO
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies	40	Jeana Partin	YES
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies	41	Zac Hyder	YES
Educational Psychology and Counseling	42	--	N/A

Educational Psychology and Counseling	43	--	N/A
Kinesiology, Recreation, & Sport Studies	44	--	N/A
Kinesiology, Recreation, & Sport Studies	45	--	N/A
Nutrition	46	Anna Jackson	YES
Public Health	47	Catherine Warner	YES
Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management	48	Eda Gokecik	YES
Theory and Practice in Teacher Education	49	Arianna Banack	YES
Theory and Practice in Teacher Education	50	--	N/A
Accounting and Information Management	51	Jack Badger	YES
Accounting and Information Management	52	Alex Zukowski	YES
Business Administration	53	Caitlin Hensley	YES
Business Administration	54	Shannon Evanchec	YES
Business Analytics and Statistics	55	--	N/A
Economics	56	Richard Beem	YES
Finance	57	--	N/A
Management & Entrepreneurship	58	--	N/A
Marketing	59	--	N/A
Marketing	60	--	N/A
Supply Chain Management	61	--	N/A
Supply Chain Management	62	--	N/A
Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communications	63	Alexis Clark	YES
Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communications	64	--	N/A
Agricultural & Resource Economics	65	Mary Marks	YES

Animal Science	66	Alison Pfau	YES
Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science	67	Alexis Gillmore	YES
Entomology & Plant Pathology	68	Kassie Hollabaugh	YES
Food Science	69	Melissa Dein	YES
Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries	70	Davis Carter	YES
Plant Sciences	71	Devon Carroll	YES
Cent/Interdisc Rsrch Grad Edu (Bredesen Center)	72	Dustin Gilmer	YES
Cent/Interdisc Rsrch Grad Edu (Bredesen Center)	73	Isis Fukai	YES
Law	74	Mac Hazlerig	YES
Law	75	Gina Tanaskoski	YES
Nursing	76	--	N/A
Nursing	77	--	N/A
Social Work	78	Katrina Kline	YES
Social Work	79	Lindsey Collier	NO
Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering	80	Alex Horton	NO
Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering	81	Austin Conte	YES
Civil & Environmental Engineering	82	Amin Mohammdnazar	YES
Civil & Environmental Engineering	83	Iman Mahdinia	YES
Electrical Engineering & Computer Science	84	--	N/A
Electrical Engineering & Computer Science	85	Samaneh Morovati	YES
Industrial & Systems Engineering	86	Samuel Trevino Martinez	NO
Industrial & Systems Engineering	87	--	N/A
Materials Science & Engineering	88	Grace Pakeltis	NO

Materials Science & Engineering	89	Kate Higgins	NO
Mechanical, Aerospace & Biomedical Engineering	90	Jenny Patel	NO
Mechanical, Aerospace & Biomedical Engineering	91	Ashley Rice	NO
Nuclear Engineering	92	--	N/A
Nuclear Engineering	93	--	N/A
Comparative and Experimental Medicine	94	Wesley Sheley	YES
Comparative and Experimental Medicine	95	Lufuno Phophi	YES