GSS Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 27, 2021, 5:30 pm
Student Union, Room 169

Senators Present: Refer to Appendix
Ex-Officio Members Present: Millie Turner Cheatham, Dixie Thompson

Opening Remarks
1. Call to Order - George Fields
   a. Hello everyone and welcome to our third senate session of the 2021-2022 academic year. Thank you for being here today. We have a lot of exciting ideas and updates on the agenda for today.
   b. Raise your hand if you wish to be acknowledged. Once you have the floor, you may speak. Always introduce yourself with your name and voting number so that we can make note in the meeting minutes. Same goes for zoom members as well.

Guest Speakers
1. Guest Speaker - iSTEMmed
   a. Inclusive stem majors for equity and diversity.
   b. We recognize the need on this campus to cater to underrepresented graduate students in the STEM fields
   c. Want to provide a better space for learning, research, etc.
   d. Introduced officers
   e. Passed out fliers
   f. Question from senator regarding the policy iSTEMmed is looking to promote.
      i. Better understanding of TA experience, hours, impact on TA graduation schedules.
ii. Working with diversity and inclusion committees to hold departments accountable to their missions

iii. 12 (Nate Gibson) asked for digital version of flyer

iv. Question from senator about connecting with OUTStem on campus, iSTEMmed is definitely looking into making that connection.

v. Dean Thompson suggested connecting with other DEI focused organizations on campus, to be stronger together.

2. Guest Speaker - Dr. Lou Gross
   a. Dr. Gross’ second time as Faculty Senate President. Pleased by the grad student involvement level here now.
   b. FSA is interested and concerned about the magnitude of fees grad students pay.
      i. Greatly impacts stipend
      ii. Reduces faculty capability to attract graduate students as compared to other institutions
      iii. These fees keep going up every year (he’s been here 43 years) but the impact these fees have for grad students and the impact of fee use doesn’t seem to change
      iv. Looking into having fees covered for students who are receiving outside funding. Working on a way to come up with that.
      v. Dean Thompson is trying to find ways to reduce those fees.
      vi. Anyone with resolutions or policy ideas, please let them know through the Graduate Council so the Faculty Senate can best support you in this role.
      vii. RE: Stipends, historically there is very little oversight about the stipends paid to grad students. The stipends are very variable, because they’re based on each department funding. Central oversight is not necessarily possible, but a new budget allocation model will be determining how funds are distributed across campus.
      viii. Deans of Colleges will now have tremendous power regarding numbers of graduate students, and costs for graduate students.
      ix. GSS should be as cognizant as possible of this and work together with Deans moving forward so it doesn’t negatively impact students.
      x. You (students) do have the authority to work with the Deans and Provosts Office to work on these things, faculty has very little power in this aspect.
92 (Christian Xavier Young) asks about research into where those funds go and how they’re used by grad students.

1. Dr. Gross: Those fees are tracked by central administration. May be able to contact the IT department to see what percentage of use is grad students. These fees aren’t allocated based on use, by percentage of grad students using each etc.

2. Some members of the Board of Trustees are open to increasing student capabilities to run organizations with money from fees.

**President’s Report - Hunter Hammock**

1. Thank you Dr. Gross and all our speakers, we look forward to working with you to serve students.

2. Thank you everyone for being here today. We greatly appreciate your continued support and participation. Over 6500+ graduate students are grateful for your leadership and your advocacy. They depend on our continued support and avocation.

3. I am so honored to have been elected to serve in this role. During my time meeting with graduate students as well as UTK admin, I am amazed by the stories I have heard. The work our graduate and professional students perform is nothing short of extraordinary.

4. Today I want to provide some GSS updates and some of the major wins we’ve accomplished since our last senate meeting, so that you can pass this information to your respective departments.

   a. I was notified by Dean Thompson that the HEERF III covid Grant money is currently being distributed to our student body.

      i. Thank you to the grad school for helping our student obtain this funding. This will significantly benefit our students.

   b. Dean Thompson also relayed news about Student/Faculty Research Awards

      i. These are currently being deliberated and announcements will be out mid november.

      ii. These awards are used to advance the scholarship of graduate students and faculty working in partnership.

      iii. This award is intended to help support student research/scholarship/creative activity; give students experience writing grants; and foster the mentoring relationship between faculty and graduate students.
iv. Thankful that graduate school is providing this type of support for our students. Spread the word to your departments. Another round of SFRA funding will be available in the spring, if they would like to apply. Details TBA.

5. Board of trustees met last week, and I had the opportunity to network with the board as well as provide remarks during the luncheon.
   a. Thankful to express our vision and ideas to improve our university
   b. Remarks included our mission as GSS and the results of climate survey
   c. Covid was high on the list, but graduate student wellbeing was a common theme.
   d. Social, mental, physical, financial health
   e. Touched on our ideas to reconnect, improve student morale and productivity, our desire to have a safe work and teaching environment via vaccines and masks
   f. And almost all students indicated financial burden was a major concern, and ⅓ students identified as food insecure in a 2020 UT system survey
   g. They were very receptive and we had the chance to discuss some of these topics in depth. We appreciate your support and voices in our climate survey

6. Mossman lecture was last night, Van Jones was the keynote speaker
   a. Excellent event and spoke to many of the issues that we currently face in our generation
   b. Highly suggest you take a few moments to watch the keynote speech, it was very impactful.

7. Want to promote a speaker session hosted by the graduate school
   a. Titled "strategizing for life after the PhD" by Rena AS Robinson
   b. Great session for all graduate students
   c. Encouraging students to explore possibilities after terminal degree
   d. Hosted through Graduate and Professional Student Professional Development
   e. Please share this resource with your constituents
   f. This effort is led by Dr. Ernest Brothers, associate dean of the graduate school. Hosted through GPSPD.
   g. We would love to have him come by and discuss some of the opportunities that GPSPD has to offer.

8. Travel awards first round of awards submitted, will let Kassie present updates.
a. Do want to remind you to let your fellow senators know about the academic support award and the travel awards located on our website.

9. Speaking of the website, I want to commend Samaneh for her excellent work on updates.
   a. We plan to overhaul the website in the upcoming months and provide a template for future administrations.
   b. We want to make sure things are consistent from year to year and we can catalog all of the major accomplishments for GSS on the website.
   c. More information to come.

10. Our judiciary committee has been hard at work analyzing our current constitution and bylaws, and they have suggested a number of changes and updates that will be discussed over the next few meetings.
   a. Our goal is to revamp both documents and make sure all language is clear and concise.

11. We increased our senator count by 5 since the last meeting, and we are on track for 100% participation by the end of this calendar year.
   a. This is a goal of ours. Want to make sure that all departments and academic units are represented on campus.
   b. Please let us know if you know of anyone that would be willing to fill vacancies.

12. Internal committee assignments.
   a. You have all been assigned internal committees, look forward to seeing the progress each senate meeting from the committees
   b. Vital role that committees serve for GSS, this is how we make change and influence campus for the better.
   c. They are the workhorse, providing background and extended discussions on issues that impact grad students.
      i. Just think. If each of the 95 senate seats were filled. 1 hour per month across the fall and spring semesters. That's 950 hours of service given back to our grad students. Through events. Policy proposals. Initiatives. Etc. This is why our work is so vital. Each of us contributing a small part will make a major difference.
   d. Use this mechanism, to develop proposals and policies that will be used to improve graduate student wellbeing and success. Divide and conquer.
   e. Today we will have the first committee reports of the academic year.
f. Each chair will discuss the role of their respective committee and planned initiatives. Each senate meeting, we will hear updates.

g. Not all committees have had a chance to meet, but you will be meet approximately once per month (in between senate meetings).
   i. You are welcome to set up additional meetings as needed.
   ii. The chairs will be in charge of these meetings.
   iii. We ask for your participation in these committees, as they are vital to accomplishing our goals for GSS.
   iv. Attendance for these committee meetings is equivalent to senate meeting attendance, so make sure to send your proxy if you are not able to attend.

h. Progress with committees, they will provide broad overview today of their current progress as well as some the ideas they have for the year. Then open up the floor to discuss or questions if there are any questions.

13. Our overarching goals for this semester remain the same:
   a. Improve social interaction among students
   b. Advocate for students mental/physical/social/financial health
   c. Keep finger on pulse using your feedback and insight
   d. Behind the scenes, we have been working to develop a strategic plan for the year, and we want your input as we continue this process. Our committees will begin working on these initiatives and we will share this in phases.

14. One note on departmental Communication -
   a. Relying on senators to distribute GSS news to their fellow constituents.
   b. Most departments have a listserv and easy access. If not, ask someone in the department to get access or to obtain a listserv.
   c. You may also reach out to your DGS and/or department head so that you can keep open communication with your department.
   d. Good relation with DGS

15. We also strongly encourage you to reach out to Mohamed and myself if you know of specific issues that we can bring to the senate’s attention.

16. Thank everyone for your attendance and participation so far.
   a. Without each of you, we cannot function as a deliberative body.
   b. Our mission is to be the official student voice for graduate and professional students.
   c. Being a senator – and student leader within your department – has the potential to improve morale, connectivity, and productivity.
   d. I ask that you continue to mentor and help your fellow constituents.
17. Relay back any concerns they have as we continue to develop that strategic vision for the year.
18. Thank you for your time

Internal Committee Reports - George Fields recognizes each

Finance Committee Chair (and Treasurer) - Davis Carter

1. Purpose of Committee
   a. Responsibly spend our budget for this year (Use it or lose it)
   b. Create a culture of fundraising within GSS which will benefit both GSS and the surrounding community.
   c. Use fundraising events as social events for graduate students to bring the student body back together and make connections.
   d. Want to spend money more on tangible and lasting things like merchandise, not just food/etc.

2. Background info and membership
   a. Managed my lab’s budget for several years prior to taking this position.
   b. Committee is made of 6 members, hoping to have strong connections with the programming and events committee/other committees or organizations wanting to collaborate on fundraisers or events.

3. What have you accomplished so far?
   a. Created a Halloween Costume Contest Fundraiser benefiting Big Orange Pantry (Saturday 5:30 Southside Garage → Bar crawl afterwards)
      i. $5 entry fee
   b. Reached out to several breweries (Xul, Trailhead, Southside) all willing to host pint nights for us.
      i. Pretty easy to set up, fiancee has experience in development and confirms this is a good way to get fundraising and events.
   c. Began looking into giveback nights at larger restaurant chains (Krispy Kreme, Chipotle, Duck Donuts, Moes)

4. Money
   a. Budget is essentially $9,633.15 for the year after stipends, communication/electronic fees
   b. Need to budget around $5,000 for GPSAW Professional Student Appreciation Week (GPSAW)
   c. We have $824.34 in checking account
      i. Checking acct money a little more flexible
      ii. This is where events that fundraise for GSS goes
   d. We can ask for more money through various sources by submitting proposals.
5. What can GSS/senators do to help accomplish these initiatives:
   a. Attend events
   b. Reach out with ideas
   c. Thank you for your time

Judiciary Committee - Elizabeth O’Connell

1. Purpose of committee, role of justices
   a. The role of the GSS Judiciary Committee is to determine the
      constitutionality of measures passed by the GSS.
   b. Review current Constitution and Bylaws for conflicts and updates
   c. The Judiciary Committee reviews all new, passed legislation, resolutions,
      and changes to the By-Laws to ensure that they do not conflict with the
      Constitution. In the event that a majority of the members of the committee
      judge a law, resolution, or By-Law to be in conflict with the Constitution, it
      will cease to be valid immediately.

2. What are your ideas/initiatives for the year?
   a. We had a meeting and discussed some updates. These include phrasing
      updates, fixing typos, and adding some details for roles/responsibilities of
      officers.
   b. Going to work with the steering committee on changes.
   c. We will work on a draft proposal for updates for both documents and
      provide them to the senate for review.
   d. The Constitution is more difficult to make changes than bylaws, but some
      language updates are necessary.
      i. Need to make roles more clear through the language.
      ii. We will detail these proposed changes and provide information
          about the process to approve changes.
   e. Any suggestions are welcome
   f. Thank you for your time.

Legislation Steering Committee Chair - Igor Bernardi

1. Purpose of Committee
   a. Committee will be responsible for aiding Senators in writing
      legislation and proposals.
   b. The Committee will be responsible for reviewing the Constitution
      and Bylaws and recommending any changes deemed necessary for
      consideration (in coordination with judiciary committee)
   c. Identifying matters of concern for GSS
   d. We don’t “pass laws” but we promote initiatives.
2. What are your ideas/initiatives for the year?
   a. Just topics, to save time:
      i. Advisor/student feedback mechanism at the graduate school level
      ii. Bylaws adjustment
      iii. Parking issues
      iv. Graduate student fees/salary (i.e. ease financial burden)
      v. Time-off for grad students for personal reasons
      vi. Office temperatures
   3. What can GSS/senators do to help you accomplish your initiatives?
      a. We are always open for ideas and I am open to anyone who wants to talk to me
      b. Thank you for your time

**Equity and Diversity Committee Chair - Ashley Browning,**

1. Purpose of committee
   a. Identify, evaluate, and advocate issues that graduate students experience related to workplace issues and community
   b. The Committee is charged with developing legislation to bring forward to the general body.

2. Working with GSS Initiatives
   a. Student well-being - Mental/Emotional/Physical/Financial
      i. Working with the Graduate Student Wellbeing Committee this year.
   b. Access for students who have been marginalized--making a place for everyone on campus

3. What have you accomplished so far?
   a. Meetings with student orgs - WiSTAR3, LAGS, OUTgrads
   b. Meetings with Graduate Workers Committee of UCW-CWA
   c. Meeting w/ GSS events committee
   d. Keeping an ear to the ground in terms of students and needs.

4. Member of Commission for Diversity and Inclusion
   a. Any data needed from campus, please let me know

5. What are your ideas/initiatives for the year?
   a. Diverse events - working with student orgs to plan
   b. Collaborate with GSS committees
      i. Actions that reflect new strategic vision of the university, including working with well-being committee re: fees + housing
c. Increasing campus awareness of academic support/travel awards. Kassie will discuss more.
   i. Real progress being made in availability of these funds.

6. What can GSS/senators do to help you accomplish your initiatives?
   a. Committee members- Please respond to email/availability poll if you haven’t!
   b. Communicate to committee members when students are experiencing hardships so we can advocate for them
      i. Not just me, communicate with anyone on the committee
   c. Communicate to committee members when you have ideas
      i. Help identify orgs in need of assistance
      ii. Help identify gaps in access
   d. Executive Team will share information with senators for dissemination to departments
   e. Share information with your departments when asked
   f. Looking forward to collaborating with you all this year
   g. Thank you for this opportunity

Graduate Student Well-Being Committee Chair - Brigid Ogden

1. Purpose of committee
   a. Work to create and implement initiatives related to improving the mental, physical, social, professional, and financial health of the Graduate Student Body at UTK
   b. Provide resources for students and departmental graduate student organizations looking to improve wellness at the department level while pursuing change at the institutional level

2. How does your purpose tie in with GSS initiatives
   a. Many of the initiatives GSS will be pursuing this year are directly related to student wellness
   b. Common theme of the climate survey was items related to graduate student wellbeing; all of the objectives in Chancellor Plowman’s ‘strategic vision’ align with our objectives of promoting graduate student wellbeing.
   c. Want to work closely with her as well as the other UTK administrators.
   d. We will also be working closely with other committees and executives to assist on relevant initiatives to the committee related to improving student wellness

3. What have you accomplished so far?
a. Met with the executive board multiple times and discussed possible initiatives
b. Met with several committee members individually to brainstorm for the upcoming year
c. Planning to have our first meeting in the next two weeks

4. What are your ideas/initiatives for the year?
   a. After discussion with other e board members and committee members:
      i. Health Insurance Literacy events for domestic and international students beyond the UTK system
      ii. Possible collaboration with GSS members at other UT institutions to improve student wellness across the UT system
      iii. Events that offer support or guidance for students regarding some of the specific wellness topics that can concern grad students as we navigate the post-undergrad phase of life while remaining in the university system
      iv. Curation of resources for departmental graduate student orgs looking to instigate change or hold events on the departmental level.
      v. Continue to support other committees in their initiatives and goals that may overlap with ours

5. What can GSS/senators do to help you accomplish your initiatives?
   a. Tell us how you’re doing! Feel free to reach out, email is on the GSS website
   b. Let us know if there’s a particular wellness issue that has been coming up in your department that might be relevant to others
   c. If you have ideas for events or initiatives (fun or serious!) please let us know
   d. We want to make sure we’re engaging with students where they’re at in a relevant way, we need to hear from you to do that!
   e. Thank you, looking forward to working with everybody

Travel Awards Committee Chair - Kassie Hollabaugh

1. Purpose of committee:
   a. The GSS Travel Awards provide support to students who are presenting UT research at in-person professional conferences.
b. Go through applications, make sure they meet requirements, work with our budget to support them and ensure they’re also aware of other funding opportunities.

2. How does your purpose tie in with GSS initiatives:
   a. Covid has been extremely difficult for students to travel and present their research at professional conferences.
      i. Very important for students to get this experience.
      ii. I would like to see as many students supported by this award as possible.
      iii. Students need all of the support that they can get to succeed academically and professionally.

3. What have you accomplished so far?
   a. Our first major accomplishment was the roll out of our five-deadline policy.
   b. Our 1st deadline was October 1st - After meeting as a committee we were able to award 58 students with a GSS Travel Award, with an average of $348 per student being awarded.

4. Any updates?
   a. Please start telling your departments to begin applying, can apply early!
   b. The next deadline is November 1st for fall review.
   c. The two spring deadlines are February 1st and March 1st
   d. The summer deadline is April 1st

5. What can GSS/senators do to help you accomplish your initiatives?
   a. Please inform students in your department about GSS Travel Award deadlines and encourage them to apply for in-person conferences
   b. Thank you.

Programming and Events Committee Chair - Leighton Chappell

1. Purpose of committee
   a. Planning and execution of events.

2. How does your purpose tie in with GSS initiatives
   a. Many of our programming and events tie into GSS initiatives to promote social connection and re-integration via professional and social events

3. What have you accomplished so far?
   a. WiStar: Women in Stem
      i. Salary Negotiation Workshop (What kind of issues, questions women face)
      ii. Event Date: February 10th
b. Self defense event
c. Women at work podcast (by Harvard Business U)
d. LAGS: Latina/o/x Graduate Student Organization
   i. Graduate Student Appreciation Week Cooking Workshop
   ii. Hoping the Big Orange Pantry will help/donate
e. Really needs help with awareness and promotion- something we could assist with
f. OUTGrads
   i. Want to host a small, social event in the Fall
   ii. Need assistance in fundraising
g. GSS Events:
   i. Hiking event to the Smokies
      1. Currently in the planning stages
h. Halloween Costume Event
   i. October 30, 5:30PM @ Southside Garage
   ii. $5 entry, benefits the Big Orange Pantry

4. What are your ideas/initiatives for the year?
   a. Connect with student organizations who represent graduate students as well
   b. Want events that foster social connection and re-integration among all graduates (as well as mental health and social wellbeing)
   c. Promote events better: email, social media, flyers, posting on GSS website, posting UT calendar
   d. Want to be as cost effective as possible with our decisions
      i. We have a number of organizations that want to lead events and will pay for our events

5. What can GSS/senators do to help you accomplish your initiatives?
   a. Inform departments and students of events
   b. Post events on social media, UT Calendar, GSS website
   c. Assist with any connections or ideas

Graduate Student Senate Advisory Committee Chair - BJ Armstead

1. Purpose of the committee is to provide representation to non voting members (i.e. graduate and professional students who are not serving in the senate).
2. My first objective is to form our committee by gathering all grad student presidents and vice presidents
3. Also find representatives from other areas on campus that would be useful to our cause
4. Will provide more updates next meeting
5. Reach out if you know of any grad students that might be interested in participating.

New Business - George Fields

1. External Committee Updates and Confirmations
   a. Chair will recognize president to introduce positions and nominees
      i. Jessica Barfield(36), UT Libraries Open Education Advisory Group. Per Hunter: Excellent fit based on background.
      ii. Jason Jonson(16), Classroom Upgrade Committee
      iii. Kat Capstick (37), Dean of Libraries’ Student Advisory Committee.

2. Continue discussions in the hallway/GSS office if there is any need due to the room being occupied immediately after. Next session will provide time for discussion on topics from each committee.

3. Dr. Dixie Thompson
   a. Thank you for all your great work
   b. Look forward to supporting you in any way we can
   c. Appointing a role to support graduate students, this funding is coming from graduate student fees.

4. Vote results:

5. Vote to confirm meeting minutes from September 23, 2021.
   a. 37 (Kat Capstick) motions to pass.
   b. 16 (Jason Jonson) seconds.
   c. 50/55 affirm, passes.

Adjournment

1. 26 (Igor Bernardi) motions to close, 92 (Christian Xavier Young) seconds.

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 18th, 2021 in SU 169 at 5:30
## Appendix: Senator Attendance

### GSS Session 3

**10.27.21**

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<th>Voting #</th>
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