



## **GSS Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, November 18, 2021 5:30 pm**

**Student Union, Room 169**

Senators Present: Refer to Appendix

Ex-Officio Members Present: Millie Turner Cheatham, Dixie Thompson

### **Opening Remarks - George Fields**

1. Call to Order
  - a. Hello everyone and welcome to our fourth 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. For those on zoom, please raise your hand and one of the moderators will notify me so I can acknowledge you. 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.
  
2. Attendance
  - a. We're going to take attendance to make sure we have a quorum.
  - b. As we take attendance, I want to provide a few brief reminders regarding attendance and voting procedures. We will use QR codes provided during each session. Links will be provided to zoom senators. Make sure you are logged in with your UTK net ID for your attendance to be valid. The form will not work if you are using a personal gmail account. If you receive an error message, click on "learn more," which will then prompt you to log in with your UTK net ID.

- c. You must send your proxy email and name in advance so that we have it on record. If someone attempts to count attendance or vote using someone's number and they are not on file, it will not be valid.
- d. We will take attendance before/after each senate meeting
- e. Zoom specific rules for attendance and voting reminder.
  - i. You must have your video on and mute yourself the entire time unless acknowledged.
  - ii. Video must be on so that we can verify the identity of each Zoom senator, and ensure attendance/vote security.
  - iii. 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). Contact [gss2@utk.edu](mailto:gss2@utk.edu) for technical issues or troubleshooting during the senate session.
  - iv. Every senator must have a designated proxy, must be on file for attendance and vote to count. Please send those into [gss2@utk.edu](mailto:gss2@utk.edu) if you have not already designated a proxy.
  - v. 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
- f. Verify quorum on google form, state for the record - 42 present ensuring we have quorum.
- g. Now I will introduce our President, Hunter Hammock, for the President's Report

### **President's Report - Hunter Hammock**

- 1. Hello everyone. I want to thank you for being here today and I hope that you are doing well.
  - a. Our graduate and professional student body is grateful for our continued support, leadership, and advocacy.
  - b. Mohamed and I, as well as the graduate school, are thankful for your continued support and participation.
  - c. GSS has a vital role at UTK, and our deliberations and resolutions will shape the experience of graduate students for many years to come. Thank you for your service.
- 2. 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. Mask Mandates

- i. First topic of discussion, elephant in the room. Masking requirements. There has been confusion about the back and forth regarding policy.
- ii. Based on what I know and meetings attended with admins, it's a very complicated situation that has state and federal funding in the balance, along with numerous legal ramifications.
- iii. At this time, our Knoxville campus will reinstate the policy starting Monday to meet federal guidelines, and we ask that students make the best choice for them as we proceed over the next few days.
- iv. The chancellor will keep you updated, please be patient and aware of changes as they come.
- v. We hope that all senators do their part to encourage their fellow students to get vaccinated and wear masks so that we can continue to teach and perform research in person.
- vi. Both COVID and flu. Get boosters if applicable.
- vii. Vols vaccinate vols – be a Volunteer and help those around you. We want to protect others so we can continue doing research, teaching, and taking classes. Despite this being a politically charged issue, we want to keep each other safe and remain in person.
- viii. Grad wellbeing will discuss our proposed campaign for encouraging student health and safety, and talk about some of our strategies to improve vaccination rate and keep our students healthy.
- ix. One on one communication has been shown to persuade more people, as opposed to strict mandates or requirements from authority figures.

3. Updates to constitution and bylaws:

- a. Our judiciary committee and legislative steering committee has been hard at work analyzing our current constitution and bylaws, and they have suggested a number of minor changes and updates that will be discussed over the next few meetings. Our goal is to revamp both documents and make sure all language is clear and concise. We want to make it a working document for GSS.
- b. Some terms and phrasing are dated and require slight revisions.
- c. We want these documents to be practical for future administrations.
- d. We want to make sure to consider future changes. Departments will change, merge, separate. How will this impact the application of our constitution and bylaws in 5, 10, 15 years?

- e. We want as much feedback as possible from the Graduate School as well as our fellow senators.
  - f. Some other examples: Add language about the nomination process for senators and provide a template for departments to select and send representatives via legislative steering committee.
  - g. Specific language about the role of a senator, and the roles of each committee chair/executive team member.
  - h. Discuss voting in detail, both senate votes and general elections.
  - i. Clearly define and elaborate on our purpose, mission, values, structure, and mechanisms for submitting proposals, resolutions, and making concrete changes on campus.
  - j. Since we are opening up the document, what potential changes could we make to improve the functionality of our constitution and bylaws?
  - k. Bottom line: These documents fundamentally establish the purpose, mission, and operating procedures. We want to take a good look at this document and all the potential implications that changes will incur.
  - l. The Judiciary committee will provide a general update and timeline proposal later in this meeting.
4. Updates to the website:
- a. We want the website to be functional and have the ability to archive each year of initiatives, accomplishments, photos, etc. Mohamed will discuss some details. All suggestions are welcome.
5. Graduate Student and GSS social media takeover, we have the opportunity for a few students to take over the Graduate School social media to show the day in the life of a graduate student. You'd share your experience, please reach out to Mohamed or myself if you're interested.
6. Stipend Increase
- a. One of our major initiatives for the year is to help graduate student well being, and stipends have been a major portion of that based on feedback from students, senators, and faculty.
  - b. Dr. Gross from the Faculty senate gave an excellent presentation last senate session, and our committees have been working towards acquiring information and proposing solutions.
  - c. GSS, in addition to other groups on campus, have worked together over the past few years (including this year) to obtain a significant amount of background information about student fee structure and stipends across the graduate school, using a variety of methods including freedom of information act requests.

- d. We are working on gathering information and documents regarding this and how we can best lobby for the university to help their students succeed.
- e. How can we best improve the experience and productivity of students? Provide them with an adequate living wage.
- f. This one factor has the ability to improve many aspects of a graduate student's life.
- g. Direct example of maslow's hierarchy of needs. People cannot self actualize if any of the basic needs are not met. In the same thread, students cannot conduct top-tier research or teach at the best of their ability if they are having issues with housing and food security.
- h. When Mohamed and I took office, the first thing we did was reach out to our senators and figure out which issues were most important to grad students.
- i. Nearly all senators have indicated that improving grad student's financial situation is their top priority, along with social reconnection, and health/safety measures (i.e. COVID). Based on that feedback, we established the blueprint for 2021-2022. Unfortunately, as the year has progressed, this has become a more severe issue.
- j. We have been notified that it is unlikely that fee structure will be altered because of restrictions at the federal and state levels. I am working with Legislative Steering and Grad Student Wellbeing committees to discuss our options for lobbying stipend increases to help offset the incurrence of fees. In terms of GTAs, this will likely be at the college level, so this will require effort and pressure from all senators towards individual deans of colleges.. In terms of GRAs, those are mostly funded by external grants, etc., which is more difficult to lobby. That being said, we are discussing some options for both. I ask that any senators who would like to share their experiences to please reach out to myself and our VP and grad student well being.
- k. One key note: the issue of financial instability disproportionately impacts students considered minority status, below the poverty line, and international. Specifically international students, because they are not allowed to get second jobs at the risk of losing their visa. This is extremely discouraging for these specific demographics, and these demographics are vital for ensuring a diverse and talented workforce in the graduate school.
- l. COVID has given us many curveballs and obstacles to overcome. In terms of financial insecurity, I would like to focus on some upsides and a

potential opportunity for UT as a modern R1 land grant university. The best way to sell our proposal is to show how the increased cost would produce significant returns.

- i. Considering inflation, students will have more attention focused on the financial situation for their graduate program, even more so than previous years.
  - ii. We can offer these students 5-10 percent more than other SEC universities, and have a competitive advantage in recruiting top tier talent.
  - iii. At a bare minimum, we must match inflation. Students should not be forced to pay higher tuition/fees while actively losing an increasing percentage of their paycheck year after year.
  - iv. The worst case option is to slowly match other SEC universities, which decreases our competitive advantage for recruiting diverse and talented students for many years to come. This is a pivotal moment.
  - v. UT system and UTK admins have previously shown its willingness to increase student stipends -- specifically for students on the lower end of the pay range.
7. One potential idea along with an addition. GSS has previously been discussing a formalized mentoring program at the college level, which includes a feedback mechanism for PIs and students to give annual reviews of one another.
- a. Legislative steering will talk specifically about this proposal for grad school level mentoring and biannual review program for faculty/students
  - b. A number of senators and faculty had comments/issues with providing feedback
  - c. Gives a wealth of information to dept heads for faculty review
  - d. Helps to mentor both the student and mentor, builds relationship
  - e. Helps to identify problems, DGS or dept head can rubber stamp if there are no issues, have conversations and mediation if there are issues.
  - f. Would not cost anything other than time to meeting and develop the tech basis
  - g. Should consider retaliation if negative feedback is received, and how we could reduce/limit this from occurring. This topic should be handled with care and focus should not be on venting about your grad school experience, but communicating key topics like work habits, personal traits, expectations for each other, project goals, etc.

- h. I strongly believe implementing a system to receive the feedback and encourage facilitated discussions about expectations and progress will lead to overwhelmingly positive outcomes for all parties involved.
- i. A number of departments are already doing this, why not formalize the process at the graduate school level?
- j. We could expand on this idea.
  - i. In addition to this process, establish a more formalized "mentoring program " for advanced undergrads by grad students (at the grad school level) who are doing their studies in areas that the undergrad is studying.
  - ii. Many units have something like this in place (e.g. EEB has one "Grads Mentoring Undergrads Program, which allows undergrads to meet with graduate students who share interests in order to learn more about EEB careers and research opportunities').
  - iii. This allows us to pull talented students who attend UT for undergrad towards attending UT for graduate school and bring the talent we've cultivated to our graduate programs. Our college has spent time and resources to train excellent student leaders, and we should have efforts in place to retain that talent.
  - iv. I think if GSS were to volunteer to coordinate such a collection of programs broadly across the campus, the Provost's Office would likely view this very positively and perhaps encourage Deans to increase stipends if such programs are established in their Colleges because this enhances the undergrad success (and improves the campus as a whole).
  - v. This would require minimal resources on the part of the University (i.e. potentially an online presence, but grad students would meet with students as part of their regular duties).
- 8. Other avenues will be required for increasing GRA stipends, since the majority of those come from external funding sources. For example, set the culture among faculty as we move forward (and anyone participating in grant writing) to request more funds for students and create more attractive financial packages for their potential students. Encourage students to assist them with grant writing to obtain more funds as well as give them the experience/CV accolades.
- 9. Overall, GSS hopes to hold a high quality standard of research and teaching at the University of Tennessee.
  - a. One of the biggest issues that our graduate students face is financial instability.

- b. That being said, there is an excellent opportunity to make small-moderate budgetary changes and produce significant returns in productivity, publications, quality of teaching, and overall academic prestige.
  - c. Our Legislative Steering and Grad Student Wellbeing committees will be involved with researching this topic and lobbying to help all graduate and professional students.
10. This week, we purged the senate list of inactive members and increased our senator count by net gain of 4 since our last meeting.
- a. A major goal of ours is to fill all senate seats and have 100% participation by the end of this calendar year. High churn rate but active senators are greatly appreciated! Want to make sure that all departments and academic units are represented on campus. George, Mohamed and I have been working to secure senators for all of these seats. Please let us know if you know of anyone that would be willing to fill vacancies. An updated copy of the senate list is on the website, so please check to ensure your information is correct and up to date.
  - b. Make sure that you have sent Mohamed ([gss2@utk.edu](mailto:gss2@utk.edu)) a copy of your designated proxy. This is important to have on file, so that we can track attendance and voting. This also allows you to miss a session if you have scheduling conflicts (so that your attendance record is not impacted).
11. Encourage departments to have winter break events
- a. Lots of graduate students remain in Knoxville once school gets out
  - b. We will create formal events with committees, but we encourage you to have department social events as well. Even something as simple as going out for food before seminar
  - c. We're going to try to plan some events, but we want to encourage you to do so at your department level.
  - d. The most effective way to encourage student social engagement are departmental level events.
12. Departments, we ask form GSAs if they have not already done so.
13. BJ, our advisory committee chair, will be compiling a list of up to date grad organizations and pulling in the Presidents and Vice Presidents. If your department has a GSA, I encourage you to reach out to both and help facilitate that connection.
14. Encourage all senators to join the slack. Reach out to your respective committee chair if you need access and they will send an invitation.
15. Despite the many changes we've endured this semester, based on our senators' feedback, our overarching goals for this semester remain the same as when we started.



- 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
16. Behind the scenes, we have continued to hone our strategic plan for the spring semester, and we want your input as we finalize this process. Our committees will continue working on these initiatives and I can't wait to see their progress.
  17. Thank everyone for your attendance and participation so far. Without each of you, we cannot function as a deliberative body. Our mission is to be the official student voice for graduate and professional students. Being a senator -- and student leader within your department -- has the potential to improve morale, connectivity, and productivity. I ask that you continue to mentor and help your fellow constituents.
  18. Before concluding my remarks, I also want to give a huge thank you to all of the exec team and committee chairs for their countless hours of volunteer work each month, in addition to the senate meetings.
  19. Your efforts directly improve campus as well as the overall morale of our student body this semester. I have heard SO many positive things about our organization and our accomplishments, and that is all thanks to you!
  20. I am so proud of GSS and what all we have accomplished so far this year.
  21. We will see you again in 2022, and I am so excited to see what all we can accomplish in the new calendar year.
  22. Thank you for your time.

### **Vice President's Report - Mohamed Al Sager**

1. Hello everyone, thank you for joining us today. I have a few general announcements to make before our committee chairs give us their updates.
2. The HERFF III relief fund money is currently being distributed
  - a. Thank you to the grad school for helping our graduate student obtain this funding and putting the money in the hands of grad students who need it.
  - b. This will significantly benefit those who were affected by the pandemic
3. Student/Faculty research awards have been finalized and the recipients were notified.
  - a. 100k budget
  - b. 89 applications
  - c. 25 applications funded
  - d. Dean Thompson could probably speak more to this, but overall this has a huge impact across campus
    - i. It fosters the mentoring relationship between faculty and graduate students as well as creates some amazing research opportunities

4. Second round of travel awards were distributed this week, I will let Kassie present updates, but we are very happy with the turnout and the ability to support students who present UT research.
  - 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.
5. Plans for Website
  - a. Speaking of the website we have some plans to make some updates to make it better.
  - b. Functional for all grad students, senators, prospective students and other people outside of UTK
  - c. It is important to keep it maintained and organized to make it more accessible as it reflects on us here at GSS.
  - d. Through it we would like to provide updates and news.
  - e. Place to archive all useful documents, photos, etc.
  - f. Link with the university calendar to show all events - hopefully that way we'll have more participation and we can get more folks to show up to our events.
  - g. Have the ability to host secure elections through the GSS website and tie in that process into the bylaws.
  - h. List initiatives and accomplishments year by year, so that there is a digital record starting 2021-2022 academic year.
  - i. Visual updates, user friendly, delete phantom pages.
  - j. How can we update the website to make the senator's experience better?
  - k. Any other ideas are welcome.
6. GSS has a presence on social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. If you're on there, you can follow us and receive updates about GSS and events taking place that may be of interest to you. You can also share our page with your peers in grad school, they may also find it beneficial.
7. Communication
  - a. One note on departmental communication. We rely on our senators to distribute GSS news to their fellow constituents. You are the liaison between GSS and your department.
  - b. Most departments have a listserv and easy access. If not, ask someone in the department to get access or to obtain a listserv. You may also reach out to your DGS and/or department head so that you can keep open communication with your department.
  - c. Hunter and I will begin forwarding pertinent information and opportunities as we receive them, so please pass them along to your department as you see fit.

- d. We ask that you establish and maintain a good relationship with your DGS, if you don't already. This will make the senator's role easier. I would also begin discussions about next year's GSS senator appointments (each department is different).
  - e. You can formalize how your departments appointment process will proceed
  - f. We also strongly encourage you to reach out to Hunter and myself if you know of specific issues that we can bring to the senate's attention.
8. Internal Committee Overview
- a. You have all been assigned internal committees, look forward to seeing the progress of all of the committees and getting updates at each senate meeting.
  - b. Vital role that committees serve for GSS, this is how we make change and improve our experience here at UT.
  - c. Hunter mentioned last session that if each of the 95 senate seats were filled, and each senator dedicated 1 hour per month across the fall and spring semesters. That's 950 hours of service given back to our grad students. Now double that, considering your once per month committee meetings in addition to the full senate session. That's 1,900 hours of volunteer labor that GSS has given to campus. Imagine the possibilities of things we could accomplish by using that time judiciously through events, policy proposals, initiatives, etc.
  - d. This is why our work is so vital. Each of us contributing a small part will make a major difference.
  - e. We can use this mechanism to develop proposals and policies that will be used to improve graduate students' wellbeing and success.
  - f. I believe that together we can divide and conquer these tasks to achieve our objectives.
9. Today we will have the second committee progress reports of the academic year.
- a. The Chairs of the committees will give a broad overview of the progress made so far as well as ideas they have for the year
  - b. Each chair will discuss the role of their respective committee and planned initiatives. And at each senate meeting, we will hear updates.
  - c. We will then open the floor for discussions and questions if there are any.
  - d. Do not hesitate or hold back your suggestions.
  - e. Not all committees have had a chance to meet, but you will be meeting approximately once per month (in between senate meetings).
  - f. You are welcome to set up additional meetings as needed. The chairs will be in charge of these meetings.

- g. We ask for your participation in these committees, as they are vital to accomplishing our goals for GSS.
  - h. 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 and notify the Chair of your committee
  - i. If you have an idea, issue, or concern that you would not like to discuss publicly, or keep things anonymous, you are more than welcome to email Hunter and myself at [GSS@utk.edu](mailto:GSS@utk.edu) and [GSS2@utk.edu](mailto:GSS2@utk.edu). Or schedule a private zoom meeting. We are happy to discuss things in confidence if that is desired.
10. Lastly, I would like to say that we are almost at the end of the Fall semester
- a. I know things can get a little hectic with deadlines and tasks piling up but you have got this.
  - b. Persevere and push through, you're almost there.
  - c. Give yourself a pat on the back for the great things you've done this semester so far.
  - d. Hopefully by the end of this semester, we'll all be that much closer to graduating.

## **Internal Committee Reports**

### **Davis Carter, 70 - Finance Committee Chair**

1. Halloween Costume Event - Raised \$125 for Big Orange Pantry
  - i. 22 people participated in the event including some senators.
  - ii. Hopefully more of you and your friends will attend future events.
  - iii. If any one has pictures, please email them to Hunter and I. We would like to start sharing pictures and videos of our events on social media.
2. Planned Purchases
  - i. GSS Shirts.
  - ii. Potentially we could have a t-shirt design contest, depending on interest.
  - iii. We kicked around the idea of purchasing a backdrop for GSS, that will be approximately \$300.
  - iv. If you have any ideas or things that would benefit GSS and our student body, please let the finance committee know.
3. Planned Future Events
  - i. GSS 5K in the spring weekend prior to or of GPSAW

1. About \$3500 total to host the event
  2. Perhaps we could get sponsors to cover costs associated with the run
    - a. If you know any groups or businesses that may be interested in supporting this, let us know.
  3. Apply for support from Graduate School or Student Engagement.
  4. If we're going to host this event, we'll need at least 200 runners in order for the cost to be worth it.
4. Current Balance
- i. Actual Balance: \$14294.59
  - ii. Budgeted Balance: \$4633.15 (After expenses/estimating cost of \$5,000 for GPSAW)
  - iii. Balance after future purchases: \$980-Banner & shirts and 5K event (if that were to occur) -\$3500. ~\$150.
  - iv. Checking is still \$824.34
5. Open floor for comments and questions and ideas.
- a. Ashley Browning (32) had ideas for the 5K
    - i. There is an on-campus wellness program for faculty and staff, the BeWell program, often has funding for wellness initiatives.
    - ii. UT System President Randy Boyd is an avid runner, might be worth seeing if the system or the president is interested in supporting the run.

### **Catherine Warner, 47 - Judiciary Committee**

1. Purpose of Committee, Role of Justices
  - i. Determine the constitutionality of measures passed by the GSS. Reviews current Constitution and Bylaws for conflicts and updates
  - ii. Reviews all new, passed legislation, resolutions, and changes to the By-Laws to ensure that they do not conflict with the Constitution.
2. Constitution and Bylaws Review
  - i. We have reviewed the current documents and identified typos, formatting issues, and more information needed on officer roles.
  - ii. Exec team and judiciary committee are creating a timeline for when we will provide the legislative steering committee with changes for review.
  - iii. We are working on a way to adequately track changes from the old documents to the new documents.

- iv. We will work to provide details about changes and the process to approve changes to the entire Senate.
- v. Proposed Timeline
  - 1. November and December we will draft a document detailing the proposed changes.
  - 2. We hope to hold a special session in January or February so we can have an in-depth discussion and debate on changes. This will likely be on Zoom and we will send out this info far in advance so everyone can plan accordingly.
  - 3. In the February meeting these changes will be tabled to be read, in March we will propose constitutional amendments for voting and passing.
  - 4. I encourage you to actively participate in these matters.
- vi. The Constitution is more difficult to make changes than bylaws, but some language updates are necessary. We will detail these proposed changes and provide information about the process to approve changes.
- vii. Notable steps in process
  - 1. Draft update documents with comments
  - 2. Share documents with senate
  - 3. Hold special session for discussion/review
  - 4. We will likely hold a special session next semester over zoom so that we can have an in depth discussion (difficult to discuss substantive changes during a regular meeting, and we want to provide plenty of time for comments and deliberations). We will send out information well in advance so that everyone has notice.
  - 5. Table discussions, vote at the next allowable senate meeting
  - 6. Final vote for constitution updates at the graduate student body level during general elections.
- viii. Any suggestions are welcome
- ix. Thank you for your time.

**Legislation Steering Committee Chair - Karen Norwood, 14**

(Karen Norwood will be speaking on behalf of the Legislation Steering Committee)

- 1. Purpose of Committee
  - a. The Legislative Steering Committee is responsible for aiding Senators in drafting proposals for legislation and resolutions.

- b. Committee is responsible for setting both short-term and long-term goals for the Graduate Student Senate by identifying matters of concern to be addressed by the GSS for the current and following academic years.
  - c. The Committee is responsible for reviewing the Constitution and Bylaws and recommending any changes deemed necessary for consideration (in coordination with the judiciary committee).
2. Updates
- a. We had a very productive first meeting where we outlined our ideas and formed small groups to focus on each of the individual issues brought up.
  - b. We are excited to move forward together as a committee and in conjunction with the other GSS committees to pursue these initiatives.
3. Initiatives for the Year
- a. First, we are working on a revitalization of the GSS Constitution and bylaws. These were last updated in 2020. Our goal with this initiative is to update some of the old language, correct various typos, and make this a more accessible and useful document for future administration in GSS. We are looking forward to working with the Judiciary Committee on these updates.
  - b. Another initiative is to collaborate with the Faculty Senate to work on Advisor 360 Feedback to ensure graduate students are receiving consistent feedback from advisors to make sure they are on track for their degree, especially because advising standards vary by department and there should be a minimum requirement of advising for graduate students established across the board to avoid delays in the program that would inevitably come at the expense of graduate students.
  - c. We are also interested in connecting with UT Parking to allow graduate students the ability to request parking/access to campus during events/game days. Professors are already able to receive parking accommodations for such circumstances, and we believe the same accommodations should be extended to graduate students as well. In addition, make the newsletters widely accessible on campus listservs so that all undergrad, grad, staff, and faculty are aware of the changes.
  - d. Another issue we feel strongly about is Graduate Fees. We are thankful that UTK has made strides for transparency. We hope to improve the marketing and publicity of the fee structure and how the fees are spent. We want to lobby to reduce student fees, and make sure they are put to better use across the board. We also feel it necessary to ensure that all departments provide honest communication in offer letters to prospective grad students about what fees and how much graduate students will be

expected to pay out of pocket each semester. This is another issue that will benefit from collaboration with the Faculty Senate.

- e. Time off for graduate students was brought forward due to work schedules and time off for graduate students seeming to differ widely between departments and advisors/supervisors. We want to clearly establish the minimum requirements for graduate students to take time off or leave, as well as ensure that graduate students know where to find information and are informed about who to contact if their department chair or advisors are unwilling to work with them.
- f. An issue brought to our committee was complaints about inconsistencies in office and building temperatures. One way we plan to address this is to establish better communication and contact with facilities to work together to keep our work environments hospitable.
- g. Finally, the issue of accessibility at bus stops on campus was brought to us by graduate students with mobility issues who have pointed out specific accessibility issues with campus transportation.
  - i. The most significant being that many of the bus stops on campus have no seating area, or the seating is too far removed from the bus stop itself, forcing students with mobility issues to stand for upwards of 10-15 minutes to catch the bus.
  - ii. There also is an apparent lack of training wherein if a person does not have a visible cue for a disability (such as a wheelchair, cane, crutch, etc...) they are assumed to be able-bodied and many bus drivers do not pull up all the way to the curb, making the steps onto the busses extremely difficult. We hope to work with the ADA Coordinator and Student Disability Services to tackle these issues and make our campus accessible for all.
  - iii. In-line with the bus stop comments, some of the older buildings have accessibility issues, especially considering their age. One perfect example is Neyland stadium in the student section. It's not really feasible for someone under ADA to interact with their friends in the student section. Potentially, we want to add this to the list of renovations as well as considering student seating/ticketing protocols into the next football season.
- h. We are looking forward to collaborating with other committees in GSS as well as the Faculty Senate in order to accomplish our common goals.
- i. We also are always open to ideas on how to best serve our community. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any ideas or suggestions,



especially as you communicate with the graduate students you represent in your respective departments about their needs and concerns.

#### 4. Questions

- a. Alexis Gilmore (67) has a question regarding improving feedback to minimize graduation delays
- b. Speaker responds they are considering a baseline for how often they should be meeting with their advisor and the quality of that information and who students can go to if they feel their needs are not being met.
- c. Brigid Ogden (3) asked if they have reached out to the Faculty Senate to discuss this issue. Faculty are generally not receptive to it so it may be helpful to go through it in a way that ensures we're not encountering that kind of opposition.
- d. The Speaker responds they do plan to reach out to the Faculty Senate and will use that resource as they move forward on this issue. There has only been one meeting but now subcommittees are moving forward. Any advice as to how to reach out to the Faculty Senate most effectively are appreciated.
- e. Hunter Hammock notes that it helps our cause to identify the ways these initiatives provide returns to the school and programs.

#### **Ashley Browning, 32 - Equity and Diversity Committee Chair**

1. The Council for Diversity and Inclusion has funds available for student organizations and events that promote diversity. Please email me and I'll put you in contact with their programming chair.
2. The Chancellor has put together an AAPI Ad Hoc Committee
  - a. The AAPI Ad Hoc Committee is hosting a lunch and learn on December 9th that will focus on building a community for AAPI and understand what AAPI means to all the members of the community. They also hope to expand our AAPI Ad Hoc Committee to broaden cultural representation. If you are an Asian graduate student interested in participating in a panel discussion about these topics, please contact me immediately.
  - b. Hybrid event, lunch served for those who attend in person.
3. Brainstorming
  - a. International Student Needs
    - i. GSS could be a part of the welcome to campus during orientation/first week here; help ensure students are connected to I-House and Center for Student Engagement when arriving.
    - ii. Reaching out more to ensure they have transportation to events and know where the locations for events are.

- b. Low stipends are a barrier to students of color, issue for recruitment and issue for retention; departments are aware of their lack of diversity but are also aware we cannot pay them what they're worth.
- c. Reaching out to more organizations and students to get them interested in GSS
  - i. Offering a route for help when students need it
- d. Need for more grad student casual social events
  - i. As simple as "let's grab a beverage and chat," it doesn't have to be structured
- 4. Executive Team Initiatives
  - a. Diverse events - work with student organizations dedicated to this; collaborate with events committee
  - b. Focus on serving the strategic vision that was just approved
  - c. Work with the well-being committee regarding fees and housing
  - d. Build awareness of academic support/travel awards
- 5. Please complete availability poll for our final meeting of the semester @ South Press by noon on Friday
  - a. Open meetings, you're welcome to join us. Email if interested and I can share details.

### **Brigid Ogden, 3 - Graduate Student Well-Being Committee Chair**

- 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. Identify areas where these metrics of wellness are lacking across the University
- 2. Ties into 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 wellbeing.
- 3. Accomplishments

- a. Met with the executive board multiple times and discussed possible initiatives.
  - b. Held our first committee meeting during the first week of November.
  - c. Met with the Student Counseling Center's Student Advisory Committee to discuss the counseling center's current goals for improving their role in facilitating student wellbeing on campus
    - i. They are in the process of searching for a new Director, and we look forward to taking part in those discussions.
4. Ideas/Initiatives for the Year
- a. After discussion with other exec board members and committee members
    - i. Goal to facilitate or sponsor at least 2 wellness-related events during the spring semester
      - 1. Health Insurance Literacy events for domestic and international students for this country and the UTK system. To allow students to find what serves their needs best.
      - 2. Events that offer support or guidance for graduate students dealing with the stresses of the current pandemic. Fields that are caring for sick or grieving have been hit especially hard with fatigue.
      - 3. Collaboration with the Student Counseling Center for Fresh Check Day, a nationwide initiative to promote the discussion of mental health on college campuses (Spring 2022)
    - b. Promote awareness of opportunities for graduate students to vaccinate themselves on campus - Vols Vaccinate Vols and keep each other safe. Want to encourage students to get vaccinated or get their booster shots before returning home for the holidays.
    - c. Continue to support other committees in their initiatives and goals that may overlap with ours.
5. GSS/Senators
- a. Tell us how you're doing!
  - 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.

**Kassie Hollabaugh, 68 - Travel Awards Committee Chair**

- 1. Purpose of Committee:

- a. The GSS Travel Awards provides support to students who are presenting UT research at in-person professional conferences.
  - b. The purpose of this committee is to review applications and award applicants in a fair, unbiased manner that allows students to gain support for traveling and presenting at professional conferences.
2. Tie in with GSS initiatives:
  - a. Covid has been extremely difficult for students to travel and present their research at professional conferences.
  - b. I would like to see as many students supported by this award as possible.
  - c. Students need all of the support that they can get to succeed academically and professionally.
3. Accomplishments:
  - a. Our first major accomplishment was the roll out of our policy.
  - b. Hunter, Mohamed, and myself developed a formula that accounts for many factors of student's travel.
    - i. Including existing funding, expenses, location of conference.
  - c. Impact statements are judged by the committee and factor into the equation.
  - d. This provides a fair and unbiased method for allocating funds.
  - e. Our 2nd deadline was November 1st - After meeting as a committee we were able to award 47 students with a GSS Travel Award, with an average of \$420 per student being awarded.
4. Deadlines
  - a. The next deadline is February 1st for the first spring review.
  - b. The two spring deadlines are February 1st and March 1st, the summer deadline is April 1st.
  - c. These deadlines refer to students submitting their application; there is a second deadline (a week later) for signatures from all signees before the applications are able to be reviewed by the committee.
  - d. Our goal is to have a committee meeting to review applications and send out approval/denial letters to all applicants within 10 days of the signature deadline.
5. GSS/Senators
  - a. Please inform students in your department about GSS Travel Award deadlines and encourage them to apply for in-person conferences.
  - b. Students MUST be the primary author and primary presenter of the work and present at an in-person conference.

- c. Students who are attending online conferences, professional development workshops can apply for a GSS Academic Support Award.
  - d. PLEASE tell the students in your department that they cannot receive both a GSS Academic Support Award and a GSS Travel Award.
  - e. We do not review or allocate GSS Academic Support Awards. These are separate from GSS Travel Awards. If you have questions, I can direct you to someone who can help.
6. Questions
- a. Ben Thornberry (27) asks if we can post a link to any websites mentioned for ease of access.
  - b. Alison Pfau (66) asked for repetition regarding turnaround time for awards.

### **Leighton Chappell, 45 - Programming and Events Committee Chair**

1. Purpose of Committee
  - a. Plan events
    - i. Event logistics: location, date, time, resources needed, running it, compliance
  - b. Create proposal for the event
  - c. Promote events via social media, flyers, word of mouth, email
2. Accomplishments
  - a. Ijams 'A Colorful Hike' event
    - i. Saturday at 10am at Ijams Nature Center
  - b. Halloween Costume Event (Davis already detailed)
  - c. Planned an OUTGRADs, iSTEMmed, LAGS Pint Night
    - i. POSTPONED
  - d. Promoted numerous events (Hunger and Homeless Week, LAGS organization meeting, Basic Needs Fair, and others from organizations who have reached out)
3. Upcoming
  - a. WiStar:
    - i. Salary Negotiation Workshop (What kind of issues, questions women face in the working environment)
    - ii. Event Date: February 10<sup>th</sup>
    - iii. Intending to begin planning on December 9<sup>th</sup>: 11am at meeting for this event

- b. Women at Work panel discussion (based on Harvard Business U podcast)
  - i. Q&A, Panel discussion
  - ii. Event Date: March 24
  - iii. Intend to begin planning following salary negotiation workshop
- c. LAGS: Latina/o/x Graduate Student Organization
  - i. Graduate Student Appreciation Week Cooking Workshop (tentative)
  - ii. Hoping the Big Orange Pantry will help/donate
  - iii. Intend to begin planning contingent with GPSAW planning
- d. GPAW 5K Event
  - i. Have received material from Millie Cheatham (Graduate School)
  - ii. Intend to begin collaborating with Davis Carter and committees in December/January.
  - iii. Host smaller, cost-effective events in the Spring given the potential costs of other future events (5K, GPSAW, Work Shop) and the GSS budget.

#### 4. Initiatives

- a. Connect with student organizations who represent graduate students as well
- b. Want to host small events that foster social connection and re-integration among all graduates (as well as mental health and social wellbeing) in the spring.
- c. Would like to promote events better: there are several avenues (email, social media, flyers, posting on GSS website, posting UT calendar), however would like more participation from all senators to make an effort
- d. Want to be as cost effective as possible with our decisions
- e. Have a number of organizations who want to lead and help pay for events (The Graduate School, Student Engagement, etc.)

#### 5. GSS/Senators

- a. Inform departments and students of events
- b. Post events on social media, UT Calendar, GSS website
- c. Assist with any connections or ideas

### **BJ Armstead, 44 - Graduate Student Senate Advisory Committee Chair**

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).
  - a. Gives the opportunity for other students to voice their opinions and concerns. Mechanism to keep GSS's finger on the pulse.
2. Membership is open in order to obtain unbiased opinions and representation.
3. I am in the process of gathering a list of all Presidents and Vice Presidents in grad orgs. If you know of someone that wants to get involved with the senate, please send them my way.
  - a. 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. None at this time.
2. Approval of Minutes from October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021
  - a. Brigid Ogden (3) moves to approve, Jordan Schaefer (4) seconds.
  - b. Results of vote via QR code/Zoom link:
    - i. 40/44 members voted to approve, approved as read.

### **Guest Speakers**

1. Ashlyn Anderson, President of the Student Basic Needs Coalition
  - a. Thanks to Ashley Browning for making this connection.
  - b. Amazed at the work GSS does.
  - c. SBNC seeks for student basic needs to be understood as human rights.
    - i. Universities should be held accountable to that.
    - ii. Student success relies on needs being met.
    - iii. Now a 501(c) nonprofit on a national level, the chapter at UTK is the first but there are now chapters across the country.
    - iv. Needs: Food, Health, Housing and Safety.
      1. Food in particular is one we are active in addressing, started as a food advocacy group.
      2. Study from Nutrition Dept of 2017 revealed that 1 in 3 students on campus identify as food-insecure, numbers have increased since COVID. 2019 survey results forthcoming.

- v. Seek to address student needs holistically.
- vi. SNAP advocacy in particular is something we are active in (formerly known as Food Stamps). College students are eligible for SNAP, but it is underutilized. This is a meaningful intervention for food insecurity on campus to provide a stable food supply instead of the need for emergency resources like the pantries on campus.
- vii. Today is the third SNAP Access Day, which is intended to raise awareness and destigmatize the resource as well.
- viii. This week is Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, the last event of the week is tomorrow - Hunger and Homelessness Summit from 9am-1pm on Zoom.
- ix. SNBC only has one graduate student involved currently, would love to expand this and collaborate with GSS. You are welcome to join, we meet in the Student Union right after this. I can share my email with the exec team to share with all of you.

### **Adjournment**

1. Attendance
  - a. Via QR code/Zoom link
2. Adjournment
  - a. BJ Armstead (44) moves to adjourn
  - b. Lufuno Phophi (95) seconds
  - c. All in favor
3. Any final convos or questions can happen in the hall

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**Next Meeting:** Wed, Jan 26th, 2022 in SU 169 at 5:30



## Appendix: Senator Attendance

### GSS Session 4

11.18.21

Department by College	Voting #	Name	Present
Architecture	1	--	N/A
Landscape Architecture	2	Mary Beth Robbins	NO
Anthropology	3	Brigid Ogden	YES
Anthropology	4	Katherine Parker	YES
Art	5	--	N/A
Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology	6	Bethany Campbell	YES
Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology	7	Logan Dunn	NO
Chemistry	8	Trevor Wilson	YES
Chemistry	9	Elizabeth O'Connell	YES
Earth and Planetary Sciences	10	Kaitlyn Gauvey	YES
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	11	Nicole Lussier	YES
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	12	Nate Gibson	NO
English	13	James Shepard	YES
English	14	Karen Norwood	YES
Geography	15	Victoria Haynes	YES
History	16	Jason Jonson	YES
Life Sciences	17	Alexandra Teodor	YES
Mathematics	18	Evan Habbershaw	YES
Mathematics	19	Johannas Krotz	NO

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	Katherine Trubee	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	NO
Communication and Information	35	--	N/A
Information Sciences	36	Jessica Barfield	YES
Information Sciences	37	Kat Capstick	YES
Journalism & Electronic Media	38	--	N/A
Child and Family Studies	39	Cassie Sorrells	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	BJ Armstead	YES
Kinesiology, Recreation, & Sport Studies	45	Leighton Chappell	YES
Nutrition	46	Katherine Bell	YES
Public Health	47	Catherine Warner	YES
Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management	48	Eda Gokcecik	YES
Theory and Practice in Teacher Education	49	Arianna Banack	YES
Theory and Practice in Teacher Education	50	Jared Huisingh	YES
Accounting and Information Management	51	Jack Badger	YES
Accounting and Information Management	52	Alex Zukowski	YES
Business Administration	53	Joseph Moulden	YES
Business Administration	54	Abigail Ritch	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	Elliot Loughran	NO
Nursing	77	Courtland Kuntz	YES
Social Work	78	Kiki Kline	YES
Social Work	79	Lindsey Collier	YES
Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering	80	--	N/A
Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering	81	Austin Conte	YES
Civil & Environmental Engineering	82	Amin Mohammdnazar	NO
Civil & Environmental Engineering	83	Iman Mahdinia	NO
Electrical Engineering & Computer Science	84	Bhaskar Gaur	YES
Electrical Engineering & Computer Science	85	Samaneh Morovati	YES
Industrial & Systems Engineering	86	Ebrahim Sharifnia	YES
Industrial & Systems Engineering	87	--	N/A
Materials Science & Engineering	88	--	N/A
Materials Science & Engineering	89	--	N/A

Mechanical, Aerospace & Biomedical Engineering	90	--	N/A
Mechanical, Aerospace & Biomedical Engineering	91	--	N/A
Nuclear Engineering	92	Christian Young	YES
Nuclear Engineering	93	Evan Williams	YES
Comparative and Experimental Medicine	94	Wesley Sheley	YES
Comparative and Experimental Medicine	95	Lufuno Phophi	YES