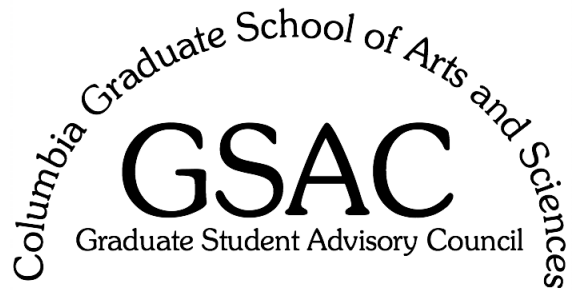


**Minutes from GSAC Plenary**  
Dec 3, 2013



### **Library Off-Site Storage**

Ms. Crow

Several professors took part on a survey about library space. Proposal that books that are not checked out regularly will be stored off-site. Students will be able to request books, or scans of chapters to be sent to them. There is a worry among some humanities students that while this will free up study space, this will make their research more difficult. They are asking if this affects other students, and if there is support to make this process more transparent.

Voting on the formation of an exploratory committee to assist the GSAS Humanities Senator working under Sophia Brumer:

**For: 22**

Against: 0

Abstain: 1

### **Finance Committee Motions**

Mr. Hendricks

#### **Motion 1 – Departmental Representatives Incentives Program**

1) The steering committee proposes to move \$1000 from the 'volunteer' budget and up to \$1000 from the Alumni relations budget (if needed) to create a \$2000 fund as an experimental Departmental Representative incentive program. This funding would enable GSAC representatives (in good standing) to attend one GSAC-sponsored event (either a social event or subsidized ticket event) for free, in an effort to reward department representatives for their hard work, and to encourage their participation so that they can understand and promote future events. While the details of the program need to be finalized, the initial plan is that the GSAC-compensated event would have to be less than \$40 and it could not be used to subsidize a more expensive event (thus excluding the skip trip, etc.). Similar programs are successfully used at our peer institutions.

Debate to the floor:

Feel that money would be better spent towards supporting more student travel grants, worry that it will not significantly attract new students.

For: 8

**Against: 11**

Abstain: 4

## Motion 2 – Steering Committee Compensation

### a) same as now (\$1500/year)

We have a full steering committee and things are running smoothly. In contrast, we have previously had trouble electing representatives to the university senate, which is not a compensated position; it is possible that these are related. Furthermore, some members of the current steering committee feel that the efforts of the steering committee should be reasonably compensated, and that without the compensation they would have been less likely to take on these duties.

### b) less (\$500-1000/year)

We should not remove stipends completely; the reason being is that it acts as an incentive for whoever is taking the time to bear the responsibility for the given school year. Steering committee members undertake responsibilities above and beyond that of individual GSAC department representatives and are critical to carrying out the GSAC's mission of advocacy and community-building. Furthermore, internships offered on campus with similarly administrative-style tasks pay \$500-1000 for 5-10 hours of work per week per semester, on par with the work expected for steering committee members.

Currently, stipends are distributed at \$500 per semester, plus the summer, even though GSAC is not active in the summer. Therefore, stipends should be reduced, but should be maintained. \*If this option is selected, it will be followed by a vote to determine the actual compensation amount of \$500 or \$1000.

### c) none

The steering committee ought to be a voluntary position; volunteers run the student councils of nearly all schools. The money used to compensate the steering committee is taken from the activity fee that all graduate students pay, which should go towards their benefit rather than to pay the steering committee.

*From Dean Alonso:* "I write today to urge you to do away with this practice [of compensating the steering committee] for two reasons. First, Columbia is alone among our peers in this respect; student service in other institutions is seen, I think appropriately, as an instance of volunteerism. More compelling, however, is the financial cost to your fellow students. At \$1,500 per steering committee member, GSAC costs students a total of \$12,000 annually. Put more starkly, that figure represents the aggregate student activities fee for 240 individual Arts and Sciences students, or 15-20% of your total budget." It is actually 10% of the 2013-14 budget, and 18% of our annual income from student activity fees.

In opposition of this view, it is likely that without compensation the steering committee would not be filled, meaning that each committee member would have to do more work. This could mean that GSAC's money would not be used as effectively (or at all), and therefore graduate students would actually receive less benefit from their activity fee.

### Debate to the floor:

The undergraduate council does not receive stipends. However, many representatives feel that the amount of work done by the steering committee deserves compensation. Also a worry that not as many people would be attracted to the position without a salary.

### **Vote to keep it the same as now: 18**

Vote to reduce the stipend: 4

Vote to remove the stipend: 0

Abstain: 1

### Motion 3 – Fiscal Year

a) Sept 15- Sept 14 (we elect the steering committee in April and pass the budget in September)

Under this policy the orientation funds are determined on the previous year's budget. It is possible, although unlikely, that the budget would have to be passed with an estimated income if that information isn't available prior to the September plenary meeting. It also means that steering committee stipends would be approved prior to full budget approval.

**b) July 1- June 30 (we elect the steering committee in March, and pass the budget in April)**

Under this policy, the steering committee knows the budget before the school year starts which enables planning of orientation events. This also lines up with the university fiscal year. However, this would mean that the budget is approved with an estimated income (GSAC funds are distributed in September when the student population is known). It also means that steering committee stipends would be approved prior to full budget approval.

Debate to the floor:

Changing the fiscal year would allow a more seasoned group of department reps to vote on the budget.

Vote for current fiscal year: 0

**Vote for fiscal year to match university: 22**

Abstain: 1

### Motion 4 – SIG Grant Eligibility

a) only recognized groups (which still allows departments, etc., but they will have to receive GSAC recognition)

This is the current policy, but we will begin to enforce the rule that departments must be approved as a student group before applying for funding. It is a clear rule that is easy to administer and provides the GSAC plenary some level of oversight by requiring group recognition without establishing a significant barrier to funding.

**b) only recognized groups plus official department-sponsored groups/events**

This is how we currently operate in practice, although we have no way of defining "official" department-sponsored groups/events. We would have to implement a system requiring a letter/email from a professor or department administrator validating the event/group is officially operating on behalf of the department.

c) only recognized groups plus individuals planning conferences

The proposal is to open up the SIG Grant application to both officially GSAC-recognized groups as well as conference organizers based at GSAC-affiliated departments and cross-disciplinary institutes. The regulations would stipulate that GSAC department or institute-affiliated students can only apply for conference funding if these conferences are open to the entire GSAC student body, and circulate a call for papers: this would exclude other events such as receptions or talks. Departmental or institutional affiliation with GSAC will ensure that these groups are legitimate, and GSAC still withholds the right not to fund these applications.

d) anyone (groups, departments, and individuals)

This could create significant problems with number and quality of applications.

Vote for only recognized groups: 0

**Vote for recognized groups + official department groups/events: 17**

Vote for recognized groups + individuals planning conferences: 3  
Vote for anyone to be eligible: 0  
Abstain: 0

#### Motion 5 – Travel Grant Selection

a) Randomly (current method)

A committee of GSAC representatives would not be able to judge the merit of travel grant applications in an effective and unbiased way, and therefore no judging should be done at all. A steering committee member confirming that the applications are acceptable and randomly awarding the grants works.

b) With approval of a standing committee, and then random selection

Having a committee rather than an individual approve the travel grants will increase the transparency of the selection process, but it remains difficult for individuals to grade applications in fields other than their own. After a committee checks that applications fulfill the minimum requirements (cover letter, grant application, title/abstract), they will be entered into a lottery system and travel grants will be awarded to random individuals.

**b) Sort the applications based on financial need by a committee, and then random selection**

Keep the lottery system, but split the lottery into two rounds. Have a committee prioritize applications based on financial need (significant, not significant), which is most strongly related to whether the student's department provides travel support (well-defined criteria will be developed based on specific questions that will be included on the grant application). Grants will then be randomly select from those applications in the "significant need" pile, and in the unlikely event that funding remains after this first lottery round, the other grants are selected at random from those remaining.

d) Based on grading by a standing committee, similar to the current SIG process

We should eliminate the lottery system in favor of a modified application review system. Set up a committee to review applications on the basis of need, the reasonableness of budget estimates, and the student's statement of the importance of the conference to his/her research. The subcommittee vets the applications according to financial criteria and then scores the remaining applications in a process similar to the SIG grants.

Debate to the floor:

Concerns about relying on the honor system for financial need.

Vote for random process (current): 8

Vote for standing committee to review all applications, and then random selection: 0

Vote for criteria of financial need for selection: 10

Vote for financial need and merit selection: 2

Abstain: 1

Revote:

Vote for random process (current): 8

**Vote for criteria of financial need for selection: 12**

Abstain: 1

## Motion 6 – Travel Grant Eligibility

### a) yes (current policy)

Requiring acceptance to a conference prior to applying for the travel grant ensures that the individuals being awarded the grants will be able to attend the conference, and therefore the money will very likely be spent.

### b) no

Travel grant applications should not require prior acceptance to a conference as this usually means that the individual applying already has alternative means of paying for the conference and therefore would attend without the grant. This means that the grant isn't supporting students that couldn't afford the conference without the grant, which seems like the best use of the grant.

Keeping travel grants applications open to individuals who have not yet been accepted to conferences will allow people who do not have prior funding to apply, without significant risk to GSAC because the funding is awarded through reimbursement. At worst, if a candidate is not accepted to the conference the money would not be used in that funding cycle and would roll over to future funding cycles.

### Debate to the Floor:

Worry of students not going to the conference if they have not already been accepted.

### **Vote for current policy: 11**

Vote to change this: 8

Abstain: 2

Clarification from the Dean about a previous concern of the role of student clubs at Columbia:

“GSAC-recognized groups are not permitted to sell goods or services for payment, but are encouraged to seek donations that must go towards funding current or future group events and activities.”

### **Alumni & PR Updates**

What can you be with a PhD is coming up this week, it should be particularly appealing to humanities departments. There are also opportunities for master's students for these events.

### **Social Updates**

Purchasing training session tomorrow, should be informative for student groups that are funded.

EGSC is having an end of semester social at the DL this Thursday.

GSAC, TC, and the Dental School are having a joint end of semester social in a few weeks. Need volunteers to help organize this.

### **Humanities Senator Election**

Pieter Vanhove is the only official applicant.

All are in favor of his appointment.

## **GSAC Updates**

Philosophy 301 construction has been delayed, should be open in mid-Spring 2014 semester.

Looking for volunteers for President's Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault.  
Drafting a formal letter of complaint to university facilities, and UAH, concerns over discrepancies between stipends and costs of housing. At a subsequent meeting we will bring a representative from these departments.