

GAPSA General Assembly

February 8, 2021

Meeting Notes

- Graduate Student Leadership Series
 - First leadership workshop series geared towards graduate students! Find out more here: <https://gapsa.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-Graduate-Leadership-Series.pdf>
 - Certificates awarded to those who complete 3 out of the 4 sessions
 - First session begins tonight at 6:30p, but future sessions still have space!
- GMU-AAUP
 - For more information about AAUP, take a look at our November meeting notes: <https://gapsa.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/November-2020.pdf>
 - Last semester, we collected about 100 survey responses from grad students. The survey results are available here: <https://gapsa.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AAUP-Survey-Top-Issues.pdf>
 - Main findings include concern over lack of funding, transparency, etc. Feel free to peruse the results and reach out if you have questions!
 - Jonathan: part of our hope is also to expand on interdisciplinary approaches to graduate student life, which we hope this survey helps capture
 - Q&A
 - Some students expressed concern over influence of private donors. What information can we get about this?
 - Some organizations can offer information on what donors are contributing and what the donor contracts include.
 - Did the survey capture responses from STEM and Business students? It seems to be mostly sociology and CHSS students.
 - We tried to get more survey responses, but unfortunately had a low response rate, so the survey definitely isn't representative, and we ultimately had a small sample size
 - AAUP: We have a campaign starting regarding extending time limits for grad programs. We are also looking to send out a [new survey](#). We'll be in touch about that!
 - Our next upcoming meeting is Feb 12 at 11am: <https://gmu.zoom.us/j/92883148462>
- Possible Graduate School
 - Background: Currently, graduate programs are spread out across a number of colleges/schools. Thus, while we have a few centralized offices (e.g., Dr. Bray's provost office), many other services are decentralized across academic units. President Washington has suggested that we consider centralizing all graduate programs under a single graduate school.
 - Advantages: Centralized services and policies
 - Disadvantages: Some programs, which currently exercise a lot of autonomous control over their graduate program, might lose some of the control if they are moved to a separate graduate school.

- Whatever we decide, it would be a model that's developed specifically for Mason that works for the graduate programs at Mason. We are very much in an exploratory phase right now - what are your questions?
 - Would this potentially affect stipend rates, which currently are determined by the departments individually?
 - Background: right now, there is a centralized minimum, but programs can offer more than the minimum at their discretion
 - We're not sure exactly how the new model will work, but at the very least we'll have more oversight over comparing packages across programs and making them all competitive
 - Would this affect admissions policies?
 - Not sure, but it would hopefully at least streamline graduate admissions policies (that will happen first)
 - Ultimately, it's a fine line of how to be more efficient in centralized management, without taking away what specific disciplines need to exercise expertise and control over
 - What are some strengths in terms of cost efficiencies?
 - The strengths are in cost savings based on economies of scale. Specifically, centralized processes and technology (software) can save time and money.
 - Will there be opportunities for interdisciplinary research or collaboration?
 - Yes, this could really create both research and practice opportunities that spans across disciplines.
- Other topics that students brought up that would be questions to resolve if we proceed with a graduate school: allocation of funds, impact on support staff, tuition, time demands on faculty/staff that takes away from their students, etc.
- Reminder: this is still in a very exploratory phase. We're still figuring out whether or not this is possible, and even if so, how we would structure it. Keep in mind that, again, not everything will be centralized - it will be a balance on what to centralize and what to keep separate by department/division.
 - How you can help: let us know what your experiences have been, the challenges you face as graduate students, etc.
 - Please reach out if you have any questions! We hope that our next steps will be some sort of exploratory task force, we will be in touch.
- Side note: about 10 years ago, we did have a centralized graduate school. It now being dissolved, one challenge we face is that we don't have grad student representation at a high-level centralized governing board.
- Mason Graduate Interdisciplinary Conference: two-day virtual conference, Apr 8-9
 - Call for abstracts open until February 19: <https://forms.gle/XvyP4oimrnyrdQbN7>
 - On Feb 16, GAPSAs will host a webinar on how to prepare abstracts
 - Sign up here: <http://cglink.me/2d7/r939138>
 - In early March, we'll also have a poster-creation webinar
- Committee Time