

Town Hall – 4/17/15

Attending: Bly, Massaro, Rooker, Weber, and 22 graduate students.

The MGSC was introduced and a description of the group's general function and purpose was given.

The topic of by-laws was discussed. Topics included:

- Will the MGSC always be present at faculty meetings? No. Only when formally presenting a concern.
- Is there a group hierarchy? A president will be the default faculty meeting attendee. All other responsibilities shared.
- Four current members, but only three voting members? Yes. Elections for next term will be next spring.
- People could join even if not elected as a voting member? To assist with a specific objective of the council, yes.
- Need to make certain amending by-laws needs two-thirds of student votes, not two-thirds of students.
- First-years can't be voting members? No. Voting members must be elected during previous spring.

The topic of general MGSC operations (not specifically in by-laws) was discussed. Topics included:

- Specific issues resolved by the MGSC? Channeling communication from department to grad students and grad students to department, running Town Halls, professor of year award, orientation help, etc.
- How does interaction with faculty exist? Through sharing meeting minutes and/or formally presenting student concerns.
- Will there be a way for grad students to stay current on MGSC activity? Yes. A website is planned.
- Specific social events to come? It's the plan. We'll likely welcome help to organize such activities.
- Will the MGSC be present at orientation to make first-year students aware of the council? Yes.
- Any awareness of pitfalls of failed GSEC? Wasn't organized. Poor awareness. Lost money (theft).
- Is there a plan to secure general university funds for student organizations? Yes. As soon as we can.
- Perhaps students could be designated to oversee snack sales? A good idea.
- Might the MGSC be able to offer travel grants in the future? If funding and fundraising allows, yes.
- A department newsletter might make for a useful extension of the MGSC? Noted.
- Might MGSC connect with the community? Possible STEM Day run by MGSC or could get involved with youth.

The topic of summer teaching reduction was discussed. Topics included:

- No indication received that positions were being taken away.
- Contracts signed by grad students said summer employment would be "normally available."
- Any notification of teaching reduction came through hushed rumors. Still no official explanation given.
- Foreign students need to plan flights long in advance. Communication on such matters must be timely.
- Students in summer prelim prep course(s) must pay fees and cannot work. It's financially demanding.
- When did this decision to reduce summer teaching actually/officially occur? No one knows for sure.
- Was the ratio of grad student to lecturer summer teaching positions also reduced? If so, why?
- Students can't afford not to work during the summer. Off campus jobs means more hours for same pay. Will cut into time to develop as mathematicians. Were told so late this year that good summer jobs off campus are very difficult to find.
- The extra experience teaching is valuable, especially to those interested in a job involving teaching.
- Summer courses offer a gentler introduction to being an instructor of record for first time. Described as "wonderful" by one who had such an experience.
- Was funding for summer course cut? If so, why was there no indication given to the students?
- What can the students expect in future summers? Will positions be "normally available" as promised? Offer letters claim is currently a lie.
- Is there an option to seek loans for living expenses if out of work this summer? If so, where? How?

The topic of the GTA mentorship program was discussed. Topics included:

- See value in 115 and 119 helping disproportionate workload issue between recitations for 2 credits and leading courses for 3 credits. Calculus hours required of students feel bloated. In particular, 12 hours of Calculus I in a year seems like a particularly strenuous commitment.
- Hour requirements seem like a slippery slope. If 12 credits of 141 now counts for 10 credits of commitment, will it later be even more credits counting for 10? Or, will everyone's commitment be raised to 12 hours?
- What an hour of commitment to the department as a GTA needs to be well defined. It feels like next year students will be receiving dramatically different teaching loads with the same pay.
- Meeting with professors for an hour each week may not save time. May hurt efficiency.
- Student in 115 and 119 will be grading three sections of assignments one semester and two sections of assignments the other semester. This is a lot of grading, especially for first years coming in.
- If given plans to teach by the assigned mentor, will that help GTAs become better teachers or will that lead to parroting? Is uniformization necessarily good?
- Until the early years kinks of this program will be worked out, the day-to-day challenges therein will likely fall on students. Students are likely to be undercompensated as a result.
- Some students don't want this program at all. But, some courses seem as if they'll only be available to GTAs through the mentorship program. Students given no choice but to teach less desirable courses.
- Stick to offer letter and lose opportunity to teach desired classes, or join program and lose teaching freedom?
- Program might increase the floor of GTA course quality, but is our current course quality that bad to demand such a dramatic readjustment of the GTA program?
- Documents about program say "strictly voluntary" but also say "may be required to join." Very discomfoting. Language needs clarified substantially.
- When do we find out our teaching assignment? If not preferring the mentorship program, do we now get no preference whatsoever? How can we get info to the scheduler about what or when we'd like to teach?
- Since students assigned to 115/119 cannot be instructor of record, will students be enrolling in 115/119 to be with Guest or Peery? If so, GTAs with experience in this flipped setup suggest Peery is not regularly in the classroom. This is misleading and confusing to enrolled students, especially incoming freshman.
- Students enrolled in courses not likely to go to mentor coordinator with questions. Largest burden of workload likely to be falling on students.
- What if a student fails 115/119? Will the GTA (who could be first-year) have to be involved in the process of a student fighting for a grade?
- Restricting the teaching of GTAs will hurt the resumes of current students. This along with more workload for same pay might discourage future grad students from applying.
- The document given to students about the program was not clear. Details of what exactly a student would be signing up for not made clear.
- Having to write tests to a specific rubric will probably take more time than just writing a test regularly.
- Many students volunteered for mentorship program out of fear of what they might get stuck with otherwise. And, what happens if more people sign up for the program than there are classes of a particular type?

Meeting ended approximately two hours after the start.