

Imperial College Union
GSA President's Report – a note by Deena Blumenkrantz

A lot has happened within the GSA since the last Council report on the 17th of January. Below is a summary of everything that has been on my mind.

Educational Issues

1. PhD Student Seminar Series in Computing
 - a. Fan Xiuyi and other Computing representatives set up a series of student seminars, where students present their research to their peers in the absence of supervisors. This format allows students to speak freely, without worrying that their supervisors are judging them, and has been deemed a success. Computing students are next planning a collaborative Symposium with students from Oxford and Cambridge Computing Departments.
2. Life Science Restructure
 - a. The GSA AWO for Life Sciences, Joseph McKenna, relentlessly emailed Andrew George (Director of GSLSM) and Ian Owens (Head of Department of Life Sciences) while I reported discontent at Management Committee meetings, until Niki Gounaris, the Director of Postgraduate Studies (DPS) for the Division of Cell & Molecular Biology finally agreed to meet with Joe and Deena on 2 March, 2011. Niki reviewed the situation of each PhD student in regard to funding, supervision and project direction. At that point Joe and I were both happy that all PhD students, bar one, were well informed and adequate if not exceedingly beneficial arrangements had been made. Joe followed up on the one student we felt was inadequately informed. (The student was not fully aware of the possibility that the student's supervisor may not be able to supervise the student through completion.) This student is now fully aware of the situation and a new primary supervisor has been agreed.
 - b. The restructure led Life Sciences to cancel an MSc in Plant Science for both academic years: 2010/11 & 2011/12. Prospective students for the 2010/11 academic-year were given the option to do an MRes and many of them took it up (~10-20 students). The large number of MRes students has put PhD students and Post Docs under more pressure, as they are the ones whose shoulders the practical teaching usually falls upon. PhD students' opinion was "understanding", but they are happy to hear that there will be less MRes students next year.
3. Transferable Skills Review
 - a. After many meetings with sparse direction from above a document that summarises Imperial "Graduate Attributes" has been passed.
 - b. The Diploma of Imperial College (DIC), which previously was given as a badge of an Imperial postgraduate degree, is being considered as a badge of transferable skills accomplishments: It would be supported by a transcript stating the courses that a student has completed. Students can also achieve Merits for activities that lead to acquisition of transferable skills, such as being a student representative.
 - c. A humanities option, which aims to stimulate Imperial Undergrads to think about, discuss and form opinions on global issues, is being developed.
4. Feedback Campaign
 - a. There is no change in the timing of Feedback that some MSc students are receiving. The GSA would like to action the DPE to do a survey on MSc feedback timing to bring new emphasis to the problem.

5. Individual with Supervisor Issue:

- a. A student, who asked me not to share her identity, contacted me. I emailed her back to explain that it would be better if she meet with the DPE to get specific info that she requested and asked if I could pass on her name, but she never emailed back. What should I do?

Welfare Issues

1. Accommodation

- a. PhD & Masters students met with Jane Neary, Head of Commercial Services, John Anderson, Chief Executive Officer of the College Fund, Denis Wright, Dean of Students, and Andrew George, Director of GSLSM to voice their disapproval of the price of a studio flat in the new GradPad accommodation called Griffon Studios. The session turned very informative for John Anderson as he took notes on the type of accommodation that postgrads would prefer for a price and location they could live with.
- b. In March students received an advert from the college, which referred to a Griffon Studio flat as "affordable". I emailed Jane Neary within a week suggesting that they advertise the flats as "luxurious accommodation". She promised to take the comments to the college fund and inform the GSA on how they decided to change their advertising in light of the feedback.
- c. PG students have voiced concerns over safety in the area where Griffon Studios are located. The only response that we have received is that there will be 24-hour concierge service, a site management team, resident access control & CCTV monitoring. GSA members do not regard this as sufficient, since the main problem is walking from public transport to the entrance and we have informed Jane Neary, however she has not responded to this issue.

2. Catering

- a. PhD and Masters students met with Jemma Morris, Head of Catering on 4/4/11. The discussion ranged from healthy food, to serving sizes to later opening hours.

3. Postgrad Funding

- a. The GSA Dep Rep AWC has agreed on questions for a student survey, which aims to raise awareness for students as to what documentation they hold as well as collect data on bursaries. Annoyingly, it has not gone out to the student body because Deena has not taken the time to put the questions into a survey format.

4. Ethos Gym

- a. A number of Postgrads have called for changes in the way Ethos charges them. The GSA would like to action the DPW to take on their issues.

Structural Issues:

1. New GSA Officers

- a. Thomas (Tom) Luth (Engineering), Sadia Ahmed (Life Sciences), Edward (Ned) Yoxall (Physical Sciences), Michael Weatherburn (Humanities), Tariq bin Hendi (Business), Helen (Allie) Shaw (Treasurer)

2. Resigned GSA Officers

- a. Sherin Cao (Engineering), Joseph McKenna (Life Sciences), Neki Patel (Physical Sciences), Llewellyn Thomas (Business & Treasurer)

3. Budgeting

- a. The GSA President spent a lot of time developing budget applications for RWB and Exec. Disturbingly, the budgeting meetings that followed were deconstructive.

4. GSA Forum
 - a. Waiting for Union SysAdmin to set it up, so that GSA Reps can start listing Transferable Skills courses on it and get students to input their real opinions about the courses that they have taken.
5. GSA Finances
 - a. The GSA has a new Treasurer, Allie Shaw, who is painstakingly going through past GSA events and expense claims to balance the books (actually create a booking system) so that the GSA can spend money with a clear knowledge of the bottom line.
6. GSA Awards
 - a. Thanks to Mark Collins, GSA Awards Nominations for 2011 are now open, link from the GSA homepage: www.imperialcollegeunion.org/gsa
7. GSA Elections
 - a. Nominations open 23/5/11 –
 - b. All GSA members can both run and vote for positions as appropriate.
 - c. All final year Imperial Undergraduate students are allowed to run for GSA Officer and Coordinator Positions (this was decided to be appropriate by Union Exec based on the assumption that only UGs who thought they would be here next year will run.)
 - d. All final year Imperial Undergraduate students who have applied for and been accepted for places on postgrad study at Imperial, plus any who are running for a position are allowed to vote.
8. GSA Constitution
 - a. Still under construction. The main holdup is how to set reasonable quorum expectations for GSA Council meetings and how to make MSC representation effective.
9. Graduate Schools Restructure
 - a. The Management Committees and ATCs are merging. Many B list GSLSM courses will become A list.
 - b. PhD course reviews will be separated from the current PQCs while the two GSEPS and GSLSM PQCs for MSc courses will remain separate.

GSA Events/Activities:

1. GSA Badminton (25/01/11 +3 in March & April)
 - a. Alex Wray, a PhD student in Engineering stepped up to help organise postgraduate badminton sessions in collaboration with the Badminton Club. After building a substantial group of interested postgrads by holding PG-only sessions, the summer saw a merge of the two groups with a special £10 membership offer from the Badminton Club.
2. GSA Pub Quiz
 - a. Nicholas Hughes has taken on the responsibility of advertising the GSA pub quiz in a timely manner.
3. GSA Cinema Night with Cinema Soc (17/2/11)
 - a. Over 70 students attended, popcorn & soda pop were free and the profit was split 50:50 between GSA and Cinema Soc. This event was a success!
4. PG Spring Mingle
 - a. Despite the Events Team doing a great job in response to PGs requests for a chill out area and more ways to mix with other students, alas, it seemed too late in the year. With only 70+ tickets sold before the event and about the same on the door, Metric seemed empty and most PGs were found hanging with the undergrads in 568. At least we have dispelled the myth that PGs don't like to hang out with UGs.

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5. Charing X Mingle
 - a. Active Medicine Reps, Jonny and Nazeeha, organised a local pub meet. With 12 attendees, it marks a good start to building a campus community.
6. Rugby League
 - a. Sport Imperial is pushing this, but only two postgrads have contacted me to show any interest.
7. Football
 - a. Conversations with Anthony Hennelly of Sport Imperial indicate that it should be easy to start an intramural tournament, but it needs someone to lead the advertising campaign.

Meetings:

1. Union Council (14/2/11, 14/3/11)
2. Union RWB (20/01/11, 12/5/11)
3. Union Exec (27/01/11, 9/2/11, 10/3/11, 23/3/11, 18/4/11)
4. GSLSM MC (16/02/11)
5. GSLSM PQC (03/02/11, 1/4/11, 6/4/11)
6. GSLSM ATC (11/02/11, 18/5/11)
7. GSEPS MC (25/3/11,)
8. GSEPS PQC (24/01/11, 4/03/11)
9. GSEPS ATC (18/02/11)
10. College Transferable Skills Review Committee (24/01/11, 23/3/11, 16/5/11)
11. College TS MSc or PhD Working Party (24/02/11, 6/5/11)
12. ULU PG Network meeting (24/01/11, 28/02/11, 9/5/11)
13. GSA Exec (10/5/11)
14. GSA Dep Rep AWC (future Council) (08/02/11, 5/4/11)
15. GSA PGT AWC meeting (15/3/11)
16. GSA Events Team meeting (07/02/11)
17. GSA Colours Committee (11/5/11)