

Council
1st May 2012

Council Report - GSA

Report from GSA President – Robert Tang

Here is a summary of what the GSA is working on:

1. GSA Elections 2012

Elections for next academic year's GSA executive committee were held before Easter, at the same time as elections for Sabbatical Officers and the rest of other Faculty Unions. While PG voting rate has improved from last year's union elections, we have seen low participation from people who wish to stand as election candidates. We have filled 2 out of the 14 positions available in our executive committee:

Election results -

Natasha Strydom – GSA Vice President elect

Chun Wang Nicholas Ng – AWO Engineering elect

There will be another election for vacant GSA positions in the coming term (and another in September/October to attract new Masters Students), this will be organised in coordination with the second round elections at the union to maximise exposure and attract people to run. PGs are often deterred to run or have resigned from GSA positions due to workload and lack of incentives. Take this election for example, commitments of 3-hour Graduate School Committee meetings, often 2-hour Union meetings plus GSA meetings have successfully scared off our GSA President candidate, a 3rd year PhD student who withdrawn in the elections as he did not think he could cope as he found out more about the unpaid role. The GSA will try hard to promote the upcoming elections. GSA has undergone internal restructuring and added new role such as Representation Officer to allow better communication between ourselves with the College and the Union. In the long run, I believe postgrads at the College would be greatly benefited to have someone dedicated working full time at the Union for better PG experience. We will be targeting the President, Secretary, Treasurer positions in particular in the upcoming election as we need those for there to be a GSA next year.

2. Postgraduate accommodation and Closure of Clayponds Halls of residence/ changes to Holland Bar

We are aware that our members have become concerned after Felix reported the potential closure of Clayponds Halls of residence and Holland Bar at South Kensington campus. The GSA has been actively working on these issues, in the past months we have been communicating closely with the Union President and the College, including meetings with the Director of Commercial Services. As these issues generated high levels of students interest, the GSA held a PG panel discussion session on accommodation with an update from the Union President regarding the Clayponds/Holland Bar issue in March. The Union has launched the PG survey, which the GSA is still waiting to hear back results of the complete survey. On both issues, we are disappointed at (1) the College on the misrepresentation of results of our focus group last year which there was an overwhelming support/ demand for cheaper and affordable accommodation and suggesting expensive studios, and not even as close as UG accommodation for the same fee, is what majority of students want; (2) the continued lack of, or none, information the GSA receives throughout the issues; (3) the GSA was left in a position to disclose

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these proposed changes to student; (4) lack of student involvement in these projects; (5) we strongly regrets the decision to close of Clayponds as it provided cheaper options for PGs; (6) proposed bursary £25/week is not even enough to compensate the rise in accommodation fees next year at Orient house; (7) we hope to see the PG accommodation survey to be launched as the soonest possible date. I have expressed my concerns that the Union and the College have happened to work around the GSA on these issues, which are both very important to PGs, to the Union President elect and hopes the same does not repeat next year. We are exhausted and spent so much time this year on fetching information and I am at times frustrated as there were no information to be conveyed to reps who have repeatedly asked for information. Aleksandra Turp, GSA Services Officer, is now leading PG student representation on these issues and have met with the Rector about Clayponds. We hope to provide the committee an update at the next meeting.

3. Securing GSA budget for 2012/2013

The GSA submitted its budget application for next academic year, with increased provisions of funding for publicity and organisation of PG events next year to attract students and to raise the GSA and the Union's profile with PG students - which is desperately needed. We received around the same amount as last year, however this is still less than what other Faculty Unions receives (GSA is classed as a Faculty union at the union), and given the PG's population is around 50% of College and have seen an increase in student number, we hope to see a corresponding increase in funding for the GSA to allow us to build on successes with new events (e.g. screening of PhD movie and GSA Mingles and Talent night) for the rest of this year.

4. Academic and welfare representation

Members of the GSA executive committee will continue to attend Graduate School and Union meetings this term. AWOs will hold academic and welfare committees to collect issues from department and course reps. We are still in preliminary discussion with the Graduate school of creating postgraduate space and GSA working space as well as the new accommodation being built at new campus (Imperial West). We welcome the union's new 'Rep week' initiative. AWOs will provide updates on issues in the next report

5. GSA Newsletter, GSA Forum and GSA Wiki

The GSA is working progressively to improve means of communications with our members, especially PGs based on medical campuses who often feel distant from the happenings at Union and College. We have been banned from the union mailing lists earlier and now every message we wish to convey to our members are now effectively now under censorship. As well as promoting our new Forum and Wiki platforms, we may start advertising our newsletter in Felix. We truly hope things at the GSA can be done better next year with greater support both from the College and the Union and I wish next year's team the best of luck.