MEMO

To: Tram Ng
From: Lela Jacobsohn
Chair, GAPSA

Date: May 1, 2006

Re: GAPSA Status Report for May 3, 2006 University Council Meeting

GAPSA – Provost’s Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation

• As reported previously, GAPSA and the Provost created a competitive program for graduate and professional student-conceived interdisciplinary projects that includes an awarded summer fellowship, jointly funded by GAPSA and the Office of the Provost. GAPSA is pleased to announce that we have received 70 applications from 10 schools, many of which are team-projects with students across both graduate groups and schools. The large number of applications, in the first year of the award, reaffirms that Penn graduate and professional students’ commitment to interdisciplinary research and education and the need for a program of this type for the graduate student community. The selection committee is currently reviewing the applications. Awardees will be announced mid-May on the websites of GAPSA and the Office of the Provost as well as in the Almanac.

Community Building Activities

• Our annual GAPSA Boat Cruise on the Spirit of Philadelphia along the Delaware River welcomed 500 students from all twelve graduate and professional schools on April 1st. The cruise started at 11 pm and the dancing went on until 4 am in the morning.

• GAPSA hosted an on-campus happy hour with School of Design on April 10th. More than 500 students representing all twelve graduate and professional schools enjoyed a barbecue on the Design School patio.

• We hosted one of our lunch gatherings at Pod which sold out in two hours to 60 students. The lunch brought together students from 8 different schools and provided an intimate setting for students from different disciplines to interact with each other.

• GAPSA members, Penn graduate and professional students, pledged $2,500 as sponsors for the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger's annual Walk Against Hunger. On April 8, despite pouring rain, 14 graduate and professional students from a variety of schools including SAS, Medicine and Nursing joined thousands of Philadelphia-area individuals, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, and service groups in the walk. The Walk Against Hunger brings people together to raise funds that assist struggling families in our region with food. The money raised at the Walk Against Hunger is distributed to organizations throughout Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey that provide food and other services to families and individuals. The walkers kept their spirits up in the rain through good conversation and the knowledge that they were out for a great cause. All of the participants received a care package that included a GAPSA t-shirt, Luna bars and a Penn insignia canvas tote bag.

• This year, as in past years, GAPSA again dedicated time and resources to Rebuilding Together. Rebuilding Together’s mission is to prevent homelessness by partnering with the community to rehabilitate the homes of elderly, disabled, and low-income homeowners so that they may continue to live in warmth, safety, and independence. GAPSA adopted a home and recruited over 100 graduate and professional student volunteers from across nearly all 12 graduate schools to assist in improving
the quality of life of one homeowner and her young son. GAPSA members also continued with their annual support of $5,000 to Rebuilding Together again this year. The Rebuilding Together effort is led by MBA students from the Wharton School, and in aggregate, 16 homes were adopted this year, bringing the total homes renovated in Philadelphia to 680 over the past 18 years. More information is available at http://www.gapsa.upenn.edu/Rebuild/index.htm and http://www.rebuildingphilly.org/

- As part of GAPSA’s Rebuilding Together efforts, on March 31st, GAPSA’s Student Programs Committee in conjunction with the Civic House hosted a walking tour of West Philadelphia followed by a reflection/discussion session. There were more than fifteen graduate students in attendance including students from Law, Graduate School of Education and Annenberg School for Communication. Following a self-guided walking tour of Southwest Philadelphia, Civic House's Associate Director, Alison LaLond facilitate a lunch discussion about the conditions in West Philadelphia and the attendees' experience with Rebuilding Together over pizza and soda provided by GAPSA. This is one of the few programs Civic House has organized specific to graduate and professional students. GAPSA and the participants were delighted to participate in a Civic House program organized specifically for graduate and professional students, and GAPSA hopes to collaborate with the Civic House for similar programs in the future.

**Graduate and Professional Development Campaign Priorities**

- GAPSA presented to Provost Daniels their report on graduate and professional student priorities for the coming University development campaign. The report was created in consultation with the GAPSA general assembly and other graduate student leaders. The ranked priorities are: (1) Endowment of the Graduate Student Center building and programming; (2) Graduate Student and Family Housing; (3) the creation of a Graduate College, an intellectual and social community residence; (4) the creation of a graduate/professional student child care grant subsidy fund. Further priorities that ranked evenly are: the creation of research funds for graduate student-led projects; endowment of graduate and professional student travel grants; graduate and professional scholarships for international students; and the creation of a graduate and professional development & alumni relations position.

**GAPSA Support of the Graduate Student Center**

- In recent years, graduate and professional students have requested a late night study space during the Reading Days and Finals. This year, GAPSA has provided financial support totaling $3,500 in order to extend the hours of the Graduate Student Center between April 24th and May 3rd. GAPSA is also providing funding for free food and massages to provide relief to graduate and professional students from the stresses of finals.

**GAPSA and the Students with Dependents Fellow**

- In the spring of 2005, GAPSA and GSAC requested funding from the Provost’s office for the creation of a “Students with Dependents” (SWD) Fellow to serve graduate, professional and undergraduate students with dependents, and the Provost responded with full support. The fellow was placed under the supervision of the director of the Graduate Student Center and representatives from GAPSA and GSAC. The goals of this position included compiling resources in and around the Penn’s campus, to work to foster a sense of community among students with dependents, and to offer one-on-one consultation about individual resources on an as-needed basis.

- The SWD fellow position was very successful and aided GAPSA’s ongoing efforts to advocate on behalf of the needs this constituency. The primary outcome of the fellowship position was the SWD website, which serves as a portal (www.gsc.upenn.edu/swd) to frequently asked questions, family friendly events, childcare, school and healthcare information. This website not only serves current students with dependents, but has further highlighted Penn’s family-friendly policies to students who
are considering beginning a family while in school. Additionally, this site serves a resource to perspective students who are considering Penn for graduate and professional study. In addition to creation of the website, the SWD fellow was available to consult with students around specific issues and questions, and identify existing and create family-friendly programming.

- GAPSA, along with its partners, GSAC and the Graduate Student Center, requested and received a $1,200 programming grant from the Provost’s Office to further student with dependent resources and activities in the 2006-07 academic year.

GAPSA Professional Student Travel Grants

- This year GAPSA created for the first time a Professional Student Travel Grant program to support professional students (those students not pursuing a PhD or research masters [MS, MPhil] degree) at Penn in their travel to promote scholarship and professional expertise. Previously, supplementary funding for travel grants had been available only to doctorate and research students. Recognizing that an important aspect of a professional student’s education is the knowledge, skills, and networks gained at conferences and that providing students the resources necessary to take advantage of these opportunities is critical, GAPSA allocated $5,000 for conference funding for professional students.

- In the two months since the announcement of the grant program, GAPSA reviewed over 30 applications and funded 20 professional students from six schools, fully depleting our travel grant budget. Demonstrating the demand for this funding and the quality of the applications, GAPSA recently asked the Provost for supplementary funding for professional student travel grants in the next academic year. GAPSA gives its thanks to the Provost for agreeing to provide professional student travel funding in partnership with school-based conference funding.

GAPSA and OIP International Alumni Mentoring Initiative

- GAPSA Chair Lela Jacobsohn and Vice Chair for Student Representation-elect Tony Lambino met with Assistant Provost for International Affairs JoAnn McCarthy and several Alumni Relations representatives to discuss ways how international students can receive mentoring assistance in their home countries before they arrive at Penn. GAPSA requested a program where incoming students are paired with an alumnus from their home country in the months prior to their arrival at Penn so they would have someone to ask questions and help them be more prepared for the details of Penn life and the Philadelphia environment. Subsequently, the mentoring relationship could last throughout the international student’s time at Penn and even further into the future. Detailed planning is in progress for this initiative.

GAPSA partnering with the Vice Provost for University Life and Cultural Resource Centers

- In the February meeting of GAPSA and other graduate student leaders, the Trustee members of the Trustee Student Life Committee, the VPUL, the University Secretary, Office of the Provost, and the Graduate Student Center director, graduate students communicated their desire for the University to take a greater role in community building among graduate and professional students as well as a need for the cultural resource centers and other University resource and support services to give increased attention to addressing the specific and diverse needs of graduate and professional students.

- In response to these outcomes in part, the Vice Provost for University Life invited leaders of GAPSA, BGAPSA, LaGAPSA and GSAAM as well as directors of PAACH, Greenfield Intercultural Center and La Casa Latina to discuss how cultural resource centers can better serve the graduate and professional student community. As a result of this meeting, a workshop is scheduled for the end of May with the leaders of GAPSA, minority graduate student group leaders, cultural resource center directors, VPUL staff members, and the Graduate Student Center director. In advance of this workshop, graduate leaders will provide their priorities for the coming academic year, and based on those, during the workshop, participants will together develop a plan for how VPUL can meet the
diverse needs of graduate and professional students, including programming ideas. GAPSA is looking forward to working with VPUL and the cultural resource centers.

**GAPSA’s efforts to create a Ph.D. Teaching Certificate**

- GAPSA leadership in partnership with the Office of the Provost and the School of Arts & Sciences’ Center for Teaching and Learning worked this year to establish a university level program to encourage graduate students to pursue additional preparation as university teachers and give such students official recognition of their teaching credentials. The rationale behind the offering of the Ph.D. teaching certificate is to formally acknowledge graduate students’ participation in programs designed to train future faculty. The teaching certificate will provide a structure in which interested graduate students can hone their teaching skills, initiate reflective practices, and gain additional knowledge about teaching and learning. The Penn Ph.D. teaching certificate will be accompanied by notation on the transcript, will be administered by the Center for Teaching and Learning beginning in the fall, and has been funded by the Provost for the next two years.

**GAPSA’s Darfur Resolution**

- GAPSA supports the victims and refugees of Darfur and wishes to aid their cause. On April 5, 2006 the GAPSA General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution brought forth by our Social Responsibility Policy Group asking the University to commit publicly to divestment from Sudan, specifically from holdings in seven multinational corporations, including Bentini, Higleig, Hi-Tech Petroleum, Nam Fatt, ONGC, PetroChina and Sinopec, considered the principle revenue sources for the Sudanese government’s military build-up.

**GAPSA Advocacy for Improved Pottruck Center Membership and Fee Options**

- GAPSA is pleased to announce that graduate and professional students are going to have various payment and membership options in the 2006-2007 academic year. GAPSA has worked with the Pottruck Center and the Provost throughout the fall and spring semesters to advocate for improved and more flexible payment options. Next year, graduate and professional students will have the additional option of paying for a fitness center membership with automatic monthly withdrawals from a VISA or Mastercard or their checking accounts. This will allow the graduate and professional students to spread out their payments over the term of their fitness center membership. Other payment options include full payment of the membership fee at the time of enrollment as well as through University of Pennsylvania payroll for qualified applicants. Additionally, annual membership fees will be pro-rated so that members receive the most out of their membership fees, even if initiating their membership after the start of the school year.

**GAPSA Executive Board Elections**

- GAPSA Executive Board elections were held on March 22nd and were very successful. The incoming GAPSA Board consists of:
  
  - Chair - Lee Shaker, Annenberg;
  - Vice Chair - Joung Lee, SAS;
  - Vice Chair for Finance – Hana Oh, SEAS;
  - Vice Chair for Internal Affairs – Shih-Wen (Wenny) Lin, Medicine;
  - Vice Chair for Policy – Scott Brodsky, SAS;
  - Vice Chair for Student Representation – Tony Lambino, Annenberg;
  - Vice Chair for Student Programs – Erin McPherson, Nursing;
  - Vice Chair for Social Activities – Hadi Ghazzouli, Dental;
  - Vice Chair for Public Relations – Jason Tocci, Annenberg.

The newly elected students take office on May 1st, while the current board holds its council and committee positions throughout the end of the school year.