MEMO

To: Tram Ng
From: Lela Jacobsohn
Chair, GAPSA

Re: GAPSA Status Report for March 29, 2006 University Council Meeting

Interdisciplinary Opportunities

• GAPSA-Provost’s Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation: Recently Provost Ron Daniels and GAPSA Chair Lela Jacobsohn announced a new competitive award program for graduate and professional student-conceived interdisciplinary projects. The GAPSA-Provost’s Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation encourages the collaboration of student scholars from different University departments and/or schools and includes a summer fellowship, jointly funded by GAPSA and the Office of the Provost, for a select group of students.

“GAPSA has been striving to foster interdisciplinary study and work among graduate and professional students and to identify additional, especially summer, funding sources for students. The Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation not only achieves both of these important goals but also advances the principles set forth in the Penn Compact,” said GAPSA Chair Jacobsohn. “It’s a tremendous accomplishment for GAPSA, and more significantly, it’s a phenomenal opportunity for graduate and professional students.”

“These new grants reinforce several key values we hold in high regard at Penn,” said Provost Daniels. “The integration of knowledge across disciplines is becoming increasingly vital in almost every major field of study. Increasing access—opportunity—for students to pursue their scholarly ambitions is another valuable consequence of these awards. Finally, it’s my hope that these fellowships will contribute to an enhanced sense of collaboration and cooperation between scholars and schools.”

The Award program will enable graduate and professional students to integrate knowledge across academic disciplines and engage in a project of their own design to explore, research, and act on critical societal issues. To overcome the barrier of financial support, students will be selected, based on the quality of their application and their funding status, to receive a $2,000 monthly fellowship from June through August for this work.

The deadline for completed applications is Monday, April 17, 2006. For more details, please see www.gapsa.upenn.edu; the information is also linked from the Office of the Provost, the Graduate Studies, and the Penn Compact websites.

• Taking Classes Out of Your School: GAPSA and the Graduate Student Center hosted its second Taking Classes Out of Your School event to promote student involvement in Penn’s commitment to interdisciplinary studies on March 15th. Representatives from the Graduate School of Education, School of Social Policy and Practice, and the College of General Studies overviewed their programs for 25 students.

Personal Finance Series

• In connection to GAPSA’s efforts throughout the year to work with TIAA/Cref for retirement planning and with Craig Carnaroli for mortgage programs, GAPSA, in collaboration with the Graduate Student Center, created a Personal Finance Series for graduate and professional students. We recently held two events; Retirement Planning with a representative from TIAA-CREF on March 21st and First-Time Home Buying with Stefany Jones, director of Office of Community
Housing and a loan officer on March 23rd. Both were highly successful and extremely well attended, attracting almost 100 students in total.

Outreach to and Advocacy for International Students

• GAPSA recently held its International Students’ Forum, which was very fruitful in identifying and confirming key issues for this graduate student population. From this and other outreach activities, GAPSA prepared a report for the Provost’s office of challenges faced by International students and potential solutions. In a meeting with Provost Ron Daniels, Deputy Provost Janice Bellace, and Assistant Provost for International Affairs JoAnn McCarthy, and Interim Director, International Students and Scholars Sheila Gardner, GAPSA leaders raised critical Penn-level issues such as – orientation, short-term housing upon arrival to Penn and Philly, need for community integration – as well as Federal level issues, which were communicated to the President as well. The Office of International Programs has already begun to respond to these issues, and a follow-up meeting with the Provost’s office is planned for mid- to late-April, in addition to a meeting on building up the connection of international alumni, current and prospective students is planned for early April with Office of Alumni Relations.

Community-Building Activities

• We recently hosted one of our dinner nights at Continental which sold out in two hours to 30 students representing 6 schools. We are also holding a similar lunch event at Pod on April 10, and tickets go in sale April 3rd. Finally, the cherished GAPSA Boat Cruise on the Spirit of Philadelphia along the Delaware River is on April 1st for approximately 500 students.

Community-Building and Service Activities

• GAPSA members, Penn graduate and professional students, pledged approximately $2,500 as sponsors for the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger’s annual Walk Against Hunger. On April 8, approximately 50 graduate and professional students will join 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.

• 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. 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/.

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;
  Treasurer – Hana Oh, SEAS;
Secretary – 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 will take office on May 1st, while the current board holds its council and committee positions throughout the end of the school year.