

GSC Board of Directors Meeting
May 2, 2002
North Catalina Recreation Room

The meeting began at 12:05 pm.

ATTENDANCE

Directors Present:

José Mumburu, Harish Bhat, Ying Gong, John Choi, Steve Pracko, Matthew Sumner, Heather Cox, Ben Herbert, Alex Tobias, Chris Veazey, Jason Cohen, Mike Fleming, Florian Gstrein, Mike Johnson, Jeff Bergthorson, Fok-Yan Leung , Tim Lesko, Graeme Smith.

Directors Absent:

Ileana Carpen, Deepshika Datta, Terrell Neal, Theofilos Strinopoulos

Guests Present:

Melissa Soriano (coffeehouse), Alvaro Masias (Totem)

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

A. Introduction of Guests and New Directors.

B. Additions to the Agenda.

Point 6 (under “Announcements”) about the proposed wall on the Beckman lawn was added to the agenda. A point about forming a housing committee was also added to the agenda and was covered in the Housing and Internet Committee report.

C. Approval of the Minutes of February, March, and April

The minutes for March were approved (with one abstention).

ACTION ITEMS

1. Election of GSC Officers

José Mumburu announced the results of the election, which were

Chairman: Matthew ‘Chip’ Sumner [Favor 15; Oppose 0, Abstain 1]

Vice chairman: Michael Fleming [Favor 15; Oppose 0, Abstain 1]

Social Director: Jeff Bergthorson [Favor 13; Oppose 0, Abstain 3]

Treasurer: Alex Tobias [Favor 14; Oppose 0, Abstain 2]

Secretary: OPEN

Executive Director: Florian Gstrein [Favor 15; Oppose 1, Abstain 0]

José then ceded the “chair of power” to Chip, as the new GSC chairman.

2. Guest Requests

The guests were heard from at this point.

a. TOTEM

TOTEM wanted to know how many copies of the 2001-2002 issue the GSC would like to buy, so that they can make arrangements with the printers. They don't have a final quotation from the printers, but they believe the magazines will cost \$1.50/copy. Last year we bought 600, which was an overestimate of demand. (Voting was done later and is detailed under Point 13, "Vote on TOTEM Funding.")

b. Coffeehouse

The coffeehouse is planning a large party for May 17. They would like \$300 (and have already been approved for \$250), mostly to cover the purchase of alcohol. The turnout for last year's party was quite good (about 600 people, 50% of whom were graduate students). Last year they received \$300 from us and \$300 from ASCIIT, and had the appropriate amount of alcohol for the party; they would like to do the same this year. (Voting was done later and is detailed under Point 3 in Announcements, "Vote on Coffeehouse Funding.")

3. Appointment of new GRB Chair and Secretary

John Choi was appointed as the new GRB chair and Isaac Chenchiah was appointed as the new GRB secretary. All votes were in favor; one abstention occurred in each vote.

4. Election Certification

The results of the election were certified by the board of directors, with fifteen votes for the certification and two against. The certification was suggested because of concern about the legality of e-mail elections (further addressed under Point 7, "Updating the Bylaws").

5. Position of Secretary of the GSC

The position of secretary was vacant due to an overwhelming lack of interest in the job. Several solutions for this problem were proposed in the agenda. Heather Cox volunteered to become the new secretary and was voted in with one abstention.

6. Presentation to the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has decided to begin having "themes" at their meetings, and the theme of their next meeting (on May 14) will be the quality and experience of student life at Caltech. They plan to give the undergrads and the graduate students half an hour each to talk to the Board about student life. Florian and Chip met with Parandeh Kia on May 1 to discuss the presentation, and reported that the GSC should participate in the presentation.

There was much discussion of what exactly should be addressed in the trustee meeting. Heather suggested that all students be notified of the meeting, so

that they can respond to the GSC if they have concerns they want to air. José asked whether the trustees would actually care about the quality of student life, as they seemed to be happily going along with the changes implemented by the administration. Jason suggested we focus on the financial changes and talk about how these changes could be better implemented with student input.

This brought us to the communication barrier between students and administration. Florian mentioned how difficult it is to meet with President Baltimore, and Fok suggested that we have a place on the working groups. Even if we can't do this, it would be nice to have our desire to do so noted. Other schools often have students sit on groups in a voting capacity; we might be able to sit on groups as observers, as well. Jeff noted that the budget can be cut in ways that do not harm students, but that communication with the students is necessary for this to occur. We do not want to present a laundry list of specific problems to the administration; ideally, we can discuss broader issues and have a laundry list handy to back up any specific points or answer questions from the trustees.

Alex, Steve, Heather, Jason, and Chip volunteered to help with the presentation to the Board; other interested students are also welcome. Chip mentioned that there were issues brought up at the meeting with Parandeh that he hadn't heard about before, such as problems with the Caltech day care facilities. (Apparently they cost \$800/month, have an extremely long waiting list, and are in general impossible for students to use.) Jason asked whether this problem had been dealt with through the appropriate channels and mentioned that we should not waste this opportunity to talk directly to the trustees on issues that have not risen through the system.

We hope to have an email to graduate students sent out within the next day or two, soliciting their input.

7. **Updating the Bylaws**

Chip suggested we update our bylaws to ensure the legality of our proceedings and moved to create a bylaw subcommittee to examine the bylaws. The reasons for this were

- a. typographic errors and contradictions;
- b. ambiguous wording in sections;
- c. electronic communication is not mentioned.

Other reasons included in the agenda were to institute policy changes of the BOD and to examine the section on indemnification. The motion passed with one absention and one opposed vote. Jason, Mike, Chip, Graeme, and Fok volunteered for the subcommittee.

After the vote, there was some discussion of the need for bylaw changes. José mentioned that the ambiguous wording of the bylaws also allowed for flexibility on the part of the GSC, and suggested that binding future incarnations of the GSC to rules that are convenient for us might not be a good idea. He also felt that continually changing the bylaws is not a good idea, as they have remained relatively untouched for some time, and wondered about any legal impact changes might have. Chip said that any changes should be checked with Caltech's legal counsel before being implemented, and Fok mentioned that the

bylaws are almost completely procedural (and so should reflect our procedures). Jason said that many groups with bylaws revisit their bylaws on an annual or biannual basis, to make sure that they are current. The bylaw committee will be revisiting the bylaws, regardless.

8. Approval of the Annual Report

José sent out the annual report prior to the meeting. It was excellent work – José mentioned that slight revisions had already been sent to him and implemented. The report was approved with one abstention.

9. Search for VP of Student Affairs (VPSA) Continues

Chip is the student representative on the search committee for a new VPSA. He is bound by the strictest vows of confidentiality, but revealed to us that they have decided to seek a full-time VPSA (in the past it has been a part-time position taken on by faculty members). This person might be a professor or might be a full-time administrator before being hired for this position. Chip feels that there are communication problems between professors and full-time administrators which have created problems for previous VPSAs. Baltimore's ideal candidate would be someone who was a graduate of Caltech (on the undergraduate or graduate level), obtained their Ph.D., became a professor or worked in Student Affairs as their career, and then was willing to take on this position.

Jason suggested that the GSC bind Chip to automatically oppose any non-faculty member. This sparked a great deal of discussion. José pointed out that Sharyn Slavin-Miller, Kevin Austen, and Parandeh Kia are all people who are full-time administrators and look out for students; however, others suggested that these people might not be taken seriously by the current administration because they lack professorial credentials. Opinion was mixed on whether the new hire should be a professor or not. Tim mentioned that Chip should not have restrictions imposed on him. Jason said that it was not optimal, but the GSC was prohibited from finding out what was going on (because of the confidentiality agreement) and should be able to have input. Fok agreed with Tim, stating that Chip was picked and that we will have to trust his judgment among the candidates. Steve asserted that whoever is hired for the position will need to be able to rouse students to action. Jason asked whether the search will remain open until the ideal candidate is found; Chip confirmed that the search is open.

10. Lab Review

Ben is currently the Lab Review editor, but he will be leaving in mid-July and needs someone else to take over the post. The position is paid (\$400). The work that needs to be done is to keep in contact with the Alumni Association and the Graduate office to make sure new graduates get surveyed, and to develop an on-line database where the survey results can be archived and appended to those of previous years. It is important to find a new editor before Ben leaves, so that they can learn what needs to be done. Ben will place an advertisement in the GSC Newsletter to find candidates.

11. Students who do not pay their rent

There are about 15 students who owe Caltech \$5,000-\$15,000 on their student accounts (essentially an interest-free loan). Florian suggested that financial responsibility is an educational goal of Caltech. If students are intentionally not clearing their balance to benefit from the interest-free loan, this could be a violation of the Honor Code. Isaac (the GRB secretary) said that this might be a case of taking unfair advantage of the administration. Florian proposed that students meet with Dean Kiewiet to discuss their situations and attempt to work out a payment plan. Also, Florian suggested that the Bursar's office provide financial counseling for students who cannot pay their bill, and that the Bursar not introduce a financial penalty at this point.

Jeff asked how a student making \$1500 per month could pay down a balance of \$15,000. He also asked how the Bursar can allow this sort of situation to occur. Alex asked whether students can still register if they have an outstanding balance on their student accounts and how other schools have solved this problem. José mentioned that if the Bursar does not allow students to register because of overdue balances, student visas can be suspended, which creates a lot of difficulty for international students given the current political climate. Jason said that for Catalina residents, the problem will be addressed; if a student has not paid off their balance (including their Catalina rent) Linda will not allow them to be in the lottery. Jason said that the GRB could look at the situation to see whether an Honor Code violation had occurred, but that if there was no violation, the GRB's task would then be over (that is, the GRB cannot be responsible for financial counseling). He also mentioned that this does seem to take unfair advantage of other Caltech community members and that the issue should be addressed.

People generally seemed satisfied with the proposed plan of action (have offenders talk to Dean Kiewiet, suggest that the Bursar offer financial counseling to those who need it, and try to keep people from intentionally taking out interest-free loans).

12. Alumni Association Seminar Day Poster

Seminar Day occurs on May 18, and the GSC was invited to present a poster about its activities to the Alumni. No one volunteered to create a poster, so the GSC will decline the invitation.

13. Vote on TOTEM funding

There was some discussion of how many copies of TOTEM we needed (how many were taken last year, etc.). Tim said that we had budgeted \$350 for TOTEM and moved to give them that amount. Jason proposed a counter-motion (a procedural twist) to give them less money than last year, since we had an oversupply. José pointed out that last year the editors of TOTEM had gotten a very good deal on the print run, but that they might not this year. Chip calculated that, at \$1.50 per copy, the \$350 would buy us about 200 copies (down from 600 last year). The motion was then voted on.

The motion to give TOTEM \$350 this year passed with one opposing vote and one abstention.

14. Social Events

Jeff said that he has taken care of most of the organizational details of the Beach Trip, but that he can't make it and another GSC representative should probably go. He also asked for volunteers to organize the Ice Cream Social. Ying volunteered and will take over this task.

15. GSC Newsletter

The newsletter received four letters to the editor this month. They share one common theme: no one was satisfied with what was said in President Baltimore's message last month. The GSC BOD was praised in one of the letters for the work we do in representing graduate student interests.

Steve requested an assistant editor to help out with the newsletter. The job description could change with time, but initially this person's duties would be 1) to be an "enforcer" responsible for getting contributions from both BOD and non-BOD people by the deadline, and 2) acting as a proofreader in addition to what is already done by the graduate office. He/she and Steve can also sit down and brainstorm on any changes to the current design that he/she thinks would be an improvement. He would like to announce the position in the newsletter and split the editor's compensation at \$35/\$15 (\$70/\$30 with next year's bonus). A person with good editing abilities and the persuasive power to obtain articles from people would be ideal. We will aim for having the person start in June.

Steve also suggested that we change the deadline for submissions to the Thursday after the GSC meeting (that is, the second Thursday of the month). This will move the publication of the newsletter back six days, but should give people plenty of time to turn in their submissions.

The motion to install an assistant editor passed unanimously and the deadline for submissions to the newsletter has been changed.

ONGOING ACTION REPORTS

1. Health Committee

Fok gave us an update on the Faculty Health Committee. They are rapidly coming to conclusions and should be discussing the final report next week. It looks like the committee will recommend that:

- Students will be required to pay the entire cost of their health insurance premiums, but their stipends will be adjusted accordingly.
- The deductible will be replaced with a minimal co-pay for each service (essentially allowing people to pay off the deductible in "installments").
- Offer letters to prospective students will include the cost of the health insurance plan, so that they are not fooled into thinking they are getting a substantially higher stipend that is being offered at other schools.

- Additional loans (and perhaps grants) will be available from Caltech to cover students who are stuck in extreme cases (many dependents, expensive medications, etc.). This will probably be more cost-effective than trying to purchase such a high level of insurance that it can cover every "special case."

Fok mentioned that these are tentative recommendations and that the Provost may not follow the committee's recommendations. Also, we need to make sure that stipends are actually increased. The good news: HMO's are not interested in bidding for our health care, as we are too small and too healthy a group of people to make it profitable for them.

José mentioned that currently there is a pilot plan for students with dependents, under which these students can be reimbursed for a fraction of their dependents' health care costs. He wants to be sure that this program is continued in spite of the changes in administration. Jeff asked whether the administration was also planning to raise our stipends enough to cover taxes. Chip said that you can write off medical expenses as a tax deduction, but Jeff said that most of us don't do itemized deductions, and that international students can't do this anyway. It was agreed that the issue of taxes and commensurate salary increases should be addressed by the Health Committee.

2. Housing and Internet Committee

Jason informed us that in three to four years, Caltech will begin destroying the north undergraduate housing and renovating the south houses. They plan to create "swing housing" for them during that time. The swing housing will then turn into graduate student housing. Several locations have been proposed: two blocks north of Avery, and one block south of the Catalinas on Wilson. Jason strongly feels that we need more graduate students on the committee. Right now the housing committee consists of two voting undergraduates, one voting graduate student, and five nonvoting undergraduates. Because graduate students will have a far longer stay in the housing, we should have more input into its design. The undergrads are fond of dormitory-style living and open common areas, and graduate students have very different needs in housing.

Linda has instituted new lottery rules for the Catalina housing lottery, and the lottery is set for May 13.

The project to obtain Ethernet access in the Catalinas has been blocked at the Electric Shop. They don't want to provide a more accurate estimate of how much it will cost to install the infrastructure without being guaranteed of the contract. (They have already provided an estimate accurate to +/- \$25,000.) Jason wanted advice on how to proceed. He was asked whether outside contractors would be willing to provide an estimate. It seems that although outside contractors would be cheaper, Tom Mannion wants to go with the physical plant. Jason was encouraged to talk to the head of physical plant and tell them that the GSC supports his attempt to get the Ethernet installed.

3. Library Committee

Florian told us that the library committee did not meet in April. However, Professor Bronner-Fraser has told the library committee that the faculty discussion of the LTF report will be open to the Caltech community. Florian will step down as graduate student representative to the task force and Lauren Webb will take his place. Professor Kevin Gilmartin, chair of the Library Faculty Committee, has been notified of the change.

4. Status of Wine Tour

Mike told us that the response for the wine tour (scheduled for May 11) has been overwhelming, so he arranged for a 47-person bus instead of the originally scheduled 33-person bus. Seventy-six people expressed interest in going. However, we decided not to rent another bus, because the wineries would not be able to host that many people. Also, since the busses leave at 8 am, the actual turnout is often much lower than the response rate.

5. SIF Proposal

Mike submitted a proposal to SIF for audiovisual equipment for our parties. He asked for \$1300 for a mixer and two CD players. (Mike received permission for funding on May 3.)

6. Status of TA Awards

Theo was going to present on this, but he wasn't around. Something needs to be done about this soon, as the TA awards are mentioned at graduation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Quickfunding Report

No quickfunding was given out this month.

2. CHCC Report

On April 7 we showed Billy Elliot for the movie night. About 35 people came to watch the movie and have the usual pizza and snacks. Linda received the GSC recommendations for changes to the housing lottery procedures and incorporated them as best she could. The housing applications for next year were to be sent out on 4/15, but this was delayed until 4/26. The lottery itself will be held on Monday 5/13.

3. Vote on Coffeehouse Funding

The motion to give the Coffeehouse the extra \$50 for their party passed with one abstention.

4. Turnout of Yuri Night

The bus service that the GSC provided to students going to the Yuri Night party on April 12 went very well. The bus left at from Caltech (the corner of San

Pasqual and Wilson) at 8:30PM with 27 people and returned at 2:15AM with a few more people.

5. Student-Faculty Conference

There were various reports from attendees of the Student-Faculty Conference. Basically, the conference was for undergraduates only (as one participant explicitly stated in response to a question about academic advising for graduate students). This was disappointing because the organizers of the SFC had approached us about making the conference applicable to all students, and we had some graduate students who were willing to help out. The panel on the Honor Code was the only one which talked about graduate students very much, and they did it in a negative fashion: undergraduates were referred to as well-versed in the honor code, and the rest of the Caltech community, led by graduate students, was the opposite.

6. What's with the BI Wall?

Florian brought in pictures of the proposed BI Wall (there was a model in the Beckman Institute). It is a huge, jagged line that slowly grows up out of the grass as it heads toward Wilson, and will run diagonally across the BI lawn. We discussed whether this was mandated by the Eli Broad grant, whether Beckman's original donation of the BI required the lawn to be free of visual obstacles, and whether this was a fight the GSC needed to take on. Jason thought that a certain ratio of sculpture to buildings was required for public spaces. Heather mentioned that she had heard students could write to their department chairs to voice their concerns, and that it might still be cancelled. Tim suggested a motion to mention the wall in the GSC Newsletter next month to inform graduate students of the proposed sculpture. The motion was passed.

The meeting ended at 1:40 pm.