

# MINUTES

Board of Directors Meeting - Graduate Student Council  
Thursday, December 2nd, 2004, 12:00 – 1:45 pm  
Winnett Club Room (Above the Red Door)

**Directors Present:** Amir Sadjadpour, Emily Schaller, Deniz Armani, Andrea Martin, Alex Brown, Graeme Smith, Chip Sumner, Marco Latini, Sidharth Jaggi, Neena Kadaba, Alexei Dvoretzkii, Catherine Ward

**Guests:** Jerry Houser (Career Dev. Center), Miriam Feldblum (Student Affairs), Zhiyi Li (grad student), Steve Pracko (grad student)

## I. PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

### A. Call to Order

Amir called the meeting to order.

### B. Introduction of Guests

Jerry Houser and Miriam Feldblum are here to discuss the vacancies that are opening up in the Career Development Center and how these positions will be filled.

### C. Modifications to the Agenda

None were made at this time

### D. Approval of the November Meeting Minutes (See Attached)

The minutes were approved

**Minutes were approved**

## II. ACTION ITEMS

### A. Steering Committee (Amir Sadjadpour)

#### 1. Career counselor vacancies

Two of the top career counselors of Caltech have resigned and are leaving their positions. We need to work with the PostDoc Association as well as the Career Center to sure the replacements have been well considered and that these positions will be filled soon.

Miriam explained how the Career Center works to serve the needs of graduates, undergraduates and alumni. They are very happy that Amy Malak who is leaving the Career Development Center will still be staying at Caltech. Victoria is leaving Caltech and is going over to the Keck Graduate Institute at Claremont. Career Services is working internally and seeking input from graduate students, post-docs etc. that they serve to help figure out what the type of job description is that they will put out to replace the two people who are leaving.

Amir & Deniz noted that they had been working with Amy and Victoria who are now leaving which is how this was brought to their attention. Amir said that filling the positions soon would be good – they are leaving January. Deniz said that the

Career Center works well. Jerry said that the Career Center evaluates its own strengths and weaknesses. Amy was an associate director and only worked 20 hours per week. They will reexamine if they need an associate director at 20 hours per week – but none of the responsibilities will be dropped. The main concern is that the Career Center keep the counseling appointments. Jerry said he will be picking up some of those. The Career Center is committed to working with PhD's and postdocs. Jerry said if the GSC has suggestions or input that he is happy to hear about it.

Chip asked if the Career Center is planning on reducing the number of counselors and if there are there budget cuts. Miriam said that they are trying to enhance the services, not cut the budget. The goal is to meet student needs while they are here and also doing a lot with alums. 30% of the career center's time is one on one counseling. They are working on how to formulate the position is the question. It really would be useful to have someone at the level of intern. An intern could help out with career fairs and doing tasks that are necessary but take up a lot of time.

Amir noted that Victoria helped him to take care of writing resumes, and the good of it was that since she had been on campus for a good amount of time she knows a lot of alumni who have similar interests etc. This comes from experience so interns cannot really do that.

Miriam noted that you want people who are there long term and there is a question between full-time and part-time. It is good to have a fulltime investment in a center. Jerry said that the challenge with interns is that they are only here for a short time. However, they can work well on specific projects. Often they are good counselors with an undergraduate – usually younger students. For PhD's it is usually better to have somebody who is a little more seasoned.

Alexei said that this makes a lot of sense - that we don't want to see a lot of turnover in terms of career counselors. He explained that you want someone who knows you. He said it is silly that career councilors are setting up tables – that should be left to interns.

Marco asked if there is some mechanism by which we can retain people? Miriam said that Amy worked very heavily with the women mentoring women program and was a real interest for her. She is very happy that the staff faculty consultation center gets Amy. As with Victoria, she is becoming the director of the KGI at Claremont. Amir said that we are excited for her but there is this need at Caltech for counselors. Miriam said that there could be growth opportunities for somebody in the center as well. Jerry said that turnover is not usually a problem in career counselors. Jerry asked if there were any other questions or issues that they should be paying attention to:

Andrea said that a lot of grad students get job offers in the fall and it would be good to have some sort of seminar discussing how to deal with the problem of getting lots of job offers in a short period of time. Jerry said that this happens on an undergraduate level as well – early offers. Andrea said it would be good to have a seminar on how to handle that.

Marco asked if the career center sees a growth of the number of people using their services with the turbulent economic times. Jerry said that in 2000-2001 during the dot com boom a lot more students were checking out dot com. He said that during

the bad economy students tend to put their heads in the sand. You would expect people to use Career Services more but this is not generally what's observed. The post-doc/PhD conference has gotten bigger and a lot of clubs are offering more workshops. Jerry said that Career Services has become more of a consulting role to the clubs. Marco asked if Career Services can meet all the increasing demand. Jerry said yes, but where they get stretched is staffing – labor – filing, carrying tables etc. They can't attract Caltech students to work there. Miriam explained that they do have work study but that students have other choices (labs etc) that tend to be more attractive. Deniz said that when 60 percent of undergraduates go to grad school, they want to do research.

Alexei said that he's found that the Career Center is promoting career alternatives to science (finance, consulting, patent law). He thinks it's great that they are focusing on these other things. He asked if they have programs for people who want to stay in science. Jerry said yes and that they try to maintain a balance. Nobody else on campus is commissioned to look into other options so that falls on Career Services to do. Miriam said that at the undergraduate level the interest has been at grad student preparation. Focusing it per division would be good. Talking about it at the graduate level, the post-doc PhD conference was one example. She asked from the graduate student perspective if there could be something that is more division focused?

Catherine said that there are differences in what is expected option to option Andrea noted that telling people if a post-doc is even necessary, things like that would be useful. Alexei said that it sounds like that would be where career services could work effectively with the clubs. Advisors don't often talk to you about what is expected.

Chip said that it might be interesting to give some workshops on helping students to maximize their time here and telling them what to expect. Andrea said that during undergrad she got a lot of advice or direction from grad students and that you don't really get that from advisors when you are in grad school. Marco said that so many grad students say that they have discovered the Career Center in their final year. Amir said that we will be in touch and we want to make sure the career center is in good shape. Miriam concluded by explaining that they are going through a process and that they are trying not to rush and hire.

## 2. Lunches with VP Margo Marshak

The BoD (Board of Directors) has lunch with the Vice-President of Student Affairs Margo Marshak once a month. This month's lunch will be Monday December 6<sup>th</sup> at noon in Parsons-Gate 112. Carolyn Ash – the director of Student-Faculty programs, and Carol Casey from the SURF office will be in attendance to discuss the SURF program.

Three meetings ago with Margo we talked about the SURF program and the problems that some grad students as mentors have every year and we wanted them to hear our thoughts. Marco asked how the agendas for meetings with Margo are determined. Deniz explained that this meeting agenda was brought up organically because of discussion that occurred in a previous meeting.

ACTION: The meeting was announced

### 3. Resolution from Union of Concerned Scientists:

The GSC has been contacted by the Union of Concerned Scientists to endorse a resolution calling for integrity in scientific policy. They are attempting to get student governments and faculty boards to support this resolution. The resolution is below:

"The role of science in our society is to ask questions, to facilitate free and open access to information, to provide facts and evidence that can guide and shape policy, and to contribute to the betterment of society through technological improvements. Scientific discoveries and innovations play a critical role in increasing our nation's living standards, ensuring our national security and improving our families' health and well being. From the development of new medications to technologies that make our environment cleaner and our lives safer, the application of scientific information is essential in guiding public policy decisions.

Yet to be effective, science depends on adherence to fundamental principles in its pursuit and application. These principles include objectivity, the use of rigorous research methods, transparency, and the disclosure of potential biases and real or perceived conflicts of interest.

In order to preserve the core values in science and science-based decision making, our nation's policies should uphold fundamental scientific principles and practices. We call upon the administration and Congress to make a commitment to policies that will support those principles.

These policies should:

- Ensure that scientific and health information and reports provided by the government are based on full and informed assessments of all relevant data, done in an independent manner, free of financial conflicts of interest.
- Ensure that scientists are not pressured to delay, suppress, or alter scientific or medical information that may be in conflict with the administration's political position, and are not penalized if they resist such pressure.
- Ensure that the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) is fully enforced, to make certain that scientific advisory committees are able to provide the highest quality independent scientific advice to the government, without political or ideological bias. Ensure that people who do not have adequate scientific qualifications are not appointed to scientific advisory positions.
- Safeguard against subjecting scientists to ideological or political litmus tests for advisory committees and civil service positions.
- Ensure that the President and Congress get scientific advice as early as possible in the decision making process, and that this is done in a transparent fashion.
- Ensure that the lack of complete certainty or irrefutable proof does not erode time-honored precautionary approaches to public health and environmental protections.

The suppression and distortion of scientific information erodes credibility and public trust in government, and may compromise the health and safety of Americans."

Chip explained that we have not endorsed resolutions in the past. Deniz said he thought it was a waste of time and that passing this resolution would do nothing. He also added that it is backed by the Caltech Democrats and that people are very sensitive to this sort of thing. Chip noted that it is non-partisan but backed by the Caltech Democrats. Deniz said that it needlessly uses up our political capital if we have any. Alexei wondered if there should be an avenue for these things to go if they came up in the future. Marco asked if the faculty board endorsed resolutions. Alexei asked how we should deal with such situations and noted that what is usually done is to pass it off to a committee. Deniz said that it would be a waste of a committee's time and that if we're not interested in this we should tell them that we're not interested. Alexei asked if we should adopt a policy of not adopting any resolutions. Chip noted that the resolution does affect Caltech graduate students (changes in funding etc). Amir noted that it might raise awareness. Deniz said that this is the sort of thing that is up to people on their own and not the responsibility of an organization. We are not the moral compass of the graduate student body he said. Alexei noted that we do have a mandate, we can adopt resolutions all we want. Deniz again said that we shouldn't in this case. He said that there might be a situation where it is clear but in this case it is not. This will be interpreted that we are backing the Caltech Democrats. Sid noted that the Democrats were backing getting out the vote and that that was something we supported. He said that in this case he didn't think it was fair to push them off. Amir asked if we should bring them into the meeting to state their case. Deniz said that if we brought them in it would be a huge debate – it would be a waste of time to bring them in. Marco asked about bringing it to a vote in a GSC announcement. Alexei said we should vote to hear from them at a future meeting. Graeme also said we should bring it to a vote. Marco asked if we should have it be a vote of all graduate students. ACTION: Amir called a vote for having the proponents of the resolution attend a future meeting to plead their case. 3 voted in favor, 4 voted against, 5 abstained. ACTION: Amir called a vote to have the GSC sign the resolution. 4 voted in favor, 6 voted against, 2 abstained.

#### 4. "Caltech: The Facts"

Natalie Gilmore is compiling a list for graduate recruiting called "Caltech: The Facts." We have solicited responses from graduate students across selected departments. Here is the resulting list. The responses are divided into "academic" and "social" and are not presented in any particular order.

##### "Academic"

-----

- access to incredible scientific resources and top-notch facilities
- good research funding
- wide-ranging research interests among the faculty and the students
- other graduate students, professors and post-docs are all very bright, competent, talented and motivated
- small departments with great interaction among faculty and students
- friendly administration with little red-tape
- low teaching loads and small classes for teaching assistants
- research opportunities that cross departments and are inter-disciplinary

- graduate students are in general happy and free to pursue their research
- environment that promotes and encourages innovative and ground breaking research

To sum it up: "Caltech does everything it can to make sure nothing gets in the way between you and your research."  
 "Things are done right."

## Social

- a lively and diverse graduate-student community
- a genuine desire to involve student leaders in decision making
- health insurance provided by the institute
- a strong and pro-active graduate student government
- Membership to the Caltech Athenaeum open to students
- Beautiful campus
- Small size of the campus creates a sense of community and it is not a crowded environment
- Friendly campus
- Gym facilities are excellent and free
- Good graduate housing near campus guaranteed to incoming graduate students"

Alexei asked how many emails we received back from all students. Marco replied that he received 6 from his department and 12 from the general Caltech population. Alexei said that it sounded like it was representative of Caltech. Chip said that part of what concerns him is that we should have a high threshold for representing the students. He doesn't want us to get caught up in being a PR machine. Deniz said that we don't want people to be saying that they read something in the brochure that is not true. Catherine said that there is no universal Caltech experience and that there will be a large variety of responses. Chip said that he is uncomfortable promoting many of these statements. Amir asked if Chip would be willing to help Marco tailor what he has already gathered. Deniz said that we should talk over email and eliminate things that don't pass a threshold. Alexei said that it is a great effort and it shouldn't be wasted. He asked if it should go through some committee. Chip said that we may be getting the cream of each department with these responses. Marco said it is biased toward people who have positive things to say. Chip said that most people can't have access to all of the good things at once. Graeme said that we could just say no to helping with this altogether. Alexei noted that this is PR and so it will be positive. Deniz said that some of it is false advertising. Emily asked why we couldn't just gather quotes from students – that way it is coming from individuals. Alexei said he liked that idea. Chip asked if it is our job to paint the most positive picture or the most honest picture? Catherine noted that whoever is putting this together is going to edit it so it is going to be positive. She said that either we don't contribute or we come up with a positive contribution. Chip said that there are lots of things about Caltech that all students can reasonably expect to find. Alexei said that we should forward those to Natalie and have her make sure the GSC

is not mentioned. Chip said he would be happy to go through the list. Marco said we could have an additional one or two days of discussion.

ACTION: Cull the list down over email, reach a consensus and send to Natalie

## **B. Publications Committee (John Bender)**

### 1. Technique Editor

It's time again to choose the *Technique* editor(s) for next year. This position is paid \$5000 from the Graduate Office, and the editors are chosen by the Publications Committee (and the selection is later ratified by the BoD). Last year's editors, Julie Fry and Wendy Bittner, did an excellent job and expressed interest in doing it again. However, the GSC's policy for paid positions is to advertise and search through the entire graduate student body, which in this case includes having applicants write a proposal and go through an interview. Since we would like to hire Julie and Wendy again, it seems dishonest to interview other students, not to mention a colossal waste of everyone's time. So we would like to seek a one-time exemption from the GSC policy in order to rehire Julie and Wendy without performing a full search.

Alexei noted that we need to make sure that the amount given to the technique editors is not an outrageous amount of money. He asked how much time do they realistically spend doing it. Andrea said that it takes a lot of time and that the graduate office pays them. Amir said that he would personally like to see new people working on it but he understands that this will impose some time constraints on the publications committee. Catherine noted that we may legally have to advertise it. Alexei said that he is not saying that Julie and Wendy are doing a bad job or that they are getting too much money. He just thinks it is weird when there is a position that is exclusively allocated to a specific group of people. Chip said that if you are going to give strong preference to people who have significant experience you can note that in the application. Alexei said that it is a way to transfer knowledge. Jerry noted that there is a way to list a job with a preferred candidate. Alexei said that that would be a good way to make it fair. Chip said that there are legal issues that transcend our bylaws. He doesn't think we can do this with a vote of the board.

ACTION: Andrea will talk to John Bender about this. The consensus of the Board is that we should open this position up.

## **C. Budget Committee (Alex Brown)**

### 1. ISP California Trip

The ISP office has asked the GSC to sponsor their annual California trip now that the per student costs have reached higher levels. They have requested \$400.

The Budget committee has a policy against subsidies. However we need to reach out to graduate students. Marco asked why are we being asked to pay for their trip. Deniz noted that we didn't subsidize the Dance club's trip to the ballet. Alexei said that it is a tricky issue. Deniz noted that they are driving up to Napa and drinking wine. Marco said that they have a huge budget. Alexei said that he didn't like it that whenever something falls through the cracks it falls to us. Chip noted that the grad

office bails us out. Amir noted that the ISP is very helpful and eager to work with us. Deniz said that this is a matter of poor budgeting.

A lot of international students who are going on this trip are first-year graduate students. The cost was raised to \$105. Graeme noted that this is cheap advertising for the GSC. Chip suggested that we shuffle it off to quickfunding.

**ACTION:** The request was passed to quickfunding which has an upper limit of \$300.

**D. Academics Committee (Andrea Martin)**

1. Library Committee Volunteer

The Caltech library committee needs a graduate student volunteer. This committee has a meeting in January.

**ACTION: Xin Liu agreed to be the new library committee representative**

### **III. UPDATES AND REPORTS**

**A. Academics Committee (Andrea Martin)**

1. Everhart Lecture Series

The Everhart Lecture Series interviewed 12 outstanding candidates the week of November 14 and selected three 2004-2005 Everhart Lecturers:

Ben Lev (Physics)  
Tanja Bosak (Geobiology)  
Nelly Khidekel (Chemistry)

The lectures will be held in the spring. A formal announcement, lecture titles and abstracts will be posted on the Everhart Lecture Series web site (<http://www.its.caltech.edu/~els>) this week.

Three of the five committee members served last year as well, and we were impressed with the overall caliber of applicants this year. The selection process, though difficult, ran smoothly.

**B. Publications Committee (John Bender)**

1. Red Door Display Case

Finally, P. Plant has drilled an access panel inside the Red Door, underneath the stairs, which was supposed to have been there when it was built. This panel will allow them to assess whether our future display case will be surface-mounted or recessed. Currently, recessed is predicted. Only by the labors of Steve Pracko does this project have any chance of success.

**C. Underrepresented Students Committee (Min Tao)**

1. H-1B Visa/Green card application seminar

Scott Warmuth LLC was invited to campus to give a free immigration seminar for international students to meet their need in job application at this recruiting season

on Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> at Noyes 147. The event was very welcome by Caltech international community and attracted over 80 graduate students and postdocs.

#### **D. Quality of Life (Jonathan Galownia)**

##### 1. Health Insurance Representatives on Campus

We continue to meet with Aetna/Chickering representatives, Kevin Austin and Angelica Santana on a monthly basis to discuss the health insurance plan. Aetna/Chickering is very responsive to difficulties that students have, and looks for ways to stop the root cause of the problem. They are also, of course, very interested in fixing individual problems.

The representatives now have an open door policy where they arrive on campus once per month and students can sign up or drop by to speak with the representatives. Students can go just to meet the representatives, talk about how the insurance works, or have problem solving initiated. In either case, it is a great way for students to get know the insurance company and their plan.

##### 2. Safety

I have sent some emails to Paul Carroad about lab safety checklist and introductory classes and am waiting on a response.