

# AGENDA

Board of Directors Meeting - Graduate Student Council  
Thursday, February 3rd, 2005, 12:00 – 1:45 pm  
Winnett Club Room (Above the Red Door)

Members present: Steve Pracko, Min Tao, Catherine Ward, Chip Sumner, Deniz Armani, Amir Sajadpour, Graham Smith, John Bender, Alexei Devoretskii, Marco Lantini

Guests: David Levy (Director of Financial Aid), Margaret Milman-Barris (grad student)

## I. PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

### A. Call to Order at 12:10

### B. Introduction of Guests

- a. Margaret Milman-Barris is a first year graduate student.
- b. David Levy is the director of financial aid.

### C. Modifications to the Agenda

- a. Time was added so that David Levy could discuss how the financial aid office could assist graduate students.

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

- a. The minutes were approved with one abstention.

## II. ACTION ITEMS

### A. Steering Committee (Amir Sadjadpour)

#### 1. Lunch With VP Margo Marshak

This month's lunch with Vice President of Student Affairs Margo Marshak will be held on Monday February 21<sup>st</sup> at noon in Parsons-Gate 112. Please email Emily if you are planning on attending.

**ACTION: Discuss what we would like to put on the agenda for this meeting (i.e. grad student pay, housing, etc.) and what guests we would like to invite (e.g. division chairs, provost, etc.)**

Amir suggests dedicating the meeting to housing issues and asks that feedback be given to Steve Pracko. There is a need a strategic plan for housing. There has not be an increase in student housing although there has been a large increase in both students and postdocs. We recognize the need to quantify "large increase." John asks whether this should be the Dean's responsibility. Graham wonders how this ties in with the amount of pay we receive and the pay freeze. John suggests that housing send out bullet points for ideas about housing before the meeting with Margo. Another suggestion is for Steve to send an email out telling the board what the housing committee thinks. If we search for Master Plan at Caltech, this will give specific information about what the administration is doing. Chip will look for the recommendations from the Size of the Institute Committee. From what he

remembers, he says their bottom line is to maintain quality and ensure growth does not decrease education.

**ACTION:** Members will send Steve Pracko specific suggestions for the meeting.

## 2. Financial Aid (David Levy)

His office is in charge of student loan program. He says Caltech can provide low interest loans with fixed rates of 5% or 2.77%. Often loan requests can be processed within 48 hours. There are Caltech loans (short term, no interest) independent of Federal loans. Federal loans max at \$14,000/year. There is also a cumulative maximum. Federal is for domestic/permanent residents. Caltech can make loans to international students after first year. There are need based and not need based loans. Need based loans do not accrue interest until after getting out of school. The average loan size \$6000-8000. Caltech participates in direct loan programs, that is the Federal government loans money, but there is no intermediate bank. Institute can also loan you money at low interest. Government requires exit process. Caltech will not loan for a really nice car, for example. They are more likely to loan for cash flow problems. However, if educationally related car is needed, they will subsidize that. They've processed 20 loans this academic year. Their advertisement is through GSC and the grad office. The grad office also has \$500 loans.

John Bender suggests that loans are discussed in orientation. David is happy to help at orientation, but has not been invited in the past.

If the first year restriction on international students is a problem, we need to take this up with the graduate office. The idea is if foreign graduate students leave the country, they may default on their loans. Alexei points out that there can be a cash flow problem at the beginning of the year. Graeme suggests talking to Hoffman.

There is general agreement that 20-30 students a year seems like a low number of students seeking loans given the perception that many students have cash flow problems. David says that the faculty don't want students need loans. Margaret asks if there are students without stipends. David says there may be some masters students; but in general the loans go to students that are just low on money. David is increasing the housing allowance (ie, the amount of money that the institute says students need to live on; information needed in loan applications). Fees are now going to be a part of tuition. General consensus is to get this info into as many publications as possible.

Min suggests highlighting a grad student issue each month. "Ie, financial aid."

David is open 8-5 to help grad students. He will stay open late if necessary. Amir notes "David is way too kind."

David Levy is chairing the Ath Membership committee. The Ath is increasing its membership to include institute employees. He's looking for suggestions to increase grad student membership. The Ath is not profitable. Selling that grad students don't have to pay fees probably will not fly. David mentions changing the Rathskeller as well; decorations, etc. Alumni association is now sponsoring wine education and maybe table manners in the future.

**Action:** Invite Kjersten Eastin (grad student rep to Ath Membership committee).

### 3. \$100 general deposit

Margaret Milman-Barris would like to raise the possibility of the GSC working with the administration to revise the policy of requiring all grad students to pay a \$100 general deposit. She had an encouraging conversation with the Bursar (Heidi Dillon) and would like to raise this issue with the GSC. She asks if the \$100 deposit has been discussed. Says the bursar says that this is to cover damage (lab, dorm) and student ID cards. The bursar says the policy is more than 4 years old. Alexei wants to know why they keep the money? \$100 won't even end up covering the expenses. You do get it back in the end. Alexei wants to know "Why are you nickel and diming students at the beginning of their careers?" Students often have cash flow problems initially, however the institute asks you for it immediately. However, if you don't pay it, they may not ever worry about it. With permission of the bursar, Margaret isn't paying it.

Margaret Heidi suggested she talk to Sharon Patterson and Erika O'Neil. She'll go talk to them and report back to us.

**Action:** The board will support Margaret in looking into the deposit.

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

### 1. Photo Contest for GSC Newsletter

As has been noted in several issues of the GSC newsletter, there is a significant lack of pictures. I (Andrea) would like to hold a GSC sponsored photo contest. After this past issue, I got several emails from graduate students offering pictures, and when I suggested the idea of a contest to them, they were all very excited by the idea. I suggest a \$100 "grand prize" and several \$50 "first prizes".

I'm asking for \$500, which is 1 grand prize and 8 first prizes. If I don't need this much, I'll return the rest.

Discussion revolves around whether this is too much money. This will be a one time event. Andrea will have rules about the time frame. Min suggests \$50 per month rather than one big event. Deniz notes we have tons of money. Alexi points out we need to optimize how effective this money is. Passes 5 (yes), 4(no), 1(abstain).

**ACTION:** Board approves funding in amount of \$500 for photo contest (5 yes, 4 no, and 1 abstention).

Meeting ends at 1:10 when Catherine (acting secretary) has to leave and the board loses quorum.

**C. Quality of Life (Jonathan Galownia)**

1. New QoL Chair needed

I will be retiring from board shortly, and a replacement chair is required for the QoL committee.

No action taken because the board lost quorum before we got to this item.

**D. Budget Committee (Alex Brown)**

1. Discussion of Surplus

Alex Brown once again wishes to remind the GSC about their continued surplus.

No action taken because the board lost quorum before we got to this item.

**III. UPDATES AND REPORTS**

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

1. Technique / little t Collaboration

We had a productive meeting with ASCIT and last year's *little t* editors regarding avenues of collaboration between the two publications. One area that would benefit both groups tremendously is the reviews section (reviews of restaurants, services, etc.) ASCIT pays a lot of money to their computer people and very little to the *little t* editors. We pay a lot of money to the *Technique* editors, but this comes from the Grad Office and so is more or less fixed and dedicated to graduate students (i.e., we probably couldn't pay undergrads with it). Given these constraints, we decided to combine all reviews into a single database, hosted and maintained by ASCIT, including online submission forms, etc., and use server-side hooks to allow the *Technique* website to display the reviews in an arbitrary (but consistent) format. The *Technique* editors will be responsible for editing the reviews (for accuracy, grammar, and appropriateness), and both publications will be able to export the database for print publication. There is certainly room for further collaboration here, but we feel this is a good first step.

**B. Budget Committee (Alex Brown)**

1. Taxes

Alex Brown has completed state and federal taxes for fiscal year 2004. He renewed the non-profit status of the GSC in the state of California.

2. Postdoc Association

The Budget committee has approved the CPA's two lunch talks at a level of \$150 each. The first talk was held Friday, January 28.

## **C. Housing Committee (Acting Chair: Steve Pracko)**

### 1. Family Housing

The Housing Committee has made a number of recommendations to the Housing Office for what accommodations should be made for housing graduate students with children after the elimination of the old lease property priority group system. We have asked the Housing Office to set aside a sufficient number of 2-bedroom apartments to meet the anticipated demand from students with children, which is not expected to exceed 40-50 families based on present demographics. These units should ideally be clustered together to create family-friendly environments and should include amenities tailored to the needs of those living with children. (Extra laundry facilities, more storage space, a play area, etc.) At the request of the Housing Office, we have agreed that a 5-year limit on residency is reasonable; residents will be able to reapply at the end of that term. The committee hopes to see this system in place soon.

### 2. Housing Lottery

The Housing Office is considering changes to the housing lottery system. The off-campus locations which had previously been part of the lease properties may be placed on a 3-year rotating lottery system. Each year, one-third of these properties would be placed into the lottery pool. Those residents who are placed in these units would be permitted to live there for three years without having to reenter the lottery. The Housing Office has asked for feedback regarding this proposal, which the committee will solicit via an all-student e-mail.

### 3. Avery House Graduate Student Meal Plan

The committee is continuing with our efforts to have the Avery House meal plan for graduate students either eliminated or significantly restructured into something which meets with the approval of residents. We now have a copy of the results from last year's internal Avery survey, showing much dissatisfaction with the present arrangement. We are also interested in occupancy numbers from Housing, to gauge how demand from graduate students to live in Avery has changed over the years. Informal discussions have already suggested that the meal plan is having a highly detrimental effect on the ability of Caltech to create an environment in keeping with the original Avery ideal. The committee will likely ask to meet with Tom Mannion and Andre Mallie once we have our data and make our request to them to have the meal plan eliminated.

### 4. Housing Office Customer Service

The Housing Office is willing to consider the committee's suggestion for having an online customer service feedback form on their web site. They have also offered to add a contact e-mail on each of their existing web pages, in case students would like to reach the administration directly. All of this should hopefully lead to improved quality of service from the various departments within the Housing Office.

### 5. Security for off-campus Caltech housing

The committee will contact Caltech Security to ascertain how frequently officers patrol nearby off-campus Caltech Housing (in some cases within a block of campus). A recent auto burglary in those properties prompted this request from a resident. If there are no patrols at present, we will ask to have the properties covered in the future.

#### **D. Library Committee (Member: Xin Liu)**

I attended the Library Committee meeting in January. Three things were discussed in the meeting.

First, a report on Elsevier negotiation. Elsevier is a publisher that we spent around \$1M with on journal subscription each year. With their increasing price and unwillingness to cut it down, the Library Committee has decided to cut the high cost/use journals (those that are most expensive but are viewed by least people) and subsidize the request for articles on these journals.

Second, new faculty members added to the committee.

Third, awareness of high cost on online journals and inter-library loans, especially the latter. Library will soon add a new message on the Ibid request page indicating how much it actually costs the library to get the requested item.

Kimberly, the University librarian, would like have graduate students' opinion on how our practices such as submitting papers more to the journals published by non-profit publishers like American Physics Society, American Chemistry Society, etc., can play a role in the long run. She mentioned that because of the effect of cost, the journals with non-profit publisher can reach a broader audience. And graduate students, as the next generation of researchers, may change the bargaining power of profit publishers.