

Members in Attendance: Harish Bhat, Ileana Carpen, Jason Cohen, Heather Cox, Mike Fleming, Ying Gong, Melvin Leok, Tim Lesko, Marissa Mock, Chip Sumner, Lauren Webb

Organizational Issues

Jason asked if there are any Caltech academic committees that do not currently have students on them, or do not have students willing to talk to us. Lauren mentioned that she is serving on the faculty library committee, and graduate student Elizabeth Penn is serving on the committee for the move of the HSS collection into its new home(s). Chip said that he and Mike F. serve on the Graduate Studies Committee, and Chip suggested that Jason check the back of the Caltech catalog for a list of faculty committees. We could then decide which are relevant and should have student representation.

Library Issues

Lauren gave us an update on the library situation, much of which she had heard from Elizabeth Penn. The majority of the Humanities Collection will be stored in compact shelving in the basement of Millikan. The basement is slated to be professionally waterproofed, both inside and out, and will be accessible to students during normal library hours. There is some concern that the entire collection won't fit; the remainder will be stored off-site, possibly in the basement of the Broad Center, and will not be physically accessible to students. Lauren will write up a summary for the GSC Newsletter.

Ileana wondered where the theses will be archived. Others mentioned that some are in SFL, some in the basement of Beckman.

Jason decided to delay the Everhart Lecture Series material until Ramesh is present.

SURF Survey

Jason asked for comments and suggestions on the draft of the SURF survey for graduate students.

Chip—it should specify that one should only answer if one has had a SURF

Lauren—Do SURFs themselves fill out a form? (Nobody knew.)

Chip—we should warn the SURF office that we're creating a survey, and ask them if they have any questions they'd like us to add

Jason—or maybe we should go to Dean Kiewiet

Chip, Heather, Melvin—we should go to SURF office for additional questions

Tim, Melvin—suggest word change; “Did you meet with SURF before offer was made” was changed to “Did you have any contact with the student before the SURF was granted”

Jason—suggested asking if SURF is Caltech student, others agree that the question is fine but not necessary and could be cut if the survey gets too long

Heather—drop the “enough” on “Did your SURF learn new material quickly enough”

Chip—do we want to keep asking if SURF was competent?
Heather—it's important to distinguish between preparation and ability
Ileana—we should send the survey to postdocs as well
Jason—should we ask if they're a grad student or postdoc?
Chip—we should ask what option they're in
Heather—we can give the results to the appropriate option reps
Tim—add “lab technique” to academic preparation question
Chip—ask how many SURFs for which they're primary contact vs. official mentor
Ileana—“Did you have prior knowledge of the SURF schedule and responsibilities”
Marissa—“Did you know that there was training for SURF mentors; did you attend”
Jason—“Did you get any information describing your responsibilities from the SURF office”
Chip, Lauren, Tim—change the “support from advisor” question to be “sufficient project guidance” and “training in how to mentor”
Chip—get rid of “would you work with same SURF student again”
Tim—add “Did your research benefit from having a SURF” or “Did you get more or less research done”
Mike—should we ask if mentors know where to go if they run into problems (the SURF office?)
Heather—an open-ended question? I.e., “what did you do when you ran into trouble”
Jason—its' more a question to ask of the SURF office . . . we'll put a comments box on the form
Heather, Marissa—the academic prep/lab technique isn't really a relevant question since learning these things is a part of the SURF process
Harish—ask if mentors had to create the project themselves after arrival of the SURF
Heather—“How much time did you spend developing the SURF project?” (days, weeks, months)
Chip—the questions should have a number scale; Mike—1 to 5 or 1 to 7
Jason—they will have 1 to 7, just wouldn't fit on page in the draft
Heather—the social scientist working with the TA training committee strongly recommended attaching labels to each number
Jason—1 will be “worst experience ever”, 7 will be “best”
Chip—we should send some interested students to Dean Kiewiet to learn proper surveying procedure instead of bugging him every time we want to do a survey
Tim—why does the Dean have to be involved?
Heather—because the administration will ignore survey results from forms developed improperly, and the Dean is a social scientist
Jason—we should decided what to do after we make these corrections
Heather—we should meet again to decide on a final draft
Tim—we could test the survey on the GSC BoD first to identify problems

Jason said he would compile the changes and additions made today and send out the next draft to the committee by email. After the email comments have been incorporated and the draft coded into HTML, he'll test the survey on the BoD, we'll meet again to agree on a final draft, and we'll send it to Dean Kiewiet for review.

Brainstorming

Jason asked each person present to mention at least one area of concern that the committee should consider.

Ileana—academic outreach to grades K-12

Mike—workload, especially in the first year and mentoring of first-year grads by older grad students

Harish—helping first-years make the transition from classes to research; finding a project, etc.

Melvin—pass

Heather—minimum requirements for advising; something should be done about outrageously bad advisors

Marissa—teaching: professors are often terrible and don't seem to care

Tim has nothing intelligent to say.

Ying—career awareness: if you don't want to go into academia, what are the other options and how do you prepare

Jason—tutoring/mentoring/teaching of undergrads, an academic center

Lauren—make faculty/TAs aware of learning disabilities

(Chip—and different learning styles)

and help students having problems with issues like study skills

and provide incentives for those TAs who just don't care

Chip—many of the faculty know that they're bad, and care, so maybe we should take some of these issues to the faculty board; Cathy Jurca (whom Jason should contact) is interested in providing guidelines for advising of undergrads, and may be interested in extending this to grad students

Tim—undergraduate drug use related to academic stress: a number of students have been 'secretly' placed in a local drug rehab/psychiatric facility when they break under the pressure. Heather is concerned that some professors, especially older ones, are insensitive to students with psychological problems such as clinical depression, because the professors feel the students should just quit anyway because they can't cut it. Chip mentions that dealing with learning disability issues is a problem for student affairs programs everywhere. Heather thinks that there is too much belief among the faculty in a "trial by fire," and the faculty should be discussing this issue. Tim thinks it would help to stress to TAs at orientation that they should be prepared/able to refer people to the Health Center or give names of Health Center staff to students.

Jason tables the discussion of the "Quality of Education Survey" because Marissa forgot to bring the course evaluation materials gathered by the TA Training Committee from the various Divisions.

We discuss a regular meeting time for the committee. We'll meet the week before regular GSC BoD meetings. The next meeting is set for Thursday, July 25, at 1 pm in Avery (upstairs).