

## GSC Academics Committee Meeting 9/19/02

Attendance: Marissa Mock, Lauren Webb, Theofilos Strinopoulos, Tim Lesko, Michael Fleming, Ramesh Srinivasan, Julie Fry, Jason Cohen, Heather Cox, Chip Sumner, Ileana Carpen

### Everhart Lecture Series (ELS)

We introduced ourselves because of new faces. Ramesh began talking about ELS, and passed out a list of the new ELS committee. 14 people replied, but some were turned away, based on optimizing diversity of Divisions. Alex said \$400 per lecture will come from GSC for refreshments, A/V, advertising. The location will be moved to Lees-Kubota lecture hall to save money spent on expensive A/V stuff in the BI. Interviews will be held during the 2nd week in October, and the 3rd week will be selection of the speakers. Ramesh raised some issues from ELS last year: we need special permission to send email to faculty, so last year they sent hard copies to faculty. Ileana suggested talking to Marianne Bonner-Fraser about getting permission for emails this year, and Jason suggested Sharyn Miller. Ramesh thought Natalie Gilmore was the appropriate person to speak to, but there was some problem last year. Chip said the ultimate authority was Provost's office. Tim suggested going through the graduate dean, and Chip agreed that that should be the first step. Tim wondered how many applications were expected. Ramesh said that there were usually 12-18, and then 3 are accepted. Applicants can nominate themselves, but need 2 letters of recommendation, 1 from faculty and 1 from a peer. Late applications are not considered, said Ramesh. Ileana wondered if Oct. 4 was a little early for a strict deadline. Ramesh pointed out that it was already announced in the Newsletter. Tim said we should not fix what has worked in the past. Jason wondered if Ramesh needed any specific help from us, and he said not immediately. It was agreed that advertising is key.

### Lab Reviews

Julie Fry is going to take over the Lab Review editing from Benedict. She's only spoken briefly with Benedict, and solicited advice from us. She thought her first step should be to get in touch with the people who have graduated since the last survey was done, probably through the Alumni Office. Julie wondered if our goal is to make it bigger and more public (it's on an IP restricted website), perhaps also to go back further (less recent alumni). Chip didn't think that was a good idea, because one starts forgetting what it was like to be in a particular lab 10 or 15 years later. Mike wondered if the Alumni Assoc. could contact everyone who graduated or just those who joined the AA. Jason suggested sending out an email just before convocation, or picking up a convocation booklet to find names. Ileana suggested going to the Bursars Office, but Chip thought they wouldn't release that information. Julie wondered if the Lab Reviews were well-received, and Chip said they were, but previously the administration had been reluctant to include it in the exit interview. We should ask again. Chip said we should also be trying to catch the people who switch groups or leave without graduating. Tim suggested advertising this at the GSC booth at the grad fair.

Heather pointed out that people leave all year, and many don't come back for convocation. Jason suggested sending out an email soon to avoid losing the people whose email addresses are about to be cancelled by ITS. Tim suggested beginning in Chemistry (Julie is a chemist) by talking to Dian, the chem. secretary, to find out the people who are leaving. Julie said that it might be best to go through analogous secretaries in each Division. There was some discussing whether obtaining names through the Alumni Assoc. would bias the reviews towards happy people, who actually joined up after graduation. Lauren mentioned that the Alumni Associations is also used for networking, and Tim pointed out that people could be proud of their degree from Caltech without enjoying their lab experience. Jason was concerned about the people who drop out, who we'll really be missing. Chip suggested sending about 2 emails per year to the all-student list to cast the widest net to get people and also to make them remember that it exists. Julie wondered when the last surveys had gone out, and Chip said 18 months ago. Chip suggested getting the Lab Reviews up as a web-based survey. Last time they were all paper. Ramesh wondered if the reviews would be anonymous. Julie thought that they were. The problem is getting people who fill it out more than once. Chip said that we'd just have to trust them.

### Teaching Awards

Theo talked about how the Teaching Awards were conducted last year. Nominations were solicited and the awards were given once at the end of the year. The procedure on how to do it is in his head and not written down, so it will be easy for him to do again this year. He wondered if we were going to do it on a quarterly basis, and Jason clarified that we'll be accepting nominations each quarter, but only giving the awards annually. This will help people from forgetting their first-term TAs. Jason asked Theo what help he'd need from us. We talked about advertising: posters, emails, word of mouth, website. Tim suggested advertising the week after Thanksgiving. Ileana said that we shouldn't have deadlines for the nominations until the very end of the year. Chip agreed, and suggested saying in the email "send it in now before you forget, and before finals." Jason wondered what the criteria were for selection. Theo mentioned the nomination form. Chip wondered if we should revise the nomination form. Heather pointed out that we haven't had a huge response. Jason asked us what it would take for a person to nominate somebody who might not feel comfortable doing it. Heather said she had nominated somebody, and wondered why somebody would not feel comfortable. Ileana said that we should put a form at the Red Door. Heather said that if the advertising was directed to students, it would be clear that students can nominate somebody, not just faculty. We discovered that the advertising doesn't go to undergrads; they have their own teaching awards. Are our awards only for classes that graduate students are in? Tim wondered why we have separate awards with separate forms. Ileana pointed out that we also have mentoring awards. Tim suggested Theo could focus on mentoring and just help ASCIT with teaching awards. Theo wanted to clarify if we're accepting applications from grad students only, or from anybody in classes with graduate students in it. Ileana said that ASCIT probably only accepts nominations from undergraduates and pointed out that graduate student values may be different. Jason thought that we would be able to make the decision based on undergraduate nominations with our graduate values. Heather wondered about judging between quantity of nominations vs. quality of nominations.

Theo said that he had been favoring one “really nice” evaluation over multiple boring nominations. Heather wondered if we could ask for permission to publish the essays on the nomination forms. Ileana said we should publish the list of nominees. Theo will bring the nomination form to the next meeting so that we could discuss it in detail then.

(There was an aside suggesting that that the 3rd Thursday of each month would be a good regular meeting time.)

### New Ideas

Jason wanted to address new ideas. Mike said that, on Monday, five people met with Marianne Bonner-Fraser, chair of the Faculty Board, to get more representatives on the faculty committees (which went well). Also, they discussed previous survey results that students are having conflict with advisors and that some professors don't put any effort into teaching. We'd like to have guidelines in place to protect students who get into bad situations. MBF suggested that we work with the Graduate Studies Committee to come up with something to take in front of the Faculty Board. The GSC-II is a committee of the faculty board with the Dean and all Option reps and one grad student. MBF suggested going to the GSC-II with a rep from each option to brainstorm issues we'd like to bring before the faculty board to improve advising or teaching. MBF has charged the GSC-II to investigate the problem and bring it before the faculty board by December. It is likely that the recommendations of the GSC-II would be accepted by the faculty board. Ileana said that a few years ago the GSC went to the GSC-II with many similar issues. The response was to either not respond or shoot-down the issues as whining. Jason pointed out that the situation is different because of the recent strife with the administration, and that option reps tend to be productive. Heather didn't think that the relationship with the administration would influence faculty perception of advisor-student relationships. Jason described the GPS system, where your committee chair is not your advisor and you meet with your committee each year. Heather pointed out that all committees Caltech-wide should be meeting each year according to the Catalog, and we need more enforcement of existing policies for student protection. She thought the department should be taking more responsibility for these types of things, instead of leaving it up to the students. Heather wondered how we address the problem of the faculty ignoring us. She mentioned that John Roberts has written something for the ACS on increasing length of graduate degree, and is on our side in a way. Ramesh worried that his Emeritus status would decrease his credibility with the rest of the faculty. Jason wondered how we show them that it's a systemic problem, rather than a case-by-case individual problem. Mike had received advice from Alumni that we should find other universities that have working, good systems, and asking them to implement something similar here. Chip suggested that we initially ask that the student affairs type people be given more ability to help student with problems, rather than putting the onus on the faculty. Ileana thought that many issues were caused by money, and suggested a temporary fellowship for support for students with issues. Heather suggested looking at the Econ department, which does a good job of getting students out quickly, where they may have good managerial skills. Jason suggested having uniform standards across Caltech. Theo argued that certain fields really can't get enough done in 5 years, and

Jason pointed out that the standards don't have to be time, but could be committee meetings each year which decide when the students could be graduating. Jason asked us to go around the table and bring up issues specific to our own departments. Julie thought you have to rely on your advisor's good intentions too much. Jason said we could use good examples of students who are happy with their advisor setting up meetings, etc. Ramesh pointed out that the problem is one of enforcement, and not of policy. He suggested having your registration for fall term contingent on your committee signing off on your yearly meeting (and also on excessive registration). The problem is changing the system so that it's not solely the students' responsibility to arrange these meetings. Jason wondered how we get a graduate student from each department, who's been here awhile, and who can articulate these problems and isn't afraid to do so to the GSC-II. Heather wondered if we really needed somebody from each option. We thought it might be excessive to have every single one, but we should have a wide variety. Mike suggested have one from each Division (7). Ileana said they should be non-GSC people.

What we need to do now: find people across divisions, get them together, compare how other systems work at other schools, look at Caltech's public information. Tim suggested sending out an email to get student representatives for the GSC-II. Mike was volunteered to spearhead the effort.

Ileana brought up course evaluations. We need to get them done and put out by the end of this quarter. Jason suggested working through the questions by email. Jason will post the evaluations we've already collected onto the website.

Our regular meeting time will be 3rd Thursday of every month in Avery Conference Room at noon-1pm.