

Hello,

As the end of the year approaches, I think it is reasonable for most graduate students to ask what their student government has done for them in the last year. This column seeks to answer that question: what has the Graduate and Professional Student Organization (GPSO) done for you this last year? Last May, the 2008-2009 Executive Committee of the GPSO met to establish an agenda for the coming year. Drawing on the advice of the GPSO Assembly, we established two primary goals for the student organization: to increase the visibility and the relevance of the GPSO to the graduate student community. To those ends, the Executive Committee identified four objectives for the organization: to provide graduate students with academic support, to program activities that fostered a tighter graduate student community at IU, to advocate on behalf of graduate student interests to the campus and Bloomington communities and to provide resources to assist graduate students with living and learning at IU-Bloomington. Having established these pillars, the GPSO set about to create and improve initiatives in each of the four areas.

Focusing on academic support, we streamlined the process of applying for travel grants from the GPSO and set about to make the review process more transparent to the graduate community. We also widened the criteria to provide support to students in the School of Business, the School of Law and the School of Music. We ought to increase awareness of this form of support by spreading the word as far as possible; that effort paid off with nearly 220 applications for Travel Grants in the spring semester. We established a new budget line to provide support for academic conferences organized by graduate students at IUB and provided support for nearly a dozen conferences organized at IUB in the last year. We secured outside funding to provide a small monetary award to the GPSO Faculty Mentor of the Award and student fee money to re-establish Research Grants for IUB graduate students. We have secured funds so that we can double the number of travel grants going to graduate students; next year we will start giving back \$12,000 a year in Travel Grants. Finally, we initiated a new GPSO tradition with the "New Voices in Academia" graduate student conference, which recognizes and rewards graduate student research and seeks to develop more inter-disciplinary research at IUB.

The GPSO also seeks to develop a tighter community among graduate students at Indiana University-Bloomington. In the last year, GPSO staff members have sought to plan a greater number of events at a lower cost to the organization so as to provide more academic support to graduate students. We have ~~also~~ sought to involve a greater, more diverse number of students, by planning different types of events, and spreading the word as far as possible about GPSO activities. To that end, the GPSO has nearly halved the budget going into events, while simultaneously planning nearly a third more events. Moreover, we have seen attendance rise at our events; with an average of 150-200 students at each of the Spring Social Hours and nearly 300 attendees at this year's Grad Bash. We re-designed our Graduate Appreciation Week, to include a health and wellness event at Hoosier Heights climbing facility, an academic event with our "New Voices" conference, a social event with the annual Grad Bash and a family event at this year's Lotus Blossoms Bazaar. We also began several new traditions highlighting the cultural communities at IU: including the Multi-Cultural Halloween Fair, organized in partnership with

the International Outreach Council, and the G5 event that featured different graduate student groups from around campus.

We have also sought to increase the GPSO's efforts to advocate on behalf of graduate students. The GPSO's biggest initiatives this year have focused on the stipends provided to graduate student employees. In the summer of 2008, we commissioned a survey that compared stipend levels of graduate students at IUB by department with our peer institutions. Based on that report, we initiated surveys of the graduate student population and Chairs and Directors of Graduate Studies at IU, seeking to identify how the resources for graduate student salaries impact recruitment and retention of graduate students at IUB. We released the report of that survey in early April 2009. The GPSO Assembly voted in support of a resolution to establish a campus-wide committee that will meet every other year, review data on salaries and establish a minimum pay threshold at IUB. The Bloomington Faculty Council has now voted in support of this resolution and it has gained the support of the administration; we expect the committee to meet for the first time this fall.

The Assembly passed and the Executive Committee promoted other resolutions about the costs of graduate education at IUB, including a resolution calling for the administration to allow graduate students to make course changes through the second week of classes without incurring substantial fees and a resolution calling for graduate students to have more time to pay their tuition and fees to the Bursar. With the support of the BFC and the IU administration, it appears that IU may follow the recommendations of these resolutions. In our advocacy efforts, we have successfully pushed for change in most of these areas.

The GPSO has also improved the resources offered to graduate students; securing additional perks for the GradPad space for graduate students in the Indiana Memorial Union (IMU), providing new information about funding and finances, housing in Bloomington and health care through the GPSO website and re-designing the website to better feature graduate students on the IUB campus. As a result of these efforts, we have seen usage of both the GradPad and the website increase dramatically in the last year.

To improve our relevance and visibility, the GPSO has also undertaken several reforms to the organization and lines of communication with graduate students. Prior to the first week of classes, members of the Executive Committee attended over 30 department orientations and presented on the GPSO to nearly 900 new students. We have established three new list-serves; one to make announcements to any graduate student who signs up with the list-serve, another to direct announcements through department secretaries and a third to communication information through student leaders in each department. These list-serves have allowed us to better reach out to graduate students on the IUB campus. We also introduced the GPSO Town Halls, in which the GPSO comes to any department that requests a Town Hall, provides lunch for the attendees, presents on the organization and takes questions and concerns about graduate education on the IUB campus. Finally, we have revised the GPSO Constitution to make clearer the function and role of each of the GPSO Executive Committee positions and the different GPSO bodies. As a result of these efforts, we have seen attendance at our GPSO Assembly meeting increase dramatically.

These are some of our efforts to better serve graduate students; there is a lot more work to do in the future. As we move ahead, we are seeking any graduate student willing to offer ideas and get involved. We are in the process of setting the agenda for the next year and hope we can continue to improve and grow this organization.

Thank you,

Nick Clark

GPSO President