

## **Chancellor's Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Board, 2022-2023**

### **Community Building Subcommittee**

*Members: Aubrey Golden, Geneva Jost, Doreen Joseph, Lara Schroeder, R. Kay*

#### **1. Information gathering**

##### **a. Convenience sample interviews**

In order to better understand student concerns regarding community building among graduate students in our campus community, our subcommittee attended a selection of GradPathways events, including Grad Slam Practice sessions and inclusive teaching seminars, and interviewed attendees at these events. The conversations and informal interviews with student attendees highlighted reasons for attendance, barriers that prevent attendance, and suggestions for promoting increased attendance at future events.

General reasons for attendance collected from our convenience sample include: (1) the availability of refreshments/meals at events, (2) interest in the specific objectives of events, and (3) interacting with students with shared interests. The second point was mainly underlined by students' goals to expand knowledge outside of their own disciplines. In addition, a motivation for attending events cited by several students was the opportunity to interact with fellow graduate students outside of their own disciplines who shared similar career development interests. Given that graduate students interact primarily with students in their own academic program, many report that they appreciate opportunities to connect with graduate students from other disciplines. The Grad Slam practice sessions were organized around specific objectives, attendees shared the similar interests in communicating research findings, and attendees had the opportunity to gain more experience/knowledge from interacting with other students.

Low event attendance remains a concern among the broader graduate and professional student population. Additionally, many students register with the intention of attending events targeted toward graduate students, but only a subset of those who register will attend such events. A major factor that contributes to low attendance is a lack of availability. Graduate and professional students are frequently occupied with obligations relating to research and teaching, resulting in minimal availability for attending career development and social events. Moreover, some graduate students cited inconsistent and decentralized communication as a factor that affected broader awareness about events targeted toward graduate students. In other words, information communicated over different channels may contribute to graduate students being unaware of where to find general event information.

In order to improve attendance for future community building events, it is crucial to consider timing, content, and registration options. From the informal interviews, many students mentioned that community building events were scheduled at times that conflicted with other obligations. Many events occur during hours that overlap with instruction, during which graduate

students must fulfill teaching and research obligations. Moreover, interest in attending events varies over the course of the quarter; the beginning of the quarter was cited as a time during which students had more flexibility to attend community building events. Students also mentioned that virtual event offerings are particularly enticing. Lastly, the interviewed students noted that some event registration forms did not provide an option for respondents to change or update their responses. An inability to modify registration information may partly explain the gap between student registration and attendance rates.

b. Resources

Subcommittee members reached out to several campus faculty, staff, and organizations to inquire about how to best serve graduate and professional students' needs. We specifically focused on serving those who are first-generation students. We contacted Dr. Jeanette B. Ruiz, CAMPOS faculty scholar, to discuss who would be best to reach out to regarding specific events and ways to build community for this targeted demographic. Dr. Ruiz is a First Gen Faculty Lead who connected me with Dr. Kem Saichaie, the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. Dr. Ruiz advised that Dr. Saichaie may be particularly of interest for events or proposed projects that are aimed at first-generation students. Additionally, we reached out to Dr. Devin Horton, Graduate Diversity Officer, seeking similar advice on how to develop a project that serves students with diverse backgrounds. Dr. Horton referred me to the Graduate Students of Color group to discuss this further. We also reached out to the Student Recruitment and Retention Center and the Craft Center to ask about collaborating on events that would allow our subcommittee to directly speak with our targeted population.

We also had the opportunity to connect with Eva Meza who serves as a DEI Consultant for Graduate Studies and organizes quarterly community building events. She has organized many successful graduate student events from a holiday mixers to craft nights and professional development panels. She offered advice about how to engage graduate students in community building events and to publicize those events on campus. Firstly, she shared that the most important recruitment strategy is to post information about community events in multiple places at multiple time points leading up to the planned event. Eva suggested posting in social media groups operated and run by graduate students, advertising in the Graduate Student Association announcements, and sending email reminders a few days before the event. She also noted that it is important to have graduate students RSVP for events well ahead of time and to have a waitlist for any overflow registrations. In her experience, she has always been able to notify those on the waitlist that they can join the events a day or two prior to the event itself, which has contributed to successful turnout. Eva also shared that she has witnessed the largest turnout for those events that (1) offer meals and refreshments and (2) are held on Thursday afternoons.

## **2. GSoC+ Townhall**

### **a. Approach**

In an effort to better understand what makes a successful community building event for graduate students, members of our committee attended and helped plan one of the community dinner events hosted by the Graduate Students of Color (GSoC+) group on campus. This event was held at Walker Hall and was open to all graduate students. The event was intended to create an inclusive, community building space for graduate students of color. Subcommittee members spent time speaking with attendees and asking questions about what makes the GSoC+ community events so successful. This event was attended by roughly 40 people, with many attendees sharing that this was not their first time at GSoC+ hosted event.

### **b. Findings**

Attendees shared gratitude for having a dedicated space to connect with others and many shared that they appreciated having the opportunity to connect with graduate students from other departments and programs through GSoC+ dinners and events whom they likely would not have met otherwise. For future events, attendees noted that they would like a mix of social and professional development events. Examples of desired future events included crafting, bowling, roller skating, time to practice for qualifying exams within the community, and opportunities to share a meal and meet with recently hired faculty of color. Notably, we also received feedback that while the events during the quarter are much appreciated and highly sought after, there is a desire for more opportunities to connect with community over the summer.

## **3. Outlook/Recommendations**

### **a. Ideas for future events**

After brainstorming sessions, we feel that a major challenge is accommodating graduate and professional student schedules. We believe this is one reason for the low turnout for many events. The subcommittee's idea for how to overcome this challenge is a "Skills Swap" initiative. We envision a project where graduate and professional students form connections with one another and mutually swap and share their skills. To gauge student interest in this event, we hoped to have a partnered pilot event with an established center or organization. This would allow us to create a place for graduate and professional students to share their hobbies, skills, and crafts with one another. We would hope that in the future, this could be expanded to other interests, such as music, technology, or practical skills. To formalize the process of getting in contact with one another, we would likely need a central place for students to express their interest. This project would ideally foster connections between students across disciplines. Additionally, this would be a mutually beneficial relationship between students who want to both share their skill and also to learn a new skill from someone. Overall, we hope this project can

accommodate student needs and schedules while serving the domains of community, socialization, connection, and a sense of belonging.

b. Remarks for future planning

Recommendations for future subcommittee projects include planning an event where students can share subject-area expertise relating to hobbies and recreational activities. Further efforts to gather information pertaining to graduate student concerns about community building can prove useful as well. For example, gathering information from focus groups or using existing data from University-wide surveys can help inform future subcommittee projects. Lastly, future subcommittee tasks can include identifying overlapping projects that are currently being carried out by the Office of Graduate Studies and the Office of Student Affairs to promote student engagement among graduate and professional students and working more closely with personnel on joint projects.