**General Assembly Meeting**

*Graduate and Professional Student Senate*

11-2-23, 5-7PM

**Prior General Assembly Meeting**

11-2-23, 5-7PM, hybrid in the GLC MPR and over zoom

**In attendance**

Vice President | Yohan Sequeira

Senators: 47

Quorum reached: YES

**General Notes**

**Motions**

* Mins NOT adopted

**Exec Board Reports:**

PROGRAMS

* TFP program open for spring please distribute the flyer!
* Grad school symposium is running in the spring, abstract review is open, if you want to review them please reach out
* Cap and gown program OPEN until december 22nd

EVENTS

* Events: tacos with the dean, let constituents know and have good discussion about grad student questions and discussions
* Scary halloween party in november! (nov 10th 5-8 in southpaw)
* Little hokie hand me down will occur in november (13th), can donate any kids items, please send it out to everyone in community

FINANCE

* GPSS Budget:
  + Budget Board Allotment: $24,438
  + Spent so far: 3, 498 (Current Balance: $20,940)
  + Generated Funds: $71, 265.95
  + Spent so far: $10, 763.95
* GSBB:
  + Total Budget: $100,000
  + Allocated: ~$30,542.93

VP

* Looking into improving international travel programs
* Less financial pressure on graduate students and more help for travel issues

DEAN UPDATES

* Aimee pushing for 2734 min by fall 2024
  + Come up with a better reporting and monitoring system for graduate student stipends - monitoring through banner system
  + There will be a system on reporting issues on stipends and financial updates (flowchart)
  + Getting summer funding data soon

**Open commission/committee reports**

BOV

* Interested in being next year’s BOV rep, please contact emily
* Resources exist for all grad students but having a resource fair on FEB 7th!
  + Many groups will attend, please nominate your group or volunteer to help

***Old Business***

***New Business:***

SVPI: DISCUSSION

* Presenters: Kelly Oaks (K) - SVPI leader, Meghan Kuhn (M), Katie Polidoro (KP)
* (K): most questions on response piece, SVPI trying to “Laser focus” on prevention, when we look at sexual violence, 4 areas: response, adjudication, prevention, advocacy and support, VT works mostly on response (federal regulations) but in past years of SVCC work, prevention has the least resources and is unstructured and very distributed, needed to focus on prevention ro reduce harrassment, can’t ground cultural change model on reactive response, “Laser focused” on prevention, need to be focused on metrics of success and focused on having a solidified student voice, look at factors which influence violence, all factors which influence the environment. Need to make sure we don’t just add things and take a step back and see if the structure works: “what is the best model as we move forward”. Want to be more intentional about how these groups are structured. SVCC was too much for Katie on top of her full time job - not the most sustainable model. Because they all have busy jobs, there was one group with too many people with different roles and functions. Because of this, you want a smaller group and a steering committee, have one grad group and one undergrad group, would welcome participation in that, need to spend time creating a strategic plan and communications plan. Need to make sure that we don’t forget about responses even though they are focused on prevention. Other institutions which do this well have a centralized model, at VT we have a very distributed model. Other institutions have a single UNIT which handles everything. One initiative is applying for national programs to engage with grad students, things like authors of sexual citizens, need to remove institutional practices which create dangerous environments. Want to have an environment free to sexual violence, it will not completely go away, but we ill not stop pushing for positive change
* (M) Students are very busy, and want to be very intentional with student time. Have two committees for SVPI, one grad and one undergrad. Want to have space for people to share. Groups will provide feedback for steering committee, help different groups on campus, and provide feedback on how the goals are going. Want to have a strategic plan by the end of the academic year. How are we going to address the issues on campus, want students to be part of this plan. The groups will provide dinner and want grad students to participate.
* (KP) Speaking as title IX coordinator, got into the work by working in response services, as a lawyer, she sees mistakes in administration, not in policy (from mostly lack of experience). Most questions bridged space between prevention and response. Our response it twofold: here to support people who have had something happen to them, might include accountability, for most people this is just helping them get through their academic experience. Sometimes people see our numbers and say what’s going on, but majority of work is based on supporting people. Do also do response work, job is to investigate, work with office of student conduct, but need to make sure that everything follows title IX laws, need to follow all the laws. Laws often change, comes from US DOE, which issued a set of regulations in 2020, written by people in the DOE office. Whenever there is a change in the president, there is a change in the title IX laws. Laws are the floor, where is the space above that where we can serve the community. Trying to do our best within the constraints of the law. What can we work on and what can we change. Have created a policy and practice committee which will allows people to meet and talk about title IX policy (will meet 2-3 times a semester), their job is to look at the existing policies and see if they are good over time. Will also be the committee that looks at DOE rules which will make recommendations about policy. Will also be a student title IX committee which will tell people what their experiences are like and how they are doing, meets with groups to advise about title IX policy.
* Q1: *What might be some metrics and examples of success of SVPI*
  + (K) is there a better way than prevalence to identify success, is that just students know more about resources, more structs and more reports, there is a lot about or work which we cannot talk about because of privacy. There needs to be transparency and use evidenced based practice and things that have demonstrated success. Have faculty member from psychology who is part of our group.
  + (KP) one of the things that needs to be understood is that there is a difference between prevalence and reports, there was an increase in reports (not a long range trend), our office is a tip of the iceberg, still in a space where sexual violence is largely underreported. Need to make sure people report.
* Q2: *What prevents grad students from getting sensitive information?*
  + (KP) Don't share information with any mandated reporters, there are only 5 or so people who interact with the details of a certain case.
  + (K) steering committee will focus on four different areas of title IX work, and help people be accountable for work and planning. Students don’t want to do the work and want to advise, some things can’t be changed because they are federal law. Need to have opportunities where people gather together.
* Q3: *trying to implement better procedure, but how does that work if there are already set rules?*
  + (KP) Policies are in university policy and DOE rules, 202 title IX gave procedures as well as policy which was strange. Lots of specifics about who and what should be happening in a response case. There is still some room though to think about procedure. Example is there is a policy where an employee needs to disclose any issue in sexual harassment. Procedure is that I get to decide how to disclose information in the most comfortable/gentle way.
* Q4: *around the vote of no confidence, students are being relegated to outer committees, how do you build trust back with students.*
  + (K) Built out the model more to get things that students are most interested about, have done a lot of recruitment and engagement for the student advisory committee, will listen and be in as many spaces that we can be in. Cannot control whether people can trust us, but will engage people wherever we can. Can try to bring in students by building trust with student activities. Want people to feel supported in their processes. Want people to feel equitable and comfortable.
* Q5: *Graduate students and experiences, why is the response so miserable and what are you going to do about that to get people’s trust back?*
  + (KP) response is not miserable, people are in school, people have been held responsible, VT compares somewhat better to other institutions (more likely to take action) process is very hard though. Many parts of the process cant be changed. Do have a group on campus who sees if the process works. Doing their best, understands that people have pain, best that they can build trust is to try and do better.
* Q6: *What happens when a case goes through, what is the accountability?*
  + (KP) student might be sanctioned or removed from the university, sometimes there is a case where people can return to the community. There are some educational sanctions, person needs to understand what happened. People may not want to engage with the title IX office again though. Want to have a restorative justice model, to allow for people to have options when someone is not found responsible, how to have rules in this case. Want to have a person to fill that gap.
* Q7: *What are some specific and detailed prevention policies that the university will use?*
  + (K) still early, want to make sure people have access to different spaces at different times. Are there things within the institution purview that things can change? Mostly looking at spaces that can or cannot be restricted to people.
* Q8: *Where can the committee structure be found, there was a lack of transparency last year*
  + (K) lack of communication when things are not centralized. Want to have a strategic communications plan so that students can see where things are.
  + (M) SVPI should have a website where there are the steering committee members and emails for the chairs of the committees.
* Q9: *Student voices were not heard on advisory groups, feel that students voices were not heard and there was no power for students (they were ignored) how will this change.*
  + (M) the institution wanted to put a full time person into this position to make sure that student voices are heard in the SVPI initiative. There was a lot of concern last year about students not getting enough work, or the wrong kind of work, and the plan is to provide students a space to advise the sterling committee.
* Q10: *Last question was not answered, still no representation of students on the steering committee. Is there any world where students will be on the committee*
  + (M) Students not on the steering committee, but their advice will be an input, will have one meeting where everyone meets, and have some undergrads on a separate committee.
* Q11: *What power will students have on any of these committees??*
  + (K) We are not the ones making the decisions, it is mostly compliance, GPSS has a voice and that’s where your power comes from, for us you have a voice to draft policies (while not violating title IX), there will always be places where students are not completely involved. What does power being relinquished even mean, *“what decisions can student make”* Student can give feedback, decide on what events they can run, or talk about different things. Struggling to understand the question. Want to form the group first. Know that I’m not answering the question, stay tuned.
* Q12: *What plans does SVPI for helping people beyond title IX? How can we lower barrier for reporting? How can we stop victim blaming culture?*
  + (KP) SVPI will not support victims, there are other programs on campus to do that. Want to see if there are adequate resources on campus. Neet to search for barriers to reporting. Need to have a climate survey, and ask why people have not come forward. Need to think about how we can set up more approachable reporting. How do we have more of a physical presence? We have an online reporting form, but it doesn’t work. What is a better way to report? Want to have a better way to report. Other things that people can do are be open and transparent and have a more transparent community where we don’t talk about sexual violence in a charged or negative way. Lots of people know where to go, but don’t want tother people to know. There is a cultural issue
  + (M) just not enough people working on prevention, need people to know what consent means, how we are talking about relationships, sex etc. There needs to be spaces for students to engage in these conversations. These pieces are part of prevention. We need to have education happen so that people know what consent is, what are the resources. It’s not just a one and done thing.
* Q13: *Why are there allowed to have people on committees which have multiple title IX violations. Why is the president's office letting people in committees which have many many violations? We should not let them serve on committees because this puts students in danger.* 
  + (KP) Unfortunately we can’t do anything because of the title IX rules. There needs to be a hearing and an outcome. Currently there is no mechanism unless there is a significantly investigated complaint.

**Signed:**

