

'Stacking' up the Grad Senate

By FIFI BALL
Collegian Staff

Q. Would you explain, briefly what the Graduate Senate is?

A. The Grad Senate is one of the four governance units, senates, on campus (graduate, undergraduate, faculty, and the PAUMA senates). They are recognized by the trustees, viv-a-vis the governance documents.

Q. When, how often, and where do you usually meet?

A. The senate meets weekly on Monday nights at 7, somewhere in the Campus Center, except for the first Monday of the month, where there's a conflict with the Graduate Council of the Faculty Senate.

Q. What activities and programs do the Grad Senate sponsor?

A. We don't have an RSO. We sponsor many organizations which are themselves RSO. We give money to the Transit, the *Collegian*, the child care system, Outfront, and numbers of other groups. They may be services, like child care or off-campus housing or CAOS, or special projects; projects for women in graduate school, political projects.

Q. How is the Graduate Senate funded?

A. We collect the Graduate Student Tax, \$13 per semester. It's substantially less than the undergraduates' tax. It's a fee that graduate students pay on the same basis as the Undergraduate tax.

Q. How many grad students are there?

A. In the vicinity of 5000. Graduate students are organized mainly around departments rather than dorms. We have a program called revenue sharing which disperses a maximum of \$200 per semester, to graduate student organizations within departments.

Q. How many people are involved in the Grad Senate itself?

A. There are four officers, and presently 65 senators.

Q. How does one become a senator?

A. You are elected in your department by other graduate students. You get one senator for every fifty graduate students who pay the Grad Student Tax, up to a maximum of three senators per department and any number of alternates the department may choose to elect.

In addition we recognize Prince House. This is a group of graduate students who live on campus.

Q. Do you feel that the Grad Senate has an effect on the average grad student?

A. It's hard to say. We determine, for example, how much the fee is, so in that sense we have an effect on what the graduate student pays. We affect what services are available by choosing which groups to fund.

In many cases RSO groups and services are available to graduate students, whether or not we fund them. Part of that is because graduate students also pay the Campus Center fee. Many RSO groups have space in the Campus Center, so in a sense graduate students, by paying are contributing, at least to the rent of the building.

We've talked only about money issues up to now. There are other, very important functions of the Graduate Student Senate. One is, as a governance body, to take positions on issues.

For example, we're working on the administrative withdrawal procedure. There was one enacted by the trustees, last summer, I believe, which affects graduate students and undergraduates. But it was by accident that it came to include graduate students. It was originally intended to affect undergraduates only. Or it had been intended to include graduate students but by accident they forgot to bring it before either the graduate dean or to tell Gage, who at that time looked at it and whose understanding was that it applied only to undergraduates, or to tell us in the Grad Senate.

So we in the Grad Senate, in conjunction with the people in the Faculty Senate, are working up an alternative motion, for graduate students, which the Graduate Student Senate will pass as a primary responsibility motion and send to the Trustees.

The Wellman Document specifies that each of the Senates will have a certain area of primary responsibility.

The faculty had it in terms of academics, to select what new courses are and what faculty standards are. Students have primary responsibility for regulations pertaining to them, and ways in which student monies are dispersed. That will change then, the conditions under which a graduate student can be administratively withdrawn, from the conditions which presently exist.

Q. It sounds like the graduate students are in a minority and that they lack rights, is this true?

A. We're one of the invisible populations on campus. The student affairs area, which administers financial aid and placement, among other things, had traditionally been quite insensitive to either our needs or our existence.

I've met with administrators time and time again and said "Look, we're here." Student Affairs and Financial Aid, Placement are all supposed to be responsive to graduate students' needs and responsible for providing services. We never got too far with that. The Acting Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, Robert L. Woodbury, has talked with us and seems to be more responsive than they have been in the past, I haven't seen any action though.

My role often here, where I'm dealing with those kinds of issues, is having always to be sort of the big-mouth-bitch who has to remind people ... and repeat it, so whenever these people see me come into a room, they'll think graduate student. I'm the only one who's making those noises.

The other thing I wanted to mention about what the senate does is its place for graduate students to talk to one another from different departments. Too often, graduate students talk with and meet only students from their own department. There are very few programs that bring graduate



Barbara Stack

students together. So we try and spend some of the time in our meetings in just open talk; you know, what's going on, what's happening in your department.

Q. Do you find a lack of response, or apathy in grad students?

A. There is a lack of response, and you can call it apathy, but I think there's a structural reason for it. Graduate students are expected, in many departments among traditional academic people, to make a very great sacrifice during their years as a graduate student, to put all their energy into their years as a graduate student, it's supposed to be real dedication, so that anything that they seem to be doing that's outside of their academic world is seen to be irresponsible, that they're just fooling around, and they're not doing what they should be doing, that's one.

Two, it furthermore seems trouble making. It's part of the apprenticeship system where you work with a small number of faculty, you're supposed to make them feel like they're "in the know" and you're going to learn from them, and that you don't have any interests of your own, that they know best what's for you.

Therefore if you're politically active and you claim there are certain issues that the graduate students' positions differ from the faculty positions, that's suspect. It gets people into trouble; there have been a significant number of graduate students who have been politically active and have suffered pretty severe consequences. It's not often overt acts like saying, "you've done this, this is bad," but like a little less good recommendations, or your work could be seen as less good, or they won't get a key assignment that they want. Things are very strange that way, it's not cut and dry as much as undergraduates expectations are. It's much more subtle for graduate students. It can be in terms of student research, how hard it sort of pushes to get you a job ... it's a long haul and you never really know how you stand.

Part of the dynamic is that you need people to say, "Yeah, you're doing okay." If that's being withheld, you really feel very insecure. That's the reason many people drop out, and partly the reason why women don't make it, which is a fact. Because the faculty is male.

The faculty tends to see women as less serious and less talented

than men. So women have to work twice as hard to create the same impression. And even if they are seen as as good, men really don't know how to respond to them in the ways they relate to other men, who they can take under their wing and sort of act as mentor for.

So women have a much rougher time. It's gone from 37 to, currently 38 per cent of graduate students are women. Fewer percentage of that 37 finally get their degree, fewer percentage of those people actually get funded, with TA's and RA's (teaching and research assistantships), fewer women in the graduating class. More women proportionately, than men, are going for their masters as opposed to their doctorates. Therefore when they go out to look for that teaching job there are fewer women looking. You get a much smaller proportion of women teaching in the lower faculty ranks.

The system continues to weed out women, so you have some ridiculous figure like two per cent of professors are women. It's something that begins in early schools, is accelerated through high school, where women tend to be encouraged in different areas, or discouraged more than men in certain areas. Undergraduate education does, so that at the entry level there are fewer women entering.

Q. What's your position in the Grad Senate, and how long have you held it?

A. I'm Secretary of the Grad Senate. I was elected last May, I believe. Last year I was President, the year before that I was Vice-President, and the year before that I was a senator. This is my fifth year as a grad student and as a person in the senate.

Q. Why did you step down from the Presidency?

A. There hasn't been a case where someone's been elected two years in a row. Though I think I could have run and won. I certainly wouldn't want it again. There are lots of reasons why not.

First of all it's an incredible sacrifice, in terms of the time. I couldn't do that, stay with that for more than a year.

There was also someone else coming along who I felt would be really good as President, who I wanted to work with.

I knew a whole lot and I knew it would be much easier if I brought what I had learned as President to the Executive Committee, as one of the officers, rather than trying to

tell them everything I knew in one day.

I guess I was intrigued, I didn't want to drop it yet, I still wanted to see how things turned out, see what we could do with another year of building on it. And I never got it together to find anything else to do.

Q. What are your responsibilities as secretary?

A. The responsibilities don't go with the title. What happens is, people get elected, those who end up officers sit down together and say, "well what needs to be done, what does each of us think we're good at, what does each of us want to do."

So what I'm doing now as secretary is very similar to what I had done before when I was vice-president. My primary responsibilities are things like elections and materials that go out for elections, committee appointments, doing all the paperwork.

I also read the committee minutes. We don't have many internal committees; we have the Executive Committee and we have the finance Committee, but we make appointments to the Committees of the Faculty Senate. And each of the principle administrators on campus, the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Provost have advisory committees, which seek graduate students.

All those appointments of graduate students are processed by the Graduate Student Senate, as official representatives of graduate students, so that they (the committees) can't just pick out an arbitrary graduate student and call that student representative. The way things end up when administrators pick their own graduate student is they pick people who are sympathetic to their own cause, graduate students who may be working for the administrator.

I also do all of the advertising, sort of Outreach efforts. I do projects which are really not part of my job description. This is the second year of a special program for graduate women. I am part of a body that meets and makes decisions and does the work. I mean you could say that I don't have to do it but I'm a liaison with the senate, and I'm interested in it and I know a lot about graduate students. That takes up a lot of my time.

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