

## PGSA Year-in-Review

### The Beginning

The academic year 2005-2006 was an exciting time for the Physics Graduate Student Association, or PGSA. A constitution was drafted during July, 2005 which outlined the structure of the group and the duties of the elected officials along with a statement of purpose for the group. This constitution was ratified by super-majority vote on July 25, 2005 effectively bringing the group into formal existence. On Aug. 8, 2005 the first office holders were elected. Elected to President: Tim Peshek; Vice President: Zak Staniszewski; Secretary/Treasurer: Lei Guo; Faculty Liaison: Jess Merlin. An application for university recognition was then submitted to the Graduate Student Senate, or GSS. At the October GSS general body meeting the Senators voted to give recognition to the PGSA as a legitimate student group bearing the name of the university with rights to reserve rooms on campus for events. The PGSA elected a department senator – Jeremy Heilman – to interact with the GSS and its president became the representative from the school of Arts & Sciences to the GSS.

### Social Activities

One of the very first acts of the PGSA was to host a party centered on welcoming the newly-arrived first-year graduate students, and also to welcome all the students of the department to the first PGSA social event. The event was held at Zak Staniszewski's, Georgi Dakovski's, and Adam Bradley's apartment in order to avoid the need for permits for on-campus parties with alcohol. The party was held using funds from the physics department and totaled <\$200 for food and beer.

Other activities include the GSS activities, mainly Grad night at Jillian's, and various other gatherings which now include Physics students due to the fact that the PGSA now allows for easy dissemination of information regarding any and all GSS events.

### Role in GSS

A strong partnership was forged between the PGSA and GSS as the PGSA helped in collecting foods for the GSS canned food drive and also helped collect money for the other major GSS charity for the year, Case, Build Hope which is a Hurricane Katrina recovery fund.

Other than charities, the PGSA president helped re-write the GSS mission statement and co-authored its new Strategic plan for increasing involvement, by using the formation of the PGSA as inspiration to help other departments form graduate student groups.

### Role in Department

The PGSA played a major role in the recruitment of prospective graduate students by planning the details of their visit. The student visit was planned for April 6-7, 2006, and the PGSA along with Betty Gaffney organized the complete time schedule including visits with professors, meals, and entertainment. The PGSA was given names of the visitors and an anticipated area of study. For each of the students 2-3 professors from their chosen field were selected to meet along with 1 from outside that area of study. The meetings were held either individually or in small groups as dependent upon the Professor's schedule. Once the profs were selected, Betty Gaffney handled scheduling. The meals included two lunches, and two dinners. The lunches were both on campus, one with pizza for everyone in the Miller room and the other with the PGSA officers at the Case Club (~\$100). Dinners were both held off-campus with the first night held at the Winking Lizard on Coventry(~\$300, drinks incl.), and the second at the fabulous Metropolitan Café (~\$800, drinks incl.) on W. 6 st. Entertainment included a short tour of campus, and visit to the research showcase, an afternoon at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (~\$50), and drinks after dinners (covered by individual) at some W.6 bars. The students were housed at the Residence Inn downtown and traveled to and from campus via a hotel shuttle. The hotel and shuttle pick up and drop off times were all arranged by Betty Gaffney.

The PGSA was also designed to deal with department level issues involving graduate students, such as the change in department chair which led directly to its creation (or evolution?). The faculty liaison office was designed as a conduit between the department administration and faculty and the grad student body, and a member of the faculty was chosen – Jie Shan – to act as faculty advisor to act on our behalf and keep the PGSA informed of major changes which effect grad students. This year no major changes occurred, and the PGSA was not involved much in the policy of the department. Future issues could

include, for example, changing of the curriculum, changing of the TA requirements as more undergrads surge to the university, or changing of the monthly stipend, or tax requirements.

The PGSA also asked for a formal budget for next year which included money for two social events at \$250 apiece, plus \$50 for intramural sports fees. The budget was denied by Chair Cyrus Taylor due to the very tight budget of the physics department. However, assurance was given that at least one party could be funded by the department but Prof. Taylor would prefer to wait and see, and provide the money when the time came.

#### Concluding Remarks

The first full year in existence for the PGSA is now almost over and it has been extremely positive. Although, certain objectives were not accomplished this year, the PGSA did very well to increase its visibility and level of involvement in the department, which can only help in the future. The creation of an official web page and formation of a listserv alias for all physics graduate students have been very helpful in getting information to every member of the PGSA quickly and concisely. For future years it will become increasingly important to have some sort of representation in faculty meetings where grad student issues are discussed, and it will be helpful for us to command our own budget. Ties with the GSS should be maintained in coming years as well. Meeting attendance has waned towards the end of the academic year, and the group members will need to fight constantly against apathy; it is only by large involvement can the group really serve the interests of the grad students in Physics.