Cornell University
Graduate and Professional
Student Assembly

***Draft* GPCI-Graduate and Professional Community Initiative:**

Sense of Community

Introduction

One of the most important components of the life of a graduate and professional student is belonging to a community. Students often rely on the communities that form organically through their departments and or fields and while these close-knit communities are extremely beneficial, they should also serve as a stepping-stone to form other communities on campus. Understandably so, it is this reason why both the 2007 and 2013 Graduate and Professional Community Initiative stress the desire of graduate and professional students at Cornell to "expand opportunities for cross-departmental collaborations and student development" (2013 GPCI). Having cross-departmental collaborations would enable students to engage more in-depth with the greater Cornell community as well as explore resources that may not have been on the purview of the student's horizon.

Developing a sense of community in the broader sense of the word would be beneficial to all members of the Cornell community. A sense of community is synonymous with a sense of belonging and expanding opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration will energize students into creating and maintaining meaningful social relationships on campus. These interactions will foster a sense of community as well as improve the mental health and the well-being of graduate and professional students alike.

Cross-departmental networking between graduate and professional students will enrich the intellectual life on campus as well as provide a platform to disengage from the pressures and demands that a student feels in their daily life. Finding outlets on campus to network and build both academic, professional, and personal relationships is a key component in developing a sense of community at Cornell. Fostering these relationships and giving them a platform to develop in a meaningful manner will make the students feel more connected to one another as well as Cornell as an institution. Furthermore, as the 2013 GPCI document states, "graduate and professional student alumni who strongly identify with their experience at Cornell could prove to be generous donors to the University." This aspect of fostering a sense of community now will be beneficial in the future community in years to come.

There are many challenges that may inhibit graduate and professional students in participating in events and/or programming that are created to enhance a sense of community on campus. The 2007 GCI and 2013 GPCI provide the necessary recommendations in order to build a sense of community on campus.

This new GPCI document borrows the same objectives as the past GCI and GPCI documents and provides additional action items that may align more with the current culture at Cornell. After all, this section, as well as the other sections of the GPCI document are structured in a way that recognize the challenges that students may face while trying to provide possible solutions to overcome these challenges.

Objectives

Objective 1: Improve opportunities for meaningful interactions and collaboration across the fields for graduate and professional student community.

Rationale: Programming events provide an excellent avenue to network and socialize but do not provide the necessary tools to create meaningful and lasting relationships. Structuring events in a way that encourage students to develop and follow-up with these interactions would "lay the foundation for strong and meaningful personal and professional relationships" (2013 GPCI).

Actions:
   a. Increase opportunities for graduate and professional students to work collaboratively.
   b. Identify ways to incentivize students and faculty to develop novel and innovative partnerships and collaborations.
   c. Increase opportunities for research graduate and professional students to present their work to a wide audience in a casual setting (e.g. Three-Minute Thesis) and incentivize students to participate in these opportunities by providing recognition and/or prizes.
   d. Increase inclusiveness across diverse communities within the graduate and professional student population (See Diversity and/or International Students).
   e. Utilize already established venues (See Big Red Barn) to promote social and intellectual interactions between graduate and professional students across departments and fields.

Objective 2: Support programming events, and activities that encourage social cohesion, connectedness and communication

Rationale: The creation of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly Programming Board (GPSAPB) has enhanced programming events on campus. The Graduate and Professional Student Assembly Finance Commission has also provided student organizations with the financial means to create unique programming events for the wider Cornell community. However, many students are still unaware of the events occurring on campus or the events occur at a date and time when the student is occupied with other matters.

Actions:

   a. Advertise events in a wide format and continue to improve communication about these on-going programming events to the student community.
   b. Provide resources and funding to create programming in the Arts and Humanities where students can share a meaningful interaction through the arts (e.g. student-led plays at the Big Red Barn, art exhibitions, etc).

c. Improve communication among student organizations and between departments on campus. Encourage cross-departmental events and co-sponsorship of these events.
d. Continue to provide a graduate student organization fair as part of the orientation programming to increase awareness of the many student efforts on campus.
e. Provide programming events that will encourage students to collaborate and form meaningful relationships during orientation week.
f. Continue to support the operations at the Big Red Barn to focus on better serving the needs of the graduate and professional student community.
g. Continue to organize a second orientation for students who matriculate in the Spring.

Objective 3: Support and encourage personal development and growth

Rationale: A common trend amongst graduate and professional students is to focus on the daily demands that their program and/or teaching responsibilities entail. Finding ways to re-energize and renew their energy and interest in their academic works is vital for both graduate and professional students. The 2013 GPCI clearly states, "learning how to balance professional and academic commitments with a happy and healthy personal life should be considered a critical part of the graduate and professional student education." Creating this balance between academic and personal life may be hard for some students and guidance from a mentor may be the answer to finding this balance in the graduate student's life.

Actions:

a. Continue to develop supportive mentorship networks, such as:
    I. Peer-to-peer networks among different cohorts of graduate and professional students
    II. Between graduate and professional students and alumni
    III. Between graduate and professional students and undergraduates, and
    IV. Between graduate and professional students and faculty
b. Continue to reward and recognize students for outstanding commitment to community engagement and service
    I. Continue to support university-wide awards for outstanding artistic or athletic achievement, public engagement and outreach, teaching, campus leadership, etc.
    II. Continue to encourage fields to recognize commitment to intellectual and personal breadth.
c. Continue to encourage faculty to have supportive conversations with students about work-life balance and personal growth and development.
    I. Continue to provide training for Directors of Graduate Studies where they are well equipped to know and react to the pressures that Graduate students encounter (See Mental Health)

Objective 4: Improve integration and communication across departments, fields, and schools

Rationale: Encouraging a social connectedness between graduate and professional students can often be cumbersome for reasons outside of the student's control. This may stem from lack of awareness of programming events or miscommunication between schools. Cornell should encourage a more

transparent lines of communication between schools, departments, and fields where students know of the different opportunities available on campus.

Actions:

a. Continue to encourage the GPSA to reach all students from all disciplines, fields and schools.
b. Encourage fields and schools to promote events sponsored by the GPSA.
c. Support departmental efforts to maintain user-friendly and updated websites and calendars to advertise seminar schedules, courses, and faculty expertise.
d. Improve opportunities within departments and fields for graduate and professional students to interact with faculty, including visiting speakers.
e. Support efforts to centralize information about the graduate student life experience.
f. Continue to generate easier ways for individuals across campus to sign up and receive emails about events going on across campus that may be an interest to them.

Objective 5: Encourage the "One Cornell" theme across all Cornell campuses

Rationale: Section VII of the Cornell Strategic Plan highlights the importance of "think[ing] of Cornell as a single entity, embedded in but transcending and overarching strong colleges and unit." This should also extend to the sense of community across all of the campuses that share the Cornell emblem and values. Cornell as an institution should find ways to develop this sense of community across all campuses and should also provide resources to foster a sense of a greater community of Cornell University.

Actions:

a. Improve communication and connection between the Ithaca campus, Geneva, Cornell-Tech, Weil School of Medicine, and other Cornell campuses around the world.
b. Provide the graduate and professional students with resources for collaborations between campuses.
c. Generate ways for easier communication between students in the campus.
d. Allow the students to participate in programming events (sponsored by the GPSA) across all of the Cornell Campus.