

March 2007 Minutes

GESA General Meeting Minutes

Date: March 14, 2007

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Location: Dawson's Row

Attendance: 13

I. Pay Raises

- A. Depending on assignments, the TA pay raises should amount to approximately \$1,000 over the course of a year.
- B. These are GSAS-wide pay increases.

II. Visiting Weekend Quick Note: Peter Baker may be in touch with area representatives to connect them with prospectives interested in their particular fields.

III. Faculty Searches and Related News

- A. Next year, there will be two double searches. We are planning on searching for faculty to cover the 18th century, world Anglophone literature, and possibly American literature (depending on retention of current Americanist faculty). We are looking to hire pairs and to do a very wide search.
- B. In the past, GESA has been heavily involved in faculty searches.
- C. We will be performing an open search – i.e. it is unclear at what level we will be hiring (assistant or associate professor etc.).
- D. Kevin Hart, a renowned theologian and poet, will be joining Religious Studies, and he will also receive a courtesy appointment in the English Department. Beginning next year, he will be available for students to work with.
- E. Potential joint hire in American studies and English: Tina Chen will be coming for a job talk on 22 March. Attending these job talks is great professional experience for graduate students. GESA and the faculty will be particularly interested in any feedback attending graduate students may have, especially as decisions begin to be made about whether Tina Chen will be joining the Department.

IV. GESA Board Elections and Transitions

- A. We need an elections officer to receive nominations, communicate with nominees, and tally votes. Christine Schott has volunteered to serve in this capacity. Nominations should be sent to Christine, who will then notify nominees. Nominees may either accept or reject the opportunity to run for office. Full guidelines regarding the election officer's duties are available in our newly updated GESA constitution, posted on our GESA website.
- B. Elections will be held near the time of next month's GESA meeting.

V. Teaching Evaluations

- A. This is something that GESA would like to discuss between now and the end of the year.
- B. Two years ago, departments were asked to decide whether to switch to exclusively online evaluations. The English Department, as well as several other

- departments, decided to keep paper evaluations. The decision to continue the paper evaluation system was made primarily by the faculty, but there were also graduate students who opposed the electronic system, mostly on grounds that online results would be available to students. But this need not be the case.
- C. Now may be an appropriate time to re-evaluate the evaluation process and format. Some faculty members have suggested that we might wish to raise this issue. Perhaps we could allow graduate students to choose individually whether they want to move to electronic evaluations, or perhaps we could make the move collectively.
- D. Central issues
1. Accessibility
 - a. Paper evaluations are notoriously difficult to locate. There is considerable uncertainty regarding the location of ENWR 110 evaluations in particular, and graduate instructors searching for their evaluations have been sent to multiple sources, sometimes without ever finding their evaluations.
 - b. Online evaluations, on the other hand, are immediately available and readily accessible.
 2. Student completion of evaluations
 - a. Concerns that students will not complete online evaluations have been allayed.
 - b. It is possible to offer incentives to students to complete online evaluations.
 3. Quantitative Comparison
 - a. In the past, there has been resistance to the quantification of our work.
 - b. When one consults the numbers on paper evaluations, such numbers are difficult to evaluate when there are no departmental averages available to which one might compare one's own results.
 - c. With electronic evaluations, instructors can compare their results against the departmental mean.
 4. Types of answers
 - a. There is some concern that the electronic evaluations may not be as pertinent to the particular kinds of courses taught in the English Department.
 - b. It is possible, however, to customize the online questions and to add questions that will encourage the kinds of comments that are helpful to us.
 5. Women and minorities
 - a. In the past, some expressed concern that evaluation scores for women and minority instructors were lower than other scores, and that these lower scores reflected an unfair bias on the part of students completing the evaluations.
 - b. Instructors with this concern opposed making evaluation results, which they judged to be biased and unreliable, easily accessible online.
 - c. We are unsure, however, how instructors with this concern arrived at the conclusion that women and minority instructors received lower scores than others. We do not have the evidence for their conclusions at hand.
 6. Negative and aggressive responses

- a. Concern expressed at meeting: Angry students may be especially inclined to fill out online evaluations, whereas content students may have no motive for completing evaluations. If it is true that disgruntled students would be more likely to complete online evaluations, then results would not accurately reflect the students' experience of the course.
- b. Response: Adding some small incentive to complete evaluations would ensure that most students took the time to fill them out.

VI. Graduate conference

- A. Please submit proposals!
- B. The deadline has been extended until Friday, 16 March.
- C. Abstracts are not difficult to write, and the organizing committee is eager to receive them.
- D. Participating in the conference will put your name on the program and allow more people to become aware of your work.
- E. Students from other universities will be participating in our conference, so there is great potential for cross-pollination of ideas.
- F. Brent Edward's keynote address promises to be very rewarding for those who attend.
- G. The lists of panels should be distributed soon. Most panels will likely be held in Newcomb.
- H. A few conference participants may need a place to stay. Volunteers to host visiting scholars should send an email to the graduate conference committee (uvagesaconf2007@gmail.com).

VII. Booksale

- A. Ken Price is organizing the sale and coordinating certain aspects of the sale with Ryan Cordell.
- B. The booksale will be on the Friday of the graduate conference in Dawson's Row.
- C. Booksale volunteers are encouraged; Ken's email, distributed shortly before the GESA meeting, gives additional information about what is needed.
- D. The graduate conference committee will send an email out to conference attendees from other universities so that they will be aware of the booksale.
- E. The booksale, pleasantly located in Dawson's Row, will provide students with an opportunity to take a break during the conference and browse the stacks of cheaply-priced books.

VIII. Visiting Weekend

- A. The Visiting Weekend will be Thursday and Friday, March 29-30. On Thursday, there will be a reception, and graduate students are highly encouraged to attend this reception and become acquainted with prospective students. GESA encourages eng-grads to engage actively in conversation with prospectives and to invite them out for dinner or drinks following the reception. This kind of "hooking up" happens frequently at professional conferences, a model we hope to emulate.
- B. By the time of the Visiting Weekend, we will have the names of visiting students and their areas of interest. Having this information will facilitate the formation of groups who may enjoy journeying to the Corner together after the reception.

- C. We anticipate about 20-30 prospectives during Visiting Weekend, though numbers are uncertain.

IX. Area Announcements

- A. Theory: On Thursday, 22 March, the Theory Reading Group will be meeting at 7:30 p.m. to discuss Sara Ahmed's recent volume, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others*. The reading is on Toolkit, and fuller details are available in David Golumbia's email.
- B. Eighteenth Century: On Thursday, 15 March, at 1:30 p.m., the eighteenth century group will be meeting to discuss John O'Brien's chapter, which is available on Toolkit. (Also, there will soon be a screening of *Tom Jones*.)
- C. Medieval: On 13 April, there will be a social gathering. 13 April is both Friday the 13th and Thomas Jefferson's birthday. More details to come.

X. GSAS Announcements

- A. There will be a St. Patrick's Day Party Friday at the Satellite Ballroom from 9-2.
- B. March 29 there will be Happy Hour at Jaberwoke from 7-10.
- C. There will be a chocolate-themed wine festival on March 24 from 11-4. Participants should pay at the door. There will also be a bus service, but only a limited number of seats is available.
- D. The Mardi Gras themed wine tasting was cancelled from lack of interest.
- E. In April, there will be a wine-tasting and wine education experience organized by students on the Range. More details to come.
- F. At Foxfield's, GSAS will have a tent, co-sponsored with the Engineering Department, which has a charter that allows it to provide alcoholic beverages (unlike GSAS). Tickets will be available to Foxfield's, and there will also be a bus. This event will take place in late April.