

Public Minutes of the Student-Faculty Council

April 29, 2022

1. Updates from faculty meetings:
 - a. Updates on summer undergraduate funding from Harvard FAS.
 - b. Planning for and updates from prospective graduate student recruitments & visits.
 - c. Discussion of CfA return to the office, and associated practices (e.g., masking).
 - d. Discussion of the “Real Recourse” GSU proposal.
 - e. Updates about the CfA Director search (and its conclusion!).
 - f. Updates about the formation of the Postdoc Engagement Group.
 - g. Review of proposed CfA Statement of Professional Conduct (now online: <https://www.cfa.harvard.edu/statement-professional-conduct>).
 - h. Spring term Peer Teaching Observing pairings.
 - i. Meeting with Dean Sheree Ohen to discuss Harvard FAS resources from the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging.
 - j. Discussion of GMT funding.

2. Various policy updates and clarifications
 - a. The practical elective must also be letter-graded. Courses outside of the non-astronomy courses listed in Category 2 of the course requirements will require approval from the DGS.
 - b. Students are not permitted to teach twice in one term, except under exceptional circumstances and with approval of both advisor and DGS.
 - c. There is no longer a “first TAC report” - this has been replaced with a general set of guidelines for each TAC meeting.
 - d. Added text here (<https://astronomy.fas.harvard.edu/committees-and-advising>) describing the content of student AC meetings
 - e. Various forms have been updated and streamlined (<https://astronomy.fas.harvard.edu/forms>)

3. The graduate student reunion was discussed. ~10 students have RSVP'd so far. The schedule is as follows:

Friday-	12:00-2:00pm- Lunch
	2:00-3:30pm- Tour of building/casual meet-ups with faculty/staff
	3:30pm- Light refreshments
	5:30-7:00pm- Dinner, TBD location
Saturday-	11:00-2:00pm- Picnic

4. The process by which students are placed on a leave of absence (LOA) was discussed. The following text will be made available on the grad student intranet in order to clarify this process:

There are two firm deadlines in the Astronomy graduate program: completion of the research exam by May of the G3 year (it is intended that projects are designed such that these milestones can be completed well before this deadline. In particular, we encourage scope so that the research exam can be completed by the end of the 2nd year), and completion and defense of the PhD thesis by May of the G6 year. The advisor, advising committee, and CAS monitor progress toward these deadlines and work to identify and address possible concerns before the deadline is reached.

We acknowledge that unanticipated issues arise and we therefore seek to be in contact with students regarding their concerns and challenges (whether technical or personal) as the projects progress. Nevertheless, it is important for both the department and the student that there be a deadline and a process to deal with non-convergence.

If a student does not meet one of the above deadlines, the following actions are usually taken. The DGS meets with both the advisor and student to understand why the deadline was not met and what would be required to complete the relevant milestone. The DGS, in consultation with the advisor and student, develops a detailed plan and timeline for completion of the milestone, which is communicated in a formal academic letter from the DGS to the student. The time given for completion of the milestone depends on various factors, but is often six months in the case of a delayed research exam and one year in the case of a delayed thesis defense. Along with the academic letter, the student is connected with a member of GSAS student services who follows up with the student to connect them to various resources on campus. During this period the student is placed on a period of “grace” within GSAS, which is effectively a probationary status.

If after this period the student has still not completed the milestone, then they are placed on a one year leave of absence (LOA; <https://gsas.harvard.edu/registration/leave-absence>). After the LOA the student is eligible to return to the program if they have completed the pre-determined milestones. If, after the LOA, the student has not completed the milestones, then they are dismissed from the program.

February 11, 2022

1. Updates from faculty meetings

- Selection of Bok award and Trumpler nominee
- Introduction of new undergrad concentrators
- Report from admissions committee; introduction of prospective graduate students
- Reminder of pay scales for summer undergraduates, bridge postdocs
- Discussions of encouraging return to in-person work
- Discussion of spring graduate reunion
- Discussion of impending changes to GSAS student funding model

- Updates on hiring of new HCO Executive Director
2. The graduate program prospective visit will be held this year in person on March 24-25. Shelley, Misha, and Hyerin are the graduate student representatives who will be leading the organizing of the visit. Stay tuned for details.
 3. As previously announced, there will be a graduated students reunion on May 27-28 that will include the current graduating students as well as the prior two years graduates. The issue of housing was discussed, but was tabled for a few weeks until the university rules are clarified. The goal is to keep the planning activities light and informal so that there is plenty of time for students to catch up with friends and colleagues. Activities include a Friday lunch, events in the afternoon (e.g., 2-3 slide mini talks), and dinner (unscheduled). On Saturday there will be an extended lunch picnic.
 4. Significant time was devoted to a discussion of rebuilding the CfA community. Faculty discussed several important aspects of training and networking that are not taking place in a remote environment. Faculty expressed as a near-term goal a return to normal in-person activities. Students relayed several reservations held amongst some of the student body. There was some uncertainty regarding the primary reason(s) for students not returning to the office, and it was agreed that a short poll would be helpful in order to understand the roadblocks keeping students from returning to regular in-person work.
 5. The issue of pay continuity was discussed, in which multiple students recently received interruptions in their monthly pay. It was conveyed that this is a stressful situation that seems to occur annually. *Action item: identify the source of this issue and see if it can be resolved.*
 6. The title of the PhD was discussed, as there was confusion if it should be “Astronomy”, or “Astronomy & Astrophysics”. *Action item: Stephanie will investigate and report back.*
 7. Next meetings: April 29, May 20 (12:30-2pm)
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November 22, 2021

1. Brief orientation/overview of the SFC. Started last year to increase communication between students and the faculty. The previous path for this, student membership on the CAS, was proving unworkable because of the limitation on student privacy in CAS activities. AOB topics are best handled if submitted before hand, but we do encourage new topics to be volunteered.

2. Summary of items from recent faculty meetings

- HCO is searching for a new Executive Director (replacement for Andrea Moore).
- Preparations for the tenure consideration regarding the CfA Director search.
- Discussions of occupancy of the building: what's working and not.
- Reminders about semesterly Advising Committee meetings for grad students.
- Finding TFs for spring courses: some scramble (now successful) to fill the last couple roles.
- Overview of newly declared undergraduate concentrators: 15 in this sophomore class.
- Adoption of peer teaching observing: starting this Fall, we will start a program where every course connected to the department will be observed once by another faculty member, with the intention of giving feedback to the instructor and encouraging a common discussion about teaching practices.
- Initial discussion of opportunities for a reunion of recent PhD graduates, organized around the May commencement.
- Report regarding this year's graduate assessment exam.
- Discussion of the implications of the decadal survey for GMT.

3. The building density is still quite low - what can we do to encourage / entice more people to spend more time in the building? Several ideas were discussed, including offering free lunches, and an informal "how to be on campus" orientation in the Spring led by senior graduate students. It needs to be communicated to students that an essential aspect of their training is in-person interactions with peers and colleagues, both formal (via talks) and informal (via coffee, lunches, speaker dinners, etc). These interactions are important both from a networking perspective and also from an idea-generation perspective.

4. The TF workload was discussed, and concerns were raised that many TFs end up working more than 10 hrs per week. As a reminder, TFs are expected to work 10 hrs per week, on average. Instructors often have very little understanding of how many hours TFs are working, and so communication between TF and instructor is essential. It was proposed that the instructor have a time assessment with each TF after the first 3-4 weeks of class to ensure that the TF is using their time effectively and not working much more than 10 hrs per week. It was also discussed that TFs might need some coaching on how to make their student contact time more efficient (e.g., having many lengthy one-on-one meetings is usually not viable with a 10 hr per week load).

5. Dates for Spring SFC meetings: Feb 11, Mar 25, Apr 29, May 20, 12:30-2pm

April 6, 2021

- 1) Various updates on website & policy changes were announced, including an update to the Shu assessment language (<https://astronomy.fas.harvard.edu/placement-examination>), new EPS course options for course requirements, the grading rubric, and a link to GSAS definition of "satisfactory progress" (<https://astronomy.fas.harvard.edu/astrocourses>), and a description of this committee (<https://astronomy.fas.harvard.edu/committees-and-advising>)

There was some discussion regarding handling requests for exceptions to the department course requirements. This will be discussed in the CAS; the result of that discussion will be reported back to the SFC.

- 2) With the expanded role of TAC chairs, a need has arisen to ensure better load balancing of chair assignments amongst the faculty. In the coming weeks the DGS will attempt some rebalancing. Student meetings with their TAC chair is not required nor is this event reported to the department.

Action item: update the description on the grad pages regarding our open attitude toward changing of TAC memberships, subject to CAS approval.

- 3) Summer TF will no longer count toward the two TF requirements. TFs are needed for department courses and we are running low for various reasons (AY1 requires many TFs; lower ratio of students per TF this past year). There was some discussion about the possibility of limiting the number of times a student can TF, but it was agreed that this would generally be a bad idea. However, there was agreement that the amount of teaching is something that the TAC and advisor need to be kept in the loop on.
- 4) The outreach requirement was discussed. It was clarified that the effort expended should be equivalent to roughly 20 hrs of work. There was a proposal that the deadline for the outreach requirement will be set to the beginning (Sept 1) of a student's final year. The SFC agreed with this timeline change.

Action item: update the outreach website to indicate expected effort and provide additional examples of outreach projects. Update the student timeline to include the new deadline for the outreach requirement. Note: this policy change is subject to approval by the CAS.

- 5) There was discussion of a new policy for graduating student pay. The department will (next year) issue a recommended hourly rate. This policy applies for July-August, as a bridge between graduation and Fall employment in academia. It was emphasized that these positions are individual employment arrangements, subject to the mutual interest of the employer and the employee and of course availability of funds. We note that Harvard has a relatively new policy that requires a minimum rate, tied to the NIH postdoc rate. We stress that we are not making this a required level; these are individual jobs. Still, we think that making a recommendation will help ensure more uniformity.

6) We continued discussion of G0 pay (see minutes from last meeting). The G0 pay policy has been finalized and is described on the web and in previous SFC minutes. We have agreed on a remedy for students who were under-paid in the past: all current astronomy graduate students whose effective compensation (e.g., including compensation such as housing) was lower than the GSAS monthly rate will be back-paid to the GSAS monthly rate. Andrea will reach out to individual students who will receive back-pay. There does not appear to be any systematic trend of under-payment with either gender or minority status: of the 14 current students who worked the summer before their first year at Harvard, 7 will receive back-pay. Of those 7, 2 are women (out of 4 total) and 5 are men (out of 10 total); Of those 7, 4 are URM.

7) *Summary of items from faculty meetings*

- January 29 meeting: Overview of graduate admissions decisions and preparations for virtual visit.
- February 26 meeting: Presentation regarding Outside Activity and Interest Reporting; Trumpler prize nomination selection; Discussion of climate report, town hall, and follow-on meetings.
- March 16 meeting: Presentation regarding Civility and Active Bystander Training; Discussion of post-doc mentoring; Discussion of optical telescope budgetary support.

February 1, 2021

1) An overview was provided by Andrea Moore (HCO) regarding past practices of “G0 summer pay” (i.e., salaries of students doing research in the summer prior to their first year of graduate school at Harvard). Some pay disparities were identified among G0 summer workers. There are several important variables affecting total compensation, including the appointment type (HCO, SAO, GSAS, Banneker, SAO REU), hourly rate, form of compensation (e.g., some positions include housing) and number of hours worked. Pay disparities can be traced to one or more of these variables. If any student would like further clarity on their individual case they should contact Andrea to discuss their G0 compensation.

G0 summer students may be appointed through GSAS on GSAS monthly payroll or through HCO as a Temporary Harvard Student on a weekly/hourly rate payroll. GSAS appointment/payroll requires early arrival permission and registration. Going forward the policy will be to pay all G0 summer students working with Astronomy or SAO researchers and appointed through HCO the GSAS rate based on a full-time schedule of 35 hours per week (GSAS monthly rate/140 hours = hourly rate). This rate does not apply to summer programs such as Banneker and SAO REU programs. Finally, we note that because a month has a variable number of business days in some months students on GSAS (month-based) payroll will earn less than a student on HCO's (hourly-based) payroll.

Further discussion of the noted pay disparities and any potential remedies will be discussed at the next SFC meeting.

- 2) The Shu assessment was discussed, including changes to the format, clarifying the expectations regarding the exam, and the formal possibility of deferral for students who arrive with no astronomy background. These changes have been formalized on the department website: <https://astronomy.fas.harvard.edu/placement-examination>
- 3) Various small updates were discussed by the DGS, including the smaller allowed class size this year (due to GSAS financial constraints), and the last-minute shuffle of AY209 from Spring 2021 to Fall 2021.
- 4) The department chair provided a very brief overview of what the department climate survey roll-out was going to look like over the coming weeks.
- 5) Other items briefly discussed:
 - Process for scheduling the Dept Social Conversations just launched; expect a call from Emily circa this weekend. How can we encourage more participation?
 - ADRF will restart soon.
 - Funds for home office expenses (bring these requests to Peg)
 - Remove Director Education blurb on website (role no longer exists -- done.)
 - Define “satisfactory progress” more clearly on the webpage
 - Discussion of the addition of additional relevant courses, in EPS especially, to count as an astronomy elective in course requirements (done - new EPS option added to course requirements)

November 16, 2020

1) Committee processes

We adopt that the committee regards its discussions as private, i.e., not for external communication, save for what we write into the public portion of the minutes, with the intention that this public portion be agreed upon at the close of the meeting. Members should edit the agenda document during the meeting. The public portion should be anonymized. It is important that committee members feel unburdened about speaking. Members are free to discuss their own views or statements with those outside the committee, but should not attribute anything in the public (or private) minutes to any other committee member.

The public portion of minutes can be made available on the departmental website behind Harvard Key. The Department DEI committee is adopting a similar path.

It is worth stressing that although student membership on this committee was selected by G year, this is not a “representative” committee. In other words, the student members should participate based on their own opinions. It is not necessary to go back and consult with the rest of the students in a cohort as a matter of routine. That said, there may be topics where the committee believes that it should consult with the full student population, and the student members can structure that as they think best.

Aiming for two meetings per term, or as needed.

Next meeting: mid-January. DJE to circulate a poll for times.

2) Updates from the term

Director search has been launched. Pepi Fabbiano and Ramesh Narayan are co-chairs. Townhall on Thursday Nov 19 at 2:30 to describe process. The first phase is a broad consultation with the CfA regarding the desired characteristics of the job and successful candidates. It will be important for people to use this phase, as executive searches cannot publicly discuss names of candidates. Even the short list interviews will be with limited groups (including a student group) and with an expectation of discretion; there won't be the equivalent of a job talk. The Director does not need to be a US citizen.

Robb Scholten will be retiring at the end of January. The search for his replacement hasn't yet started but is nearing administrative approval.

Faculty meetings (Aug, Sept, and Oct) have discussed:

- Grad student orientation
- Confidentiality vs privacy
- The student wellness resource page on the departmental website
- Reorganization of student committees (i.e., this SFC)
- The implications of the graduate student union contract
- The structure of the graduate and undergraduate research forums
- The “social lunch”
- Updates on DEI activities (more info in DEI committee minutes)
- Updates on outreach activities
- The situation with post-doctoral fellowships
- New large grants funded: Cosmic Data Stories & IAIFI
- A briefing on the HCO budget
- Campus occupation and COVID plans
- The new CfA website

The faculty who are teaching have met 3 times to exchange ideas and reports from the term; now planning an additional meeting to transfer these to the spring teachers.

Faculty are expecting that GSAS will set a smaller target for graduate student admissions this coming year.

Training session from Danielle Farrell on November 13, 2020, regarding student support resources. Session was well attended.

DGS conducted a short student check-in survey in September, following one in April. Probably wise to do another one after the break, early in the spring term. Respond to struggling students with a peer mentoring program?

3) Questions/topics arising, including proposals for near-term agenda items

Investments in outdoor space for small gatherings, e.g., for the garden space behind A building. We've gotten various suggestions here (most recently last week), and DJE is pretty sure that we have identified funding. We just need the shopping list to discuss with Charlie Hickey. Magda and Chani already compiled a shopping list. Rain garden proposal by an undergraduate student will be discussed with Charlie Hickey in February -- funding for this is in place, might be worth joining efforts.
