

Plenary Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2019, 6:30 PM | Philosophy Hall 301 | <https://council.gsas.columbia.edu/>



ARTS & SCIENCES GRADUATE COUNCIL

Guest Presentation

1. Presentation: Samantha Lu

Samantha Lu, Associate Director of ISSO (sl2769@columbia.edu), presented at this month's plenary. The International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) serves the international population across all Columbia-affiliated institutions, including the undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools as well as CUIMC. The office functions as the international community's resource for immigration, advisory and documentation services, and information on issues such as visas, employment, travel, and tax-filing obligations. Samantha clarified that the office is divided into several sections: Scholars, Admissions, Advisors (international student advisors), and Communication. Information regarding the office location, hours, and phone appointments can all be found on the [ISSO Website](#).

Samantha highlights in her presentation that some of the most important responsibilities and roles of the office include travel signatures for government documents-the office is often seen as a processing center, offering support for the international students studying at Columbia-including support settling in from orientation to graduation, and facilitating compliance to the university and government laws for international students-ISSO supports the students for awareness regarding these rules and wants the students to utilize all the benefits available to them. Other than these legal matters, ISSO provides resources for cultural adjustment, financial support, and mental health issues. Samantha also comments on the current focus on [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) in the government and that the office very much cares for the students.

Alex Cuadrado (ASGC President, asgc.president@columbia.edu) reminded the plenary that there will be a series of **OPT workshops in February** for students in GSAS, especially for departments that have not hosted workshops already.

2. Questions & Answer Period:

- a. Q: What is the minimum number of credits a student must be enrolled in to be considered full-time? Some departments require 12 credits while other departments require 9.

A: Samantha responded that undergraduate students are required to be registered for at least 12 credits to be considered a full-time student. She explains that at the graduate level, however, the full-time status depends on the department; the requirement is determined by the university's academic committees and is not evenly distributed across the various departments. Therefore, the requirement may range from 6 to 12 credits.

- b. Q: When will ISSO implement a direct phone line? There may be unforeseen emergencies, perhaps at the border, and access to a direct phone line will support the international community tremendously.

A: Samantha first noted that there was a direct phone line several years ago, but it was not functional. ISSO began investigating a new phone system last year, but a lack of staff has been a prevalent issue; issues regarding immigration required highly trained staff, and simple questions may have several answers. Therefore, ISSO prioritizes quality service and responses. She directed students to Public Safety for emergencies, as their office has access to seven emergency contacts in the ISSO office, including Samantha. Furthermore, the [ISSO staff directory](#) lists several ISSO staffs' phone numbers.

- c. Q: Is there another method of communication for international students besides emails? Students may find it difficult to effectively communicate legal issues; phone conversations may prove more efficient.

A: Samantha recommended that students with difficulty communicating legal issues via written email to schedule a phone appointment with any of the [staff](#). She also commented that students with any issues can [call her](#) at 212-854-3591.

Alex (ASGC President, asgc.president@columbia.edu) also notified the representatives that the office is continuing to grow. Students with feedback or comments may contact Samantha (sl2769@columbia.edu) or Alex, as ASGC meets with ISSO twice per semester.

Minutes From October Plenary - Approved Unanimously

Minutes From November Plenary - Approved Unanimously

Election of Davida Marie Rios as new Media Chair - One Abstention, Otherwise Unanimous

- Davida Marie Rios (Chemistry department, dmr2199@columbia.edu)

Announcements

- Following the Plenary, there will be a department representative appreciation party at [Arts & Crafts](#).
- Joseph Greenwell (VP of OUL, jg4233@columbia.edu) will be presenting at the next plenary at 6:30 PM on January 28, 2020, at 301 Philosophy Hall. Department representatives and attendees were encouraged to prepare questions.
- Mike Ford (ASGC VP External Affairs, asgc.vpexternalaffairs@columbia.edu) announced that since the Alumni Chair has stepped down, ASGC has reflected on the benefits the position has on the GSAS community, as the MA Affairs Chair also hosts alumni events. Having contacted several peer institutions, Mike suggested adopting a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusions (DEI) Chair. He asked the plenary about what some of the responsibilities of the DEI Chair should be, the budget, and how they could spend their allotted budget.

Alex Cuadrado (ASGC President, asgc.president@columbia.edu) clarified that this announcement was intended to open the discussion; officially opening the position will take several months, and in the meantime, students are encouraged to contact Mike, Alex, or ASGC (asgc@columbia.edu).

A representative commented on the great success of the DEI Chair at Cornell. ASGC can follow up specifically about their chair.

- Question & Answer Period:

1. Q: Will there be competition between the Alumni and DEI Chair, and is there a tradeoff between the two?

A: Mike responded that there is not necessarily a tradeoff: it is entirely possible to have both an Alumni as well as the DEI Chair. Alex added that because many of the ASGC officers serve on committees, ASGC does not believe that the Alumni board is a priority position. ASGC has begun thinking about what else we could and should do.

2. Q: Did ASGC remove the disabilities representative?

A: Mike replied that the disabilities representative no longer exists as the university committee fell; ASGC did not stop supporting the position.

3. Q: What is the scope of the DEI Chair?

A: Alex clarified that the DEI Chair will likely work closely with the [Students of Color Alliance](#) (SoCA). ASGC will reach out to SoCA to specify the official responsibilities.

General Updates

- There was an inquiry regarding the process of validating an international student's official documents, including transcripts and recommendation letters. The Deans of GSAS clarified that the requirement that admitted students must have their institution send a sealed copy directly to Columbia is not a GSAS policy. However, GSAS wants to support students with any issues; contact GSAS-admissions@columbia.edu for more information or help.
- Last plenary, a representative asked about writing support opportunities for MA students. ASGC is in contact with the Deans, and there will be updates during the January plenary.

Committee Updates

- Tea Crnkovic (ASGC Finance Chair, asgc.finance@columbia.edu) sent Alex an update to present at the plenary. The [ASGC Travel Grants](#) were awarded to 35 students, and exactly 50% of the budget was used. Thus, having doubled the travel grant budget is likely to be a good target. For more information on the ASGC Travel Grants and the [ASGC Student Initiative Grants](#) and the recipients, please refer to the "Funding Opportunities" section of the "For Students" tab of the [ASGC website](#).
- Pierre Devlaminck (ASGC Events Co-Chair, asgc.events_cochair1@columbia.edu) hosted a very successful Wine & Cheese Party this semester, and there will likely be more for the Spring semester. There are more events on their way, and updates will be listed on the weekly [ASGC Newsletter](#).
- Audrey Amsellem (ASGC Quality of Life Chair, asgc.qualityoflife@columbia.edu) updated the plenary with information on the yearly [ASGC Quality of Life Survey](#). The Deans and institutions take the data very seriously, and the QoL committee wanted to increase student participation. The QoL committee suggested improving the incentives of completing the survey and rewarding 10 random participants \$100 Amazon gift cards; last year, there were 10 \$50 Amazon gift cards. Audrey also announced the possibility of holding an event at the department lounge, if there exists such a space, with cookies, tea, and coffee for students to attend and fill out the survey. She is drafting an email for representatives to send to their constituents, and students with comments or feedback are encouraged to contact her. Furthermore, to increase the department representatives' involvement in survey participation, the QoL committee suggested rewarding the representative whose department holds the highest response rate with a \$200 Amazon gift card.
 - Question & Answer Period:
 1. Q: What is the policy on confidentiality, and how will the QoL preserve it?
A: Audrey responded that the names of the participants and the data will be separated. There will also be a confidentiality update on the email sent to the students; entering the raffle is entirely optional. Once the raffle is finished, all names and UNIs will be permanently deleted to preserve confidentiality.

External Representative Updates

- Dominic Walker (dtw2120@columbia.edu) presented several updates on the Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC). There have been negotiations regarding the contract beginning February, and the status of the different contract articles are available on the [GWC website](#). Some highlights are concerned with [employment files](#), [severability](#), and [travel](#). The Union-Management Committee has also established a 10-member (5 GWC and 5 CU), joint committee that will meet each semester to discuss the administration of the contract and related matters. The upcoming bargaining dates are both held on Friday, January 24 and Friday, January 31 at 469 Studebaker from 9:30 AM - 1 PM.
- Frank Gutierrez (IGB Representative, fg2462@columbia.edu) updated that the number of members on the committee has increased, but the budget has not changed. They expressed their need for a larger budget.
- Senators' Updates
 - Mike Ford (Humanities, gsas.humanities_senator@columbia.edu) notified the plenary that the program for a dual degree for 2 MAs has been approved. Additionally, NAGPS will be holding

their [Legislative Action Days](#) in Washington DC which consists of 2 days of training followed by 2 days of lobbying with lawmakers. Some of the key issues are research funding, mental health, and other issues regarding the graduate students' welfare. ASGC will pay for the attending students', whom will be chosen by interest and application, bus rides and hotels. Mike will continue with his updates in the spring plenaries.

- Weitao Zhu (Natural Sciences, gsas.puresci_senator@columbia.edu) expressed an interest in starting a joint, interschool newsletter. Those interested are invited to contact Weitao.
- Darold Cuba (Social Sciences, gsas.socialsci_senator@columbia.edu) announced the 50th anniversary of the senate. Updates are coming in April, and there will most likely be a panel and reception. He also brought attention to [Disrupt Wikipedia](#) to combat Wikipedia's systemic issues.

New Business: Open Forum

- A member of the plenary inquired about an issue with class registration. Currently, SIPA students are allowed to register for all GSAS classes while the converse is untrue. Furthermore, there exist SIPA courses exclusively for SIPA students. A student from the European History and Politics MA program asked whether this was unfair. Another student, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, also announced that students in the program complained about enrollment into the same courses, as one student was unable to enroll. SIPA courses registration for SIPA students begin in January, which conflicts with GSAS; when the GSAS registration opens, SIPA students are registering for those courses, but by the SIPA registration date GSAS students are unable to enroll. Alex (ASGC President, asgc.president@columbia.edu) responded that he will notify the GSAS deans. Unfortunately, there will most likely not be any actions by January. Students with similar problems can contact Alex or Jason (asgc.communications@columbia.edu).

Meeting Adjourned