

## ASGC Plenary Meeting Agenda

April 28, 2020, 6:30 PM | Zoom: [971695284](https://council.gsas.columbia.edu/) | <https://council.gsas.columbia.edu/>



# ARTS & SCIENCES GRADUATE COUNCIL

## Presentation of Chinweike Okegbe Service Awards

The Chinweike Okegbe Service Awards are awarded to two senior graduate students and one non-student who have had a lasting impact due to their service to the Department and University while demonstrating academic excellence.

In honor of Chinweike Okegbe, this award is meant to reflect his vision of a student being recognized for leaving the Department and the University, as a whole, more improved than when he/she first entered the program. As the co-founder of the Biological Sciences Career Initiative, in addition to his many other contributions, Chinweike Okegbe demonstrated this ideal and this award captures the determined spirit that he had to help others. For more information, including past recipients, please refer to the [ASGC Chinweike Okegbe Service Award page](#).

Alex Cuadrado (ASGC president) presented the award to:

- a. Sharon Kim, Program Manager, European Institute
- b. Elise Myers, PhD Student, Earth & Environmental Sciences
- c. Cat Lambert, PhD Student, Classics

## Approve Minutes from March Plenary - Approved Unanimously

## Department Representative Transitions (2020-2021)

Current department representatives who wish to continue serving their position and future department representatives are required to submit the [2020-21 Department Representative Form](#). Furthermore, the End-of-Year Department Representative Appreciation Event has been postponed and will be scheduled and announced later.

## Committee Updates

1. Will Plews-Ogan (ASGC VP Administration) gave three important announcements.
  - a. First, the Student Group [Change of Group Leadership Form](#) has been updated on the ASGC website.
  - b. Second, the tutoring corps of the various [COVID-19 Volunteering and Donation Opportunities](#) has been a great success. There were 1,500 volunteers across the graduate student body across Columbia, including Columbia College and Barnard. Currently, the volunteers tutor students across the east coast, including the children of CUMC staff, but there are more volunteers than needed. The corps is rolling out to other hospitals, including NYU Langone, and following that, will possibly roll out to DC, Boston, and other NY hospitals. Will stresses unmatched volunteers to continue checking their emails for potential matches. He also notified the plenary of the other opportunities still available [online](#), including check-in calls through [DOROT](#), volunteer student corps created at the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, research through the

Columbia Researchers Against COVID-19, and other volunteer/donation opportunities with greater NYC organizations. The current matches have been in service of emergent needs, but if you have not yet been matched, reach out to Will via his email ([asgc.vpadministration@columbia.edu](mailto:asgc.vpadministration@columbia.edu)).

- c. Lastly, Will announced the creation and results of the first round of the GSAS Community COVID-19 Emergency Fund. The committee is currently in the process of reviewing applications and are trying to meet as much need as possible. ASGC suggested the creation of this fund to the deans, who then had GSAS match the contributions by reaching out to the departments and alumni, quadrupling the original fund. Special thanks were given to Audrey Amsellem (ASGC Quality of Life Chair) and Will for spearheading and working with Celina Chatman (GSAS Associate Dean for Academic Diversity and Inclusion, [chatman.nelson@columbia.edu](mailto:chatman.nelson@columbia.edu)).
2. Tea Crnković (ASGC Finance Chair) summarized the results of the final batch of applications for the [ASGC Travel Grants](#). Despite the pandemic, there were still applications submitted by students for future conferences, of whom 11 were successful. The expenditure was below expected for the final round of applications. Tea then announced that the [annual ASGC budget](#) has been updated. She commented that ASGC was able to separate a significant fraction of the budget for the emergency fund.
3. Audrey Amsellem (ASGC Quality of Life Chair) presented the [annual Quality of Life Survey Report](#). Audrey highlighted the recommendations, but also noted that the survey was conducted prior to the COVID-19 crisis. The survey is the primary way ASGC sets its advocacy, and the first meeting of the new executive officers will start with the Quality of Life report. Students with any questions or concerns should contact Audrey ([asgc.qualityoflife@columbia.edu](mailto:asgc.qualityoflife@columbia.edu)).
  - a. There were 542 valid responses, a 15% participation rate, which was more than the previous year. There were significantly significantly more MA student participation this year, but MA responses were still underrepresented (180 MA and 362 PhD). Approximately 60% of respondents were in the Humanities and the remaining 40% were in the Sciences. The gender distribution was skewed towards those who identified as females, with LGBTQ students proportionally well-represented. The strong majority of respondents identified as white, with around 30% as Asian or Asian-American, 8% as Hispanic or Latino/a/x, 6% as Black or African-American, 3% as Middle Eastern/North-African, and less than 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native. This raises concerns about the extent to which this survey may be able to address concerns specific to racial and ethnic minorities. However, ASGC is taking steps towards prioritizing responding to and better representing the concerns of students from underrepresented groups with the creation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair.
  - b. The Academic Life section reported that students were generally satisfied with their departments/programs and advisors. The main issues stemmed from a lack of transparency, support, and clear communication between the administration, departments, and students. Over half of the students reported being satisfied with the channels of communications and opportunities for students voices to be heard for academic and administrative matters. The Quality of Life Committee and the ASGC executive board recommend GSAS to reinforce to departments and faculty the mentor-advisee expectations.

- c. The Housing section reported that rent payments, in particular, were a significant source of stress due to students' lack of financial confidence and support from Columbia. According to the results of the survey, approximately an equal number of students live on campus as they do off campus. There also seems to be a significant difference between the distribution of Masters and PhD students' percentage of income spent on rent: the average Masters student spent over 50% of their income on rent while the average PhD student spent over 30%. The Quality of Life Committee and the ASGC executive board recommend Columbia Residential to establish, beginning in the Fall of 2020, a Columbia Residential Advisory Committee which brings together student representatives from the different schools which it serves.
  - i. Alex commented that ASGC has received verbal commitment from Columbia Residential that the committee would be started in Fall 2020. ASGC will push them to follow through. He also noted that Columbia is transitioning from its current TBER system to Concur.
- d. The Health section reported that only about 40% of respondents believe that Columbia provides adequate resources for physical health, and only 45% that the university provides adequate mental health resources. The majority of respondents are also not satisfied with the appointment system for medical services. Over 45% of respondents do not believe that stress is addressed as an issue by the university. The vast majority of commenters called for improving current resources rather than creating new ones. Some comments also identified stress as a symptom of structural issues and called for departmental solutions, in addition to additional funding, adequate health insurance, and a better gym. The Quality of Life Committee and the ASGC executive board recommend ASGC and the Health committee to bring the dissatisfaction with the appointment system to the attention of Columbia Health and GSAS to recommend departments to promote departmental level conversations around stress and work life balance.
- e. The Disabilities section reported that about 9% of survey respondents identified as having a disability. Of these students, 17% report experience disability-related discrimination at Columbia, and 28% report experiencing violence, discrimination and/or harassment at Columbia. Students with a disability appear to experience violence, discrimination, and/or harassment at a higher rate than the general survey population. Students are neutral or slightly negative about disclosing their disability to the university or their department, and a quarter of students are "not at all" comfortable disclosing. About half of students with a disability have sought assistance from ODS. Students' experiences with support from ODS and their home departments are mixed. Half of the comments criticized ODS specifically. The Quality of Life Committee and the ASGC Executive Board recommend ASGC to create an anonymous complaint portal to collect student complaints and grievances and convey these directly to ODS and OADI to work with departments to foster an inclusive, respectful culture that supports students with known or private disabilities.
- f. The Diversity and Inclusion section reported that, in line with last year's report, the experiences of women and/or underrepresented minorities on campus continue to differ from that of their male and/or White and Asian/Asian-American counterparts. Specifically, perceptions of departmental and university-wide commitment to diversity

and inclusion greatly differ, such that students who identified as male, White, and/or Asian / Asian-American reported more favorable experiences than their peers. Further, genderqueer / non-binary / gender non-conforming students continue to be underrepresented in our data, a byproduct of underrepresentation on campus. The Quality of Life Committee and the ASGC Executive Board make two recommendations. First, GSAS administration (not just those within the Office of Academic Diversity and Inclusion) and the future ASGC Executive Board Members, should carefully review students' written remarks on the efficacy of Columbia's current diversity and inclusion efforts. A summary cannot fully capture the nuance of students' disparate experiences on campus, which is one reason this section of the report was created. Second, special care should be taken in addressing COVID-19-related concerns, the burden of which is disproportionately felt by students of color, students with disabilities, and/or students with financial insecurity (among other marginalized groups). These concerns include, but are not limited to, housing (e.g., Columbia Residential) and food insecurity; racism and xenophobia (e.g., Asian/Asian-American students being physically and verbally assaulted, including at Columbia 'Safe Havens'); and access to health services.

Audrey also responded to a student's comment about the ISSO phone line regarding tax help. If you would like to share your experience with Audrey, contact [asgc.qualityoflife@columbia.edu](mailto:asgc.qualityoflife@columbia.edu).

- g. The Violence section reported that about 20% of survey participants reported either having directly experienced, or having been affected, by instances of violence, harassment and discrimination at Columbia. Out of these students about 40% have directly experienced violence, harassment and discrimination, in the form of gender-based misconduct (36%), sexual harassment (23%), racial discrimination (23%), bullying (12%), followed by violence based on sexual orientation, sexual violence, disability-based violence and finally transphobic violence. Of those indirectly affected, the majority of respondents witnessed racial discrimination (41%), followed by gender based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, bullying, disability-based discrimination, transphobic and based on sexual orientation. The ASGC Executive Board and the Quality of Life Committee recommend to improve the system to report instances of violence, harassment or discrimination to foster trust with targets of these violences and to control the hiring of faculty with history of violence, harassment or discrimination.
- h. The International Students section reported that respondents' experiences as international students differ widely depending on their race and/or ethnicity. Those who identify as Asian/Asian-American are more likely to be affected by recent immigration policies. Those who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x, are the most likely to experience harassment or discrimination at the border closely followed by Black/African American, Middle Eastern/North African and Asian/Asian American, in stark contrast to those who identify as White/European-American. The majority of respondents are pleased with Columbia's resources for international students, although the satisfaction rate has decreased from last year. The vast majority of international students have not taken advantage of Columbia's resources for non-native English speakers. Those who have are satisfied with the resources, although multiple people in the comment section decried the lack of available appointments at the Writing Center. The majority of respondents

found Columbia to be welcoming to international students, although several students described their unfamiliarity with US culture as a significant barrier to inclusion. The majority of respondents are pleased with ISSO services. The ASGC Executive Board and the Quality of Life Committee make three recommendations. First, international students should be taken into account in discussions about inclusion and diversity. This work should be coordinated between ISSO and ODCI, and should address integration. Second, ISSO should improve accessibility through establishing a direct phone line and increasing staff, including hiring advisors with legal training. Third, ISSO should communicate to its students their current tax filing resource, as many students seemed unaware of the service.

- i. The Parents section reported that a total of 6% of respondents are parents. 67% of parents believe that Columbia doesn't provide enough resources and services. Roughly half of the parents have used parental accommodations or have taken a leave, around 60% receive childcare subsidies and around 20% have used Back-Up Care. Numerous respondents commented on the high cost of childcare in New York City, and expressed that the \$2000 subsidy wasn't enough. Many asked for affordable on campus childcare services, such as a daycare. Several commenters didn't know what Back-Up Care was. Some commenters also expressed that childcare costs deter would-be parents from having children. The ASGC Executive Board and the Quality of Life Committee make two recommendations. First, ask University Life to increase communication on existing services such as Back Up Care. One document that lists all parental resources and recommended outside services could be distributed to each parent, as opposed to the current format of information request form. Second, GSAS should maintain and continue to expand parental support.
- j. The Campus Resources section reported on students' experiences with seven services: Libraries, Center for Career Education (CCE), Health, Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS), Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), Fitness Centers, and GSAS Writing Studio. The libraries are heavily used. Fitness Center, Health Services, CPS, and CTL have fewer frequent users. CCE and the GSAS Writing Studio are poorly used. The fitness centers and GSAS Writing Studio have smoother distributions of frequent and occasional users. A majority of respondents who have used the services are satisfied with each service, except for the Fitness Centers. The GSAS Writing Studio (opened Fall 2018) has the highest satisfaction rate and attracts repeat users. Libraries, GSAS Writing Studio and CTL have high percentages of "very satisfied" users. Commenters did decry overcrowded libraries and a desire for more quiet space, accessible seating, and carrels. The Health Services appointment system was criticized for its lack of flexibility, and the gym drew routine criticism on overcrowding; broken equipment, and the cost of lockers, towels and group fitness classes. The GSAS Writing Studio was particularly praised in the comments. The ASGC Executive Board and the Quality of Life Committee make three recommendations. First, ASGC should bring some student complaints to Dodge (broken equipment). Second, ASGC and the Health Committee should bring student complaints to Health Services (appointment system). Third, there should be continued support of the Writing Studio while continuing to seek space for GSAS students to work and write, including for MA and pre-dissertation writers.

- k. The Funding section reported that funding and financial wellness are some of the key influences in the graduate student quality of life. Incredibly, only 22% of PhD students relied solely on funding through Columbia, while a stunning 4% of Masters students relied solely on funding from Columbia. Approximately half of all Masters students reported having taken out a loan to finance their program, with a median amount of between \$50,000 and \$75,000. The median Masters student felt that they were not 14 financially stable, and the median PhD student felt mildly financially stable, both of which need to be improved. A significant fraction of students experienced issues with reimbursement, and the most common feedback from students included poor communication, system issues, and administrative/logistic complaints. The open write-in submissions in the last two questions shed light on the growing inaccessibility of graduate education at Columbia; the majority of students' sources of stress were due to their financial instability, as well as their ability to make rent payments in a timely manner. The recommendation is for GSAS to address the issue of late pay and late reimbursement and ensure that the process for pay and reimbursement is streamlined, such that the financial insecurity many graduate students are facing is not additionally burdened by unpredictable income.
  - l. The Unionization section reported that respondents were largely familiar with the Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC) union and its bargaining process. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported feeling that a contract and recognized union would improve their quality of life. All the same, the majority of respondents are not at all satisfied with the Columbia administration's response to unionization and bargaining. These data suggest a disparity between graduate students' needs (for improved quality of life) and the Columbia administration's desire to bargain. These data also suggest that respondents are feeling uncertain about ongoing negotiations, with many being unsure if they are satisfied with either the union or Columbia's bargaining. This uncertainty is perhaps symptomatic of a general lack of information about graduate student's rights as workers, which is one issue that the union rallies to address. The Quality of Life Committee and the ASGC Executive Board recommend that Columbia commit to bargaining in good faith with GWC, which would demonstrate a true commitment to improving graduate students' quality of life.
4. PJ Robinson (ASGC Events co-Chair) announced the last week of the virtual Dungeons & Dragons campaign. Additionally, all the books have been shipped, and the book club will be able to start.

### **External Representatives Updates**

1. Bhargav Gopal (Health Representative) announced that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 30.
2. Laura DiNardo (Libraries Representative) announced that the committee had met in March. There will be an optional meeting on Friday, May 1. The committee is gathering feedback on students' transition to online learning. Laura commented that anyone with particular Libraries feedback that they would like to share was free to contact her ([lf2113@columbia.edu](mailto:lf2113@columbia.edu)), Rahim Hashim ([rh2898@columbia.edu](mailto:rh2898@columbia.edu)), or Alex ([asgc.president@columbia.edu](mailto:asgc.president@columbia.edu)). The ASGC newsletter contains useful information in the "Message from the Columbia Libraries" section.
3. Amelia Spooner (Union Representative), Dominic Walker, and Alexander Cook presented the recent updates on the Union. The Bargaining Committee recently released a [FAQ](#), which gives

the background around what has been happening in a number of departments toward the strikes. Important resources, including bargaining sessions and days of action, are published on the [Union website](#). Important contact information (Columbia People's COVID Response), access to the mailing list, teach-in events, access to the email and Twitter for grad workers on strike, and Week of Action events are listed on this [Google Doc](#). The union will be addressing other issues as well, including discussions, activists' talks, and podcasts. They also linked the [Directory of Teach-ins](#) as another reference. Alexander then explained some of the confusion surrounding the strike. Collective action under the NRA is protected. The current strike is not supported by the union nor by the Bargaining Committee. They are not necessarily opposed, however. If they had expressed opposition, the laws would be unclear. As the situation currently stands, the strike should be protected, and Columbia should respect their right to collective action. There are legal retaliations on Columbia's part (docking of pay), but the university should continue to respect the actions. Additionally, some of the comments from faculty are discouraging, bordering on intimidation. They conclude that this is not a wild cat strike. Anyone with questions regarding the union, Columbia People's COVID Response, or CU Workers of Strike are encouraged to contact Amelia ([ajs2144@columbia.edu](mailto:ajs2144@columbia.edu)).

4. Frank Gutierrez and Korina Baraceros (IGB Representatives) announced that the committee held its final meeting yesterday, welcoming the new executive board. The previous meeting voted on the new groups, of which 3 out of 6 were approved.

### **Senators' Updates**

Mike Ford (GSAS Humanities Senator) collectively announced that the senate itself is not able to meet if there are not a certain number of people present. There was a caucus of PhD students addressing reported pressures on housing and rent over the summer, extended funding, and various other issues. These have been taken up by the executive committee, but were all shut down as union issues. The senate is advocating for graduate students, but is facing difficulties.

### **New Business (Open Forum)**

### **Adjournment**

**ASGC plenary meetings are conducted in the style of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th Edition)***

**Obtain the floor (the right to speak) by being the first to raise your department placard when the person speaking has finished. You must be recognized by the Chair before speaking.**

- No member can speak twice to the same issue until everyone else wishing to speak has spoken to it once.
- The agenda and all committee reports are merely recommendations. When presented to the assembly and the question is stated, debate begins and changes can occur.