



ARTS AND SCIENCES

GRADUATE COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT
2020-2021

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ASGC Executive Board

President

Alex Cuadrado

Vice President, Administration

Laura DiNardo

Vice President, External Affairs

Bhargav Gopal

Finance Chair

Tea Crnković

Communications Chair

Ashley Wells

Quality of Life Chair

Dorna Movasseghi

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Chair

Arden Lee

Events Co-Chairs

Pierre Devlaminck & P.J. Robinson

Media Chair

Dauida Rios

Masters Affairs Chair

Meave Sheehan

President's Report

President

Alex Cuadrado

COVID-19 & ASGC

When writing a note for the 2019-2020 Annual Report on COVID-19 and the ways in which ASGC had to change gears and pivot towards pandemic-related advocacy and student support, we could not have expected that this would still be the case for the entire 2020-2021 academic year. The three pillars of ASGC's mission, in my opinion, are advocacy, research support, and community-building. In ways that would have been unrecognizable in previous years, we accomplished all three of these core objectives.

Much of ASGC's efforts have been channeled towards advocacy with various administrative offices on the Columbia campus. ASGC also participated in national-level advocacy, by submitting a successful *amici curiae* brief in the Harvard & MIT case against the Department of Homeland Security in the summer of 2020.

While conference and travel grants were not able to be disbursed for physical travel, we accomplished our research support mission by mobilizing travel grants to support virtual conferences.

Lastly, through a handful of virtual events, our own plenary meetings, and initiative grants (both Student Initiative Grants and Diversity Initiative Grants), ASGC was able to foster some avenues for community building during this most abnormal year.

PLENARY MEETINGS

For the most part, ASGC plenaries this year were forums for communicating important health and advocacy information. That said, there were a few grassroots movements (such as the Tuition Strike) that were brought to the plenary and put to a vote. Even though the Executive Board might not have agreed wholeheartedly with the motions that were passed, the current parliamentary structure allows for these motions. As a suggestion for future years, it might be worth considering proposing an amendment to the ASGC Constitution and By-Laws such that the threshold for floor movements be higher, or incorporate members of the ASGC Executive Board (as they are then put in the position of defending these decisions).

ELECTIONS

ASGC Executive Board

Elections for the 2020-2021 ASGC Executive Board were held during the March Plenary Meeting. All three divisions are represented in the new slate of officers.

President	Ashley Wells (American Studies)
Vice President, Administration	Laura DiNardo (Italian)
Vice President, External Affairs	Bhargav Gopal (Economics)
Finance Chair	Tea Crnković (Chemistry)
Communications Chair	Geronimo Cristobal (American Studies)
Quality of Life Chair	Clem Choi (French)
Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Chair	Arden Lee (Chemistry)
Events Co-Chairs	P.J. Robinson (Chemistry) & Thu Hai Pham (Economics)
Media Chair	Dauida Rios (Chemistry)
Masters Affairs Chair	[elected in October]

GSAS Senate Elections

In the Spring of 2021, elections were held for the two vacant GSAS Senate seats (Social Sciences & Natural Sciences). Anne van Vlimmeren (Biological Sciences) was elected for the GSAS-NS seat and began her term in March. Due to complications between the Senate Office and CUIT, the GSAS-SS constituency has yet to be fully determined. The election was suspended, and the seat remains vacant. This issue has been handed over to the VP, External Affairs with the hopes that is resolved soon. Mike Ford (Music) is serving out his term as GSAS-Humanities Senator.

AWARDS

Faculty Mentoring Awards

ASGC continued the tradition of presenting a faculty mentoring award annually during convocation to two members of Columbia University faculty to recognize excellence in mentoring GSAS students. This award is a student initiative; selections were made entirely by graduate student representatives from GSAS and affiliated schools based on student nomination letters spanning across all disciplines. The recipients of the 2021 awards are:

Professor Joseph Massad, Professor of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies
Professor Jenny Davidson, Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Chinweike Okegbe Service Award

ASGC also presented three Service Awards to a combination of graduate students and/or non-students in recognition of their service to the Columbia graduate community. This was the second year the awards were presented under the Chinweike Okegbe Service Award name, and the first year they were presented by ASGC. The recipients of the 2021 Chinweike Okegbe Service Award are:

Awo Yayra Sumah, PhD Candidate in MESAAS

Mike Ford, PhD Candidate in Music

Nicole Meily, Graduate Programs Manager, Department of Art History & Archaeology

COMMITTEE WORK

As President, I served on several committees at Columbia, including the Executive Committee of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, the Educational Policy and Planning Committee of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences, the PhD Council, the Students of Arts & Sciences Consortium, and the Student Libraries Advisory Council.

Administration

Vice President, Administration

Laura DiNardo

INVITED PLENARY SPEAKERS

- September 2020: n/a
- October 2020: Graduate Equity Initiative, Paco Lara; GSAS Compass, Rachel Bernard and Francesca Fanelli
- November 2020: ISSO, David Austell
- December 2020: Columbia Food Pantry, Mackenzie Collins
- January 2021: Columbia Health, Dr. Melanie Bernitz
- February 2021: PE and Recreation, Sara Negrette (Invited, but unable to attend)
- March 2021: n/a
- April 2021: Office of University Life, Joseph Greenwell

ASGC-RECOGNIZED STUDENT GROUPS

New approved student groups: 0

Rejected student groups: 1

- ASGC received one Group Recognition Application this year from PhDish. After having reviewed their application and constitution, it was determined that the group should be recognized by the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) due to the makeup of their membership.

Updates: At the end of this academic year, ASGC decided to add a new question to its funding applications to ensure that all eligible and interested groups are aware of the benefits of becoming recognized by ASGC. Applicants will now be required to indicate whether they are affiliated with a department-specific entity, with an ASGC-recognized student group, or if they are unaffiliated. Any eligible group that indicates they are unaffiliated will, going forward, be sent information on the benefits and process for becoming an ASGC-recognized student group.

ADVOCACY

Columbia Residential: One major focus this year was to help create a student advisory council in partnership with Columbia Residential, much like those in existence at Columbia Libraries (SLAC), Columbia Health (SHAC), and now at ISSO (ISLC). As VP, Administration, Laura met twice with Columbia Residential in the fall, as well as shared a brief write-up of the benefits of such a committee to be brought back to Columbia Residential leadership to demonstrate its utility. ASGC is now in the process of collecting written support from other student governments at Columbia in hopes of demonstrating a strong level of interest across schools for this council.

COMMITTEE WORK

In her capacity as VP, Administration, Laura was a member of the Columbia Libraries Student Library Advisory Committee as well as the CAA Student Leadership Advisory Council. She also attended ad-hoc meetings with the PhDC and with ISSO leadership and their newly founded student advisory committee.

External Affairs

Vice President, External Affairs

Bhargav Gopal

SHAC

ASGC collaborated with other student groups to disseminate timely health information provided by the Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC). Based on the information shared by Melanie Bernitz and Michael McNeil, ASGC directed our constituents to appropriate Covid-19 testing locations and clarified rules on mandatory testing.

CARES ACT

ASGC successfully advocated for the university administration to accept and distribute funds from the CARES Act. These funds were distributed across various Columbia schools and were proactively provided to students who demonstrated financial need on their FAFSAs.

IVY+

ASGC representatives Bhargav Gopal and Alex Cuadrado attended the annual IVY+ conference in the Fall semester. The sessions focused on how universities could best respond and adapt to the challenges brought upon by the pandemic. We learned about best practices adopted by other universities, such as ways to conduct student social activities remotely, and adopted some of these suggestions within our organization.

NAGPS

ASGC continues to foster bonds with a broad coalition of schools represented in the National Association of Graduate Professional Students (NAGPS). Conducted in the fall of 2020, the NAGPS sessions also focused on how various schools were adapting to Covid-19. The organizers dedicated a panel to discrimination faced by international students. To further contribute to this dialogue, our ISSO representative – Chuyu Tian – has been in contact with NAGPS organizers.

Finance

Finance Chair

Tea Crnković

STUDENT INITIATIVE GRANTS

	Applications	Awards
Number	6	6
Amount	\$4,635.00	\$4,635.00

TRAVEL GRANTS

Due to COVID-19 related closures and travel restrictions, there was an exceptionally low number of applications for travel grants. Since many conferences were held online, ASGC approved the use of travel grants for coverage of online registration fees. All eligible applicants were awarded travel grants of 100% of what they requested. Reasons for disqualification were previously received ASGC travel awards, or students opting out due to travel restrictions.

	Applications	Awards		Applications	Awards
Summer			Winter		
Number	0	0		2	2
Amount	\$0	\$0		\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00
Fall			Spring		
Number	5	3		4	3
Amount	\$1,200.00	\$645.00		\$1,315.00	\$1,215.00
Total					
Number	11	8		Original budget	% Spent:
Amount	\$ 3,515.00	\$ 2,860		\$ 25,000.00	11.44%

Conference spending statistics for the entire year, broken down by expenditure type:

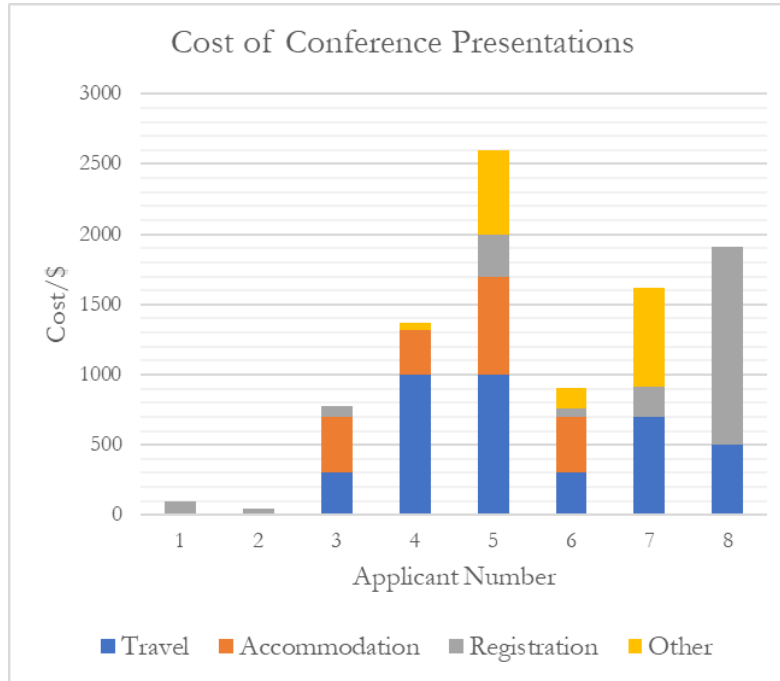
Travel costs:

\$422.22 +/- \$382.32

Accommodation costs:

\$202.22 +/- \$245.93

Registration costs:
\$250.89 +/- \$420.25
Other costs:
\$166.67 +/- \$263.52



IMPLEMENTATION OF MEAL EXPENDITURE POLICY

Columbia's set maxima for meal reimbursements are excessively high for certain events organized by ASGC, so we have set up modified maxima and criteria for such events: <https://council.gsas.columbia.edu/content/meal-expenditure-policy>

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

- Academic year 2020/2021 had exceptionally low student and ASGC activity due to COVID-19 pandemic, so budgeting plans for the next year cannot be based on its spending
- With pandemic situation steadily, but certainly improving with high vaccination rates and the majority of restrictions already being lifted, I recommend that the next year's budget can be based on and predicted by the 2019/2020 academic year
- Due to large carryover from 2019/2020 and due to even larger carryover from 2020/2021, ASGC needs to find ways to utilize its budget to the fullest potential and to do so, I recommend that certain grant restrictions and limits are lifted. I propose that student

initiative and diversity grant limit is increased from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and that travel grant limit is increased from \$500 to \$600. For travel grants, we can see that our funding was not able to fully cover planned in-person conference expenses of any of our applicants (Applicants 2-8 on the graph above).

Communications

Communications Chair

Ashley Wells

DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATION

By the end of the year, there were 26 (out of 29) PhD representatives and 24 (out of 40) MA representatives. The 2021-2022 Department Representatives roster is being updated as the 2020-2021 representatives submit the 2021-2022 Department Representative form. Finally, programs with less than 10 total students are not required to have a representative. All external representative positions were filled: IGB, ISSO, GWC, Libraries, Health, and Disabilities.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April
PhD	15	23	24	22	22	23	23	21
MA	8	17	14	18	16	14	15	13
Total	23	40	38	40	38	37	38	34

Department Representatives were reminded on the day of the plenary meeting via email, which included the agenda, the minutes of the last month’s plenary, and a brief highlight overview. We have also decided that all department representatives will be reminded of plenary meetings 24 hours beforehand with a shorter email including the minutes from the previous meeting. The aggregated PhD attendance rate was consistently higher than the MA counterpart rate.

NEWSLETTER, WEBSITE, and EMAILS

Beginning on September 2nd, regular newsletters were sent every Tuesday. The final weekly newsletter of the academic year was sent on April 20th. Intermittent newsletters will be sent out throughout the summer as necessary. The ASGC website was maintained with updated newsletter archives, plenary attendance, minutes, and the agenda. Separate emails were sent out directly to the GSAS students via the mailing lists containing information regarding the Quality of Life Survey and the University Senate elections for the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences positions.

COVID-19

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the community. All plenaries, executive board meetings, and ASGC-GSAS meetings during the academic year were held virtually, via Zoom. The plenary meeting links were communicated via email to the Department Representatives and were also included in the weekly newsletters.

Quality of Life

Quality of Life Chair

Dorna Movasseghi

Note from President: Unfortunately, in 2021, the Quality of Life Chair was unable to successfully complete a Quality of Life Report and, subsequently, an annual report. Luckily, the Quality of Life survey did take place, so the raw data is available for future Quality of Life committee members to consult.

In the past, we had discussed running every-other-year Quality of Life surveys, in an attempt to reduce survey fatigue and have more dedicated time to analyze and act upon previous report findings. We are hopeful that we may move to this model next year after the completion of a successful survey, though the timing will have to be coordinated with the every-other-year Quality of Life Survey run by the Office of University Life. In future years, it will be more important to emphasize the expectations of the Quality of Life Chair role, and develop mechanisms by which a report can be successfully compiled in the event of their absence.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair

Arden Lee

Informed by the results of the 2019 Quality of Life Survey Report and inspired by our peer Ivy+ institutions, ASGC held a series of conversations Spring 2020 to discuss creating a new Executive Board position focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

POSITION ON SYSTEMIC RACIAL INJUSTICE IN OUR COMMUNITY

In response to the ongoing racial tensions both within our community as well as the country, we found it important to clearly state ASGC's stance on the topic. Working with executive boards of ASGC-sponsored affinity groups—Students of Color Alliance (SoCA), Women in Science (WISC), and the Initiative for Diversity in Engineering and Science (IDEaS)—as well as Celina Chapman Nelson (Associate Dean of Diversity and Inclusion), we were able to create the first iteration. This document was created before the first plenary meeting of Fall 2020, where the departmental representatives voted on if it was acceptable to publish on the ASGC website. The statement contains goals that ASGC hopes to accomplish in terms of DEI, the largest action being the creation of this DEI Chair position. Additionally, it acknowledges shortcomings that we have had in the past, which disproportionately affect marginalized students. This document will be reevaluated annually to both update the goals and reframe the perspective.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION SUBCOMMITTEE

This year, 17 departmental representatives signed up to be a part of this new subcommittee. We met monthly to share what various departments' responses are in terms of DEI. These interdisciplinary meetings served to share concerns across GSAS and work together to create solutions on talking to leading faculty members in their departments. For example, many language and culture departments began communications with each other to create curricula about teaching with inclusive language. Additionally, we began working on a Master Document, which delineates what the bare minimum requirements that should be integrated into every department, such as forming a DEI task force that includes both faculty and students.

DISABILITY SERVICES AND COLUMBIA RESIDENTIAL

As of August 3, 2020, Columbia Residential switched over their rental payment system, where all residents would be charged monthly, instead of semesterly. With this change, those who have ADA accommodations were unknowingly charged the full rent amount, rather than the discounted price that was agreed upon due to their accommodations. The full rent amount was

also the only number listed in the lease agreements that students must sign at the end of the spring semester or when they move in. The “ADA credit” would be added onto the student’s SSOL SFS account an undisclosed amount of time after their rent was charged, with very little description as to what the credit was for. This caused a lot of confusion and forced students to pay much more than necessary upfront, which may have been detrimental to their finances, especially as we were well into the peak of COVID-19. After many communications with Disability Services and Columbia Residential, as of April 23, 2021, an email was sent out to all students who have housing accommodations explicitly explaining their rent. This email was sent the same day lease agreement renewals were also sent, and the agreement now reflects accurately what the student must pay monthly, rather than the rate prior to applying ADA accommodations. This should also be reflected later this summer, when first year students begin moving to campus.

DIVERSITY INITIATIVE GRANTS

This year, we received 9 applications for DIGs. We were able to disburse 7 DIG awards to sponsor events and projects such as seminar series, a multilingual poetry anthology, birdwatching with students in Harlem schools, and more. Two were not awarded because they did not provide enough detail for their events and/or how it would directly promote DEI. Given the nature of this past year, many events could not be held because of online limitations. As of March 3, 2021, the awarded groups were contacted and asked if an additional \$1000 each would be of use to their ongoing projects. Groups were asked to provide an updated budget and submit a new application, which is detailed below as an additional line item. All applicants who were eligible for funding received 100% of what they requested. We expect that as Columbia and NYC continue to open up, more events will be organized and therefore additional funding supplemented by the DIGs will be needed. The 20-21 budget would have most likely been completely allocated out if it were a normal year, and so it would be recommended to keep the 21-22 budget of equal value to this year’s.

Group Name	Event/Project Name	Amount Requested	Awarded? (Y/N)	Date Awarded
E3Birders	ManhattaNaturalists	\$999.35	Y	10.26.2020
Economics Department Diversity Initiative	Undergraduate Mentoring Program	\$1000	N	N/A
Columbia Physics Community Round Table	Community Round Table Seminars	\$500	N	N/A
Lamont Seminar Diversity Initiative	Intersectional Environmentalism Panel	\$1000	Y	12.11.2020

Limbo Poetry Sessions	Tang Dynasty in the 21st Century: Poetry in Translation Project	\$1000	Y	01.22.2021
Zora's Daughters	Zora's Daughters Podcast	\$970	Y	01.22.2021
Anti-Racist Language Pedagogy Working Group	Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Language Pedagogy Workshops	\$1000	Y	01.22.2021
Anti-Racist Language Pedagogy Working Group	Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Language Pedagogy Workshops	\$1000	Y	03.08.2021
Zora's Daughters	Zora's Daughters Podcast	\$1000	Y	03.09.2021
Columbia Climate Conversations	Climate Impacts, Resilience & Solidarity	\$1000	Y	04.12.2021

Total: 7969.35

Original Budget: \$18,000

% Spent: 44.27%

Events

Events Co-Chairs

Pierre Devlaminck & P.J. Robinson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2020-2021 academic year there were very few ASGC sponsored events because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Our only Fall 2020 events were two virtual orientation events (a scavenger hunt and a game night). At the end of the Spring 2021 semester we were able to start resuming in person events with a Yankees game. Looking forward to Summer 2021 and the 2021-2022 academic year, we hope to resume in-person social and cultural events as soon as possible.

EVENTS BREAKDOWN

Carryover	Debit Estimate	Credit Estimate	Category
Summer Events	\$ 2500.00		Cultural
Summer Events	\$ 2500.00		Social

Event Name	Event Cost	Ticket Sales
Scavenger Hunt with Watson Adventures	\$ 1010.00	Free Event
Virtual Game Night with Hex & Co.	\$ 750.00	Free Event
New York Yankees vs. Houston Astros (5/4/2021)	\$ 0.00 (credit from 2020)	\$ 74.52
New York Yankees vs. Tampa Bay Rays (6/2/2021)	\$ 930.00	Pending
TOTALS	\$ 2690.00	\$74.52

Media

Media Chair

Dauida Rios

MEDIA AND WEBSITE

ASGC website was regularly updated to create an archive of newsletters, plenary attendance and minutes, ASGC-recognized student groups, and new forms for the Diversity Initiative Grant. The statement of ASGC's position on systemic and racial injustice within the Columbia community was added. Forms were corrected to prevent continuous CAPTCHA errors during form submission. A new link was added to the internal forms page to the new meal expenditure policy. A new form question is being into the ASGC grant application forms in order to easily identify the ASGC-recognition status of student group or entity applicants.

Masters Affairs

Masters Affairs Chair

Meave Sheehan

The Master's Affairs Committee in 2020 - 2021 was composed of seven students from the following departments: Anthropology, Classical Studies, English, Latin American Studies, Math, Oral History and Slavic Studies. In January 2021, one student departed the Committee due to a scheduling conflict and a new member joined in February 2021.

Over the course of Fall 2020, no events were held. In December 2020, the Committee began holding regular video meetings and communicating via email threads. Early on, for Spring 2021, Committee members decided to prioritize planning for an in-person photo event, holding career talks and producing relevant content for MA students.

In January 2021, the Committee sent out a survey to MA Representatives to gather more information about what types of career talks students might want to attend, in addition to current offerings. Committee members acknowledged that some career pathways are not as well-known or understood and have not had recruiter representation at the University. The survey did not get much of a response, but responses were: NGO/ the UN, any alum who has entered a job in a field that is significantly different from their degree and writers/journalists or policy-makers who focus on the subject of their degree

Two Committee members invited alumni to speak at a future webinar. The invited alumni were an author and an anthropologist but plans did not materialize further. Additionally, a planned entrepreneurship webinar with the University Startup Lab encountered technical difficulties due to using a borrowed Zoom account and was canceled.

One Committee member began attending [Compass](#) career events and wrote summaries to distribute to the employees in that newly set up office for graduate students. The Committee deliberately sought to establish direct relations with Compass. Starting in December 2020, the Master's Affairs Committee began email exchanges with Compass employees regarding M.A. student career interest and holding a joint webinar. Early in the semester, the Master's Affairs Chair and one Committee member participated in a virtual meeting with Compass staff. The ASGC promoted Compass career events, such as the Nonprofit Alumni Networking in March 2021, in its newsletter.

On Sunday, March 21, 2021, the Committee held its first photo session in front of Dodge Hall in and around the tent that had been set up there. Ten students had their photos taken and the photos were distributed to them soon after via Dropbox. A university employee was hired as the photographer.

One highlight moving forward for Committee proceedings was that the Committee had CUIT establish a Zoom account specifically for ASGC use. The Committee tested this account on April 14th when it held a webinar about the resources of the [Ombuds Office](#).

A second photo session was held on Sunday, April 25th in Sakura Park in front of the International House. The Committee hired a Columbia College student who helms the [Columbia Photography Association](#) as the photographer and [photos](#) were distributed.

The Committee has tentative plans to hold one or two mixer events over Summer 2021.