



**GRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT**  
**DIVERSITY COMMITTEE REPORT**

2012-2013 Graduate Outreach Open Discussion (GOOD) Panel on Diversity



April 7, 2014

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report summarizes two events planned by the Graduate Student Government (GSG) Diversity Committee, the Diversity Luncheon Series and the GOOD Panel on Diversity. The former focused on roundtable discussions with graduate students about their experiences at the University of Delaware (UD), and the latter focused on a public open discussion with a panel of administrators and faculty on issues that were raised in the Diversity Luncheon Series. The goal of this report to inform the UD community about the GSG Diversity Committee, the events that were planned, and, recommendations that came out of those events. The recommendations compiled by the committee are:

- Improve overall structure of graduate student orientation.
- Provide more opportunities for interaction between members of graduate community.
- Improve advertisement and communication of graduate focused initiatives.
- Increase involvement of current graduate students in recruitment.
- Incorporate cultural competency elements into orientation and training.
- Promote more opportunities for discussions on diversity.

Through communication of resources, programming and reports, the Diversity Committee plans to continue to address the ever-changing needs of the graduate student population throughout the University and work with allied offices, organizations and individuals.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Graduate Student Government (GSG) Diversity Committee is one of three Student Affairs committees of the GSG. The GSG Diversity Committee works to make sure that the needs and concerns of graduate students on campus are being met by the policies and programs of the University, and advocates for diversity in demography and in ideas across the University of Delaware.

The Diversity and Equity Commission (DEC) and the President's Diversity Initiative (PDI) prepared the following Diversity Statement released April 2012:

The University of Delaware's educational mission is to prepare students to live in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world. To do so, we are committed to fostering a robust educational environment that supports critical thinking, free inquiry, and an understanding of diverse views and values. We see diversity as a core value and guiding principle for our educational mission and thus must work to make diversity an integral part of everyday life on campus. To this end, we take diversity to mean both the recognition and appreciation of the different backgrounds, values, and ideas of those who comprise our campus, as well as a commitment to ensuring that all people on our campus are treated according to principles of fairness, civility, dignity, and equity. We are committed to building an educational community that understands people from different backgrounds and economic circumstances, with different needs, and from diverse personal and philosophical beliefs. We want to make all people who are part of the University feel welcome and valued in campus life.

Along these lines, the committee believes that an emphasis on diversity advocacy can help to create an appreciation and understanding of various cultures, perspectives, talents, and abilities of others, while contributing to the overall experience of graduate students at the University of Delaware. During the

2011-2012 academic year, the following mission statement and goals for the GSG Diversity Committee were formalized and adopted through the efforts of co-chairs Andre Ifill and Mary Kristen Hefner and other members of the committee:

The GSG Diversity Committee is open to all graduate students at the University of Delaware. Those who are interested in supporting the underrepresented graduate student populations in their ever-changing needs throughout the University are encouraged to participate.

The committee seeks to accomplish its mission by:

1. Offering graduate students the opportunity to network and engage in dialogue about specific diversity-related issues with their peers in an inclusive environment.
2. Fostering community building through committee meetings, events, and by serving as a general information resource.
3. Working collaboratively with various departments, organizations and programs across campus and within the Newark community to identify and address the various issues and needs faced by underrepresented graduate student populations.

Following this mission, the committee was able to plan and execute the first event in the Graduate Outreach Open Discussion (GOOD) luncheon series during the 2011-2012 academic year, which focused on mentorship and was led by Dr. Margaret Andersen, Director of PDI and Edward F. and Elizabeth Goodman Rosenberg Professor of Sociology. The second luncheon focused on the following topic: "What I wish I knew as a first year graduate student." The discussions included a diverse group of students, from new to senior graduate students, and various administrators and faculty members, including Dr. Gabriele Bauer from the Center of Teaching and Learning Assessment (CTAL).

These two successful events during the 2011-2012 academic year fueled the motivation to continue diversity-related efforts and expand current efforts of the GSG Diversity Committee. For the 2012-2013 academic year, under the guidance of the Vice-President of Student Affairs, Cesar Caro, the leadership of committee co-chairs Mosi London and Neda Moinolmolki, and the support of dedicated committee members, the GOOD luncheon series was reimagined to focus primarily on obtaining the stories and experiences of the graduate population in order to better communicate the needs of graduate students to administration.

The purpose of the GOOD luncheon series was to start a dialogue between graduate students and administrators on the topic of diversity and related issues that affect the graduate community and the UD community at large. While prior campus-wide climate surveys, including the annual Blue Hen Poll which was released this last spring semester, focused on the overall work and living environment of students, the goal of the Diversity Luncheon Series was to focus on the perspectives and opinions of the graduate population specifically.

The purpose of this report is to describe the planning and execution of the GSG Diversity Committee's efforts in the 2012-2013 academic year, specifically regarding the Diversity Luncheon Series and the GOOD Panel on Diversity. The focus is on the ideas and thoughts that were expressed during these events, but the report also serves as a resource for future events and initiatives related to diversity on campus.

## **OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS OF THE DIVERSITY LUNCHEON SERIES**

Beginning in the 2013 Winter session and continuing through that spring, the GSG Diversity Committee held a series of luncheons sponsored by the Office of Graduate and Professional Education (OGPE) to get a better understanding of graduate students' perspectives on the issues of diversity on campus. From four diversity luncheons with a total of over 30 participants and evaluation surveys from those events, the GSG Diversity Committee collected the real stories and experiences of a small but diverse portion of the graduate student body. Participants were graduate students from across all the academic colleges, at all stages of their career, and from various ethnic backgrounds, including both domestic students and international students from India, China, Philippines, Honduras and Colombia. Through these face-to-face discussions, graduate students were able to openly share their graduate experiences with their peers. The four main themes that were most prominent are:

1. Graduate Student Orientation and Retention
2. Link Between University and Departments
3. Awareness of Diversity Programs and Information
4. Community Development

For each of these themes, the committee developed a narrative reflective of the aggregated student responses of those who attended the luncheons. While these narratives are based on the experiences of a small subset of the graduate student population, they are still able to provide some insight on related issues and concerns.

### *1) Graduate Student Orientation and Retention*

In recent years, the orientation experience offered to graduate students has improved a great deal through efforts to create a welcoming environment for new students. This has primarily been done through the "Graduate Teaching Assistant (TA) Conference," "English Language Institute (ELI) Orientation," "UD Ambassador/Connect Program," and department organized events. However, students expressed that these events seem to target only specific audiences or are too disjointed, without a strong link between them. In addition, connections made during these events seem to dwindle as the academic year progresses. The committee agrees with this assessment and recommends that improvements be made to the overall structure of graduate student orientation, which can in turn help with retention.

### *2) Link between University and Departments*

The graduate student experience mostly revolves around the program or department in which one belongs. Opportunities to interact with other students are made possible through department events and graduate student organizations, but are limited in nature. There needs to be a stronger link between the university and departments in developing initiatives than can enhance the graduate experience. There are certain departments which benefit from existing mentorship programs, student government associations, and weekly research/professional development seminars, while others do not. In addition, there is no system in place to navigate the academic landscape or address issues of conflict within each department.

### *3) Awareness of Diversity Programs and Information*

There are multiple endeavors that are being undertaken by various administrative offices to improve diversity, education and the overall quality of UD as an institution. However, it has been expressed that there is lack of knowledge or awareness of the occurrence of these initiatives or of the resources that are

currently available. In addition, there seems to be an apparent segmentation of similar efforts (i.e., separate silos) that are independent of each other. As such, the committee recommends that the advertisement and communication of these initiatives and resources need to be more centralized and similar endeavors should be centrally coordinated.

#### *4) Community Development*

The graduate student population benefits by increased representation of various races, cultures, ages, and backgrounds. Through increased interaction among graduate students and with the larger UD community, there is a lot that different groups can learn from each other. However, with such diverse backgrounds, there is a very wide range of needs to address. For example, the needs of full-time versus part time students or single versus married students are very different. Attendees expressed that interaction among students is an important part of being at an academic institution, and the committee concurs that more needs to be done to facilitate those types of interactions.

### **OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS OF THE GOOD PANEL ON DIVERSITY**

For the GOOD Panel on Diversity, key individuals who have a history of working with issues of diversity convened to share their experiences and address the issues that were emerged from the four luncheon series and the evaluation surveys completed by luncheon attendees. In Appendix A, a short biography can be found for each of the panelists, based on the online resource “Experts at the University of Delaware” and panelists’ personal websites. Panelists include Dr. Margaret Andersen, Ms. Louise Bank, Dr. Pamela Cook-Ioannidis, Dr. James Jones and Dr. Ismat Shah.

The wide range of experiences and expertise of the panel members and an engaged audience resulted in a riveting discussion about issues of diversity and the needs and lives of graduate students at the University of Delaware. In order to capture this discussion, the committee collected notes on the main topics and ideas that were presented. Similar to the aggregated narratives for the themes of the Diversity Luncheon Series the GOOD Panel on Diversity provided some insight into the issues and concerns of graduate students and as the perspectives of key administrators and faculty. Refer to Appendix B for questions that were given to panelists on each of the luncheon themes.

The panel discussion’s salient points have been grouped into four categories:

1. Recruitment and Enrollment
2. Retention and Success
3. Campus Culture
4. Moving Ahead

#### *1) Recruitment and Enrollment*

There are very definitive differences between undergraduate and graduate student experiences, from school selection and the application process to student responsibilities and requirements. However, within the matriculation process of retention, recruitment and graduation, recruitment can be considered to be one of the most important. The panel acknowledged that recruitment is very much localized to the departmental level, given that the decision to attend the University of Delaware is based on the connection made on that level. It was also expressed that while recruitment is localized, more can be done to establish a strong link or collaboration on the university level with OGPE.

In terms of improvements on the department level, Jones stated that the recruitment process does not involve graduate students. With potential students becoming the peers of current graduate students, current students should have a say. Shah pointed out that faculty with certain characteristics, traits or interests attract students with similar backgrounds, thus helping those students feel more comfortable in entering a program, but it is also important to for a student to have a diverse group of mentors. Cook provided some best practices for recruiting and retaining students in STEM disciplines as a framework of improvements that could be made across all departments, which include: 1) transparency, 2) cultural awareness and 3) family friendly policies. Overall, it was conveyed that not having diversity guarantees exclusion.

## *2) Retention and Success*

While the undergraduate experience prepares students for graduate school, there are still many challenges that are unique to being a graduate student that require guidance and support. The panel stated that professional associations are the foremost valuable resources to establish support on the department and discipline level. Andersen elaborated that professional associations and associated student chapters play a large role in helping diverse students succeed in their department, where they serve as extraordinary support systems within and outside of the university.

In addition, it was acknowledged that graduate students need to be proactive in fulfilling their own needs through the organization of writing workshops or participating in programs such as the Dissertation Boot Camp. While there are many resources available through the UD website, effective communication is key. In terms of future programming, Andersen stated plans for a “Teaching for Inclusion” program to advocate for better instruction to faculty in teaching with diverse students and addressing “chilling” or uncomfortable moments in the classroom that arise from stereotypes. The program is based on the idea that one cannot tell people how to teach, but one can tell them how to do it better and with greater sensitivity. Along those lines, Shah emphasized that exposing new faculty, thorough training, to issues related to diversity is essential. Since the faculty members are required to go through other forms of training, there is no impedance for diversity and cultural competency training to be mandatory as well. Furthermore, incoming graduate students should be required to participate as well.

Another existing program was mentioned by Emily Bonistall, 2012-2013 President of the GSG, in terms of professional development. Specifically, in the Department of Sociology and Criminology, there is an annual student run conference that is open to students in other departments to present their research. Presenters get experience and immediate feedback. It is an opportunity that gives visiting potential students, a real example of the level of work that is done and the types of interaction among graduate students. Additionally, the GSG annual hosts an event called the Graduate Student Forum<sup>1</sup>, which provides a similar opportunity on a campus-wide scale.

Overall, the panel also acknowledged that graduate student retention in doctoral programs is dependent on a variety of factors, including family obligations, academic challenges, and funding. If one these cannot be resolved, departments typically encourage or expect students to complete a master’s degree before leaving the university

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<sup>1</sup> The Fourth Annual Graduate Student Forum will take place this year on Wednesday, April 23.

### *3) Campus Culture*

Even though academics are the main focus of the graduate experience, fulfilling cultural and social needs are necessary for academic success. For example, it was articulated by the panel that international students can feel lonely because they have troubles adapting to American culture and society at the beginning of their residency in the US. There is also an evident divide when examining interaction between undergraduate and graduate student populations. This occurs in the classroom and with student clubs and groups. For example, Haven is the undergraduate LGBTQ advocacy organization on campus, but there is little to no interaction between graduate and undergraduate students who share the same interests. Jones' work at the Center for the Study of Diversity helps students explore these issues of diversity or concerns that students may have. In addition, there is a breadth of literature on diversity related issues provided by various offices. Nevertheless, there are questions of how these resources can become more centralized and how awareness and interest in diversity can be increased.

Andersen communicated that students should not feel limited to only seeking resources and guidance within their department. Through her work with the President's Diversity Initiative, there is an instant "confidential chat" (as seen on the OGPE website) to provide students additional guidance or help in the form of private online mentoring. Jones also expressed that in terms of the mentee and mentor relationship, the latter does not need to be discipline-specific, given that advisors may not be able to take care of all the needs of the students. There needs to be more of a balance and more interaction between graduate students and faculty as a whole, rather than just one-on-one interactions.

### *4) Moving Ahead*

The panel acknowledged that as a research-based institution, where research is the forefront of the work and investment, there are certain unintended consequences in terms of other areas, such as recruitment, retention and campus culture. To address these implications, Andersen expressed that we have to find ways to make our graduate community more inclusive. In terms of moving ahead to create that type of environment, Dr. Mary Martin, Assistant Provost for Graduate & Professional Education, stated that plans are in place in the fall of 2013 to establish a graduate student space at 44 Kent Way, former home of The Blue and Gold Club<sup>2</sup>. 44 Kent Way will provide a welcoming location for both faculty members and graduate students to get together in order to further facilitate faculty/student relationships. Moreover, it is the hope that it will help foster education between departments and majors. In addition, the OGPE is moving forward with new diversity initiatives, such as hiring a new graduate assistant director for diversity and recruitment, whose goal will be to bring campus wide diversity efforts together<sup>3</sup>.

While these initiatives are significant, there is still more that needs to be done. Andersen expressed the need for more inter-departmental collaboration, a stronger focus on incoming graduate students by OGPE on the front end and more support provided in the second, third and later years of graduate study. Louise Bank also expressed that OGPE needs to do a better job of being a cohesive unit and addressing the needs that students have. Dr. David Wilson, Professor of Political Science & International Relations and member of the core advisory group for the Center for the Study of Diversity, stated that diversity is a collective action (i.e., community) problem, which benefits the entire university community when

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<sup>2</sup> The student space is known as "The Speakeasy" and is currently open from 4:00 to 10:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

<sup>3</sup> As of Fall 2013, the position has been filled by Dr. Keeley Powell.



addressed. He also expressed that an important part of the graduate experience is clearly establishing expectations for students, where students can relate those expectations to individual responsibilities and requirements. Conversely, it was expressed that there should not be any real expectations for graduate school. Explicitly, those who have attained a Ph.D. represent only 1% of the population, which reflects the unique nature of graduate studies and the level of effort, commitment and sacrifice that is needed.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Graduate Outreach Open Discussion luncheon series and panel discussion reflects the efforts of the GSG Diversity Committee to advocate for the ever-changing needs and concerns of the graduate student population. From the exchanges that occurred during these events, specifically on the four main topics of Graduate Student Orientation and Retention, the Link Between University and Departments, Ensuring Awareness, and Community Development, the recommendations presented in the report are summarized as follows:

- Continue to improve overall structure of graduate student orientation to be more inclusive and less segmented (i.e. university vs. department level).
- Provide more opportunities for interaction between different departments and between undergraduate and graduate students.
- Improve advertisement and communication of graduate student-focused initiatives and resources
- Involve current graduate students more heavily in recruitment process.
- Incorporate cultural competency elements into new graduate student orientation.
- Promote more opportunities for open and frank discussion about diversity involving the larger university community.

Overall, the most important take-away from the panel is that, through collaboration and teamwork, as community we can accomplish much more as a group than individually trying to tackle issues affecting graduate students and the larger community. In addition, the panel itself demonstrates that open dialogue can occur freely amongst and between administration and graduate students.

## APPENDIX A: PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

### *Dr. Margaret Andersen*

Dr. Margaret Andersen, Director of the President's Diversity Initiative, co-chair of the Diversity and Equity Commission, and Edward F. and Elizabeth Goodman Rosenberg Professor of Sociology, has a long illustrious history of examining the sociology of race and gender. From 2008 to 2010, Andersen was the Vice President of the American Sociological Association. She is also the author of several books about diversity, race, and gender including *Sociology: The Essentials* (with Howard F. Taylor); *Race and Ethnicity in Society: The Changing Landscape* (with Elizabeth Higginbotham); and *Thinking about Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender; Race, Class and Gender* (with Patricia Hill Collins). Andersen teaches courses on the topics of social inequality, the sociology of race and ethnicity, race/class/and gender, and introductory sociology.

### *Ms. Louise Bank*

Louise Bank is the Director of Admissions and Recruitment in the Office of Graduate and Professional Education. Her work focuses on the process of attracting diverse applicants to the University of Delaware. In 2011, she was awarded the Greater Philadelphia Region Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Distinguished Service Award at the alliance's 14th annual Research and Mentoring Conference in Philadelphia.

### *Dr. Pamela Cook*

Dr. Pamela Cook-Ioannidis is Professor of Mathematics, Associate Dean of Engineering and Professor of Chemical Engineering, and her research areas include transonic aerodynamics, fluid mechanics and other applications of mathematics. Cook has been a strong advocate for increasing the diversity of both faculty and students in STEM fields, particularly women in engineering. In 2012, she received the Women Engineering ProActive Network University Change Agent Award.

### *Dr. James Jones*

Dr. James Jones, Professor of Psychology, Professor of Black American Studies, Director of Arts & Sciences, and Director of the Center for the Study of Diversity, has spent his career exploring the psychosocial mechanisms for adapting to and coping with the chronic accessibility of racism as a potential explanation for life's experiences. In 2012, he received the Award for Outstanding Lifetime Contributions to Psychology by the American Psychological Association, which is the association's highest honor. As a social psychologist, Jones serves on several editorial boards including the *Journal of Black Psychology*, and is past-President of the Society of Experimental Social Psychology and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

*Dr. Ismat Shah*

Dr. Syed Ismat Shah is Professor of Materials Science and Professor of Physics and Astronomy, and his research areas include biomaterials, energy, the environment, and nanomaterials. Through his various academic endeavors, he has supported and overseen the mentorship of a diverse group of graduate students; in 2012, he received the 2012 Mentor Award by the Society of Vacuum Coaters. Shah has also been the faculty advisor for the Graduate Muslim Student Association and is the 2013 co-chair for Diversity and Equity Commission along with Andersen.

## **APPENDIX B: PANELIST QUESTIONS**

### *Graduate Student Orientation and Retention*

What efforts can be made towards attracting underrepresented students to the University's various graduate programs?

In terms of retention, what can be done to assist those having trouble academically?

### *Link Between University and Departments*

In addressing issues of diversity at the University of Delaware, how important is to have dedicated administrators and professionals to lead the effort, and at what level is it the most effective?

What resources are available to faculty to address critical pedagogy, the relationship between teaching and learning, based on the diversity of students?

### *Ensuring Awareness*

What efforts are being made to ensure there is adequate cultural competency and cultural sensitivity between the faculty and students?

What efforts can be made to help unify the segmented resources of Diversity on campus?

What ways can administration help to communicate the resources that are available to graduate students as well as how to address issues of conflict within student's departments?

### *Community Development*

Are there any plans to conduct an updated campus climate survey based on the recommendations of the Diversity Task Force Final Report?

How can interdisciplinary work be encouraged among faculty and students?

What incentives can be provided to encourage collaboration and interaction between student organizations, both graduate and undergraduate?

What is one thing we, as a community, can start doing today to encourage students to try new things with different people?