

General Council Meeting Agenda: February 15, 2024

# General Council Meeting

1. Call to Order and sign in!

# Executive Board Reports

* 1. President Lacey Rzodkiewicz (ldr27@pitt.edu):
		1. Seeking information on intermittent master’s degrees
			1. Uncommon in some depts, common in others
			2. Do all require reapplication to the graduate program for continued dissertation work?
				1. Particularly difficult for international students who may not be able to receive electronic transcripts or would need to retake English proficiency exams
		2. Upcoming elections:
			1. Available positions: President, Vice President, VP of Programming, GPSG Representative, Teaching Award Chair, DEI Chair, **SUMMER RESEARCH GRANTS CHAIR (Work mainly in Spring and that is all)**
			2. Open from 14 Feb-14 March, election from 15 March-20 March
			3. Nominate here:<https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3P3nnM7N1DQjPVA>
		3. Statement on unionization: new business! Hold tight

# Vice President Payne Banister (wpb20@pitt.edu):

* 1. Faculty Advisor Rosemary Capo (rcapo@pitt.edu):
		1. Adriana Cox – new clinician for grad students – she is working on orientation and training – We will receive an email with a form to make an appointment with her

# Administrative Assistant Christina Vega-Alemany (asgso@pitt.edu):

# Don’t forget to submit the purchase approval form prior to purchasing things to make sure you’re good!

# Please check our website or with Christina/Lacey/Payne for deadlines for grants and/or reimbursements and also make sure to check your email for any information from us!

# I am available to help with SORC purchasing Tuesdays 10-12p (virtual) and Fridays 10-12p (virtual). Please let me know in advance if you need to purchase anything with SORC’s card! I will need your name, event information, address, and a link to what you want to purchase.

# SORC is being slow with responses and reimbursements, but please continue sending them in! I will put them in and keep pushing SORC to make sure you guys get your money!

# Internal Committees

# GPSG:

* + 1. Meeting next week
		2. Food drive for Pitt Pantry in January; competition to earn funding for school level GSO - late January through February 23rd
			1. Total volume of food as well as individual items – different scoring methods
			2. Not just food but personal hygiene items will be accepted as well – they also accept gift cards and pet supply items
			3. Top three schools awarded ($800, $500, $500)
			4. Interest in participation? Alternative fundraiser?
				1. We have decided to donate the money back if we *are* awarded any money
				2. Please let Lacey know where your dept dropbox is! So far BioSci has one in their private grad lounge, Phys&Astro outside 100 Allen, GES on 2nd floor main office of SRCC, and HPS by the 11th floor elevator landing of the Cathedral
		3. Watch their event brite for upcoming events! Coffee hour and Penguins game coming up
			1. Penguins Game – tickets will be $50 lower section seats and includes refreshments – no date at this time
		4. Leadership and service awards are open: <https://www.pittgpsg.com/leadership-service-award>
		5. Nominations for executive board positions open:
			1. Elected positions: <https://www.pittgpsg.com/executive-board-elections>
			2. GSA position: <https://www.pittgpsg.com/executive-administrator>

# Grad Expo:

* + 1. Chair: Payne Banister
		2. The date is now March 28th (Thursday)
			1. Did not receive many presentations for posters – will send out an application again
			2. Oral presentations received a Lot of people – about 21 – will not be receiving more because that is a lot
		3. Grad Expo in the afternoon (12-5p)
		4. Call for abstracts has gone out; seeking judges as well!
			1. 19 people interested in being judges – very exciting!
		5. Please, please, please, volunteer to help moderate if possible
			1. The committee will be around to moderate and managing logistics
			2. Reach out to Payne if you want to help out!

# Teaching Awards:

* + 1. Members: Natalie Runkle (nataliebrunkle@gmail.com) (Philosophy), Alysha Lieurance (Anthropology), Caitlin Mace (cbm49@pitt.edu), Kathryn Carney (klc171@pitt.edu)
		2. Gearing up to send out their next announcement for FY24-25 awards
		3. **Seeking new members**
		4. Most of the work is a month or so in September-October to get the banquet set up and get awards out

# Committee for Diversity and Inclusion:

* + 1. Members: Mihir Khanna (Physics), Arnab Dey Sakar (Math)
	1. Summer Research Grants
		1. Chair:
		2. No grants going out if we don’t have anyone volunteering to help with this committee

# External A&S Committees:

# Healthcare task force: Allison Mahoney (amm540@pitt.edu)

# See attached email

# They are working to create a town hall meeting – the more people that can come and express our concerns about the accessibility and ease of usage of the emergency fund – they give less than expected, takes minimum one month to get reimbursed, the standards for giving a reimbursement are unknown, hard to access the form

# Going to put the link to the form in the Discord server and Christina will send it in an email to representatives – you don’t have to put a lot of details in the justification part of the form, you can just say you cannot afford it / it is over your budget and you should be okay!

# HERE IS THE LINK TO ACCESS THE FORM: <https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3ELhzY6ZAhXwDLU>

* 1. A&S Dietrich Council: DSAS Council, grad student reps
		1. Reps: Grace Naa Korkoi Amoah (GNA16@pitt.edu), Godspower Ubit (godspowerubit@pitt.edu)

# A&S PBC: DSAS Planning & Budgeting Committee, grad student reps

* + 1. Reps: Neel Patel (NEP48@pitt.edu), Edison Hauptman (ERH129@pitt.edu), Christina Vega-Alemañy (CMV66@pitt.edu)
		2. We will be meeting next Wednesday February 21st – Christina will email updates as soon as that meeting ends!

# A&S Grad Council:

* + 1. Reps: Oluwasegun Amoniyan (OMA55@pitt.edu), Turki Alturaifi (tma53@pitt.edu), Laura Beghini Chelidonopoulos (laura.chelidonopoulos@pitt.edu), Si Wang (SIW34@pitt.edu), Akira Pinto (akira.pinto@pitt.edu)
		2. No meeting yet this month

# University Council on Graduate Studies

* + 1. Rep: Robert Marshall (rrm72@pitt.edu)

# Old or Unfinished Business:

# Emergency funds

# Lacey wrote up an application for the website – will be given to Jack to put on our website – stay tuned!

# Funds can be used for new devices – anything needed for academic progress

# Not medical expenses – maybe a new laptop, external hard drive, etc.

# New Business:

# Letter on unionization:

# Goals:

# Inform students a union election will happen

# Ask for continued neutrality

# Important as leadership to engage all students in democracy

# We cannot directly endorse the union because it puts us in a weird legal space where we are seen as someone in authority influencing people’s decisions and exploiting their positions. There is perceived power even if there is not too much influence because we disperse funds and are involved in different communities across campus etc.

# Please send us any recommendations for amendments to the statement – Lacey will be presenting this to GPSG next week

# Deadline for departments telling us they agree / don’t want to be on the statement will be within two weeks

# Announcements:

* + 1. <https://discord.gg/T6kWFFQ8tJ>
		2. If you’re still not a member of the Discord server, now is a good time to join!

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| BEmail from Alison Mahoney, student representative to the healthcare task force (forwarded to A&S GSO after sharing updates to her department) Begin forwarded message:**From:** Alison Mahoney <amm540@pitt.edu>**Subject: Health Insurance Task Force Updates****Date:** February 13, 2024 at 10:15:08 AM EST**To: REDACTED****Cc:** "Granshaw, Michelle K" <mkg31@pitt.edu>, "Woolcock-Srolovic, LJ" <liw151@pitt.edu>Hi all,I just came from what appears to be the final health insurance task force meeting for this year and want to share the updates I received. Though the plan design hasn’t been fully finalized, I think this is important information for us all to have as we consider our financial and healthcare options for the upcoming academic year.* Our insurance plans for the upcoming academic year will remain combined with the undergrad plans. Plan design has not yet been finalized (this will happen closer to May) but based on our conversations over the course of this task force, I think it’s unlikely we will see significant moves back towards our former plan.
	+ The administrators on the task force have primarily communicated the importance of access to affordable mental health copays. While this is an important need, they seem not to have emphasized our concerns around specialist copays, emergency care copays, and dependent premiums. I (and others on the task force) pushed these issues again today. I hope we see some improvement in these areas, but again, I do not feel especially hopeful based on our conversations.
* The [Medical Hardship Assistance Fund](https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/vice-provost-dean-students/emergency-assistance/medical-hardship) will remain active for next academic year.
	+ The administrators on the task force shared data from the MHAF and suggested this data is being used in decision making about our healthcare. Currently, only 157 students have applied for MHAF reimbursement, most of whom have requested less than $500.
	+ I do not believe this accurately reflects the hardship grads have faced from these insurance changes and am concerned that the administration sees the low number of applications as evidence that the changes to our insurance have not significantly impacted us. **If you have not submitted medical receipts to the MHAF, please consider doing so** - you’ll be reimbursed for any differences between last year’s copays/deductible and demonstrate to the administration that their decisions about our healthcare has very real impacts.

Please feel free to reach out to me with questions or to talk about any of these developments. Though the task force is no longer convening, there are many grads organizing for better working conditions, and we would be eager to hear your thoughts about how we can work together to push the administration to provide us better access to healthcare.Warmly,AlisonAlison Mahoney (she/they)PhD Student, Theatre & Performance StudiesUniversity of Pittsburghamm540@pitt.edu  I support the [Pitt Grad Union](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pittgradunion.org%2F&data=05%7C02%7CLDR27%40pitt.edu%7Cadf112243a484729306208dc2ca6c252%7C9ef9f489e0a04eeb87cc3a526112fd0d%7C1%7C0%7C638434341950743724%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=NMt0htct%2Bgv39MCgqFPvpIt9cEBudzzBbAQwPuLgL8o%3D&reserved=0)! |

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| **Statement on Graduate Student Unionization** We are writing as student leaders throughout the graduate community to implore the University to uphold the highest standards of neutrality and to encourage our constituents to engage in the democratic process to come after recent developments in the graduate worker organizing campaign. On January 30, 2024, [over 200 graduate student workers gathered in the Cathedral of Learning](https://triblive.com/news/education-classroom/pitt-graduate-workers-request-union-recognition/) to request voluntary recognition of a graduate workers union. A union would ensure teaching assistants and fellows (TA/TFs), graduate research assistants (GSR), and graduate student assistants (GSA) have a voice in our working conditions and compensation. With over a majority of graduate workers having signed authorization cards to demonstrate their interest, the [Graduate Worker Organizing Committee](http://www.pittgradunion.org/) requested that Chancellor Gabel accept this majority support and recognize our union in place of holding an election. Though Chancellor Gabel was unavailable and did not recognize the union, a letter was left for our fellow graduate students stating that the Chancellor, “respect[s] your agency and self-determination to undertake this effort and look forward to continuing our important engagement in the days ahead.” The University of Pittsburgh graduate students now await an election where all graduate students with appointments outlined above will have the opportunity to determine whether or not we unionize.[Graduate unionization](https://labornotes.org/2023/03/whats-fueling-graduate-worker-union-upsurge) is not an isolated phenomenon at the University of Pittsburgh. In the past years, fellow R1 schools including [University of Chicago](https://www.hpherald.com/evening_digest/u-of-c-graduate-student-workers-win-union-election-in-a-landslide/article_c35b8a0a-c448-11ed-a19e-b790f6aaeb5e.html), [Boston University](https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/bu-graduate-students-vote-to-unionize-in-lopsided-approval/), and [University of Minnesota](https://minnesotareformer.com/2023/04/28/university-of-minnesota-graduate-student-workers-unionize-after-decades-long-push/) among othershave won their unions with greater than 90**%** supportive voters. Graduate students at represented universities have subsequently begun and, in some cases, completed negotiations of wages, healthcare benefits, and more. Our rights to seek representation as employees were cemented in [Case No. PERA-R-17-355-W](https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Labor-Management-Relations/plrb/proposed/2019/Documents/Employes-of-Univ-Pgh-PERA-R-17-355-W.pdf) in which the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board certified graduate students with appointments (TA/TF, GSR, and GSA) as statutory employees. To the administration, we ask that we continue to be treated fairly as the election approaches. Under the University’s past administration, we saw charges pressed against the University for alleged unfair labor practices including [creating confusion in union eligibility](https://www.utimes.pitt.edu/news/unfair-labor-practice), [implied directives on voting](https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Labor-Management-Relations/plrb/proposed/2019/Documents/Employes-of-Univ-Pgh-PERA-R-17-355-W.pdf) from supervisors, and more, resulting in [millions spent by the University](https://pittnews.com/article/178220/featured/pitts-spending-on-union-avoidance-firm-slows-but-reaches-3m/) in legal fees. However, our current administration has remained neutral throughout the graduate organizing campaign. We implore the University to continue to uphold Chancellor Gabel's statement of respect and recognition of our agency in organizing. To our constituents, we ask that you familiarize yourself with [your rights](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1970&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=195&chpt=7) to organize. As governing bodies, our organizations maintain neutral stances on unionization. However, we encourage you, the graduate students of the University, the future academics and leaders in your fields, to be informed voters in this democratic endeavor. |