

FAS-SEAS Senate Meeting
Thursday, January 19, 2023
3:30 PM – 5:30 PM
HQ276 and Via Zoom

Minutes
APPROVED

Senators Present: Paul Van Tassel, Chair; Meg Urry, Deputy Chair
Sybil Alexandrov, Jill Campbell, Michael Fischer, Valerie Horsley, Gerald Jaynes, Maria
Kaliambou, Paul A. North, Maria Piñango, Ruzica Piskac, Mark Solomon, Jason Stanley, Dara
Strolovitch, Julia Titus, Rebecca Toseland, Jing Yan, Oswaldo Chinchilla

Staff: Rose Rita Riccitelli

Absent:

Elisa Celis (on leave), Alessandro Gomez, Greta LaFleur, H el ene Landemore, Larry Samuelson,
Kathryn Slanski (on leave), Mimi Yiengpruksawan (on leave)

Guests – Open Session:

Yoram Alhassid, Nicoli Angeli, Laura Barraclough, Leleda Beraki, Jeffrey Brock, Drago, David
Evans, Larry Gladney, Chuck Howard, Miki Havlickova, William Hawkins, Matthew Jacobson,
Angela Lee-Smith, Jo Machesky, Reina Maruyama, Mark Mooseker, Roxine Morris, Jenae
Powel, Victoria Rai, Julia Silvestri, Jac Terrio

Open Session: 4-5:36 PM

Paul Van Tassel, chair of the FAS-SEAS Senate, began the open session of the FAS-SEAS Senate meeting at 4:00 PM. He introduced the first agenda item to address instituting an ombuds office at Yale, an objective that the Senate has pursued over several years. He noted that the FAS Senate has been an advocate of starting an ombuds office at Yale, feeling that such an office can offer Yale faculty and the Yale community an independent, impartial, and confidential support in matters of conflict or concern. **Mr. Van Tassel** introduced **Chuck Howard**, who is a 45-year career legal professional and former Executive Director of the International Ombudsmen Association. He noted that **Mr. Howard** has been advising the FAS Senate (now the FAS-SEAS Senate) on whether Yale should create an ombuds office, and today **Mr. Howard** will offer a view of what an ombuds office may look like at Yale, and what steps need to be taken for Yale to ultimately have such an office.

Mr. Howard pointed out that there are classical ombuds, who investigate the maladministration of public agencies and issue reports and who often have subpoena power. Then there are advocate ombuds that may be confidential and are not impartial, who advocate for their community. Finally, there are organizational ombuds offices that are confidential by virtue of their structure and documentation. He said that in a sentence, an organizational ombuds is an independent and impartial person with whom someone can speak informally and confidentially

(off the record), to receive information and to obtain guidance or help in developing options for action about work or university related concerns or questions. He explained that there are four key elements: independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality. An ombuds office is a safe place where one can go before you decide what you will do regarding a situation. The organizational ombuds person has dual responsibilities – they spend their time helping individuals, but in the course of that, they are aware and privy to issues that didn't otherwise surface and are able to give information to the administration of a university about trends and systemic issues, all without breaching the confidentiality or the identity of the individual visitors.

Mr. Howard referred to the three handouts he provided for the meeting, and in particular the one - *Understanding the Types of Ombudsman: A Starter Guide* – that provides descriptions of the different types of ombuds offices, what they do, and what they don't do. He noted that they are not reporting channels, they don't do investigations, and they don't determine facts – but they are there to help people. He pointed to another article that deals with what happens when a person goes to an ombuds office about sexual harassment. He spoke about why it is important for a university to have an ombuds office and the various people who benefit – some who are at the university for a short period (students, some staff), and some who are there long-term (professors, some staff). He said most of these individuals have not been trained to deal with conflict, are not aware of the options they have for reporting issues, or what the consequences are of reporting to any of the options available. He added that there is also a power element, and people are not sure about what power others have over their careers, and there are many more issues that contribute to fear and what the implications would be if a person comes forward to report a misconduct. **Mr. Howard** said that people need help with assessing the options and resources that are available, and an ombuds office is a place where anyone can go to in order to identify options, and the key with this office is confidentiality. He explained the areas that an ombuds office can help with. He opened the floor for questions.

Mark Solomon pointed out that the response from the administration about creating an ombuds office is that everything that an ombudsperson does is covered by one or more administrators at Yale. He asked how best to respond to this. **Mr. Howard** noted that if you are an administrator of the university, you, by virtue of your position, cannot promise the confidentiality of an ombuds role. He noted that an ombudsperson can allow issues to surface even if the person bringing the issues is not identified. **Mr. Van Tassel** asked what an ombuds office would look like at a university like Yale. **Mr. Howard** responded that for a place like Yale or any major university, you would want two or three individuals who have several years of experience working in an ombuds office. He said that some ombudspersons work with all people – faculty, students, and staff, and some work with one particular group, depending how the office is structured. **Mr. Howard** said that he feels the best programs are ones where ombuds personnel work with all constituents and are not separated by groups.

Mr. Van Tassel asked how it works with introducing an ombuds office into a university that has a long history without this type of service, and what happens to the people who have served in the role before the ombuds office was established. **Mr. Howard** said if the people hired for the ombuds roles are known to be credible, the word spreads and the office is assimilated well into the culture of the university, and an ombuds office is most effective when the people who serve there are well-trained and have a lot of experience in the work that they do. **Meg Urry** asked

how the ombuds function differs from the Title 9 structures we already have in place. **Mr. Howard** noted that an ombuds office is not a reporting tool, and an investigation of sexual harassment would educate people on how to proceed by using the Title 9 office if a complaint is deemed necessary. **Michael Fischer** asked what the relationship is between an ombuds office and the labor unions, and if there is any conflict that unions have with an ombuds office. **Mr. Howard** said in his experience, there can be; however he has seen some unions advocate for an ombuds office because they were not happy with the way the institution's HR and Administration were dealing with union issues and felt that an ombuds office would add to the resources available in handling disputes.

The next agenda item, the Yale College Counsel (YCC) presentation, was introduced by **Mr. Van Tassel**. He noted that the YCC is the principal undergraduate governing structure at Yale and has been so for over half a century. Today, YCC President **Leleda Beraki** (Junior studying biomedical engineering) will talk about what the main issues are that YCC is addressing, and how the FAS-SEAS Faculty Senate could work together with them on some of their objectives. **Ms. Beraki** showed a slide highlighting the structure of YCC and its two main focuses: Board and Events. She mainly works on the policy side which is made up of 6 policy branches - Academics; Health/Access; Financial; Career Resource; Dining; and Cultural/Religious. She noted each policy branch has directors that work with senators who advocate for things that students ask for within these categories – and sometimes outside of these categories. Senators are elected – two per residential college, and elections take place in the fall and in the spring. The YCC Senate also has delegates (or associate vendors) who are official members of the Senate however cannot vote for resolutions or for budget proposals. She noted that the YCC budget is approximate \$900,000 per year, with some going to the events branch, some to the undergraduate funding committee, and some to YCC proposals. **Ms. Beraki** shared information on how the YCC works, and referred to an Impact Report that came out last semester and is available for anyone who wishes to read it. She said that YCC meets with many people including administrators throughout the year, and most are with the Dean of Yale College and the Vice President's Office. She said that the YCC Senate meets once a week and their meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend and are offered in-person or on Zoom. **Ms. Beraki** spoke about the various projects that YCC is involved with that encompass academics, financial, dining/athletics, health/accessibility, career resources, cultural/religious, New Haven engagement, and student org liaison. She also talked about what the YCC has proposed to the Administration and shared a list of each of these proposals. She concluded her presentation and opened the floor for questions.

Mr. Van Tassel asked about the budget and if it has increased over the years as students' needs increase. **Ms. Beraki** responded that the funds come from a part of a student's activity fee, so it has not grown significantly. She also mentioned that the President's Office gives the YCC \$40K per year to support the Spring Fling activity, and this amount has stayed the same - at least over the last 10 years. She also noted that about 15 years ago a small endowment was set up for the YCC and that in general, its budget has not changed. She said that with more students coming to campus in recent years, the amount of funding to support various initiatives has decreased.

Mr. Van Tassel asked how the lobbying for YCC works with the administration. **Ms. Beraki** said that usually she as president, and the YCC Vice President, and whatever Policy Director is

working on a proposal, meets with the administration. She noted that this year they have worked to mobilize students around whatever proposal they are presenting so the group can say that “students want” and therefore have a strong backing for whatever the proposal is. YCC also runs a survey in the fall and received about 2,000 responses, and they use the data gathered from the survey in ~~our~~ conversations with the administration. Whenever they get a push-back from the administration, they go back to figuring out the reasoning behind the push-back and then go back with a new tack that may get them what they requested.

Meg Urry asked how the Senate can most usefully interact in collaboration with YCC. **Ms. Beraki** said that as students, they lack the perspective of how professors think on the various asks that they have, and they would like to be able to understand that perspective in relation to what they are working on so they can present our requests in a more unified way to the administration. **Mr. Van Tassel** asked what the pressures are in becoming an elected official of YCC. **Ms. Beraki** said that there is a lot of interest in becoming involved in YCC from new students coming in and wanting to become involved in YCC. Their biggest problem, she said, is retention because it is exhausting work and there is a lot of burn out with current members. This year, she said, they are trying to show that delegates (non-elected members) can become involved and make a difference just as much as the elected members.

Rebecca Toseland asked about the mental health status of undergraduates, and what additional actions the administration needs to take in support of undergraduate mental health and how faculty can support this effort. **Ms. Beraki** said that undergraduate mental health is influenced by a variety of things, including academics, family life, how much financial support you are receiving, the social scene on campus, campus climate, and other factors. There continues to be conversations about how difficult it is to access mental health therapists on campus and how long a wait there is, and some students cannot wait for this help. She also noted that there are times when a student is just not able to handle the academic pressures and needs to take a break, and noted how difficult it is to obtain a dean’s excuse or a professor’s extension. In these cases, the student is still feeling overwhelmed but there does not appear to be a solution and so the student feels that the institution and the professors really don’t care about them. In these instances, there is more that can be done to help these situations. **Mr. Van Tassel** thanked **Ms. Beraki** for her presentation.

Mr. Van Tassel introduced **Jo Machesky**, the current chair of the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA). **Ms. Machesky** is a PhD 5-year PhD candidate in the Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering. **Roxanne Morris**, who is also present, serves as the GSA Vice Chair and is a 5-year PhD student in Microbiology. **Ms. Machesky** gave an overview of the structure of the GSA and said that they have 90 elected representatives from 68 different departments. GSA advocates for graduate student needs with the administration, and members serve on several campus committees as well. All of the information that she shared is available on the GSA web site at <https://gsa.yale.edu> **Ms. Machesky** introduced **Victoria Rai**, a 3rd year PhD student in Cellular & Molecular Physiology. **Ms. Rai** said this is her first year serving on GSA and serves as the Chair of Facilities and Healthcare. She said that both Facilities and Healthcare encompass many aspects of the campus. She showed a list of priorities, and noted that one of her main priorities is administering the dental and vision plan and incorporating the plan using the University plan – right now there is a separate plan for graduate and professional

students. GSA is also advocating that the cost of this insurance be included for all students without having to pay a premium as they do now. Other priorities are: improving medical, parental, and voluntary leave policies; to identify inaccessible areas across campus for Facilities, Transportation, and Students Accessibility Services to improve; continue to advocate for mental health resources and access. She noted that the issues that GSA addresses are the same issues that FAS is addressing and a partnership between both GSA and FAS would make our cases for resolve stronger.

Ms. Machesky talked about the Service Committee that helps students access student-centered services. It also works with the GPSS to create events for students. There is also a Public Relations Committee which helps to advertise GSA events. **Ms. Machesky** and some of her colleagues from GSA presented a list of all of GSA committees, noting what each committee is responsible for and what issues they are currently addressing. All of this information is on the GSA website and you can access these details at <https://gsa.yale.edu> and click on the Committees tab.

Next **Nicola Angeli**, a 4th year PhD student in the Department of French, spoke about International Students and noted that half of GSAS students are from outside of the USA. The priorities that the International Students Committee is working on are: increase staffing and funding of OISS in order to expand and better advertise OISS support and services; create and distribute a survey for international students to determine their concerns, and their knowledge about available services; create and prioritize new fellowships or job opportunities designed for international students in need; create a fund designed to help students in need bear the financial cost associated with the visa renewal process; increase financial and housing support for international student with international spouses and/or children. **Mr. Angeli** said that they hope that the Senate can help in the following ways: encourage a closer collaboration in departments – especially DGS’s, registrars, and international students’ advisors, and OISS by distributing OISS key information about restrictions, work regulations,, and updates on immigration law to prospective, incoming, and enrolled graduate students. Also ensuring that faculty members are aware of visa limitations regulating research assistantships, teaching appointments, etc. **Ms. Machesky** spoke about the unionization of GSA and they plan to work with other institutions who work with unionized students to learn about how they work with their constituents. **Ms. Machesky** asked **Ms. Morris** to speak about GSA Goals.

Mr. Van Tassel noted that the meeting time needs to be extended beyond 5:30 PM and asked for a motion to extend the meeting so that **Ms. Morris** could continue the GSA presentation. A motion was made and granted. **Ms. Morris** spoke about the GSA goals that were accomplished in the last year: raising of GSAS base stipend to \$38,000; having grants for students on medical leave; increased family subsidy to \$7,500 for the first child and \$2,500 for each additional child under the age of 6; allowed for graduate student parental support to increase with inflation to help reduce financial insecurity; increased budget of the GSA Conference Travel Fund from \$120,000 to \$180,000; The CTF can now support a minimum of 225 students attending conferences, up from 150 students last year; Dean’s emergency fund was expanded to cover housing-related emergencies that allow students to leave unsafe housing conditions; hired an embedded MHC GSAS clinician as well as liaison between GSAS and Yale MHC to help students navigate MHC at Yale and GSAS policies around mental health.

Ms. Morris listed the GSA's top priorities for 2022/23: increase staffing and funding for OISS, as well as advertise OISS support already in place to international graduate students; establish an ombuds office to support work of current administrators at Yale by helping students navigate Yale and its procedures when issues arise; expand and publicize grievance procedures to help facilitate resolutions for issues not under the Title IX office, such as advisor-advisee issues which violate GSAS advising guidelines; Implement access to UPass for GSAS students in Fall 2023, funded by GSAS, to provide free access to all Connecticut public transportation; introduce SEI fellowships across GSAS as an alternative to the TF fellowship after the required teaching semesters; increase professional development opportunities for mid to late-stage graduate students to help compensate for the loss of professional development opportunities due to COVID-19. **Ms. Morris** talked about how GSA and the Senate can collaborate and noted sharing of best practices, DEI successes, Department guidelines, advocacy. Also setting up a yearly meeting between GSA and the Senate, and also advocating for an ombudsperson. **Mr. Van Tassel** thanked **Ms. Machesky, Ms. Morris, and Mr. Angeli** for their presentations and opened the floor for questions.

Ms. Urry asked how big of a problem sexual harassment is amount graduate students, and particularly by faculty. **Ms. Urry** noted that Yale has a very progressive policy for undergraduate students and faculty relationships – which is there should not be any. However, she noted, for graduate students it is much looser, and in her view, this needs changing to a stricter policy of no relationships between teachers and graduate students. **Ms. Morris** noted that this is an area that is underreported because the nature of the relationship differs from an undergraduate status to a graduate student's relationship that makes it difficult to report. **Ms. Machesky** said she will talk with her constituents about this and report back to the Senate on what she hears from them.

Mr. Van Tassel asked how the unionization will change things for GSA members. **Ms. Machesky** said they are still learning what issues the union would take on and what things the GSA would continue to work on. One thing GSA is doing and will continue to work on policies within GSAS and advising guidelines that are not university-wide, and also thinking about service and events. We would also gather information from departments and what is happening in those departments to drive our advocacy. **Ms. Urry** asked about their position of asking for a dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, specifically assigned to the Graduate School and why the current dean is not utilized in this capacity. **Ms. Machesky** said that they have had meetings with the current dean and it is felt that that office is understaffed and therefore is not able to address the needs of the graduate their community– there are too many issues to be addressed for that office to handle.

Mr. Van Tassel asked about housing in New Haven and if students are satisfied with what is available or are they dissatisfied. **Ms. Machesky** said that housing is a huge issue and Yale is not planning on to build or rent more housing for graduate students. This means that there is not enough housing for all students to live on campus. They would like to see Yale work with the city of New Haven to ensure that there is safe landlord practices and safe renting practices for students, as well as affordable housing not just for us, but for city residents.

Mr. Van Tassel thanked **Ms. Machesky** and her colleagues for a great presentation on educating the group on the advocacy and accomplishments of the GSA, and looks forward to the Senate

partnering with GSA on some of the ideas presented here today. **Mr. Van Tassel** adjourned the meeting at 5:36 PM.