

Monthly Report (September-October): Chair of the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC) Naghmeh Akhavan

As the Chair of the Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC), I have undertaken the following responsibilities and tasks during the past month:

1. GS Fest Preparation

In preparation for the upcoming **GS Fest**, I have been coordinating with GAAC members to schedule a planning meeting. I am currently (Monday, October 7) awaiting feedback from the members and expect to finalize the meeting details by noon today. Since I will not be able to attend GS Fest (October 16, 4-6 pm) due to an interview in Florida, GAAC team members will represent the committee, take charge of the GAAC table, and participate in the event.

2. Transportation Department Meeting

I had a meeting with the Transportation Department to address several critical issues affecting students. In this meeting, from the department of transportation, Daniel Teage (Associate Director-UMBC Transit), Grant McGarney, and Joseph Regier (executive director for transit) were present.

- **Transit App Concerns:** Students reported issues with lag and outdated GPS information, leading to missed buses. The Transportation Department committed to resolving these problems and ensuring real-time information accuracy. Discrepancies between the app and website are typically updated within 24 hours.
- **Overcrowding and Route Management:** The Paradise route has been experiencing overcrowding and delays due to increased ridership, especially during evenings. The route has been optimized for peak hours, and passengers are encouraged to plan accordingly or take the next bus, which runs every 20 minutes.
- **Communication and Feedback:** Plans are underway to enhance communication through the myUMBC group, website, and social media. Additionally, the Transportation Department is considering creating a Transportation Advisory Board to gather student feedback more effectively.

- **Safety Measures:** We discussed safety protocols to ensure that only UMBC students, faculty, and staff are allowed on the buses. Specific concerns about driver behavior will be investigated, and corrective action will be taken as necessary.

The department outlined the following action items:

- Ensure all scheduled buses are assigned to the proper routes and reflected in the Transit App.
- Host a **Transit App 101** session later this month to educate riders on app functionalities.
- Improve GTFS data during semester schedule changes to enhance bus timing accuracy.
- Investigate increasing the frequency of routes such as Catonsville and Route 40, despite budget challenges.
- Explore options like automatic passenger counters and card swipes for improved service and security.

3. Town Hall Meeting Setup

I have organized a **Town Hall Meeting** scheduled for **October 22, 2024**, with the aim of encouraging graduate students to join the union. The meeting will serve as an open forum where students can raise concerns, ask questions, and learn about the benefits of unionization. We plan to serve food (pizza and soft drinks).

In terms of the discussion focus, we are engaging three panelists: a graduate student from UMD College Park, a UAW representative, and the GSA President. Together, they will address key topics such as graduate student rights, concerns regarding bargaining, and the advantages of unionization. This meeting will also provide an opportunity to gather student feedback, which will be discussed with **Dr. Van Dulmen**, the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, and **the Interim Vice Provost and Dean**.

4. Unionizing Efforts

I participated in two union-related meetings focused on exploring graduate assistant unionization. The overarching goal of these efforts at UMBC is to organize a unionization campaign aimed at gathering signatures from graduate students, demonstrating widespread support for unionization:

- **Meeting with Gregory Barbic:** I met with Gregory Barbic from the University of Maryland College Park, **October 3, 4-6 pm**, to discuss collaboration and insights on graduate unionization efforts at other campuses.
- **Meeting with Lydia Majure:** A meeting was held with Lydia Majure from the international union, **October 7, 10-11 am**, where we discussed strategies for organizing and mobilizing graduate assistants in support of union efforts and election bargaining at UMBC.

5. Meet and Confer Meeting Scheduled

A **Meet and Confer** meeting has been scheduled for **December 3, 2024**, with key university administrators, including:

- **Provost Dr. Van Dulmen**
- **Interim Vice Provost and Dean Dr. Halverson**
- **Associate Provost for Financial Management Mr. Correnti**

In this meeting, we will present and discuss the concerns raised by graduate assistants during the Town Hall meeting, as well as broader issues impacting the graduate student community at UMBC. This will be a valuable opportunity to advocate for the needs and rights of graduate assistants.

6. Upcoming Plans (October-November)

- Meeting with the previous GAAC chair for more updates about any milestones on unionization.
- Meeting with deans of colleges to seek their support for unionization.
- Prepare the preliminary bargaining survey.
- Weekly meetings of the Bargaining Team, with members from different departments.
- Town Hall meeting outcomes and continued discussions.