

Critical Review and Five Year Strategic Plan
Of the
Graduate Student Senate,
Case Western Reserve University

15 March 2006

Prepared by Graduate Student Committee Members @
http://wiki.case.edu/Graduate_Student_Senate/Strategic_Plan

PURPOSE

The Graduate Student Senate has prepared this strategic planning document to reflexively guide its growth as an assemblage of graduate students at Case Western Reserve University. The impetus for this process was the recent University-wide self-review and academic strategic planning process begun in 2002.

A Strategic Plan is more than a document, being both created from and for action. This document makes tangible recommendations to the Graduate Student Senate (GSS), and through GSS, to Case as a whole. This self-review process has required critical research and thought. Various Graduate Student Senators and students-at-large have participated in this process through a number of committees. The flow of participants in this process of review and planning is as varied as the student body the Graduate Student Senate represents.

The first section provides a summary background of GSS. Framed as an ecological model in which GSS operates, this section gives an overview of the status quo at local, regional and national levels. The environmental context is supplemented by a resource analysis that evaluates both tangible and intangible tools available to the GSS. We move on to develop a renewed Mission and Vision statement for the GSS. An assessment of GSS focuses on our strengths and opportunities for improvement. Being aware of the resources that GSS can access, and our unified vision for GSS, we propose a series of concrete goals and strategies for the next one, three, and five-year periods. In an effort to ensure that this process remains dialogical throughout these time periods, a participatory evaluation schema is presented to measure the impact at annual intervals. Throughout this self-review and strategic planning document, we strive to be broad enough to account for necessary flexibility, yet sufficiently detailed to ensure representation, accountability, and successful evolution.

BACKGROUND

Environmental Context

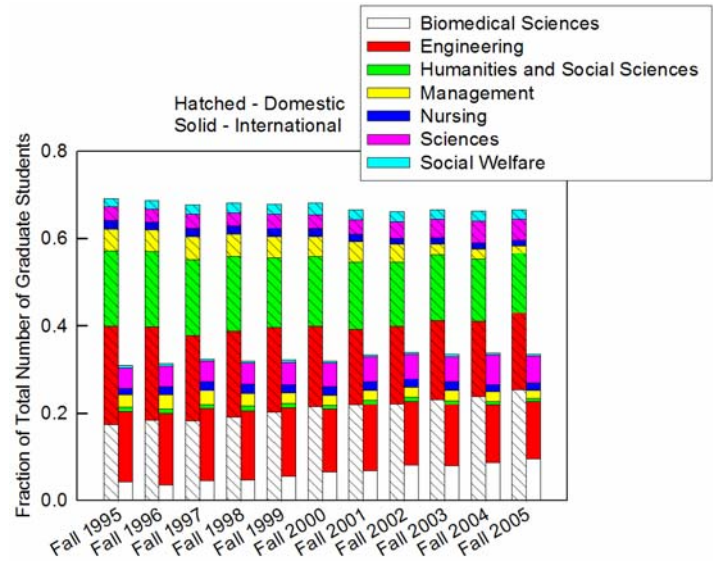
In acknowledgement and support of the stated mission and vision¹ set forth by Case Western Reserve University², the Graduate Student Senate³ strives to uphold the ideals described therein, particularly those of "...diversity, ... partnership and social responsibility, ... and continuous personal and institutional improvement." As the GSS represents a graduate community comprised of a diverse group of individuals, it is important to understand where the organization's energy should be focused over the next five years in order to maximize the outcome of its efforts.

¹ Stated mission and vision available at, <http://www.case.edu/vision/background.htm>.

² Visit Case Western Reserve University at, <http://www.case.edu/>.

³ Visit the Graduate Student Senate at, <http://www.cwru.edu/orgs/gradsenate/>.

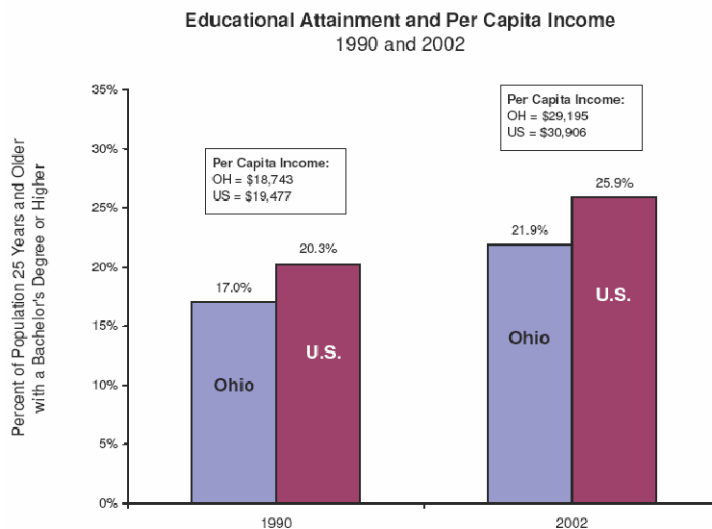
On average, over the last 10 years, School of Graduate Study (SGS) data show that approximately 65% of the graduate students at Case are pursuing doctorates of philosophy, while the rest are working towards master's degrees⁴. Historically, the citizenship of the Case graduate student population has been 70% domestic and 30% international. With regard to academic discipline, the former tend to be concentrated in the Biomedical Sciences, Engineering, and the Humanities and Social Sciences, while the latter are most consistently represented in Engineering with an increasing trend in the Biomedical Sciences. As such, the initiatives set forth by the GSS will initially be directed toward the most largely represented groups, with the ultimate goal of evolving into a role where it can more adequately address the needs of the entire graduate student body.



As stated previously, the GSS is committed to helping maintain Case as a premier private university within the state of Ohio, and the nation. It is held that both the members of the GSS, and the University, would benefit greatly from efforts to increase graduate student employability. In 2002, Case graduated 71% of the doctorates of philosophy granted in Ohio, and 3% of the master degrees. In contrast, between the years of 1999 and 2003, it was found that retention of those awarded master degrees in the state of Ohio was higher than that of those earning doctorates of philosophy—approximately 80% of the former

versus 60% of the latter.

Related to this, the per capita income in Ohio continues to lag behind that of the nation, with Cuyahoga County faring slightly better than that of the state.



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, and Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The GSS is intended to play a unique role in University affairs. It serves as a vehicle through which graduate students are able to meet and discuss issues relevant to them. This is done in the context of GSS sponsored meetings as well as those

⁴ Various (2005). School of Graduate Studies Data, Case Western Reserve University.

called by the Faculty Senate and other University wide groups in which the GSS has student representation. As suggested by the latter, the GSS, then, not only extends the mission and vision of the University, but other units such as the Faculty Senate⁵ and the SGS⁶.

Resource Analysis

Only through the dedication of graduate students at Case will GSS accomplish its organizational goals. At the core of GSS are the Executive committee and Senators, who perform the routine, everyday, tasks of the group, though a dynamic and ongoing relationship with the entire graduate population continues to be an integral lifeline of the GSS.

GSS has the ability to coordinate with other organizations and units across campus in order to expand the reach of the organization and maintain beneficial relationships with other groups that serve Case's graduate population. These units include Career Services, Alumni Relations, and departmental-level graduate student organizations, amongst others. The GSS also has direct lines of contact to all relevant University administration offices. Within the University, GSS members sit on a number of committees, both for the Faculty Senate and University-wide committees.

In both the fall and spring semesters, graduate students must pay a \$5 activities fee that directly funds the GSS budget. At present, the annual revenue stemming from this fee totals nearly \$20,000, which goes toward the variety of initiatives that the GSS pursues.

Additionally, GSS invests a large portion of its yearly budget in the Verhosek Fund endowment, which has been growing since the conception of GSS. While the V-Fund awards currently granted to graduate students come directly out of the annual budget, by continuing to contribute to the endowment, GSS will ultimately make the V-Fund endowment self-sustaining.

GSS is a member of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)⁷, through which the organization can learn valuable information from similar groups at other institutions.

VISION

New Vision Statement

The GSS is a vehicle through which the graduate students of Case Western Reserve University can meet, discuss, and take action on relevant administrative, academic, and professional affairs.

⁵ Visit the Faculty Senate at, <http://www.cwru.edu/president/facsen/facsen.html>.

⁶ Visit the SGS at, <http://www.case.edu/provost/gradstudies/>.

⁷ Visit The National Association of Graduate and Professional Students at, <http://www.nagps2.org/>.

Overarching Mission

The GSS is able to provide a means through which the members may take an active role in their University. The members participate on University committees which address issues relevant to the graduate community. This allows the graduate student body to have a representative and collective voice in the matters which may effect them.

As a recognized University student group, the GSS maintains it's own bylaws and constitution. Although composed of the entire graduate student body, the GSS has an internal structure of officers and senators. The GSS officers include: President, Vice-President, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, and Treasurer. The senators are delegated by each department, and are called to represent that department's graduate students in the GSS. Although all members may attend meetings, only officers and senators have voting rights for issues pertinent to the GSS.

All of the GSS programs are geared towards the graduate student population as a whole, attempting to break up the highly department oriented culture that is predominant at Case.

ASSESSMENT

Strengths

- Broad Representation
- SGS Support
- Bargaining Power
- Social Activities
- Well-known meeting times with supporting infrastructure
- Student activity fee = budget (we get 100%)
- Orientation
- Vfund/Diekhoff Awards
- Student Affairs Office

Opportunities for Improvement

- Diversity
 - Involvement of Departments
 - Ethnic/Cultural/Racial
- Departmental-level engagement
- Information Dissemination
- Structural arrangement of GSS offices and responsibilities
- Relationship with professional schools
- Lack recognition of student-led groups
- Partnering
 - Cleveland community relations
 - Community Service engagement
- Improved Health Care
- Grievance Forum (Arbitration & Mediation)
- Apathy

Upon closer examination of the above points, *strengths* of the GSS deal mainly with *infrastructure, resources, and social initiatives*, while *opportunities for improvement* best fit under the headings of *communication, diversification, and partnering*. In tabulated form, then, the above reduces into the focal categories of our strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
Infrastructure	Communication
Resources	Diversification
Social Initiatives	Partnering

Goals

Starting with the incomplete list of opportunities for improvement, the following initiatives were formulated and their implementation broadcast over a five year time period.

In the first year, the GSS Newsletter will be revived in order to reopen lines of communication between the Graduate Student Senate and the University community. Diversity will be promoted by seeking representatives from already established ethnic, cultural, and racial organizations on campus, as well as the Undergraduate Student Government and Professional Council. The establishment of new graduate student organizations will be encouraged by the development of a graduate student organization "startup kit" consisting of: templates for creating appropriate constitution and by-laws, and information regarding GSS support of the newly formed group. An ad-hoc committee on governance will be formed to evaluate and make recommendations for improving the structure of the GSS Executive Committee, the distribution of responsibilities, and other logistical concerns.

Efforts to disseminate University and SGS news relevant to the graduate student population, in addition to the start-up of new community service projects, will extend from year one into year two. Meanwhile, efforts to partner with local businesses in order to enhance Case graduate employability will be ongoing for the first three years. Beginning in the second year of this Strategic Plan, communication, diversification, and partnering will be upheld via initiatives through which the handling of grievances, newly formed student organizations, and interdepartmental consultation, respectively, will be launched.

During the third, fourth and fifth years of this Strategic Plan, a more formal arbitration/mediation mechanism for disputes involving graduate students will be formed.

Also during this phase, partnerships with national and potentially even global industries will be established.

Finally, a conscious effort to maintain two-way communication with the University community in as many forms as possible (e.g., the GSS Newsletter, email, website postings) will be made throughout the five-year Strategic Plan time period.

1-Year

- Increase ethnic/cultural/racial/departmental diversity from pre-existing groups
- Create "department GSS" startup kit w/ constitution template, bylaws, etc
- Get representatives from the USG and Professional Council on GSS (works toward 5-Year goal)
- GSS Newsletter
- Start grievances vehicle
- Ad-Hoc Committee on Governance to redress structure of the Executive Committee

3-Year

- GSS offering consultation (leading to arbitration/mediation)
- Increase ethnic/cultural/racial/departmental diversity from not-yet-existing groups
- Partnership: Cleveland (lean on Career Center to provide support and administration)

5-Year

- Arbitration/mediation
- Working relationship with USG and Professional Council
- Information gathering & dissemination

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

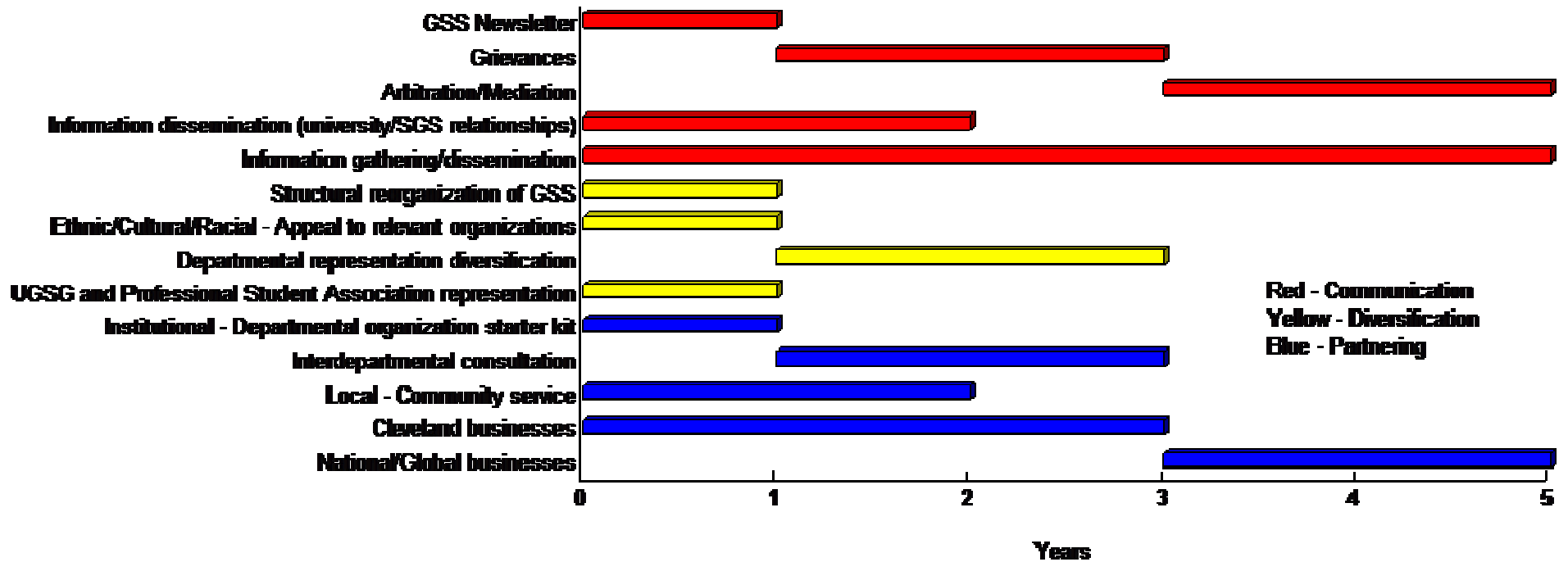
Assessing the progress and impact of this Strategic Plan will be enabled through a participatory, empowering, evaluation process. There are two primary types of evaluation that will be performed: an annual formative evaluation, and a summative evaluation at the end of the five-year period.

The formative evaluation will be conducted on an annual basis, at the completion of each academic year. The GSS Executive Committee will be responsible for program monitoring throughout the year, and will contribute to the completion of the end-of-year documentation of the performance of GSS goals. There are three key issues that the GSS Executive Committee will address in the formative evaluation: (1) whether the programs

are reaching the appropriate target populations, (2) whether the service delivery and support functions are consistent with standards deemed appropriate, and (3) whether positive changes appear among the program participants and the social and academic conditions the program addresses, (Rossi, Freeman et al. 1999). It is recommended that short questionnaires be distributed periodically and at the conclusion of GSS-sponsored events to help gauge responsiveness of participants. The program monitoring should assess each of the goals that has been implemented or addressed during the academic year. It would be appropriate to articulate any changes to the Strategic Plan and justify these changes in the formative evaluation. The formative evaluation will be kept as an official document of the Executive Committee and will be used to empower the GSS and its constituents, and will contribute to the growth and evolution of the organization.

The summative evaluation (or, impact assessment) will be produced by the Executive Committee at the end of the five year period. Survey data from the SGS Exit Survey will be used to supplement the quantitative and qualitative evaluation. Relying on the rigorous formative evaluations and other records kept throughout the past five years, the impact assessment will be able to determine the net effect of this Strategic Plan. It will be important to consider: (1) what aspects of the success, or failure, of specific goals can be attributed to the program design, (2) whether there has been an overall improvement in the social lives of graduate students, (3) whether there has been an overall increase in institutional support of graduate students, and (4) whether the programs initiated over the past five years are deemed self-sustaining (Rossi, Freeman et al. 1999). The underlying goal of this Strategic Plan is to reify the Graduate Student Senate as a student organization acting as, "... a vehicle through which the graduate students of Case Western Reserve University can meet, discuss, and take action on relevant administrative, academic, and professional affairs." Five years from now, we will look back and see what impact this Strategic Plan has had. GSS will no doubt go through numerous cycles of (re)invention over time as it evolves to meet the needs of graduate students at Case.

GSS Strategic Plan Timeline (2006-2011)



SAMPLE PROTOCOL

Implementation of the GSS goals is essential to the success and future growth of the GSS and the graduate student population as a whole. Here is a sample flow of goal implementation.

1. One Year Goals Implementation (2007)
 - a. Goal: To Increase diversity from preexisting groups
 - i. Collect contact information for all graduate and professional groups and place them into a database. 05/2006
 - ii. Create a mailing list that all groups can routinely submit information about upcoming events. This would be available only to the boards of each group. They can decide what information would be beneficial for their members. 05/2006
 - iii. Facilitate activities that are combined with two or more different departments, professionals, ethnic groups or international students. 05/2006
 - iv. Have a graduate student leadership round table or retreat where officers of each organization are invited to discuss topics and interact on a monthly basis. This would foster more communications between the groups. 09/2006
 - b. Goal: Create GSS department startup kit.
 - i. Assign GSS member to assemble all needed materials. 02/2006
 - ii. Make the materials available in print as well as electronic format. 06/2006
 - iii. Market the Kit to all the departments. 03/2006
 - iv. Obtain feedback and review progress of Kit (Issues, # new departments) 05/2006
 - v. Apply any revisions to kit process if needed. 09/2006
 - c. Goal: GSS Newsletter
 - i. Assign Editor and board. Solicit articles from the general student body. (02/2006)
 - ii. Create policies and procedures/deadlines for contributors. 02/2006
 - iii. Publish newsletter quarterly 03/06 in electronic and print format. The frequency of the newsletter will be determined by the response.
 - iv. Review format and make revisions if needed. 09/2006.
 - d. Start a Grievances Vehicle
 - i. Create a system for students to post grievances via an electronic bulletin board or wiki. Also create a mailing address and drop boxes where students can anonymously send grievances. 02/2006
 - ii. Create a team to collect, categorize and analyze grievances. 02/2006
 - iii. Develop ways to address these issues collaborating with needed departments and resources. (Ongoing)
2. Three Year Goals Implementation (2009)
 - a. Create an analysis team to review and grievances. This team should develop a methodology on how grievances are handled through GSS.

- b. Continue to form partnerships between different professional, ethnic and international groups in events that become annual events that are joint partnerships. Establish an annual leadership retreat for all officers of graduate societies.
 - c. Identify areas within Cleveland that could benefit from what a diverse body of talented graduate students could benefit the city. Partner with Career Center to form programs and disseminate information to graduate student body. This also would be a good section for the newsletter. It could even be like a classified ad section for Cleveland volunteer and professional activities that would relate to graduate students.
3. Five Year Goal Implementation (2011)
- a. Have and established methodology that is in use for arbitration and mediation. Place this methodology on the web and also in the GSS startup kit.
 - b. Through Cleveland community activities have working relationship with UGSG and Professional Societies as volunteers for large events. (Make a Wish Foundation, Red Cross, 3K race walk benefits, telethons.....)
 - c. Provide forums (coffee house, social) for Graduate Students only to discuss issues in a casual and relaxed atmosphere. Have GSS representatives present and also taking notes on how to address these issues. Assign a GSS senator to run these events.

REFERENCES

Rossi, P. H., H. E. Freeman, et al. (1999). Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE Publications.

Various (2005). School of Graduate Studies Data, Case Western Reserve University.