

Second Annual GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body

Background

The First Annual GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body was conducted from December 23rd, 2007 through January 31st, 2008. The idea to create and implement this survey arose out of conversations occurring within the Graduate Student Advisory Committee (GSAC) during the Fall 2007 semester. The results of this survey significantly shaped the advocacy efforts, member recruitment, event planning, and general functioning of the GSAC during the 2008 – 2009 academic year. As a direct result of graduate student feedback provided through the survey, the GSAC successfully lobbied for a graduate student printing increase from 500 to 750 free pages, which took effect during the Spring 2009 semester. Additionally, the GSAC began advocacy efforts targeted at improving library services for graduate students, which will be addressed further during the Summer 2009 semesters and which will hopefully lead to significant changes for the Fall 2009 semester. Graduate student concerns regarding larger issues, such as tuition, assistantships, and health insurance, were also communicated directly to administrators and other relevant individuals at the University. The GSAC also made efforts to connect with graduate students at the WMU branch campuses, as students from these campuses communicated in the survey that they felt disconnected from the GSAC and at times, WMU as a University. GSAC representatives visited the Traverse City, Southwest, and Battle Creek campuses, and visits are forthcoming to the Grand Rapids and Lansing campuses. Potential advocacy initiatives were identified as a result of meeting face-to-face with graduate students at each of these branch campuses and further efforts will be made through the GSAC to ensure that the unique needs and interests of graduate students at each of these campuses are adequately addressed.

The GSAC also made internal changes as a result of graduate student feedback from last year's survey. During the Fall 2009 semester, the GSAC made substantial efforts to ensure that a GSAC representative was present at each graduate student departmental orientation to inform students about the existence of the GSAC and how the organization can be of use to them. Although GSAC representatives could not be present at all departmental orientations, a substantial number of orientations were attended by GSAC members. GSAC events were also modified to be available at more convenient times (e.g. evenings), to address more specific professional development issues (e.g. publishing journal articles), and to provide a more diverse array of social activities (e.g. the KIA Art Museum event). Anecdotal evidence suggests that graduate students appreciated these changes and allowed their needs to be better served by the GSAC.

In order to gather additional information about graduate student life at WMU, monitor changes in the lives of graduate students at WMU from year-to-year, and aid the GSAC in continued efforts to improve the lives of graduate students, it was decided that the GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body should be run on a yearly basis. The Second Annual GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body was conducted for one month, from April 7th, 2009 through May 7th, 2009. Of the 4,726 graduate students enrolled at any WMU campus in the Spring 2009 semester, 643 (13.6%) students responded to the survey, which represents an increase of 35 (5.4%) students in comparison to the Fall 2007 survey.

The following document summarizes the data obtained from the Spring 2009 survey and compares this data (when applicable) to the data obtained during the Fall 2007 survey.

Knowledge of the GSAC

The first question of the survey addressed awareness of the GSAC in the graduate student community and the methods through which graduate students have become aware of the GSAC. Of the 643 respondents, 539 (83.8%) respondents indicated that they had heard of the GSAC prior to participating in this year's survey. The remaining 104 (16.2%) respondents became aware of the GSAC through this year's survey. The 539 respondents who indicated that they had heard of the GSAC prior to participating in the survey were then asked to indicate the method(s) through which they had heard about the GSAC. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 381 (70.7%) had heard of the GSAC through an e-mail received from the GSAC, 149 (27.6%) had heard of the GSAC during orientation, 91 (16.9%) had heard of the GSAC through a friend or classmate, 44 (8.2%) had heard of the GSAC through the GSAC website, 44 (8.2%) had heard of the GSAC through a flyer received from the GSAC in the mail, 37 (6.9%) had heard of the GSAC through a Registered Student Organization (RSO) that they are a member of, 29 (5.4%) had heard of the GSAC through a professor, 26 (4.8%) had heard of the GSAC through last year's GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body, 25 (4.6%) had heard of the GSAC during a presentation given in class, 20 (3.7%) had heard of the GSAC through the school newspaper, 11 (2%) had heard of the GSAC through another University employee, and 11 (2%) responded "other," which included membership in other student organizations (e.g. WSA, TAU), presenting a budget proposal to the GFAC, during a pre-admission campus visit, and "I don't remember." In comparison to last year's survey, substantially more individuals had heard of the GSAC prior to receiving the invitation to participate in this year's survey, which suggests that the GSAC has improved communication with the graduate student body over the past year. Furthermore, increases in method of learning about the GSAC were observed across all categories, with particularly notable increases in the number of students who had heard about the GSAC through e-mail, during orientation, and through a friend or classmate. As was expected, this suggests that e-mail continues to be a useful method to contact the graduate student body. This data also suggests that the GSAC's efforts to attend individual departmental orientations over the past year were particularly successful in terms of increasing awareness of the GSAC amongst graduate students and should be continued in the future. These data also point to other methods through which the GSAC could make continued efforts to communicate with the graduate student body, including encouraging students to visit the GSAC website, using postal mail to periodically send out information regarding the GSAC, directly contacting RSOs with large numbers of graduate student members, speaking with professors and department heads about the GSAC, making presentations about the GSAC in classes comprised primarily of graduate students, and using the school newspaper to communicate information about the GSAC.

Changes Since the Fall 2007 Survey

The second question of the survey asked respondents if they had taken last year's GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body and if so, what their perceptions were about changes in the GSAC over the past year. Of the 618 individuals who responded to this question, 469 (75.9%) had not taken last year's survey and 149 (24.1%) had taken last year's survey. Of the 149 individuals who had taken last year's survey, 76 (51%) felt as though GSAC as an organization had "stayed the same" since last year's survey, 65 (43.6%) felt as though GSAC as an organization had improved since last year's survey, 2 (1.3%) felt as though GSAC as an organization had worsened since last year's survey, and 6 (4%) individuals did not respond. Respondents were also given the option to provide further details regarding their answer selection. The majority of respondents indicated that they noticed improvements in the extent to which the GSAC is communicating with the graduate student body and making graduate students more aware of its presence on campus. Additionally, a substantial percentage of respondents noted that the GSAC had done a good job of increasing the number of events available to graduate students, in particular professional development events and social events, as well as did a better job of changing the times of events to be more accommodating to graduate student schedules. Other comments about improvements that the GSAC has made over the past year included that the GSAC seems to have more defined goals, has become more inviting, has helped graduate students get their needs met (e.g. graduate student printing increase), and has provided more funding for RSOs. Many of the comments associated with the "stayed the same" responses indicated that the respondents did not know enough about the GSAC to comment on the improvement or worsening of the organization. Other comments associated with respondents who answered "stayed the same" or "worsened" included that the GSAC had problematic e-mail errors this year that were annoying to the graduate student body and that the GSAC did not bring enough opportunities to the branch campuses.

Responses to this question indicate that the graduate student body believes that the GSAC has initiated efforts over the past year that could be considered to be improvements, particularly initiatives pertaining to communication with the graduate student body and initiatives aimed at providing events that are both of interest to graduate students and at more convenient times. These responses also suggest that continued efforts should be made to clearly define the GSAC's role on campus and the ways in which it can positively impact the lives of graduate students. While communication regarding the GSAC has improved, further efforts must be made to identify ways in which graduate students who are unfamiliar with the GSAC can be contacted regarding its existence and purpose on campus.

Purpose of the GSAC

The next question in the survey addressed what respondents feel the main purpose of the GSAC should be. Of the 532 individuals who responded to this question, 214 (40.2%) indicated that they feel the main purpose of the GSAC should be to serve as a representative body where graduate students can voice concerns about various issues at the University, 191 (35.9%) indicated that the main purpose of the GSAC should be to serve as a liaison between University administration and graduate students, 78 (14.7%)

indicated that they feel the main purpose of the GSAC should be to inform graduate students of changes and decisions at the University that impact their lives, 60 (11.3%) indicated that the primary purpose of the GSAC should be to organize events and programs that cater to the unique interests of graduate students, 11 (2.1%) indicated that the primary purpose of the GSAC should be to provide graduate students with leadership opportunities through participation in the GSAC, 2 (0.4%) indicated that the primary purpose of the GSAC should be to maintain a peer-reviewed publication, and 30 (5.6%) responded “other.” The majority of individuals who responded “other” stated that the main purpose of the GSAC should be “all of the above.” The remainder of responses were primarily “I don’t know” or “no opinion,” although other responses included “networking” and “providing funding to Registered Student Organizations.” In terms of sequence, the responses to this question on this year’s survey were unchanged from the responses on last year’s survey, although a greater percentage of students indicated that the primary purpose of the GSAC should be a forum to voice concerns and as a liaison between the University administration and graduate students. These data strongly suggest that graduate students perceive the primary purpose of the GSAC as being a place where their concerns can be heard and then effectively communicated to University administration. However, as will be discussed at a later point in this document, a substantially smaller percentage of students have actually utilized the GSAC in this capacity. These contradictory data suggest that extensive efforts should be initiated to assess methods that would best create conditions under which graduate students would be able, willing, and likely to communicate their concerns to the GSAC, such that primary intended function of the GSAC could be best accomplished. A number of initiatives may assist the GSAC in accomplishing the intended purposes of the GSAC. Given the relatively robust response rate to this year’s survey, a detailed survey enquiring about graduate student concerns at WMU may be a relatively quick and easy method to provide graduate students with a forum to voice their concerns directly to the GSAC. Additionally, the GSAC Chairperson and/or Vice-Chairperson could work directly with GSAC members to determine ways in which they could communicate more frequently and adequately with their respective departments. Furthermore, GSAC meetings could include periodic mandatory reports from GSAC members representing individual departments, which might increase the likelihood that GSAC members would initiate more frequent interactions with students in their department regarding graduate student concerns at WMU. Other possible mechanisms through which graduate student communication with the GSAC could be increased include “comment boxes” located in departments and a “comment box” located directly on the GSAC website. Additionally, the GSAC should consider making efforts to discuss with individual graduate students other possibly methods that could be used to communicate their concerns to the GSAC.

Membership in the GSAC

The fourth question of the survey addressed whether respondents identified as GSAC members. Of the 590 individuals who responded to this question, 466 (79%) indicated that they are not current GSAC members and 124 (21%) indicated that they are current GSAC members. In comparison to last year’s data, this year’s data suggest that more individuals perceive themselves as being current members of GSAC than last year, despite increased communication about GSAC and criteria for membership. Given that the GSAC has substantially less than 124 members, and in particular active members, further

efforts should be made to communicate criteria for GSAC membership and ways in which students can become involved in the GSAC. The creation of a GSAC Membership Frequently Asked Questions document may help to clarify membership requirements. The following question in the survey asked the 466 respondents who indicated that they are not currently members of the GSAC if they would be interested in finding out more about becoming a member of the GSAC. 324 (69.5%) respondents indicated they are not interested in finding out more about becoming a GSAC member and 142 (30.5%) respondents indicated they are interested in finding out more about becoming a GSAC member. Individuals who expressed interest in learning more about becoming a GSAC member were provided with an opportunity to enter their e-mail addresses so they could be contacted by a GSAC representative. The 324 respondents who indicated they were not interested in learning about becoming a GSAC member were then asked to select the reason(s) that they were not interested in pursuing GSAC membership further. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 195 (60.2%) respondents indicated they don't have enough time to be a member, 41 (12.7%) respondents indicated that they don't know enough about GSAC membership, 24 (7.4%) respondents indicated that they have no interest in impacting change at the University, 21 (6.5%) respondents indicated that the GSAC does not meet at times that they are available, 12 (3.7%) respondents felt as though the GSAC does not effectively represent graduate students at the University, and 78 (24.1%) individuals responded "other". Of those individuals who responded "other," the majority of individuals indicated that they will be graduating soon, just graduated from WMU or decided to leave the University, are commuting from long distances, are attending school at a WMU branch campus, or are working full-time or have other priorities (e.g. family) that prevent them from participating in the GSAC. Although the order of the responses that were selected the least has changed since last year's survey, the responses to this question were relatively comparable to last year's survey, with a heavy emphasis on time constraints as a primary factor interfering with membership in the GSAC. This suggests that the GSAC still needs to identify effective ways to encourage student involvement in a way that is not time-intensive. An emphasis on the relatively minimal time commitment necessary to be an active member in the GSAC (one two-hour meeting once a semester, although attendance at monthly GSAC meetings is preferred) may increase the likelihood that students are willing to become members of the GSAC. Furthermore, when orienting students to the requirements of GSAC membership, ways in which GSAC duties could be distributed among multiple students within a department could also be discussed.

Question five asked respondents what they perceive as being the benefit(s) of GSAC membership. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 214 (33.3%) respondents stated that the opportunity to impact change at the University was a benefit, 214 (33.3%) respondents indicated that learning about issues that impact the lives of graduate students was a benefit, 180 (28%) respondents indicated that the opportunity to learn more about University administration and how the University functions was a benefit, 171 (26.6%) respondents indicated that the opportunity to interact with University administration and faculty members was a benefit, 159 (24.7%) respondents indicated that acquiring experience by participating in activities to include on their resume/CV was a benefit, 129 (20.1%) respondents indicated that the opportunity to help plan events that are intended for graduate students was a benefit, 102 (15.9%) respondents indicated that the opportunity to serve on University Councils was a benefit, 158 (24.6%) respondents selected "I don't know," and 16 (2.5%) respondents selected "other." Of those individuals who responded "other," the most common responses were meeting other graduate students and no perceived benefits of GSAC membership. Other responses

included “all of the above,” opportunities to become involved in NAGPS, a way to stay connected to the University after graduation, helping international students to become oriented to the University community, and the opportunity to become involved in educational programming. In general, the responses from last year’s survey were similar to this year’s survey, with slight increases in perceived benefits about learning about graduate student lives and issues that impact them, opportunities to learn more about University administration and how the University functions, and opportunities to serve on University councils. However, it is notable that nearly one-fourth of respondents selected “I don’t know,” which suggests that the benefits of GSAC membership must be more clearly advertised. One method through which this objective could be accomplished is through the aforementioned GSAC Membership FAQ. Additionally, efforts could be made to more clearly and frequently communicate the benefits of GSAC membership through GSAC e-mails, as well as through GSAC departmental orientations and other events during which GSAC members come in contact with graduate students at WMU.

Question six asked respondents how the level of participation and membership in the GSAC could be increased. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 288 (44.8%) individuals responded “more incentives for GSAC membership,” 280 (43.5%) individuals responded “better advertisement of GSAC membership opportunities,” 46 (7.2%) individuals responded “have GSAC meetings on better days and times,” and 65 (10.1%) individuals responded “other.” The 46 individuals who expressed concern about the days and times of the GSAC meetings were given an opportunity to provide feedback about days and times that would work better for them. The majority of responses suggested that evenings would be most convenient, although many students also suggested weekends as a possibility. Additionally, numerous students suggested that the web-based technology (e.g. ooVoo) could be used to conduct meetings. The most common responses of those individuals who selected “other” included modifying GSAC membership to make it easier for branch campus students to become involved, better advertisement of the GSAC and its purpose, better advertisement of the specific benefits of GSAC membership, and specifically targeting and meeting with first-year graduate students. A substantial number of individuals also responded “I don’t know.” Responses from this year’s survey were significantly different from last year’s survey, with an over forty percent increase in “better advertisement of GSAC membership opportunities” and a nearly twenty-five percent decrease in “have GSAC meetings on better days and times.” This suggests that much greater efforts must be made to not only make graduate students more aware of the existence of the GSAC on campus, but also the ways in which graduate students can become involved in the GSAC as members. These data also suggest that continued efforts must be made to communicate the benefits of membership in the GSAC, as well as assess other incentives of membership that may not have been considered previously. The next annual GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body should include a specific write-in question asking students about reasonable incentives for participation in the GSAC. In the meantime, possible incentives for GSAC membership should be more informally assessed by the GSAC Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and GSAC members.

Promotion and Utilization of GSAC Opportunities

Question seven asked respondents if they had heard of the Hilltop Review, a peer-reviewed

publication maintained by the GSAC. Of the 556 individuals who responded to this question, 305 (54.9%) responded “no” and 251 (45.1%) responded “yes.” Individuals who indicated they had not heard of the Hilltop Review were given an opportunity to submit their e-mails so they could be contacted by a GSAC representative about the publication. Interestingly, although the Hilltop Review has been inactive for over two years, this year’s survey showed an over twenty-five percent increase in the number of individuals who have heard of the Hilltop Review. This data suggests that promotion of the upcoming return of the Hilltop Review has been relatively successful, although further promotion of the Hilltop Review is clearly needed.

Question eight asked respondents if they had submitted their work to the Hilltop Review previously. Of the 554 people who responded to this question, 548 (98.9%) individuals responded “no” and 6 (1.1%) individuals responded “yes.” Given the recent hiatus of the Hilltop Review, it was unsurprising that few individuals had submitted their work to the Hilltop Review. Those people who responded “no” were asked an additional question regarding the reason(s) that they had not submitted their work to the Hilltop Review. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 176 (32.1%) people were not aware that the Hilltop Review existed, 150 (27.4%) people responded that they didn’t have any articles or art that they felt were appropriate to submit, 84 (15.3%) people responded that they didn’t have time to submit an article or art for publication, 52 (9.5%) people responded that they prefer to submit their work to other journals, 42 (7.7%) people responded that publishing is not an important part of their discipline or educational training, and 36 (6.6%) people responded “other.” Of those who responded “other,” the majority of individuals commented that the details about publishing in the Hilltop Review have not been clearly communicated (e.g. deadlines, types of work that are acceptable to submit). Other individuals commented that they are currently working on publishable works and may submit these works to the Hilltop Review, are new graduate students and have not yet had the opportunity to consider publishing, or are simply not interested in publishing at this time. As with last year’s survey, these data suggest that in order for the Hilltop Review to be successful, the process for submission, desired content and parameters for submissions, and purpose of the Hilltop Review must be clearly conveyed to the graduate student body. It is recommended that a Frequently Asked Questions document be created that provides extensive amounts of information about the Hilltop Review.

Question nine asked respondents if they had attended any events hosted by the GSAC. Of the 552 people who responded to this question, 399 (72.3%) individuals responded “no” and 153 (27.7%) individuals responded “yes.” Those individuals who responded “yes” were then asked which event(s) they had attended. 76(49.7%) respondents attended a social event (e.g. picnic, golfing event, KIA art museum event), 61 (39.9%) respondents attended the CommUniverCity tailgate and football game, 50 (32.7%) respondents attended an event featuring a speaker (e.g. Ph.D. Comics, An Evening With Firoozeh Dumas, An Evening With Diane Rehm), 35 (22.9%) respondents attended a smaller professional development event (e.g. publication workshop and panel, financial planning), 25 (16.3%) respondents attended one of the Open Forums with President Dunn, 19 (12.4%) respondents attended a Professional Development Day for Academic Careers, 14 (9.2%) respondents attended a Professional Development Day for Non-Academic Careers, 11 (7.2%) respondents attended a day trip (e.g. bus trip to Chicago, ski trip to Timber Ridge), and 5 (3.3%) respondents answered “other.” Of those individuals who answered “other,” two had attended an orientation event, one had attended the GSAC Forum, one had attended a

GSAC meeting, and one had attended unspecified workshops put on by the GSAC. The 399 respondents who indicated that they had not attended a GSAC event were then asked for the reason(s) that they had not done so. 225 (56.4%) individuals responded that they were too busy with other obligations, 99 (24.8%) individuals responded that they did not know any other students who were planning on attending the event, 73 (18.3%) individuals responded that the events were not at a good time of day, 73 (18.3%) individuals responded that the events were not well advertised, 72 (18%) individuals responded that the events were not pertaining to a subject that was of interest to them, 60 (15%) individuals responded that the events were not on a good day of the week, 49 (12.3%) individuals responded that the events did not serve their needs, 48 (12%) individuals responded that the events were not at a good time during the semester, 10 (2.5%) individuals responded that the RSVP process for the event was too difficult, and 59 (14.8%) individuals responded “other.” Of those who responded “other,” almost all of the respondents remarked that the events were held on the main campus and as such, distance was a barrier preventing them from attending. Other responses for reasons individuals did not attend events included that the RSVP list was already full, the student did not feel as though they knew enough about GSAC to participate, and that the student may have attended a GSAC event, but they were unsure whether it was sponsored by the GSAC. In comparison to last year’s survey, social event programming had a notable increase in attendance, which suggests that additional social event opportunities should be created in the future. In terms of barriers to participation, lack of time was still the primary barrier, as was found in last year’s survey. This year, not knowing other students who were planning on attending the events became the second most common barrier. Perhaps future communications regarding events being put on by the GSAC could highlight that these events are an excellent way to meet graduate students outside of one’s department and expand one’s social network at the University. Interestingly, this year time and date concerns were selected far more frequently, despite efforts on the part of the GSAC to better structure events to fit graduate student schedules. Further efforts clearly need to be made to make sure that events are accessible to as many students as possible. This could potentially be achieved through continued surveys regarding good days and times to hold events. Furthermore, in comparison to last year’s survey, lack of advertisement of events was identified as less of a barrier than it had been previously, although clearly other methods should be identified to better reach the entire graduate student population with information about GSAC events. Finally, the lack of events on branch campuses was again a common response as a barrier to participation. Further assessment should be conducted to determine whether branch campus students are interested in event programming and whether they would be willing to pay a small Student Assessment Fee to allow for such programming to occur. The GSAC may wish to consider using a small amount of funds to have a “test” event on a branch campus to assess interest and based on attendance on this event, determine if efforts should be made to continue branch campus event programming.

Question ten asked respondents what would increase the likelihood that they will attend a GSAC event in the future. Individuals were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 331 (51.5%) individuals responded “the event is related to a subject that is of interest to me,” 143 (22.2%) individuals responded “the event offers an opportunity for professional development,” 140 (21.8%) individuals responded “the event involves a prominent speaker or distinguished individual,” 138 (21.5%) individuals responded “the event is clearly advertised and/or heavily promoted,” 134 (20.8%) individuals responded “a professor encouraged me to attend,” 133 (20.7%) individuals responded “my friends are planning on attending the event,” 124 (19.3%) individuals responded “the event is socially oriented,” 118

(18.4%) individuals responded “the event is at a more opportune time of day,” 92 (14.3%) individuals responded “the event is on a more opportune day of the week,” 90 (14%) individuals responded “the event is on a more opportune date during the semester,” 80 (12.4%) individuals responded “the event involves some type of incentive for attendance (e.g. food, t-shirts, prizes), and 43 (6.7%) individuals responded “other.” Embedded within this question, respondents were asked to indicate specific professional development events and speakers that would be of interest to them. Additionally, they were asked to specify incentives that might increase attendance as well as to clarify “other” responses. The most frequently requested professional development events pertained to discipline-specific interests. Other common responses included professional development events oriented toward preparing to enter the job market (e.g. CV/Resume building and writing, public speaking workshops, leadership and professional skill development, interview-related workshops, career assessments and guidance), entering the job market (e.g. job searching (both academic and non-academic jobs, with attention to minority groups), career fairs), and development upon entering the job market (e.g. networking). Additional responses were more focused on completing graduate school and included workshops about resources at the University (e.g. library resources), discussions of graduate student life and concerns at the University, workshops oriented toward dissertation execution and completion, workshops pertaining to grants, publications, and other professional writing, and workshops about research methods. The suggestions for speakers were varied and included individuals related to the University (e.g. the provost, administrators, successful alumni, successful professors), politicians (e.g. Jennifer Granholm, Michelle Obama), television personalities (e.g. Anderson Cooper, Rachel Maddow), journalists/authors (e.g. Thomas Friedman, Richard Louv, Anne Lamott, David James Duncan, Erin Gruwell, James McBride), CEOs (e.g. John Chambers), comedians, other notable individuals (e.g. Janet Reno, the Dalai Lama), thematic speakers (e.g. feminists, speakers from minority groups, speakers concerned with global issues), and discipline-specific (e.g. sports management, public relations, art, education, business) speakers (e.g. Allison Randal, Clayton Christensen). The three most common incentives to increase attendance at GSAC events were food, t-shirts, and prizes. Other responses included gift certificates to local restaurants, tickets to local events (e.g. plays), WMU clothes, mugs, electronic items (e.g. cameras, iPods, USB drives), extra credit from professors, and money to use for textbooks. Other suggestions to increase participation in GSAC events included holding events closer to the branch campuses, encouraging professors to allow graduate classes to attend for purposes of the class (e.g. during class time, for extra credit), having the event focus on graduate student issues (e.g. dissertation, HSIRB, networking, debt, professional writing) and/or information regarding the GSAC, and having attendance at the event not limited to only one guest. The rank order of responses to question ten were relatively comparable to those from last year’s survey. Of note, a new response (“a professor encouraged me to attend”) was included and over 20% of individuals indicated that this would increase their likelihood of attendance, which was a higher response rate than that observed for “my friends are planning on attending the event” and “the event involves some type of incentive for attendance.” This suggests that an increased amount of communication of graduate student opportunities between the GSAC and faculty members at WMU may have a substantial impact on attendance at GSAC events. As with last year’s survey, these data also suggest that sustained efforts must be made on the part of the GSAC to continually assess graduate student interests pertaining to event programming, with special attention given to professional development opportunities. Other data obtained from this survey also suggest that to best meet the needs of graduate student constituents, the GSAC may need to give further consideration to discipline-specific event programming. While this may mean that in any given year, a large number of students may not

have discipline-specific programming funded by the GSAC available to them, over the course of their graduate school career, they may be presented with such an opportunity. This could be accomplished through the establishment of a small fund of GSAC money being reserved for one departmental event each year. Money could be awarded through a lottery or competitive process, either student-initiated or departmental-initiated, with monetary amounts exceeding those awarded by the GFAC to allow for events featuring more distinguished speakers or more extensive learning opportunities.

Question eleven asked respondents what the best methods are to notify them of upcoming GSAC events and programming activities. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 451 (70.1%) people stated through e-mail, 95 (14.8%) people stated through announcements made in classes, 90 (14%) people stated through postcards mailed to their home address, 85 (13.2%) people stated through flyers posted on campus, 52 (8.1%) people stated through campus mail to their department mailboxes, 38 (5.9%) people stated through postings on the GSAC website, 36 (5.6%) people stated through advertisements in the school newspaper, 36 (5.6%) people stated through articles in the school newspaper, 34 (5.3%) people stated through postings on a University website, 28 (4.4%) people stated through flyers handed out on campus, 25 (3.9%) people stated through announcements made at campus events, and 22 (3.4%) people responded “other.” Of those individuals who responded “other,” the majority of individuals suggested the use of social networking sites (e.g. Facebook). Additional suggestions included announcements via goWMU or EduCable, e-mail or in-class announcements by professors, targeted advertising in certain locations (e.g. Health and Human Services building, branch campuses), via more concise e-mails, and through text messaging. Although these data are relatively comparable to those obtained from last year’s survey, there was a slightly notable increase in respondents encouraging announcements to be made about the GSAC in classes. This increase is reflective of an emerging theme observed throughout the survey data, suggesting that person-to-person communication regarding the GSAC more broadly may be a more effective form of communication than other methods that have typically been utilized by the GSAC. Further efforts should be made to encourage professors to make announcements about the GSAC in classes and meetings, to encourage RSOs to make announcements about the GSAC at their meetings, and for GSAC representatives to be more proactive in communicating information to their departments. Also, there was a notable increase in individuals suggesting that the GSAC utilize Facebook more frequently as a method of communication. Further efforts should be made to determine ways in which this tool can be more effectively utilized.

Question twelve asked respondents what types of events and programming activities they would like to see in the future. Respondents were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 276 (42.9%) people stated they would like more events featuring distinguished speakers, 260 (40.4%) people stated they would like more events focusing on getting a job after graduation (e.g. job fairs), 257 (40%) people stated they would like more events focusing on graduate student development (e.g. resume writing, publication), 194 (30.2%) people stated they would like more events that provide the opportunity to network with faculty members and other graduate students, 175 (27.2%) people stated they would like more social events (e.g. bowling night, karaoke night), 163 (25.3%) people stated they would like more community service oriented events, 101 (15.7%) people stated they would like more events that provide the opportunity to meet with University administration, and 18 (2.8%) people responded “other.” Of those individuals who responded “other,” events at branch campuses, family-focused events, events featuring WMU alumni, online activities, an awards night highlighting graduate student accomplishments, and events focusing on life after graduate school (e.g. applying for jobs, negotiating

salaries) were all suggested. Response order on this year's survey was exactly the same as last year's survey, suggesting that further attention may need to be given to ensuring that GSAC programming is adequately meeting student needs. Particular assessment should be obtained regarding specific speakers that could be brought to WMU that fit within the range of the GSAC's budget. Perhaps the GSAC could create a survey with a list of five to ten speakers that are considered to be affordable, with a brief description of each speaker, and circulate this to the graduate student body. The top speaker could then be brought to WMU. A survey such as this would serve the purpose of both assessing graduate interests and providing preliminary promotion for the speaking event, which is likely to bolster attendance. Further attention should also be given to developing event programming focusing on all aspects of the job search process and early career development.

Question thirteen asked respondents how the GSAC can better promote its presence on campus. Individuals were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 277 (43.1%) people stated through descriptions of GSAC sent out by e-mail, 141 (21.9%) people stated through networking with students, 132 (20.5%) people stated through social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), 122 (19%) people stated through networking with departmental student organizations, 119 (18.5%) people stated through GSAC promotional items (e.g. t-shirts), 118 (18.4%) people stated through announcements made in classes, 116 (18%) people stated through postings on University websites, 108 (16.8%) people stated through descriptions of GSAC sent by regular mail to their home address, 107 (16.6%) people stated through networking with faculty members, 104 (16.2%) people stated through articles in the school newspaper, 86 (13.4%) people stated through advertisements in the school newspaper, 74 (11.5%) people stated through descriptions of GSAC sent by campus mail to their departmental mailbox, 53 (8.2%) people stated through announcements made at campus events, 48 (7.5%) people stated through descriptions of GSAC in flyers handed out on campus, and 26 (4%) people responded "other." Of those people who responded "other," the most common response was "not sure," although other common responses included promotion on branch campuses and with distance learners, presentations during mandatory trainings, more interactions with TAU, more encouragement to use the GSAC website, networking with key staff members at WMU, creating more of a physical presence on campus, using a game or quiz sent via e-mail to help students learn more about the GSAC, and increased use of departmental liaisons. In most respects, the data obtained from this question is relatively comparable to that obtained during last year's survey, with one notable increase for the "through social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)" response. This suggests that the GSAC should continue to make efforts to integrate itself in to Facebook and other social networking sites (e.g. Twitter). Many of the responses also suggest that the GSAC must continue to make efforts to have a physical, in-person presence on campus in a variety of settings. Other ways in which the GSAC can increase visibility and interactions in this respect should be identified.

Communication of Graduate Student Concerns

Question fourteen asked respondents what issues they feel are important for the GSAC to address in future interactions with University administration. Individuals were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 259 (40.3%) people responded "availability of assistantships and

associateships,” 245 (38.1%) people responded “cost of tuition,” 206 (32%) people responded “availability of classes,” 174 (27.1%) people responded “cost of school health insurance,” 162 (25.2%) people responded “availability of professional development opportunities,” 153 (23.8%) people responded “quality of classes,” 136 (21.2%) people responded “quality of school health insurance,” 127 (19.8%) people responded “availability of research support,” 124 (19.3%) people responded “quality of faculty assistance in achieving professional milestones (e.g. thesis, comprehensive exam, dissertation, publications),” 108 (16.8%) people responded “quality of faculty members,” 106 (16.5%) people responded “prestige of the University,” 105 (16.3%) people responded “availability of support for conference attendance,” 96 (14.9%) people responded “quality of professional development opportunities,” 93 (14.5%) people responded “diversity/multicultural advocacy and support for graduate students on campus (e.g. Division of Multicultural Affairs, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Graduate Students of Color, Disabled Student Resources and Services, LGBT Student Services),” 90 (14%) people responded “representation of diversity/multiculturalism on campus (e.g. students, staff, faculty, administration),” 89 (13.8%) people responded “quality of the campus facilities,” 80 (12.4%) people responded “frequency of graduate student oriented activities,” 69 (10.7%) people responded “quality of graduate student oriented activities,” 68 (10.6%) people responded “availability of technology needed for my field,” 56 (8.7%) people responded “availability of low-cost childcare,” 55 (8.6%) people responded “international student support and resources (e.g. Haenicke Institute, International Student Handbook),” 49 (7.6%) people responded “faculty-to-student ratio,” 15 (2.3%) people responded “there are no issues that I feel GSAC needs to address with the University administration,” and 38 (5.9%) people responded “other.” Of those individuals who responded “other,” suggestions included improving sustainability, increasing stipends for GA/DA positions, increasing availability of other financial support (e.g. scholarships), increasing opportunities available on branch campuses, requiring annual graduate student reviews in all departments, addressing EUP issues (e.g. communication, library services), addressing minority issues (e.g. partner benefits, racial discrimination), addressing commuter student issues, housing assistance, prorated fees based on number of credits taken each semester, increasing the printing allowance, increasing availability of counseling services for students, improvements in infrastructure, increasing professor accountability, making additional assistance available for international students experiencing difficulties with professional writing, allowing “R” lots to be used by graduate students taking classes in the evening, increasing pay and benefits for adjuncts, increased focus on students at WMU, addressing residency status issues, and encouraging conferences to be held at WMU. Many of the most frequently selected issues with the present survey are comparable to those of the previous survey and suggest that the GSAC should continue to voice these issues to the University and attempt to obtain some kind of movement on these issues, however small. Once again, the free response box attached to the “other” response option yielded a number of more manageable issues that could be addressed with the University (e.g. writing support for international students, parking issues) and that are perhaps more easily resolvable than larger issues, such as cost of tuition and availability of assistantships.

Question fifteen asked respondents how they would like to see the amount of interaction the GSAC has with the University administration modified. Of the 457 individuals who responded to this question, 200 (43.8%) people stated “the same amount of interaction,” 170 (37.2%) people stated “more interaction,” 78 (17.1%) people stated “significantly more interaction,” 7 (1.5%) stated “less interaction,” and 2 (0.4%) people stated “significantly less interaction.”

Question sixteen asked respondents what the GSAC can do to most effectively serve as a liaison between graduate students and the University administration. This question was a free-response question that allowed participants to write a short answer. The most common response was “not sure,” but other common responses included (1) ensuring that the graduate student body has accurate information regarding the GSAC and its mission, role as a liaison, current advocacy initiatives, opportunities for student participation in terms of advocacy initiatives, and history of accomplishments/resolutions/successes, (2) holding regular forums at varied times involving the GSAC, University administration (e.g. President Dunn), and/or faculty members (e.g. department heads), (3) encouraging more graduate student participation, both within the GSAC (e.g. departmental representatives and departmental meetings) and outside of the GSAC (e.g. unifying the graduate student body and encouraging students to voice concerns), (4) using both anonymous (e.g. comment boxes) and non-anonymous (e.g. Facebook) venues to solicit graduate student opinions and allow graduate students to communicate concerns, (5) including branch campus and EUP students (e.g. establishing a presence at these campuses, having branch campus representatives), (6) communicating with faculty and finding ways in which they can serve as allies, (7) creating surveys in a variety of formats (e.g. focused solely on one issue, with open ended questions), regularly administer these surveys to the graduate student body, and communicate the results to University administration, (8) taking a firm stance on issues, and (9) maintaining a strong and visible presence on campus, both in-person and via e-mail. Many students also commended the GSAC for doing already doing a good job in serving as a liaison. Other less-common suggestions made by students included (1) ensuring that graduate students are represented at all departmental and University committee meetings, (2) attending classes to observe graduate student issues as they occur, (3) maintaining regular, concise e-mail communication with graduate students about relevant University issues, (4) improving communication with new graduate students, perhaps through the use of an introductory packet of information about the GSAC, (5) encouraging graduate students regularly via e-mail to communicate concerns to the GSAC, (6) highlighting the importance of graduate students as researchers and/or instructors at WMU, (7) highlighting the role of graduate students in positively representing WMU at a state and national level, (8) reminding administration that graduate students are customers of WMU, (9) finding additional time to meet with University administrators (e.g. the President, the Provost) to communicate both problems and good news, and (10) relying more heavily on departmental representatives to work on behalf of the GSAC within in their respective departments.

Question seventeen asked respondents if they actively communicate graduate student concerns, suggestions, and issues to the GSAC. Of the 522 individuals who responded to this question, 465 (89.1%) people responded “no” and 57 (10.9%) people responded “yes.” Those individuals who responded “no” were then asked why they do not use the GSAC for this purpose. The top five reasons cited for not communicating concerns to the GSAC were lack of time and/or concerns being a lower priority than obligations, not having any concerns that needed to be communicated to the GSAC, not knowing how to communicate concerns to the GSAC, lack of optimism or confidence that an issue could be adequately addressed, either by the GSAC or simply in general, and lack of knowledge about the GSAC’s existence. Other reasons cited for not bringing concerns to the GSAC included lack of awareness that the GSAC is an advocacy body, simply not thinking about using the GSAC in this capacity or remembering that the GSAC is a possible resource, using other resources (e.g. the Graduate College, advisors, departmental student groups, faculty members) to address concerns, lack of GSAC presence on the branch campuses, lack of connection to the GSAC, lack of knowledge about the GSAC

more broadly, inability to attend GSAC meetings, not being a GSAC member, lack of contact with GSAC members, concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, forums being held at times that conflicted with the respondent's schedule, lack of professionalism/credibility of the GSAC, apathy of departmental representatives, closeness of the GSAC to the Graduate College, lack of solicitation of graduate student concerns by the GSAC, and personal reasons. These data suggest that the GSAC could implement a number of solutions to increase the likelihood that graduate students utilize the GSAC as a resource to which to voice concerns. First, although the top reason respondents cited for not using the GSAC as an organization to which to voice concerns was time constraints, the GSAC could consider ways in which the time burden of communicating concerns could be minimized. Many respondents stated that they were willing to complete the present survey because it involved a minimal time commitment. As such, the GSAC could emphasize the use of time-limited ways that concerns could be communicated, including via e-mail. Furthermore, the GSAC should consider implementing more targeted surveys in the future, as well as placing an online comment box on the main page of the GSAC website. The GSAC should also make substantial efforts to educate graduate students about the myriad of ways that concerns can be brought to the GSAC (e.g. e-mail, telephone, in-person meetings, through departmental representatives, through anonymous letters, at GSAC forums). Similarly, the GSAC should also make efforts to communicate that students do not need to be GSAC members or attend GSAC meetings to communicate their concerns. Additionally, the GSAC should make efforts to continually solicit concerns from the graduate student body, as many students need reminders to use GSAC in this capacity. Finally, as advocacy efforts increase, the GSAC should make efforts to clearly communicate positive changes to the graduate student body to decrease apathy about the possibility for positive changes to occur.

Question eighteen asked respondents if they know where the GSAC office is located. Of the 511 individuals who responded to this question, 421 (82.4%) people responded "no" and 90 (17.6%) people responded "yes." Question nineteen asked respondents if the GSAC would be more accessible if the GSAC office was located on the main part of campus (e.g. the Bernhard Center). Of the 501 individuals who responded to this question, 294 (58.7%) participants responded "yes" and 207 (41.3%) participants responded "no." The data from this question suggests two issues that the GSAC should make attempts to address. First, the GSAC should make efforts to more clearly communicate to the graduate student body where the GSAC office is located and find ways to encourage graduate students to come by the office in person (e.g. have a month where every fiftieth graduate student who stops by the office gets a free gift card). Second, these data suggest that if possible, the GSAC should make some effort to create a presence at the Bernhard Center. While this may not be in the form of a permanent office, it could be in the form of a "GSAC Coffee Hour" once a month at Biggby's or a "GSAC Sandwich Day" at Subway, where graduate students could meet with GSAC representatives at the Bernhard Center and have free coffee and/or food.

Question twenty asked respondents what communication strategies are the easiest methods for them to use to communicate the issues they face at Western Michigan University to the GSAC. Individuals were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 475 (73.9%) people responded "e-mail," 99 (15.4%) people responded "social networking site (e.g. Facebook, MySpace)," 89 (13.8%) people responded "in-person meeting," 80 (12.4%) people responded "a comment box located on the GSAC website," 61 (9.5%) people responded "telephone," 46 (7.2%) people responded "GSAC office hours," 45 (7%) people responded "GSAC office on the main campus in Bernhard Center," 44 (6.8%) people responded "postal mail," 44 (6.8%) people responded "an interactive website (e.g. Wiki, blog), 3

(0.5%) people responded “fax,” and 1 (less than 1%) person responded “other” and stated “the Lansing Campus front desk.” These data suggest that as part of the regular e-mail communications made by the GSAC, graduate students should be encouraged to express concerns about issues they are facing at WMU. Furthermore, these data suggest that while less popular options, other methods of communication should be considered, including using social networking sites as a venue for communicating concerns (e.g. a Facebook discussion thread about graduate student issues), as well as other websites (e.g. the GSAC website) and some other on-campus options, such as in-person meetings. In order to encourage the use of in-person meetings, GSAC representatives could offer to hold these meetings in venues that are convenient for graduate students, rather than requiring students to meet in the GSAC office.

Question twenty-one asked respondents what the best method is for the GSAC to communicate University-specific and graduate student-specific information to graduate students. Individuals were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 459 (71.2%) people responded “e-mail,” 102 (15.9%) people responded “postcards mailed to [my] address,” 65 (10.1%) people responded “flyers posted on campus,” 55 (8.6%) people responded “campus mail to [my] departmental mailbox,” 45 (7%) people responded “postings on the GSAC website,” 41 (6.4%) people responded “advertisements in the school newspaper,” 39 (6.1%) people responded “articles in the school newspaper,” 40 (6.2%) people responded “postings on another University website,” 27 (4.2%) people responded “GSAC Forums,” 20 (3.1%) people responded “flyers handed out on campus,” and 14 (2.2%) people responded “other.” Of those individuals who responded “other,” Facebook and other social networking sites was the most common response (11 respondents), although other responses included text messages, monthly meetings of graduate students, and announcements in made in classes. These data suggest that e-mail is the most effective way to communicate information to graduate students, although these data also suggest that graduate students may find periodic mailings directly to their home or campus mailbox to be helpful methods of communicating information as well. The GSAC may want to consider composing a quarterly or bi-annual newsletter with important updates about graduate student life at WMU. Alternatively, this newsletter could be made available digitally. Consideration should be given to the financial cost and impact on sustainability of such an initiative, relative to the benefit of reaching graduate students who may otherwise not be reached through e-mail or other digital communications.

Branch Campus Respondents

Question twenty-two asked respondents if they are a graduate student on a branch campus of Western Michigan University (e.g. Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Battle Creek). Of the 514 individuals who responded to this question, 392 (76.3%) people responded “no” and 122 (23.7%) people responded “yes.” Those individuals who identified as branch campus students were then asked if they would be interested in paying a small Student Assessment Fee to bring GSAC opportunities to their branch campus. Of the 120 individuals who responded to this question, 79 (65.8%) individuals responded “no” and 41 (34.2%) individuals responded “yes.” Although numerous branch campus students responded to this year’s survey and through other responses at various points in the survey expressed interest in having GSAC events on their branch campuses, these data suggest that at the present time, nearly two-thirds of students on these campuses would not be willing to pay a Student Assessment Fee in order to bring

GSAC programming to their campus. The GSAC should make further attempts to communicate with students on the WMU branch campuses to educate them about the purpose and cost of a potential Student Assessment Fee and then reassess student interest in paying such a fee, as this data may be impacted by lack of knowledge of possible benefits of a Student Assessment Fee.

Participant Demographic Information

Question twenty-three asked respondents for their current year in graduate school. Of the 506 individuals who responded to this question, 155 (30.6%) respondents were first-year students, 147 (29.1%) respondents were second-year students, 85 (16.8%) respondents were third-year students, 41 (8.1%) respondents were fourth-year students, 20 (4%) respondents were fifth-year students, 10 (2%) respondents were sixth-year students, 6 (1.2%) respondents were seventh-year students, and 42 (8.3%) respondents selected “other.” Of those who selected “other,” the majority had recently graduated, although a substantial number of respondents were also “ABD” or had permission to take graduate classes (non-degree seeking). Other responses included eighth-year (2), twelfth-year (1), and not yet started/seeking admission (3).

Question twenty-four asked respondents for their field of study. Common areas of study included CECF, Social Work, Psychology, Education, Public Administration, Business, Chemistry, and Biology, although a diverse array of other fields of study were also reported.

Question twenty-five asked respondents what College their department is located in. Of the 496 individuals who responded to this question, 180 (36.3%) people indicated their department is in the College of Arts and Sciences, 136 (27.4%) people indicated their department is in the College of Education, 74 (14.9%) people indicated their department is in the College of Health and Human Services, 31 (6.3%) people indicated their department is in the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, 27 (5.4%) people indicated their department is in the Haworth College of Business, 25 (5%) people indicated their department is in the College of Fine Arts, 3 (less than 1%) people indicated their department is in the College of Aviation, and 20 (4%) people responded “I don’t know.”

Question twenty-six asked respondents what degree they are in the process of earning. Of the 503 individuals who responded to this question, 339 (67.4%) people were in the process of earning a Master’s Degree, 152 (30.2%) people were in the process of earning a Doctoral Degree, 7 (1.4%) people were taking graduate classes, but not working toward a degree, and 5 (less than 1%) responded “other.” Those individuals who responded “other,” two were working on concurrent Master’s/Doctoral degrees, two were working towards graduate certificates, and one had completed his or her Master’s Degree.

Question twenty-seven asked respondents if they currently have any type of assistantship position through the University. Of the 498 individuals who responded to this question, 303 (60.8%) people responded “no” and 195 (39.2%) people responded “yes.” In comparison to last year’s survey, approximately 15% more respondents to this year’s survey had assistantships.

Question twenty-eight asked respondents for their reason for choosing Western Michigan

University as their graduate institution. Individuals were able to select as many answers as they deemed appropriate. 265 (41.2%) people responded that Western Michigan University is conveniently located, 236 (36.7%) people responded that their program of study at Western Michigan University has a positive reputation, 120 (18.7%) people responded that they received an appealing assistantship or associateship offer from Western Michigan University, 106 (16.5%) people responded that Western Michigan University has a positive reputation, 98 (15.2%) people responded that they wanted to work with a specific professor at Western Michigan University, 30 (4.7%) people responded that they received a scholarship from Western Michigan University, 29 (4.5%) people responded that the research facilities at Western Michigan University were best suited to their needs, and 79 (12.3%) people responded “other.” Of those individuals who responded “other,” the most common responses included that WMU offered a specific degree or certification or a specific approach (e.g. theoretical) within a certain degree or certification program, tuition reimbursement for staff members, flexible scheduling (e.g. evening and summer courses), alumnus/alumni of WMU, encouraged by a friend, family member, or alumnus/alumni, other family reasons, and best choice of University out of offers received. Additional reasons given by respondents included low cost of attendance (e.g. tuition, parking), friendly students and/or faculty in the department, received a scholarship from an entity other than WMU, offered interesting professional development opportunities (e.g. teaching), convenience more broadly, and encouragement and help from the Graduate College and/or WMU.

Question twenty-nine asked respondents for additional comments, feedback, or information that might be useful to the GSAC. The majority of responses fit into six categories: (1) general positive feedback about the GSAC, (2) program-specific concerns (e.g. professor quality, class availability, significant program changes, curriculum changes, and branch campus program support), (3) student support concerns (e.g. level of support for international students, level of support for non-traditional students), (4) suggestions to find additional ways to communicate about the existence of the GSAC, the benefits of the GSAC, and the role of the GSAC, (5) concerns about EUP fees and suggestions that these fees should be used to fund an EUP GSAC, and (6) suggestions to the GSAC to focus more on professional development events, including events regarding finishing a graduate degree (e.g. conducting research, obtaining funding) and events regarding next steps after the completion of a degree (e.g. job fairs). Other responses included suggestions of things to work toward changing at WMU (e.g. improving health care, diversifying program offerings, increasing available scholarship money and/or assistantships, increasing the technology fee, increasing the number of classes available during the summer, giving unfunded graduate students the same library benefits as funded graduate students), specific feedback regarding the survey (e.g. eliminate the reset button, shorten the survey, decrease redundancy within the survey, try to administer surveys on a monthly basis with the help of classes), specific feedback regarding desired event programming (e.g. “fun events,” continue CommUniverCity, free basketball and football tickets, annual WMU graduate student conference, international speakers, merit award program for graduate students), suggestions for the GSAC as an organization (e.g. increase visibility/exposure in various parts of campus, obtain an office in the Bernhard Center, meet with new graduate students as soon as possible, increase the responsibilities of departmental representatives, provide more incentives for involvement in the GSAC, continue to work on reviving the Hilltop Review, give away water bottles as promotional items), specific concerns about University structure (e.g. facilities, technical support, policies, efficiency, availability of consolidated lists of deadlines for programs and graduation), specific feedback regarding GSAC e-mails (e.g. eliminate future e-mail problems, make sure unsubscribe requests

are honored, shorten the length of e-mails, change the focus of e-mails to more professional development and university-student relations topics, create multiple listservs for the GSAC that disseminate different information [e.g. social events listserv, professional events listserv, university issues listserv]), and other positive feedback regarding the current GSAC Chairperson and specific programs.

Interpretation and Summary

The results from this year's survey suggested that the GSAC has made some movement in a positive direction over the course of the past year. The results of this year's survey also suggest that there are still many changes that should be implemented by the GSAC to better meet the needs of graduate students at WMU.

Although the number of respondents who had heard of the GSAC increased with this year's survey, numerous responses to questions still indicated that more information about the GSAC and its roles needs to be clearly communicated to the graduate student community. This goal could be accomplished in a number of ways. First, many respondents suggested that first-year graduate students should be sought out more extensively by the GSAC, such that new graduate students become aware of the existence of the GSAC as part of their first few weeks on campus. The GSAC should investigate whether it is possible to specifically obtain an e-mail list of first-year graduate students and make a special effort to initiate contact with these individuals as soon as they matriculate as graduate students. Second, e-mail preferences of the graduate student body should be assessed, so that information about the GSAC can be communicated more effectively through e-mail. Some possible ideas include creating multiple listservs, each of which only distributes certain information (e.g. events listserv, advocacy initiatives listserv), or having longer, more structured e-mails with subheadings (e.g. upcoming events, graduate student opportunities, current advocacy initiatives, GSAC mission, GSAC contact information). Alternatively, clear headings could also be put as the first couple of words in GSAC e-mail subject lines. Third, the GSAC should find ways to communicate in a person-to-person format with members of the graduate student body. This could be done through making more in-person contact with graduate students through departmental representatives, attending classes and making announcements in this type of venue, and encouraging professors to speak to their students about the GSAC. Unlike less personal methods of communication (e.g. e-mail), this form of communication is harder to disregard. Finally, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents could be created outlining a number of roles of the GSAC (e.g. mission of the GSAC FAQ, GSAC as an advocacy body FAQ), although the FAQs available could also extend to other useful types of information for graduate students at WMU (e.g. funding resources at WMU FAQ, library resources at WMU FAQ).

Responses from this year's survey also suggest that more work must be done to ensure that the GSAC is fulfilling its roles as a group to which graduate students can voice their concerns and also a group that will serve as an advocacy body on behalf of graduate students. The first step in ensuring that this role is fulfilled is finding more opportunities to solicit graduate student feedback and finding ways that this feedback can be obtained in an efficient manner. Many graduate students who completed the survey who knew that the GSAC can serve in the capacity of an advocate were still unaware of how to go about communicating their concerns. An e-mail clarifying how concerns can be communicated to the GSAC (e.g. e-mail, telephone, letter, in-person meeting) should be sent as soon as possible. Additionally,

other avenues for feedback (e.g. additional surveys, forums, web-based comment boxes) should be explored. Secondly, since many individuals stated that perceived benefits of the GSAC are having the opportunities to impact change and learn about issues impacting the lives of graduate students at WMU, additional ways in which members can be involved in this capacity (e.g. GSAC member projects on specific issues brought forth to the GSAC) should be investigated. Finally, the collaborating with faculty as allies for issues impacting the lives of graduate students should be investigated as another option in terms of enhancing the GSAC's function as an advocate.

Data from this year's survey also suggests that graduate students would like a small shift in the focus of GSAC events, more toward events oriented toward professional development and job acquisition post-graduation. Continual assessment must occur regarding events that would be most helpful to graduate students in these two areas of interest.

Finally, as with last year's survey, this year's survey included a large number of responses from WMU branch campus graduate students. Next year's survey should include more response options and questions pertaining particularly to branch campus student needs at WMU. Furthermore, although many responses in this year's survey indicated that branch campus students would like a GSAC presence on their campuses, many of these same students were not interested in paying a Student Assessment Fee in order to do so. Further assessment is needed to see if a GSAC presence can be established through the use of existing fees already charged to students (or through some other source of funding) and if this cannot be accomplished, whether graduate students on the WMU branch campuses would find benefit in paying a small additional fee in order to have a GSAC presence on their campus.

Appendix A – GSAC Survey of the Graduate Student Body