

How to start a departmental graduate student association + Resources

What is a departmental graduate student association (GSA)?

Graduate student associations (GSAs) are student-run, university sanctioned groups that represent the interests and needs of graduate students within academic departments. These groups provide a united decision-making and voice for graduate students in department policy making and activities. The officers are elected through department-wide student votes and serve to express the needs and priorities of graduate students and assure equitable transmission of information from departments to graduate students.

Why have a graduate student organization for your department?

Graduate school is challenging. However, it is far too common for those who choose to leave grad school incomplete to express that administrative and departmental policy choices and unwelcoming cultural climates were major hurdles to their academic success. GSAs are positioned to help address the poor lines of communication between grad students and faculty, and the isolation of graduate student voices between research teams, cohorts, and departments that plague many graduate student experiences.

GSAs provide a structure for graduate students to provide policy guidance to faculty and administration in a university-recognized capacity. Poor policy design and the lack of transparency of or access to departmental policy information is a constant problem for graduate students. While many departments make incremental improvements to policies, these adjustments are most likely to be equitable and effective if graduate students with a clear mandate from their peers are able to guide the process.

Further, GSAs provide an outlet for graduate students to support each other regarding concerns over department culture and working conditions. GSA officers and liaisons are able to link struggling students with support resources, provide a paper-trail for student grievances, and develop institutional knowledge of common and possible solutions.

Where do I start?

- Does your department have a graduate student association (GSA) or a mechanism to enhance communication between faculty and graduate student workers?
 - If no, think about starting one! Talk to your fellow graduate students and see who would be interested in helping form one. It will help to have at least 5 people who are interested in the beginning.

What goes into the application/what do you need?

- Roster of at least 10 people (if you are forming GSA, your roster will be every currently enrolled graduate student) (if your department has fewer than 10 graduate students, LOGS can provide alternative resources and strategies to meet your goals)
- Students who are interested/informally elected to be President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer (essential roles to fill for paperwork)
- A constitution
- A faculty advisor + letter of support from faculty advisor
- A name for the organization (i.e., Biology Graduate Student Association (BGSA))
- A logo (optional)
- Social media handles (if you choose to add them when submitting)
- You can reach out with additional questions to the Office of Student Engagement and Leadership getinvolved@louisiana.edu.

How to recruit graduate students to help

- Lafayette OGS organizers are available to support you as you develop your movement.
- There will likely be a few concerns or topics that your department has been interfacing with in regards to graduate student-faculty communication. Brainstorm with other students on what would convince your fellow students to help you organize.
- Make a flier detailing what the concerns are in the department, what a GSA for your department could help with, and a date and time for a general meeting for interested students. Adding a QR code may make it helpful for people to add their emails to a listserv.
 - An example flier is provided on 6
 - Here is a link to a free QR code generator: <https://www.qr-code-generator.com/>
- Hold a general meeting (or two) for graduate students to talk about what they want out of a GSA, what they could help with, and to start drafting the constitution.

How to obtain a roster

- Reach out to the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Mary Farmer-Kaiser (mary.farmer-kaiser@louisiana.edu)
 - Request a list of current graduate students enrolled in your department for initial roster curation
 - Following this, you can obtain the list of students from the Graduate Student Organization (GSO)
 - Email: gso@louisiana.edu

Finding a faculty advisor

- You will need to identify a faculty advisor early on so you have someone confirmed to support your group's efforts and so you can have someone to send drafts of the constitution to.
- The requirements of the faculty advisor may be specific to the GSA's needs, but generally they are a faculty voice available to advocate on behalf of the GSA if needed and are available to provide advice or help with events.
- Faculty members serving as advisors will be responsible for providing a letter of support and confirmation that they are willing to serve as the advisor. This document does not need to be longer than one page and should be signed and sent to the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement (Thomas Tolley: thomas.tolley@louisiana.edu).
- If you end up needing to switch faculty advisors for the club, use Microsoft forms to collect nominations and then ask the advisors if they are comfortable being considered. If you need to take it to an election, after the GSA is formed, you can do this through a formal election outlined in the constitution.

How to write a constitution

- Ideally, you will have a group of students that want to work together to draft a constitution.
 - An example BGSA constitution can be found [here](#).
- Focus the constitution around what the needs for your department are, but remember that this GSA is to facilitate communication and make sure graduate student voices are heard!
- Once the constitution is drafted, be sure to get approval from a majority of the membership, the faculty advisor, and the department head. Here is an ideal order of operations that worked well for the Biology department
 - Draft constitution.
 - Have a general meeting for students that allows for those who did not write the constitution to provide feedback.
 - Make edits based on the feedback from students
 - Send the draft to the faculty advisor.
 - Make edits from the faculty advisor and send the draft back out to students.
 - Send the draft to the department head and hold a meeting to discuss any needed edits or hesitations by the department.
 - Make the edits and send the document back out to the students for formal approval.

Remember that the constitution is to establish your organization as legitimate and doesn't need to define all the roles your org will take in department operations from the start. There will probably be conflict between what the graduate students would like to achieve with the GSA and what faculty are willing to incorporate into department policy. These conversations will be easier to hold once you have an established organization to speak through. Be clear about your long-term objectives, but don't be afraid to prioritize building infrastructure for those ideals at this phase.

Nominating and electing the first officers

- You will need to add what officer positions are in the GSA and the names, emails, and phone numbers of the individuals who will be holding those positions to the application
- You should send out a Microsoft Forms nomination ballot through your department or through the list of emails you obtain from Dr. Farmer-Kaiser to allow for students to nominate themselves and others for positions.
 - Ensure that you provide the role and responsibilities of each position
 - Confirm that the chosen faculty advisor is approved by a majority of the membership (you can do this at prior general meetings).
 - Reiterate that students should not put names on the nomination form if they have not expressed written consent to do so.
 - Give students a set amount of time to add their nominations.
- First election
 - Make a Microsoft Form for the election.
 - Prior to sending out the form, email the nominees and give them a week to decide if they will accept or reject the nomination.
 - Once you have heard from everyone, send out the Microsoft form and give a set amount of time for students to fill out the ballot.

How to make a microsoft forms ballot

- Everyone who has a UL email address has access to Microsoft Suite- which includes Microsoft Forms!
 - When you go to Outlook, there is a grid in the top left hand corner. When you click this, click “Explore other Applications” and then choose “Microsoft Forms”.
 - Choose “New Quiz”.
 - From here you can title the ballot and add questions.
- There are several types of “questions” you can add. Some will request for text input while others will be multiple choice.
- If you want to limit the amount of times people can respond, want to change sharing settings, or want to end response collection, you can use the “...” option on the top right hand corner to navigate to “Settings”.
- When you click collect responses you will be able to set parameters like when ballots are accepted
- Copy the link when you are done and it should save responses in the form!

Meeting of GSA representative with Office of Engagement and Leadership

- Before you get official designation as an organization, you will need to be able to give a 5 minute presentation (just words, no slides) about your organization, why it is needed, and goals.
- After submitting the application materials, you will receive an email for scheduling this meeting.
- They only need one presenter, but both the President and Vice President can attend!
- If you do not receive an email scheduling the conference call, reach out to Thomas Trolley (thomas.tolley@louisiana.edu) to get an idea of when to expect an email.

Reserving rooms for meetings + Facilities Use

- One of the benefits of being a university recognized group is that you have access to department meeting places.
- In order to host meetings in your building, you will need to fill out a facilities use form. This form is linked [here](#) and can also be accessed through your department head or assistant department head.
- The signatures needed will be the president of the GSA, the department head or assistant department head, faculty advisor, and the Dean of Students.
- When you get ready to submit this form, you should have an idea where and when you would want to have the meetings. This is a piece of information that you will need to include!
 - You can check with the department head or office manager for your department to see what rooms are open for use.
- The order of operations is as follows:
 - President and Faculty advisor sign form.
 - President sends form to Department head for signature.
 - Department head sends to the Dean of Students or assistant to the Dean of Students.
 - Dean of students email: deanofstudents@louisiana.edu
- This form will need to be filled out every semester.
- If you want to host a meeting or event at the Student Union, there are separate forms to fill out through Pathways to reserve a room.

Setting up shared (email) mailbox

- Complete the online form located here: [Email - Shared Mailbox | IT Service Desk \(louisiana.edu\)](#).
- It is advised to have a faculty advisor complete this form.

How to send email from GSA account

- Once you have an official email for your organization, you should be able to access a listserv (a list of all students in the department- if it exists) which you can use to easily send out emails.
- You will need to get permission from your department head to use this listserv. To get this started, send a message to IT and your department head so the department head can give IT permission to let you send emails using the listserv.
- Departments may vary in whether or not there is a listserv or if a GSA can have access to it.

Updated: Sep 2023

Setting up GSA bank account

Biology Graduate Student Association

BGSA

Officer Nominations	Open now until 5pm, Feb 9
General Membership Voting	Open 5pm, Feb 10 Closes 5pm, Feb 24

What is BGSA

BGSA aims to build a support network among graduate students, provide professional development opportunities, and foster better lines of communication between students and faculty. These aims will be achieved through department-wide extracurricular events, professional development workshops, amplifying the graduate student voice to faculty, and establishing written and transferable knowledge of how to navigate the department to incoming graduate students.

Why BGSA

Establishing a BGSA will help support communication between department faculty/admin and graduate students as BGSA will be a recognized organization of the university. Allowing graduate students to speak through student-selected representatives will facilitate increased graduate student participation in departmental conversations and encourage the growth of a supportive and inclusive department.



Nominations to fill officer positions are now open. Follow the link here to nominate graduate students.



Follow the link here to read the draft constitution

A very basic flier used during BGSA startup to raise awareness of coming elections. The links lead to a google form and a locked google document