

Imperial Graduate Students' Union Strategy

2017/18



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STUDENTS' UNION

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CONTENTS

2	Contents
3	Vision and Introduction
4	Representation
6	Events
8	Looking Forward

VISION

The Graduate Students' Union will aim to establish a unique role at Imperial College London where it works to bring together postgraduate communities, including those divided by nationality, discipline and culture, to improve the range and diversity of opportunities available for all of its postgraduate members.

INTRODUCTION

The GSU are excited to share and deliver its plans for the 2017/18 academic session. The contents of this document should provide an idea of current role the GSU performs at Imperial College, as well as the focus we hope to place on different functions throughout the year. These activities include representation, events and efforts made to improve these in future, accounted for respectively by the sections in this document.

As a Constituent Union of Imperial College Union, we hope to embrace our responsibility as a body of elected members who primarily act to work together to promote the experience and well being of all postgraduate students.

We very much welcome any comments or feedback. Please don't hesitate in getting in touch by contacting us at gsu.president@imperial.ac.uk.



Luke McCrone
Graduate Students' Union President
gsu.president@imperial.ac.uk

REPRESENTATION

Representation is an important line of our work as a Graduate Students' Union. The President is firstly invited to deliver the postgraduate voice at College, Graduate School and Union meetings, including committees as senior as Senate. This work is augmented by the work carried out by our Vice President (Representation) who leads our team of Academic & Welfare Officers. We therefore constitute an important part of the wider Academic Representation Network and have a crucial responsibility in shaping the postgraduate educational experience.

Representation effectiveness

As a GSU, we acknowledge that postgraduate representation is far from perfect. We firstly believe that a disconnect has long existed between parts of the Academic Representation Network and parts of our committee. We therefore want to work with the Deputy President (Education) to find ways to bridge these gaps.

This will involve our Academic & Welfare Officers (AWOs) taking more of an active leadership role in gathering feedback from Masters and PhD reps via SSC meetings, as well as ensuring that this information is fed back

coherently to members of departments, Imperial College Union and the GSU where it can ultimately be acted upon. AWO's will also be compelled to attend Education & Representation Board, Community & Welfare Board and Union Council meetings to ensure postgraduate matters are discussed in these circles.

We need to not only begin establishing structures which allow information to flow faster and more efficiently between the right people, but to ensure those people are motivated to act accordingly.

Mental health

Both PhD and Masters courses put students under pressure, but for different reasons. These pressures have been proven to manifest as mental health problems. Masters are short and intense courses, which can result in a great deal of stress for students. PhDs are long, arduous programmes, where students become increasingly susceptible to isolation and depression (43% of physical science PhD students at UC Berkeley exhibit enough symptoms of depression to be qualified as such).



We therefore endeavour to work with the College, Graduate School, Union and students in establishing the best ways to identify the root causes of mental strain on postgraduate students, as well as the types of changes which need to be made to alleviate any challenges faced by our students. Part of this work will involve working with

Imperial College Union in advising on the eventual rollout of the Wellbeing Representation Network to the postgraduate cohort.

Another aspect of our work will entail signposting those students with welfare issues to the right services, whether this be the College counselling service or the Union advice centre.

EVENTS

Events are an important aspect of our activity because they primarily serve to bring together students from different disciplines and walks of life. We hope to use events as a medium through which students can explore new development opportunities and escape their routine study. Postgraduate students have eagerly demanded College-wide event opportunities, including via the recent Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) feedback data.

Students of all programmes have expressed an appetite for wanting to meet students in other faculties. Some have explained how important it is for them to network with industry professionals during their time at Imperial, whilst others have expressed an interest in forging new connections with researchers and academics from other universities. Our events schedule for the year has therefore originated from the needs and wants of our members.

Industry Hackathon

We plan on holding this event in the first or second term of the academic year. The event will be themed around a topic related to multidisciplinary, for example Big Data. We will invite a range

of companies who have an interest in the chosen theme and who are able to identify a question/problem which relates to the topic. This question will be advertised to student participants who according to their skills and interests, will be assigned to multidiscipline teams that work together to solve the problem over a period of time.

This event appeals to us as a GSU because it will mobilise the skills of our own students to give companies constructive perspectives on projects they are already working on. Companies may also play a role in 'supervising' the team to which their problem is assigned. Each team will be invited to present, possibly on a separate evening, to explain the solution of their problem to an audience. The best team presentation will be rewarded with a prize.

Research Connections

This would be a networking-based event where research students, particularly those who possess an interest in pursuing a career in academia, have the unique opportunity to mingle and network with academics from other universities. We feel that although Imperial is a world-class, research-intensive university with an existing plethora of opportunity, it is important for our students to branch out and seek enriching perspectives from individuals and research groups outside of Imperial.

Enterprise event

This will be a co-hosted event between the GSU and Imperial College Business School which aims to bring together esteemed members of the Business School with postgraduate students from other faculties. The event will follow a 'speed-dating' model where students can pitch ideas to Business School members who can provide their opinions on the viability and commerciality of different ideas.



LOOKING FORWARD

As a Graduate Students' Union, we want to ensure we play a unique role at Imperial College London to maximise the benefit we can provide for our members. To achieve this, we respect that working collaboratively with Imperial College Union, College and others will be the key to our success.

Having interacted widely with postgraduate students to better understand our membership, we now endeavour to use our resource and energy to bring together different postgraduate communities. By integrating these communities through events and other activities, we hope to act as an enabler in opening new social and professional avenues for postgraduate students.

The work we carry out this year and the experience we accumulate as a committee will culminate into a review around the effectiveness of current postgraduate representation and provision at Imperial. This review will hopefully go on to inform important change which will improve the lives of our members not only this year, but also in future. It will also be used to inform aspects of Imperial College Union's Governance Review exercise.

Come the time of such an evaluation, a successful year for us will mean that we have experienced increased engagement with our events and services, as well as secured financial support to continue to hold bigger and better events for our members in future. We ultimately want to increase a reach to more postgraduate students.

We are very excited to embark on this strategic cycle and look forward to working with you in turning our goals into practice.





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