1. Some message from Wendi Heinzelman about graduate students' stipends and health insurance issues.

Health insurance is definitely expensive. But it is really up to the market. The plan from the University is competitive.

The Graduate Studies Office has been working on improving students' benefits. For example, the stipends for graduate students in Humanities have been increased to 18K for nine months. As to the situation that graduate students from different department within the AS&E College receive a different stipend rate, the stipend rate is set by the departments and depends on the grant support. It seems not realistic that Graduate Studies Office can do something to ensure all the students have the same stipends.

Besides, the offer letter of admission clearly states what the stipend rate is. As to the situation that students from different departments are working in the same group but receiving a different stipend rate, the faculty could pay them all the same. But this is not required. In the future, if students contact GSA regarding this problem, we can share this information with them.

The GSA board agrees on the idea from Wendi to raise students’ stipends instead of adding in health insurance, as some students may have other means for health care. But one question is, will the stipend growth rate be able to match the health insurance growth rate?

2. Plan for the new travel funding applications for the Spring semester.

Allison will announce the rewardee list in the next newsletter. Also, the new travel funding program for the spring semester will be open in March and will be announced in the next newsletter. The application window will be set to be two weeks.

3. Department representatives meeting

Janice will send out some request letters to those department don’t have reps yet. Allison will set up a doodle file to determine the meeting time.

4. Feedback request letter about GSA activities.

The board decides to do a feedback survey instead of feedback letter. Wei will set up a template for the survey form.
5. Ideas for new GSA projects/programs?
a. colloquium/spotlight showcase of students’ research. Probably a monthly event, in the lunch time or later afternoon, one or two speakers at a time. Will put in the survey form for feedback
b. social events for March: aikido, paintball/laser tag, board game night or happy hour.