

## Executive Summary

THE Committee on Campus Planning and Physical Development of the University Senate (hereinafter “the Committee”) investigated a proposed interim Graduate Student Center within the boundaries of its mandate. The Committee found that an interim Graduate Student Center would be aligned with and would measurably advance Columbia University’s institutional mission to expand an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, research, and scholarship. Faculty who are strongly identified with graduate education broadly and enthusiastically endorsed such a center, noting that it would promote and cultivate the sense of academic community that is a critical component of a comprehensive graduate education. The conspicuous lack of such a center at Columbia, as compared with our peers, places the University at a competitive disadvantage.

Students were equally enthusiastic about the prospect of a Graduate Student Center. A survey conducted by the Graduate School Advisory Council (hereinafter “GSAC”) found that 77% of students did not feel that they were part of a close-knit academic community, a response that we attribute to the lack of a dedicated community space. There are a number of departmental lounges on the Morningside and Medical campuses, though they are unevenly distributed. In addition, departmental lounges, as their name implies, neither promote interdisciplinary interaction nor offer the programming support of a school-wide Graduate Student Center.

The Graduate Faculties Lounge (hereinafter “GFL”) in 301 Philosophy is insufficient for several reasons as a space for graduate students. First, the GFL is not purposed for the use of graduate students. Second, the GFL is a highly impractical space, as it is neither divisible nor multifunctional. In particular, no space for TAs’ office hours is available, a serious obstacle to the successful pedagogical interactions integral to graduate education. Third, the GFL lacks any audiovisual technology for presentations. Though it works well for receptions and other large-scale events, the GFL is not an effective working and social space for graduate students.

The Committee also noted that the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (hereinafter “GSAS”) is the only graduate school at Columbia, as well as the only arts and sciences graduate program in our peer group, without a dedicated space of its own. While taking note of the promise of space in Uris Hall by 2017, the Committee stresses the importance of finding interim space now, as seven years represents the lifespan of a Ph.D. The negative impact of departmental moves to UTS space in the last two years is already deeply felt. An interim Graduate Student Center now is necessary, to build academic community, but also to rebuild an academic community that once existed but has since been dispersed.

Space has been made available recently, notably by the closing of four science libraries and a shelled brownstone on 114<sup>th</sup> Street. The Committee investigated all of these spaces, but declined to officially endorse any of them, in the interests of good planning practice. However, the Committee does note that space that satisfies all the broad criteria of a Graduate Student Center does exist and is presently available. Ready funds and solid fundraising prospects are also available for immediate commitment to an interim Graduate Student Center.

In summary, the Committee has concluded:

- The Graduate Student Center is fully aligned with and will measurably advance Columbia's institutional and academic mission, by promoting interdisciplinary interaction in an academic community.
- The Graduate Student Center will protect and advance Columbia's competitive standing vis-à-vis our peers.
- For the reasons above, faculty comprehensively endorse the creation of a Graduate Student Center.
- For the reasons above, students enthusiastically endorse the creation of a Graduate Student Center.
- Space is available that broadly fits the physical needs of a Graduate Student Center of approximately 2,500-3,000 square feet. While not strictly within the mandate of the Committee to decide, a Graduate Student Center should contain, in general, a combination of large and small spaces, while retaining the GFL for major events.
- The interim nature of the proposed Graduate Student Center would not deprive any department of any long-term space allocation.
- Funds from GSAS reserves with other fundraising prospects are ready to be committed immediately for the creation of such a center.
- The preservation of the Graduate Student Center as a key priority throughout the leadership transition of GSAS indicates strong and wide-ranging institutional support.
- The availability of space requiring mild to moderate renovation, and the conventional design parameters of a Graduate Student Center represent a highly efficient and highly effective use of both space and financial resources.

The Committee believes that the Graduate Student Center is a rare instance where there is full alignment among the priorities of the university, the faculty, and students, and where there is not only a crystallized vision, but also funds available to realize it – a view shared by its Senate co-sponsors. In such an instance, swift action is highly desirable to capture the momentum of good intentions and good ideas, and capitalize on available opportunities. The Committee concludes this report by respectfully requesting that the University Senate endorse and recommend the creation of a Graduate Student Center.