Candidate Personal Statements for 2014-2015 UGSA Officers

Nominated for President – David Fiala

Hi- I’d like to provide you all with a brief statement as a candidate for President of the UGSA.

This past year I joined the UGSA as a departmental representative for the Computer Science department, and admittedly knew rather little about the organization as a whole. My first day I was wide eyed and flooded with new names and exciting new graduate department names that I’d never heard of. Little did I know, that after a year I have only scratched the surface of the scope, people, and impact that this outstanding group has on everyone from NC State students to the state and country.

And that’s only counting the people I’ve heard from directly! I’ve seen the amazing work that our internal committees have done to strengthen the graduate school through recognition of outstanding teachers, to outreach that gives us a positive reputation amongst our peer institutions. Our outreach and growth is of critical importance to both the UGSA and me. As an officer and leader, I will do everything I can to ensure that our representatives have all resources necessary to accomplish their missions and expand their reach as we grow. As the needs and challenges of the UGSA progress, I’ll lead the council with an open mind and proactive spirit to ensure all voices are considered while staying on course to best serve the graduate student body.

For those of you that know me, this will come as no surprise: Beyond educational and professional growth, I believe that a healthy society of graduate students is a happy, social, and connected group. One of my personal objectives is to grow graduate students’ networks both within the university and externally. Success is not a solo activity, and let’s face it, sometimes graduate students need little push! This past year’s acceleration of new block grants is indicative of multidisciplinary social and professional interaction across NCSU. I plan to (1) continue this growth and expand the UGSA’s reach to new departments as part of this pursuit by personally ensuring every proposal receives the attention and feedback it deserves to be successful, and (2) encourage collaboration with the graduate school to improve and support the Preparing Future Leaders professional development series.

The UGSA at NCSU is growing. We're getting larger every year with nearly 60 departments represented. We're also growing in terms of responsibility and voice. This past year we've sat and voted on countless review boards, selection committees, advisory boards, national organizations, and are even co-founding the creation of a state-wide graduate student governance council. Our past executive boards, chairs, and representatives have built these respectable connections through years of hard work and dedication. As president I will continue where they left off to ensure that the UGSA continues to evolve as a respected, mature voice within the academic community.

I appreciate your support, and am excited to lead us in to the 2014-2015 academic year. Thank you.

David Fiala
PhD Student in Computer Science

Nominated for Vice President of External Affairs – Shannon Warchol

My experience in external affairs began in high school when I was the state-wide officer of external affairs and finalist for the international officer of external affairs for a Masonic youth organization I had been involved in for a number of years. During my time as the state officer, I spoke to a number of different groups about why they should support my organization. I learned that in order for them to see the value of supporting your organization, you must show those outside of your organization that you value them. This is the overarching goal I would strive for as the UGSA’s Vice President of External Affairs.

The first way to get buy in from students not involved in UGSA is through the new graduate student orientation. I want to redesign the program to serve the immediate needs of the incoming students. The information fair is a great way to
spotlight smaller areas of campus and provide resources for students to ask questions. While this can be used for departments that have less to say, for more in depth topics, I want to offer a selection of sessions so students can tailor their orientation to what they need. Perhaps an out-of-state American student on an RA-ship will attend a seminar answering all the questions about gaining residency and another on health insurance provided by the GSSP while the Raleigh native taking evening classes to get a master’s while working days can listen to a talk from a current part-time student about how they manage their time. By providing options, we are showing the incoming students that the UGSA is a useful organization that values their time and questions. In turn, hopefully, the students will look to join their department’s GSA or even start up a new chapter!

I would work to extend the sense of showing and receiving value to those UGSA representatives who sit on University Standing Committees. By pairing students with committees they are interested in and encouraging them to participate fully, the greater university community will see the impact graduate students make at the university and hopefully those committees will begin to shift their thinking about the university from one that is undergraduate centered to one that considers the needs of all students.

In the work of the VP of External Affairs that occurs outside of the university, I would again strive to demonstrate the value of NC State graduate students. Acting as the representative for all of the graduate students, I would raise concerns that are not just my own but are common to many students here. To know what their concerns are, I want to work with the Press Secretary and VP of Communications to create a space online where graduate Standing Committee Reps can provide updates of what their committee is discussing and deciding. Then graduate students can put in their suggestions and opinions giving them the opportunity to enact change. All of this would show the students that once again they are valued by the UGSA, and hopefully, they would value us in turn.

Nominated for Vice President of External Affairs – Keith Brannum

To the UGSA Representatives,

I want to thank the Graduate Representatives for this opportunity to run and serve as the Vice President of External Affairs for 2014-2015. I find the best leaders are ones that, first, build relationships and, second, not afraid to face challenges, but keep moving forward towards a greater future. I started my grad school career by attending the Institute of Political Leadership Conference for Collegiate Leaders. While, there we took lessons on running campaigns and causes and developing networks for action. We also learned what public service means, knowing that working to build a better community and society is a part of our personal mission. I walked away a capable, highly mature and eager young leader ready to serve.

It is those values and the desire to advance the graduate community at NCSU that I have thrown my hat into the ring! The VP of External Affairs works together with the Board to organize important events such as graduate work fair. Graduate students coming to NCSU should not only feel confident in their choice of attendance, but know that we as graduate community are reaching out to them. As the chairman of leadership and outreach committee, I hope to carry on my work to graduate students as a whole.

Graduate involvement in university standing committees is an important responsibility and one that I take very seriously. As VP of External Affairs, I will ensure our representatives are placed on committees where not only our opinions carry weight, ensuring they value their committee work. Having served in three University committees, I know that graduate students can leave an important impact on graduate student life. At the beginning of the year, I will revamp the process to balance preferences, experience and the enthusiasm to serve.

I also have the capacity to build strong partnerships with organizations and leaders both inside and outside NCSU. As Departmental Outreach & Leadership Committee Chairman and Student Government Senator, I have created strong partnerships and relationships with students leaders and staff throughout the school. I also come with relationships with other students across the UNC System, developed from both student government and my involvement as Director of the
North Carolina Association of Residence Halls. We have a responsibility to ensure our graduate students have a voice in North Carolina and learn how to become stronger by working with other UGSAs in our peer institutions.

I want you to know that my service to you is a partnership. And cultivating takes trust between you and me. Let’s extend that partnership to the rest of our community, both here and beyond the walls of NCSU and become a stronger Graduate Pack!

Keith Brannum
kbrannu@ncsu.edu

Nominated for Vice President of Internal Affairs – Chirag Gajjar

Hello!

I am Chirag Gajjar, PhD student in Fiber and Polymer Science, and I am seeking your vote for my 3rd term as the Vice-President of Internal Affairs for UGSA. Prior to this position, I was associated with UGSA as the secretary (2010-2011) and as the departmental rep (2009-2010). Thus, I can proudly say that I have been with UGSA for 4 years now.

I believe, my experience and my understanding of the evolution of UGSA, from the past to the current structure and its functioning, would be a helpful resource to the executive board. For example, I worked with the previous president, Bryan Hoynacke, in transforming some of the existing internal committees. I also worked on the special committee that worked at the initial stage to transform the Thesis and Travel award to the existing Award for conferences.

This year, I have worked with Matt Melillo, to reach out to the new departments and increase the graduate student participation at UGSA. We attended the workshop for DGPs and talked about UGSA. As a result of our efforts, 5 new GSAs were formed and 3 of the inactive GSAs became active again. I also worked with the previous DOLC to institutionalize the first ever leadership workshop and continued with a second successful workshop with this year's DOLC.

My objective, for the next term, is to make a roadshow for DGPs and reach out to more departments who are still not within UGSA. With the increased number of new reps this year, some unforeseen issues were presented. For example, we identified a need to develop "new rep orientation". I will work on such issues to make the system more efficient. DOLC is working on developing guidelines to make transition of officers in each GSA more efficient. I will continue that effort with the next DOLC. In order to make some procedures more efficient, I will work with VP communication, and develop online systems to submit forms and other documents, rather than asking them through email.

Beyond my required duties as VP Internal Affairs, I want to work with David Fiala and others to start a local version of Legislative Action Day, where grad. student reps from UNC system can advocate the common issues pertaining to graduate students, to the legislators in Raleigh. I also want to continue on University Library Committee for the 3rd term, and continue advocating the needs of the graduate students to the library administrators.

Thank you all for your support! It was, and will always be an honor to be on the UGSA Executive Board!!

Sincerely,
Chirag R. Gajjar

Nominated for Treasurer – Nithyananthan Poosamani

I am Nithyananthan Poosamani, a Ph.D. student in the department of Computer Science. I work as a research assistant in the Networking Research Laboratory (NRL) and my research interests primarily include human mobility pattern analysis, energy-efficient localization techniques and mobile systems. I've been nominated to the position of Treasurer for the 2014-15 academic session of UGSA. I am extremely happy and privileged to be nominated to this position and thank you for giving me an opportunity to introduce myself to you all.
My association with the UGSA started a couple years back when I started serving as an unofficial liaison for UGSA with the Student Senate. As of now, I serve as a Graduate Student Senator in the NCSU Student Senate for the fifth year in succession. Throughout these years, I’ve served both as a member and as a chair on a few important committees. I currently serve as the Senate Pro Tempore and the Chair for the Committee on Appropriations. The experiences I gained being the Chair for Appropriations is one of the main reasons for me to accept this nomination for Treasurer. For those of you who don’t know, the Student Government at NC State distribute funds to student groups (approx. 300 groups) worth around $150K every year and are done through a complex process called SG Appropriations by the Committee on Appropriations. I am pleased and proud to inform you that in this past year, the Appropriations process has been drastically revamped and made easy and informative for all participating members. One other aspect of being a Pro Tempore is to attend the faculty and staff senate meetings and report to the student senate. I also attend Chancellor Liaison meetings with other student leaders at NC State.

Apart from being a Graduate Senator, I also serve as a delegate for the UNC Association of Student Governments (ASG) council and help voice our graduate student concerns to a much wider audience (Ex., UNC Board of Governors). I am a member of STARS Student Leadership Corps where I volunteer to tutor for undergraduate students in Computer Science. In the past, I’d also helped to teach English and basic computer skills to the immigrants via the USCR refugee Outreach program. I am also part of the Orientation Team for the Office of International Services (OIS) at NC State. I help coordinate the orientation (fall and spring) and other activities for the international students throughout the year.

All of my interactions and activities have increased my leadership and listening skills and helped me shape myself as a well-rounded individual. I certainly believe that if elected for the position of Treasurer, I will provide the best of my abilities for the successful working of UGSA and its constituents.

Sincerely,
Nithyananthan Poosamani

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**Nominated for Secretary – Katie Kennedy**

Hello All,

Below is my personal statement for the position of Secretary of the UGSA. Please forgive the brevity, as I am generally not one for many words. Like many of you, this past year has been my first experience with the UGSA at large here at NCSU. I wasn’t quite sure what to expect, and in my typical fashion, jumped in ready to move. What has struck me during this first year are three major things:

1.) The degree of work that is done through the UGSA internal committees is massive. I have had the pleasure of being the exec-liaison to the TEC committee, and through this, we have re-worked the teaching effectiveness award so that the most outstanding TA's (regardless of whether they are paid through this or an RA) can be recognized both verbally and hopefully monetarily. As an exec-board member, I have been able to hear a little about the level of planning that has gone into various other committees, such as the Social committee's Garden plan, and the DOLC's leadership conference. None of these things would have been possible without your contributions. So, thank you and keep it up!

2.) With all these contributions also occasionally comes conflict. This highlighted a way that the UGSA currently needs to improve. As of right now, we do not have a suitable conflict management set-up at the UGSA. Hence the proposed amendment co-sponsored by the MBA program. In the future, I will try to continue improving the internal workings of the UGSA. As David mentioned in his personal statement, social connections and networking are a part of a healthy graduate student body -- and I would like to make sure that our internal connections and networks remain as healthy as possible.

3.) Our voice as a UGSA can be more powerful than I originally thought. To me this is most apparent when we are able to talk with the Provost and Chancellor about the GSSP program, or when we were able to send officers to meet with the potential candidates of the Dean's position. Recently, situations have come up that demand our
voice be heard loud and clear -- the decision of which library to close at night being the one that most readily comes to mind. In the future, I think I would like to see our group be more vocal regarding our needs, and hopefully extend our reach across campus as we continue to grow.

I am looking forward to next year, where I hope we can continue to strengthen ourselves from within by reducing conflict and creating a more cohesive network within our organization and equally important, where I hope we can strengthen our position as representatives to the University and graduate school.

Thank you for your support,
-Katie

Nominated for Vice President of Communications - Barry Peddycord, III

The VP Comm job doesn't seem very glamorous during the school year, since for the most part, I'm just keeping the machine running... adding and removing reps from the list, updating the blog, and mostly keeping up with all of the great things the reps are doing.

But during the summer is when I get to flex my creative muscles and do great things! Last summer, immediately after getting elected, I made some big changes - the first was an overhaul of the listserv system. I moved all of the mailing lists to google forms, and also set up new UGSA officer aliases as google generic accounts. This allows us to manage our communication infrastructure internally without relying on the university-level webmasters to respond to our requests.

The other big change was a new layout for the website. While the theme didn't change, I streamlined a lot of the information for the website and made it much easier to navigate. We had a meeting discussing the usability of the website with the other execs and I got a lot of feedback as to how the site should look and be organized, and I think it's a great improvement from last year!

This coming summer, I've been given complete access to the website, so I'll be working to make the site look a bit better by adding some imagery and changing the theme. For anyone returning next year, hopefully you'll find the website even more attractive and useful, rather than looking like a faculty web page that hasn't been updated since 1995.

Thanks for putting up with me this year! I'll do my best in the year to come!

Nominated for Public Relations Officer – Liana Lin

My name is Liana Lin, and I am a student majoring in Computer Science. I would love to serve as part of the University Graduate Student Association as the Public Relations Officer.

From years of organizing and participating in charity events I have honed my skillset of communications and media as well as administration and management. In the past, I have served as Vice President for Chinese Young Volunteers Association in my undergraduate school for years, where I cooperated with several other students to organize activities and sponsorships. We collected donations for a local public asylum. My organization and I went to the care center to spent time with patients, participated in their life, and delivered their need and concern to the whole society through multimedia. Beyond the great impact our organization had on those we touched, our outreach was impressive: I secured television coverage, newspaper articles, and much buzz on the Chinese-social media to reach hundreds of thousands of people. In this case, our message was well spread and simple: We called on people to give more love and care to this special community.
Such experience is not only rewarding but also inspirational and influential to my whole life. I learned the true passion of my life is not only to satisfy my individual demand, but also to take active part in social life, to interact with people around me, and bring everyone together to make a better living.

As a graduate student, I deeply appreciate what the school has already offered to us: advanced education facilities, good teaching staff, and lots of research and practical opportunity for us to apply our knowledge. However, there are still many things we need to work on together, especially to recognize the UGSA’s contributions:

As the PR Officer, my primary objectives this next year are to build solid relations with the Technician and the News & Observer of Raleigh. I intend to ensure a constant stream of publications and event coverage will be visible in print media through these outlets. Additionally, I’ll contact other local media such as WRAL to attract TV coverage for large scale events of interest, such as the recent Imposter Syndrome seminar that attracted hundreds of graduate students.

I would be honored to serve the graduate student body as the Public Relations Officer, and I know that my experience and passion will provide a strong platform to disseminate UGSA communications in a way that has strong impact and reach for the students that we already represent and those that we want to reach tomorrow.

Thank you for your support! I look forward to working with you all.

Nominated for Public Relations Officer – Ginger Bushey

As a candidate for the newly created position of PR Officer I am providing this personal statement.

When I began my position as a UGSA rep there were many unknowns, and I felt very much like I was simply attending an additional meeting the first two months or so. We all came together to gradually learn a small bit about each other, however at this point there are still some of us who do not know one another. The best experience of all of has been my involvement with the Teaching Effectiveness Committee, where our team has come together to truly improve our graduate student recognition programs. But, this is only one component to my involvement in the UGSA and this responsibility came about as a bit of a surprise once I was directly involved and realized how much of a commitment it could be. I am grateful that I have learned as much as I have, and believe now it is time to share that knowledge and opportunity with other graduate students.

That being said, one of the challenges we face is recruiting and educating new reps as well as their respective department GSA’s. We can address this through effective social media campaigns and having a greater presence among programs. In order to do that we need not only have social media pages and a website, but other forms of communication that reach our audience. Some initial steps that I would focus on as a new officer would be needs assessments, a collection of graduate student perceptions, and some comparative statistics regarding the technology our students actually want to use. I also believe that as an organization we can create a strong newsletter that showcases not only our members/reps but also the graduate students that are producing some amazing research across the university. One of my particular focuses would be to highlight graduate student successes, potentially even some of our UGSA alumni members and what they are doing now.

All of these are ideas of course, and just a short list of ways we can continue to promote our organization and its’ efforts. I have experiences managing Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs both for personal and professional use. As an educator, I produced a monthly newsletter for sponsors, parents, and alumni of the program I was advising. And now as a TA I teach undergraduate courses in computer technology and social media & communications; all of which I have instructed units on Google Applications, Social Media Sites & Campaigns, Intercultural & Cross-cultural Communications, Press Release & Newsletter Writing, and Ethics in PR. I also have coursework in educational law in my background that are beneficial to ensuring safe campaigns with appropriate practices.
UGSA has been an integral part of my year and I want to continue my journey with it as an officer, and particularly an officer who can help other graduate students. This student organization provides all of us with a voice, and that needs to be known by more graduate students as they struggle through the challenges and successes of their experience here at NC State. I believe I can work closely with other officers to assist in promoting activities and programs that our GSA’s & UGSA are working hard to provide.

Ginger Bushey
AEE UGSA Rep
Graduate Research & Teaching Assistant

Nominated for Social Network Manager – Kurleen John

Have you ever felt so detached, yet connected at the same time? As a self-proclaimed cultural and geographic nomad, that is the constant state of my life. I have found that Social Networking is an important factor in creating connections both personally culturally and professionally, and it is for that reason that I am sincerely interested in the UGSA role of Social Network Manager.

I am from Trinidad and Tobago, a beautiful and rich Caribbean island, with so much potential for development; however, due to my father’s employment with the United Nations, I left Trinidad at a very young age and have only visited the islands at an average rate of once a year for the majority of my life. I lived in Lebanon for 1 year, Israel for 2 years, Cyprus for 14 years and The United States for 5 years 7 months. In fact I have not only had professional experience with social networking but, given my diverse background; social media networking has been a vital tool in my personal life, as it helps me remain connected to all the countries and cultures that have come to represent me.

Having travelled to and been raised in many different countries, I have been exposed to various different cultures, characters, lifestyles and backgrounds. In fact not only has every school I have ever attended been an international school or, like The University of Virginia and NC State, a school that prides itself in an emphasis on diversity, but I am also greatly interested in people and their interaction with their environment. In fact, it was this interest that led me to major in Sociology and French at the University of Virginia and to then pursue an MBA degree in Marketing Management at NC State (I am a current full-time, first year MBA). Through my degrees, I am beginning to better understand, both theoretically and statistically, the relationship and trends between human life, its environment and the business world.

I am able to meet, and in some instances surpass, the requirements of the position. Post-graduation from the University of Virginia, I accepted a position as a Marketing Associate for the University of Virginia Alliance for Computational Science & Engineering (UVACSE). Within that role I translated, with the help of co-workers, sometimes seemingly abstract computational concepts into easily-digestible messages to promote the mission of the department and collaborating groups. I planned, promoted and developed the website for the $700,000 NASA-UVA initiative (provide programming lessons and internships for national EnviSci students), both the 36th and 37th Open Grid Forum Conferences (develop GRID and CLOUD standards) and I contributed to the preparation for UVA’s Big DATA Summit. Moreover, I was also responsible for developing the branding logo and promotional material both for UVACSE and the new visualization laboratory established by the university. Thus, not only was I in charge of event planning, the creation of marketing materials and the development of government funded initiatives, but I was also responsible for the enhancement of their website (using Wordpress) and overall brand development and management.

Furthermore, I have also had professional experience as a Social Media Marketing Consultant, through which I was tasked with generating greater demand, for a novel, through the use of social networking (primarily web content management and Facebook). I believe that the most valuable factor of social networking and media relations is their role in the development and measurement of brand strategy.

Within my many travels and experiences (both personal and professional) I have found that the concept of perception and branding to be very important. As humans, we differ on so many different levels, whether it be ethnicity, race,
religion or what have you; yet, I have found that we are fundamentally similar in many other areas, such as perception. Social Networking and Media Relations are key tools that can be used to shape the message being put forth to the world; therefore, the best candidate would not only be one who has had experience in social media or communications but one who has a profound understanding of brand strategy, NC State Brand image and the big picture that is being created. I am that candidate.

I know that I would be a valuable asset to UGSA and that I am well qualified and capable for the position of being a part of the team (within the role of Social Network Manager). I am passionate about NC State and would love the opportunity to contribute to the already bright spirit of the university and to really showcase what our Pack has to offer—because we truly are a hidden gem.