Candidate Statement for Monica Cortés Viharo

It is with great honor and gratitude that I announce my candidacy for the first Vice President of Internal Affairs for the University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS). As a first year PhD student and senator representing the School of Drama, I welcome the opportunity to continue serving GPSS and UW by forging new relationships, building on established ones, and advocating for graduate and professional students throughout the UW system. My wealth of professional skills and experiences, unique perspective, and enthusiasm for the role make me the ideal candidate to fulfill the duties of VP for Internal Affairs. As a pioneer in this new position, I am committed to setting I high standard for this position and creating a strong foundation for future holders of the office.

PROFESSIONALISM

The primary role of the VP for Internal Affairs is to support the President and act as his/her deputy. With over 20 years of experience as a working professional in arts and
educational institutions including the University of California, Berkeley (my alma mater and employer for 14 years), Kaplan Test Prep, and several public school districts, I possess the maturity and expertise to represent GPSS with authority and political acumen. In these positions I’ve built strong organizational, communication, and supervisory skills that will serve me well as the Vice President charged with managing all internal operations of GPSS. While I possess well-honed leadership skills, as an actor I understand the importance of being part of an ensemble and can collaborate effectively with GPSS Executive Officers, senators, and campus and community members. I would also like to use my training and background as a Public Speaking Consultant to create programs and events that will help graduate students build professional and career readiness skills such as communication, networking, salary negotiation, and business etiquette, as well as opportunities to interact with faculty across campus. Early results of the GPSS Census have indicated a demand for professional development and I am uniquely equipped to address that need.

PERSPECTIVE

As a first year PhD student, a woman of color, a recent California transplant, a new GPSS senator, and an artist, I provide a unique perspective from which I can critique current processes and foster innovation. I want to represent those who lack representation and hopefully lead by example to encourage more women of color and students of the Arts and Humanities to participate in the various UW decision-making bodies. While my point of view may be distinct, I am well-versed in the workings of a large, bureaucratic research institution and understand the needs of its competitive students. I earned my bachelor’s degree from the University of California at Berkeley, with a double major in Theater and Political Science. As an undergraduate I held many leadership and administrative posts. Instead of scaring me away, I
found the bureaucratic red tape an inspiring challenge. For me it was boot camp for life. I did such a good job maneuvering through the system that I ended up taking a professional position on campus upon graduation and survived the red tape for another 14 years. What I learned in and out of the classroom at Berkeley will help me navigate the bureaucracy of UW and the State of Washington, as GPSS addresses complex issues such as the proliferation of fee-based programs, the equity of practicum requirements, and budget cuts to higher education.

PIONEER

As the inaugural VP of Internal Affairs, my wealth of experience and passion for the position will help me face the challenges of an office with no historical collateral. Although I have only been a UW student since October and a Seattle resident since June, I have pushed myself to create a variety of connections outside of my department. I have taught for the Communications Department and the UW Professional and Continuing Education Program. I’m a member of the elections committee for UAW 4121, a Graduate Diversity Ambassador for the GO-MAP (Graduate Opportunities & Minority Achievement Program), am pursuing a certificate in Public Scholarship through the Simpson Center for the Humanities, and am a former member of the GPSS Judicial Committee. As a representative of the UW Speaking Center, I have conducted workshops for campus organizations as diverse as the Pre-Major in Astronomy Program (Pre-MAP), Women in Chemical Sciences, McNair Undergraduate Scholars, and the charity Camp Kesem. As VP for Internal Affairs, I will draw on these connections and continue to expand my network to provide me with a campus and community-wide perspective. By establishing a strong reputation for the office and building an administrative foundation, I will forge a new and fruitful path that will benefit GPSS and future Vice Presidents of Internal Affairs.