Responsible for initiating capital projects and overseeing millions in student fees, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) & the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW) are key players in the management and functioning of the University. This final report will capture not only my work as President of the GPSS from December 2011 until June 2012 but also the state of affairs leading up to my term given the hard work of my predecessors, specifically Aaron Naumann, President from June 2011 to November 2011.

The office of the President is responsible for work in several areas and this report will touch on the following issues: (1) GPSS Restructuring; (2) University Representation; (3) Leadership & Management; (4) Student Fee Oversight; (5) ASUW & Tri-Campus Relations; (6) Campus and Commercial Partnerships; and (7) External Advocacy.

GPSS Restructuring

Student government is often at a disadvantage to the administration when lobbying outside the university and working within it due to large differences in power and capacity. However, rather than embracing our key structural advantage, the ability to make rapid organizational changes, we have spent years building an entrenched top-heavy institution. Before I even received the keys to the President’s office I began building a commitment to evaluation, strategic planning, and restructuring with officers, staff, and other GPSS leaders in order to capitalize on our strengths and minimize weaknesses.

This commitment was carried forward through the GPSS restructuring process led by the officers and a special restructuring committee made up of Senators. The committee spent most of winter quarter evaluating GPSS resources and operations, interviewing and surveying stakeholders and key parties, identifying opportunities and threats, and researching best practices of other student governments in order to provided the officers with a report and final recommendations for change. These recommendations were used to develop a new organizational structure that leverages standing committees with specific charges (e.g. Government Relations, University Affairs, and Social committees) to provide more leadership and operational capacity, led to a shift in internal resources through the elimination of the travel grant program, and made critical staffing changes necessary to support key activities such as organizing, advocacy, and university representation.

Officer compensation was also an issue of concern to me prior to taking office and was addressed during the restructuring. The restructuring committee found that the current system of compensation was unsustainable and recommended that tuition waivers for officers continue but be capped at graduate tier 1 levels. During my attempt to execute this recommendation it became clear that changes could not be made this year due to the officer positions being part of the UAW
4121 bargaining unit and I suggest that GPSS continue to work with union leadership to bring about the appropriate changes to our system of compensation. The restructuring committee also recommended that the evaluation process be continued next year as the new committee structure is implemented and encouraged GPSS to adopt a 3-year strategic planning cycle.

University Representation

The past four years of drastic state budget cuts, pay freezes, and skyrocketing tuition has left the University of Washington in a weakened position while students provide twice as much funding to the institution as they did in 2008. With tuition revenues now double state appropriations it is clear that students must claim our collective stake in the University by taking on a more active role in the formation of university budgets and policy. While previous student governments have focused on issue advocacy within the University we have begun to chart a new path forward. Partnering with ASUW we have developed complimentary legislative and university policy goals that allow students to be more active members of university decision-making. I have led these efforts on campus by chairing the first Provost’s Advisory Committee for Students (PACS), leading the charge for student councils in all colleges and schools, and actively lobbying in Olympia for passage of legislation that would enshrine student shared governance.

My goals for university representation have been to (a) build a culture of fiscally minded oversight within a shared governance framework and (b) develop a deeper bench of capable and skilled student leaders.

Fiscally Minded oversight: This is addressed through encouraging student leaders to develop skills in the areas of policy formation, strategic budgeting, and management. As an Executive Senator and then as President I began this process by working closely with student leaders, such as the representatives to the Student Technology fee and Services and Activities fee committees, to help them build a better understanding of the impacts of their fiscal decisions. I also lead budget and policy analyses on PACS and working with the other GPSS officers to bring budgeting and planning issues within our organization to the forefront through the GPSS restructuring process.

Developing Student Leaders: In the past GPSS officers commanded choice positions on university committees and drove the agenda of the organization exclusively. This top heavy model was immediately identified in the GPSS restructuring as an area of concern and I’ve taken immediate steps to begin to remedy this. I have declined positions on committees often taken by the President in favor of appointing students interested in leadership and service so that they gain valuable experience. I and the other GPSS officers have worked hard to find Senators and students to lead projects and initiatives normally left to officers and staff. Beyond these first steps I led the creation of new GPSS standing committees, as per the recommendations of the GPSS restructuring committee, that broaden the GPSS leadership team by introducing several new chair positions that will have central roles in developing GPSS positions, tackling policy issues on and off campus, developing
relationships with other entities, and deepening the role of GPSS in fostering graduate and professional student community.

In addition to this broad agenda of representation I have continued to represent GPSS on the committees noted in our governing documents such as the Faculty Senate Committee on Planning and Budgeting and the Graduate School Council. Beyond my work as a representative many Senators and students have been amazing advocates on behalf of us all. Notable issues that have had the attention of extremely capable graduate students include the Student Code of Conduct revision process that will continuing through the autumn of 2012 and Dean searches in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Engineering and the School of Nursing.

**Leadership and Management**

In the past the success of leadership development was largely at the mercy of the president’s schedule and management of the other officers and staff was viewed as top down or nothing. I saw this model as flawed and have worked to address these weaknesses through placing an emphasis on management, transitions and leveraging changes suggested during the GPSS restructuring.

By creating several standing committees with chairs who are not officers GPSS has created leadership opportunities in nearly every area we work. Senators and students can participate as members or chairs and gain valuable experience developing policy positions, interfacing with administrative and faculty leadership and managing the dealings of their committee or sub-committee. Now each officer has a responsibility to interface with and practice “soft” management of committees and chairs in their areas of interest. Under this new model potential leaders will have several ways to not only become involved in GPSS but guide it through committee work within and outside of the organization. These new standing committees will also be linked to the far flung GPSS representatives on university committees and faculty councils, bringing an often-untapped pool of active student leaders into more regular contact with GPSS. Under this new system I anticipate that GPSS will be able to develop more student leaders to not only move into officer positions but stake out new policy territory within the University and in the community at large.

Within the GPSS office I have fostered a culture of strong management by helping officers further develop their management skills by encouraging regular staff assessments, practicing a “soft” managerial style with the other officers, and developing rigorous transition and office processes. While not empowered with absolute authority over the other officers I have utilized a soft management style in which I use officer meetings, the Executive Committee, one-on-one consultations, and broad communication to lead through consensus building rather than directive. I also made it a priority to stay up-to-date on the work of the officers as to provide constant management support that allowed me to lead by nudges and not through orders. Taking a cue from GPSS Treasurer Colin Goldfinch I have encouraged all officers and staff to document all work processes and provide rigorous transition documentation for incoming staff. I have requested that all officers hold at least one in person transition meeting with their successors and have already seen an improvement in the handover process. I have also provided the future officers with staff
evaluation and salary policy recommendations that I expect to be evaluated and implemented by the Executive Committee.

**Student Fee Oversight**

One of the paramount duties of student government is to provide oversight of Student fees and building projects. During the past year I have closely monitored two programs that have undergone changes in 2011: The Student Technology Fee (STF) and the Universal U-PASS program.

After undergoing a major restructuring the STF committee (STFC) has successfully completed a year under its new operating guidelines. Despite concerns raised by some STFC members the new guidelines, which require more frequent oversight by GPSS and ASUW, have proven generally effective. The STFC has successfully used their new yearly fund plan as a tool to drive technology spending toward those areas deemed most efficient by the committee. This year this was seen by shrinking the amount spent on traditional computer labs which require costly upgrades and are often underutilized due to students using more mobile computing devices. The STFC also implemented a key server program for STF purchased software in the hope that fewer licenses can be purchased as the committee can now track actual usage of costly programs rather than making purchases on a lab-by-lab basis.

The Universal U-PASS program replaced a nearly 20 year old opt out program that had become unsustainable as increased transit costs, shrinking parking subsidies, and increased opt out rates threatened the financial viability of one of the state’s best transportation management systems. As a universal program the U-PASS is offered at a lower cost to students and will most likely make the university an even more attractive partner during rate negotiations with the various transit agencies in the region. These and other issues were cited as key subjects addressed by the creation of the new U-PASS program.

Despite strong support from students the Universal U-PASS program, finalized by student government in 2011, has had a tumultuous first year. The rollout of ORCA card technology has allowed Transportation Services and student government to validate the ridership models our payments to transit providers are base on. It is clear that with ORCA cards students will be able to ensure that we purchase only the service we need and avoid the overestimates of ridership we saw this year. In addition to ridership the impact of recent arbitration between the university and UAW 4121 leaves the program vulnerable. In the weeks and months to come GPSS and ASUW leadership will have to work closely with the union and administration to ensure that the program remains viable and that the savings secured for students are maintained.

**ASUW and Tri-Campus Relations**

GPSS continues to work closely with the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW) and students of UW-Bothell and UW-Tacoma. On planning and budgeting matters GPSS and
ASUW came together to strengthen the student voice and worked to push legislation that would enshrine student participation in university governance. GPSS has also worked to strengthen ties with students in Bothell and Tacoma, which will become more important as more graduate students begin to study at the other two UW campuses. A new Tri-Campus meeting structure is currently being created to increase communication between the campuses and foster more cross-campus policy making.

**Campus and Corporate Partnerships**

This year GPSS has partnered with a handful of campus groups to put on events. Most notably was the 2nd annual Science and Policy Summit in which several campus units and student groups were able to come together to provide a diverse program consisting of TED style talks and an engaging panel on science in politics. GPSS must continue to find ways to bring the often far-flung groups of graduate students together through targeted and meaningful programming. This can be done through strategic partnerships with graduate student groups and college/school level student government.

Beyond campus partnerships there is a growing emphasis on corporate sponsorship within the University. The steady growth of sponsorship on campus has resulted in President Young calling for a more structured approach to these activities through the new Sponsorship Advisory Committee on which the GPSS President sits. During the past year the committee has begun to develop a framework by which sponsorship should occur. In partnership with ASUW, GPSS is committed to protecting students from any sponsorship practices that could be considered predatory or inappropriate on a university campus. As sponsorship becomes more routine on campus GPSS may consider seeking out sponsorship deals to fund new and expanded student events and services.

**External Advocacy**

GPSS has continued to place an emphasis on our advocacy efforts by maintaining a strong voice in Olympia under the leadership of Vice-President Adam Sherman. On several issues including work study, childcare, and shared governance I have added my voice to his in Olympia to push for legislation that would benefit the students of Washington. GPSS with ASUW successfully put on two legislative events (e.g. GPSS Higher Ed Summit & ASUW Legislative Reception) to connect students with decisions makers in Olympia. We also brought down busloads of students for our annual UW lobby day, “Huskies on the Hill.”

I have worked closely with other student body Presidents through the Washington Student Association (WSA) to ensure that the student voice in Washington is not fractured but unified. Through our statewide lobby day and legislative strategy building WSA provides us with a strong coalition to work with in defense of higher education. To further these goals the WSA will launch a massive voter registration and Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign this fall in preparation for the November elections and GPSS must work to ensure all eligible graduate and professional students are registered to vote.

While our work in Olympia is a major focus for the organization our Federal advocacy efforts continue to grow. This year GPSS sent another delegation to DC to join fellow members of the
Student Advocates for Graduate Education (SAGE) in lobbying on a number of Federal issues. Critical issues addressed this year include debt, federal research funding, and visa/immigration issues. As potential cuts to federal research funding loom in the form of “sequestration” our federal lobby efforts must continue to be strengthened through internal resource allocation and strategic partnerships with other student governments and likeminded entities.

Conclusions

While this year has seen positive growth GPSS and the students of the University of Washington have much work ahead of them. With uncertainty surrounding the U-PASS program, research funding, and future state budget allocations GPSS must continue to be strengthened through bold and thoughtful change. In the months ahead it will be critical for all Senators to do their part in supporting the organization as changes are implemented and new leaders find their footing.

It has truly been a pleasure and honor to serve the student body through the Senate. I have enjoyed working with the amazing group of graduate and professional students that make up our organization and without your support, prodding, and constructive criticism I would not have been as successful this year. I must also offer my deepest gratitude to my fellow officers and members of the Executive Committee whose trust and judgment I would have been lost without.

Sincerely,

Charles L. Plummer
GPSS President, 2011-12