



MEMORANDUM

To: Denise Sangster, Registrar
Dean Carol O'Neill
From: The Student Bar Association
Katherine Hayes
Stephanie Lezell
Patrick Hughes
Matthew Brown
CC: Leon Skornicki, SBA President
Re: Student Requests for Registrar Policies

Introduction

A Student Bar Association (SBA) goal for the 2008-2009 year has been “helping the Registrar help us.” The SBA hopes to improve student understanding of the Registrar’s policies and, where appropriate, assist in improving those policies. In short, the SBA hopes to be a partner in improving student-Registrar relations. To this end, the SBA has two goals:

- (1) Improve student understanding of the reasoning behind Registrar policies
- (2) Act as a voice of student concerns to help improve or change policies where modifications will improve student life, reduce exam and class related stress, and improve student-Registrar relations.

In connection with these goals, from November 24 – November 26, 2008, the SBA polled students to obtain their sentiments on different services offered by the Registrar’s office. In addition, at its November 18, 2008 meeting and in response to complaints from first year Section 4 students, the SBA passed two resolutions regarding exam policies.

Finally, in response to student complaints about the functionality of the Registrar’s website, the SBA Technology Committee developed a new Registrar website layout. This memo presents an outline of primary student concerns and the SBA’s proposals for potential solutions.

Summary of Survey Results

From November 24 – November 26th, the SBA conducted an online survey of student sentiments toward the Registrar’s office and policies. Overall, the student responses indicate room for improvement in student/Registrar relations particularly with regard to exam stress. A complete summary of responses is attached. Some points bear emphasis here:

- 1) The SBA received 178 responses to the survey representing approximately 8% of the student body. Of those responses, about 16% came from 1L, 1E, or 1J



- students, about 48% came from 2L, 2E, or 2J students, 34% came from 3L, 3J, or 3E students, 1% came from 4E or 4J students and 1% came from LL.Ms.
- 2) Students were asked to rate the Registrar's ability to solve student problems. Of the students who did not select "not applicable," a plurality of students (22.7%) said the Registrar rated "average."
 - 3) Students were asked to rate the Registrar's ability to respond to student concerns and feedback. Of the students who did not select "not applicable," a plurality of students (22.0%) said the Registrar rated "average," while nearly 20% rated the Registrar's office as being "Very Bad," "Bad" or "Inadequate" in responding to student concerns and feedback.
 - 4) With regard to the Registrar's ability to inform students about class schedules, 26.1% of students rated the registrar at average. In this category, students seemed largely pleased with the Registrar's performance with 42% of students reporting the Registrar was "Adequate" (21%) or "Good" (21%) at informing students.
 - 5) A plurality of students (24.7%) reported the Registrar as being "Good" at informing students about exam dates, times, and locations. "Average" was the second highest rating with 23.6%.
 - 6) Students were least impressed with the Registrar's ability to "help decrease exam-related stress." 21.3% of students said the Registrar was "average" but 48.3% of students place the Registrar in the "Very Bad," "Bad," or "Inadequate" categories.
 - 7) Most students had no experience with the Registrar's ability to provide transcripts – 26.6% chose "not applicable." The next highest rating was "average" at 16.9%.

SBA Resolutions

The SBA passed two resolutions regarding exam policies at its November 18, 2008 House of Delegates meeting. Both resolutions were sponsored by 1L Section 4 delegates, Katherine Hayes and Stephanie Lezell and are attached to this memorandum.

Resolution 810: Exam Printing Procedures

This resolution expresses the sense of the SBA that students should be allowed to save to a CD take-home exams of less than twenty-four hours. Because most Georgetown students live off campus and because all in class exams are saved to a CD, the SBA believes allowing students to save take home exams to a CD will greatly reduce exam related stress. This resolution passed unanimously.

Resolution 811: Exam Notification Procedures

This resolution arose from complaints of several first year sections about the Registrar's policy of notifying students of exam-room locations thirty minutes prior to exams. Several 1L sections reported problems with mid-term and Legal Research and Writing examinations because the policy was not clear to all first-year students prior to their first exam or was not followed as articulated. Students have expressed concerns about their lack of understanding of this procedure, and about the manner in which the procedure has been executed. Discussion has uncovered possible ways of improving the registrar's current procedure at minimal, if any, cost. While Resolution 811 suggests one method of



improving exam notification procedures, the SBA is open to assisting in the development of alternative procedures that will be convenient for both students and the Administration.

Class Selection Procedures

The SBA survey asked students whether they preferred to select classes for an entire year at once or by semester. Overwhelmingly, 78% of students preferred a semester by semester course selection.

Students would significantly benefit from registering twice a year, in the spring for next year's fall classes and in the fall for their spring classes, for two main reasons. First, having to register for two semesters at once adds unneeded complications to the decisions students must make in ranking classes. Students have to consider whether or not they will get into courses in the fall that serve as prerequisites for courses they would like to take in the spring, and if there is a course they very much want to take (either because it is a prerequisite or out of sheer interest) but do not know whether they will get into a fall section, they would have to waste a spring slot with that course to be safe.

Second, students, especially rising second years, do not always know what area of law might eventually interest them in the spring of their first year; they might really enjoy a certain area they discovered over the summer or might particularly like a fall class. However, in the current system, they are foreclosed from pre-registering for classes in this newly discovered area of interest until they pick their third year classes. While they may be lucky and win these classes during drop-add period, it is not guaranteed, and they may not be able to take the class with their professor of choice. Also, as students garner internships and unforeseen obligations over the year, their original pre-registration for spring classes may fall apart, leading them to have to scramble in drop-add period. Trying to find a class during drop-add can be stressful, as students may need to attend more than one section of the same class, and it is also not ideal for professors to be unsure about their final class lists until weeks into the semester. These inconveniences could be substantially remedied by having a separate pre-registration for the spring semester.

Students are also often flummoxed by the complex pre-registration process. While a first come, first served system based on credits would be easier to follow, it would also be unfair because there is no way to distinguish members of the 1L class by how many credits they have received. There is no easy answer but hopefully the SBA and Registrar would be able to work together to discern the areas in which students have the most confusion with the process. Explaining the add-drop process more thoroughly during pre-registration might ease fears about being stuck with classes students dislike, and explaining the add-drop process more thoroughly when it begins would definitely assist students. Perhaps a session on add-drop, like the sessions the school runs for 1Ls on exams, scheduling, and other topics, could prove helpful.



Registrar's Website

Students were divided on the organization of the Registrar's website; however, comments revealed that many students were frustrated by how long it took them to locate exactly what it is they were looking for. The SBA Technology Committee has drafted a proposed change for the Registrar's website which the SBA believes preserves the wealth of information currently on the site but simultaneously makes it easier to find the specific link a student or faculty member needs by creating larger headings. The proposed change is attached to this memorandum.

Conclusion

The SBA hopes that this meeting can be the first in a larger conversation to help improve the relationship between students and the Registrar. The Registrar is among the most important offices to students because it sits at the nexus of the student's academic experience at GULC. The SBA believes students can support Registrar initiatives, assist in policy changes, and that the SBA in particular can be a conduit to improving student understanding of the Registrar's policies.