CS Student Council Meeting Minutes 9-20-2018

- **Announcements**
  - TA ombudsperson
    - Grad TAs have more structure
    - Department has >170 UTAs — essential to continuing to allow the department to keep up with growing demand
      - Need training programs for new TAs
        - All first-time TAs take COMP5 — eventually this will be taught by senior TAs to create a self-sustaining pipeline, but need to work more on curriculum development for this course
        - New faculty group focused on TA hiring/onboarding
      - TA ombudsperson is a new position ==> Laney and Ben Hescott have played this role in the past as the point person for TA questions
        - Sam Guyer has agreed to take on this role — Sam is working as a point of contact for any issues involving TAs
        - Need to spread the word that he has taken on this role!
  - Adding new pages to the website
    - Resources for TAs — this will have info about TA ombudsperson
    - Apply to be a TA, TA job description, etc. coming out in the next week
  - New student group creation process
    - Online process to create a new student group
    - There are obvious students in the department who have stepped up to represent women in CS, but no similar groups or leaders to serve as points of contact for other communities/underrepresented groups
    - Want to invite the creation of affinity groups without putting anyone on the spot
      - There is a limited amount of department funding for a new group, more funding available at the TCU level
      - Supporting student groups is a priority for the department
  - Questions for the Chair
    - What were the takeaways or topics of discussion from last week’s External Advisory Board Meeting?
      - First CS Dept Advisory Board meeting, the board will meet twice a year, members serve three year terms (staggered)
      - Members are alumnae in the community or people who have a stake in Tufts CS programs
      - Help with industrial relations (job opportunities, internships, career fairs), promote programs (e.g. graduate programs), fundraising
      - Initial meeting’s purpose was mainly to give members enough information about what’s happening at Tufts CS to be able to offer meaningful advice
      - Writing up minutes/action items ==> advertising new HRI program, looking for people to teach cybersecurity courses in the spring
      - Board members want to know what value they’re providing — need to build up a narrative for this new group
    - DataBuddies
      - Surveys students at a number of CS departments to compare students based on affinity groups, experiences like Grace Hopper, etc.
      - As part of this, CRA gives Tufts back the data on their students
      - Gives a birds eye view of what students say about their experiences in the department
      - Focused on helping students feel like they really belong in the department, especially women and underrepresented groups
    - We have a huge population of undergrad TAs — is this because of the department’s lack of faculty support?
      - Direct result of student to faculty ratio
      - Even if the CS department had 40 faculty and 700 students, we would still need UTAs
      - 2 approaches: hire a ton of UTAs, or turn people away
- Can’t grow the faculty quickly enough to keep up with undergraduate student demand — UTAs can grow much more quickly
  - Hiring professors
    - With surge of UTAs in mind: doesn’t change the selection of professors directly — professors aren’t trained in teaching, so managing a team of TAs is part of on the job training
    - What role does diversity play in hiring? whole faculty is involved in the search process, search process leaders must take diversity training and reach out to underrepresented communities => process designed to get an applicant pool that is diverse. Then the department creates a longlist of plausible candidates that gets sent to the Dean’s office and gets reviewed by the diversity officer who ensures that strong candidates from underrepresented groups were not ignored, then shortlist gets made and reviewed in the same way, shortlist interviews on campus
    - Weird market for CS professors: last year made 8 offers, 2 women, both turned it down. Market for underrepresented minorities tends to be much worse, improving hiring of women is a more realistic goal
  - Department is working on addressing making Tufts more of a target for employers — through partnerships with advisory board, Ming’s work
  - There are tons of resources within the department for students who are looking for them (amongst undergrads, faculty, etc.) — who is falling through the cracks?
    - who is not asking — maybe because they feel like an imposition?
    - opportunities for feedback backed by the department like Ming’s resume reviews (Maggie) — groups within the department are focused on career development
    - Making grad students more of a resource to undergrads and linking those two parts of the department
    - Network of alumnae to reach out to — give alumnae the option to opt in to being contacted by undergraduates
      - Have new alumnae sign up to mentor students — there is some community in existing facebook pages but a more formal version of that
      - Tufts CS department has a LinkedIn group — want to have students and alumnae sign up for that!
  - Possible informal office hours for graduate students? Support for objective things like career/courses/etc and separately mental health component of graduate school — when you’re not doing well, destigmatizing that, support groups for students
    - Grad students will write up and send to Kathleen a proposal for something like this
    - Students are really hard on themselves — want to try and change that culture
  - Kathleen should host a town hall
  - How are courses chosen as the core for the major?
    - How do we decide what coursework earns a degree in CS?
    - Mostly the decision of the faculty as a whole. There is normally a process of looking at the curriculum and deciding whether to make changes, but the faculty for the last 7 years has been very focused on keeping the train running, starting to have capacity to think about changes in the curriculum
      - Some possibility of changing the language that COMP11 and 15 use

- Governance
  - Timeline for meetings
    - Monthly? possibly too much
    - Minimum: beginning and end of semester, recap and reflect — beginning and midpoint?
    - Possible means of communicating outside of meetings? i.e. Slack workspace
  - Other members
    - Need underclassmen and sophomores
    - Self-selected group of people who are willing to take up leadership roles
    - Could reach out to the group of six to get more representation in this group
    - Could be tapped by existing members — possible problem with this, there may be some self-selection happening around who spends time in Halligan, who gets to know TAs
- **Broad call for people to apply to take part in this meeting** — “looking for students who can represent diverse perspectives”
  - underrepresented people feel uncomfortable in Halligan
    - different financial backgrounds
    - veterans
    - non-traditional students
    - different political views
    - people exist at the fringes in Halligan
- **Topics**
  - TAs: managing and growing course staff — TAs make or break the department, so the department should put time and care into thinking about it
    - Best practices for professors for working with, training, managing TAs
    - Julie nominated to lead a subcommittee on TAs: Caroline, Supriya, Marilyn
  - Issues that are familiar to students but unfamiliar to the department
    - Creativity in the curriculum: CS as a “de facto major” — students choose CS because they know there are jobs — less focused on theory, CS as a way to build things — opportunities embedded in the curriculum for students to use CS in creative ways
    - CS classes can stifle creativity — could encourage extra features by giving extra credit and push students to go above and beyond and build something they’re really excited about and enjoy figuring out what else they can do with what they know
  - Alumnae issues
  - Diversity, inclusion, and belonging

- **Oct 24: CSD squared** — by invitation to underrepresented groups to have a social, talk about issues, identify ways in which the department could better support them
  - unclear whether grad students should be in those spaces (same with office of STEM diversity — grad students don’t know whether they belong in predominantly undergrad spaces)

- **Next meeting: likely beginning of November**
  - How could we be most effective as a group?
  - Do we want to have a council chair?
  - What should be discussed at the next meeting? Want the meeting to be collectively run. Up to us to drive what we want to do.
  - An agenda everyone could add to? — shared Google Doc for working agenda
  - TA subcommittee deliverable: present a bare bones proposal for how to centralize TA course staff

- **Another subcommittee on diversity, inclusion, and belonging? Abby, Emily, Maggie, Lexi, Genevieve**
  - Action item: think about action items
  - Diversifying this group
  - List of barriers to entry

- **Action Items**
  - Google doc agenda
  - communication channel
  - Subcommittees to reconvene
  - Webpage with names of representatives