PMA Undergraduate Student Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
30th April 2020

In attendance:
  • Physics: Morgaine Mandigo-Stoba, Danny Wendt, August Chen, Alexandra Klipfel
  • Mathematics: Arushi Gupta, Aru Mukherjea, Allison Wang
  • Nam Ung, Freddy Mora

Online learning
  • Problems
    ○ Professors unaware of how to use (e.g.) Zoom
    ○ Difficulty in remote collaboration
  • Benefits
    ○ Course materials are more accessible, such as lectures being recorded and lectures notes being posted
    ○ Online Q&A and Gradescope have been useful
  • Ideas
    ○ Carnegie Mellon has created a Piazza whose admins are their equivalent of Freddy and Nam, which could be useful at Caltech
    ○ In general, more avenues for feedback would be beneficial

SURFs (Updates with the shift to online)
  • PMA likely has a higher proportion of SURFs that can be carried out remotely
  • International students
    ○ Caltech international students can still take projects under SURF, but students attending universities internationally cannot
  • Ways to help students whose SURFs couldn’t be virtual
    ○ Professors with opportunities that students now aren’t able to accept can make those available to Caltech students who are without summer plans
    ○ Putting current students in touch with alumni who might have opportunities, possibly through an online forum
    ○ Freddy and Nam: PMA Division is working with the SFP office on this - these ideas can be passed on

Online social event for new PMA freshmen
  • Ideas
    ○ Continue the annual Math Tea when freshmen declare their majors
    ○ Graduate students put together a “Talk Swap” event where people volunteer to present each other’s research slides, which we can also do
    ○ It’s helpful for freshmen to have a welcome event where they can meet upperclassmen and professors
  • Possible formats
    ○ Two separate calls - one with only students, one with students and professors, or professors only present for part of the call
    ○ Panel of current students and professors
    ○ Current students each create their own Zoom link
    ○ Breakout rooms within a zoom call
○ Slack or Discord
○ EOs/option reps do introductions
○ One all-PMA event, or separate events for each option?
○ A schedule of events, and students can drop into whichever is relevant to/suits them

  • Timing
    ○ All freshmen should have declared by registration, so the event can be held soon afterwards
    ○ It would be helpful for the event to run before registration to aid in choosing classes
    ○ Students-only meeting should happen after the meeting with professors, so that professors don’t scare students with unrealistic expectations

Committee Updates
  • Clarification on organisation of committees - the goal is for people to come to committees with problems or ideas, which are then taken to the board to be carried out

Other concerns
  • Digital divide - is anyone disadvantaged by lack of access to technology, and how do we mitigate this?
  • How do we start talking about research/other opportunities for next summer?

Action items
  • Respond to remote learning surveys as more information would be helpful when planning for the possibility of a remote fall term
  • Set up committee of students to organise a welcome event