Members of the Board,

As we wrap up the Fall semester, I wanted to take some time to update you on a few major initiatives that we’ve been chasing this year, framing those remarks within the context of our three larger goals for the year. As I mentioned in my last report, our goals may be broadly summarized as the betterment of graduate quality of life, increased integration into the larger campus community, and greater visibility of graduate needs and concerns among university leadership.

In terms of quality of life, we have seen significant advances this semester. Perhaps the most exciting is the recent progress on the graduate student center. We have officially entered the design phase of the project, with the first review scheduled for next week. The objective is to complete design work around the time I next address the Board, with work on-going through the summer. I am hopeful that this time next year, my successor can stand before you and report on the great strides we have made in bringing the graduate community together and breaking down the walls between departments.

I am also happy to report that, pending contracting, we will be expanding the Student Legal Services pilot program to graduate students. Joining with PSG to fund this great service, we are able to reduce some of the greatest non-academic stressors dragging on student quality of life. While the program is slated to sunset after the pilot program has run its course, I am confident that the data coming from these first few semesters will present a strong case for continuation of the service as an important piece of University student services.

In terms of campus integration, we have continued to build on a strong relationship with PSG. As evidenced by our close coordination of such issues as the student legal services program and a recent proposal for an military absence policy, the student body benefits when our two organizations work together to find the best path forward for our community. Moving forward we will continue our regular meetings between PGSG, PSG, and our student trustee and harness the great potential of this collaboration.

As far as visibility of graduate students and graduate concerns, I am happy to say that things have improved. There is graduate representation on the ongoing Dean of Students search committee and units across the university have been receptive to our concerns throughout the semester. I am encouraged that we seemed to have turned a corner, and I hope that this communication will continue.

So what’s next? What can the Board do for graduate students? The majority of concerns, either lingering or on the horizon, must first be addressed at the administrative level. For example, we are pushing to retain what little graduate student housing remains on campus and to improve and expand the apartment-style offerings available through University Housing. As we expand the summer enrollment, we have requested that departments expand their summer teaching assistantships – a seemingly natural pairing between graduate and undergraduate growth. With its removal from the CSEL floor plan, we continue to advocate for a tutor and TA center, where graduate student teachers can hold office hours and meet with their students. Through the Dean of Students search, we have lobbied for someone who understands the graduate perspective and can help us meet the challenges facing our community.
All of these decisions exist wholesale or at least in large part below the level of the Board and I do not ask you to get involved with them directly. However, it is this body which sets the larger strategic goal for the University. My only request at this stage is to continue to consider the graduate perspective. When hearing a presentation from housing, ask how they are addressing the graduate community. When making appointments to administrative positions, ask what they will do to serve the entire student body – not just undergraduates. And when considering strategic growth, be it a new building or an enrollment expansion, consider the needs of the graduate students and the impact that your decisions will have on us and our community. You are in a unique position to ask those questions and spark the idea that graduate students are more than a resource. With your help, we can continue to build on the great strides we’ve made this semester.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and happy holidays.