

Bios

Sean Vilanova is a rising fifth year graduate student in the Chemistry department working towards his PhD in Inorganic Chemistry. He is focusing on the synthesis of new organometallic complexes in the interest of activating inert chemical bonds by taking advantage of secondary interactions with a new series of chelating scaffolds. He attended Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, PA, and obtained his B.S. in Chemistry in 2011. During his undergraduate career he enjoyed his time spent doing environmental chemistry research as well as performing in an all-male acapella group, 54th & City, while spending his weekends volunteering in the ER at a local hospital. In addition to his current involvement on the GSU Professional Development committee, Sean has recently taken on the role of Quality of Life co-chair. His involvement goes beyond the GSU, and includes roles in the Chemistry Graduate Student Organization, as well as the University of Notre Dame's Chemistry Demo Team. One of the major issues he's observed since his involvement with the GSU is communication, not only to the graduate students, but also within committees, and from the higher-ups that we have to communicate with for approvals. He believes that increasing this communication will be vital to improving the atmosphere and environment within the GSU.

Meredith Doellman is finishing her second year in Biological Sciences, studying the genomic architecture of speciation with gene flow in the *Rhagoletis pomonella* species complex. She is excited to be back at the University of Notre Dame, after graduating with a B.S. in Biological Sciences in 2005. A typical Notre Dame undergraduate, Meredith has a host of Domers in her family, father ('74), brother ('10), uncle ('71), and cousin ('12), but will (hopefully) be the first Double Domer! During her undergraduate, she studied, did research in physiology and marine ecology, studied some more, and was president of the Notre Dame Martial Arts Institute. She then moved to Massachusetts to study ecology and evolutionary biology at Northeastern University's Marine Science Center. During her graduate studies, she also spent a summer working at the University of Leeds (UK) and traveling around northern Europe (collecting snails...of course). After completing her Masters in 2010, Meredith worked as the science laboratory manager at Endicott College (Beverly, MA) and taught statistics and myriad biology labs both there and at Salem State University. Back at the University of Notre Dame, she is an active member of the Society of Schmitt Fellows, has been the Academic Affairs chair for the GSU, and spends most of her free time trying to convert her lab-mates into bioinformaticians. As co-VP for Graduate Professionalization, she would be particularly interested in partnering with the Kaneb Center to promote increased teaching opportunities for graduate students.

Bryant Vande Kolk, a third year graduate student in the Department of Physics, is studying nuclear astrophysics, with a particular emphasis on stellar nucleosynthesis. Bryant received his Bachelor of Arts from Ripon College in 2012. Like all grad students, he stays fairly busy, but when he has free time, Bryant loves board games, disc golf, watching the Packers, and doing work on the house he co-owns with a fellow graduate student. Bryant has served on his department's graduate student committees for recruitment, professional

development, and outreach. He became GSU Quality of Life co-chair earlier this semester and now is administering the Notre Dame Graduate LGBTQ Environment Survey; he is also a leader in the GSU LGBTQ subcommittee, GlassND. Bryant understands that a substantial amount of work should be done in improving communication and transparency between the GSU and the graduate student body, that the GSU must promote and provide a welcoming community for all students, and that it should ensure the health care, professional development, and social needs of its graduate students are fulfilled.

Platform

Meredith, Sean, and Bryant care deeply about all matters that affect graduate students, both presently and in the future. While we are aware that there are issues outside of those we articulate below, our platform accentuates a tri-faceted approach to addressing these concerns during our tenure as the 2015-2016 Graduate Student Union Executive Board.

Improving communication and transparency: from graduate students, to the GSU, to the Graduate School

We recognize that the most important function of the GSU, though also one of the most difficult, is facilitating transparent communication between the Graduate School and graduate students. We want to implement improvements in transparency and communication from the ground up, first by overhauling the GSU website. We envision the redesigned site as a comprehensive hub for graduate student information, in the form of new content and a compilation of links to existing information from across campus. To promote transparency, our website should feature a detailed description of the GSU structure, and incorporate user-friendly navigational tools, making it easy for students to find desired information and the appropriate GSU and/or University contacts for their concerns. In addition, the site should host comprehensive information about both the Graduate Life and Graduate Professionalization arms of the GSU. For Graduate Life, we will keep an updated events calendar (e.g., a Google calendar that could be shared with all graduate students) and thorough repositories of healthcare and housing information. On the academic side, we should provide a source for funding information (for example, CPG pointers, links to campus resources, and a curated list of internal and external funding opportunities), teaching resources (e.g., Kaneb Center and local adjunct postings), and links to Professional Development resources.

We will also take a two-pronged approach in reaching out to the graduate student body more effectively: through improved email communication with all graduate students and more effective use of GSU department representatives. We will encourage increased involvement of department representatives with GSU committees and increased

communication between department representatives and their constituents (a monthly GSU meeting report, curated specifically for each department). Finally, we will work to increase direct contact between the GSU and Graduate School by meeting regularly with its administration.

Improving the quality of life for graduate students of all backgrounds

One major goal of our Quality of Life division is to gain representation from graduate students of diverse backgrounds and have their voices and concerns be heard by the graduate student body. We want all graduate students to feel welcome and respected by the GSU and its constituents; therefore, we would like to encourage the development of events celebrating the diversity within the graduate school. This could be accomplished by working with student organizations representing the various groups that make up the graduate student body.

Another way in which we aim to increase the quality of life for graduate students is by encouraging and facilitating neighborhood watch programs. Some programs have already been instituted by graduate students in their own communities and can be an asset to the off-campus graduate community. They will also increase the visibility of available, safe housing options for graduate students, both on and off campus. This will allow graduate students, and their families to acquire safe and affordable housing for their time spent at ND.

Graduate student spouses play a very important role in the lives of many graduate students, and therefore, we'd like to include a graduate student spouse orientation that coincides with orientation week. This will allow for the spouses of graduate students to see what resources are available to them via campus and the greater community.

Educating our graduate student body on important financial issues

The financial situation can be tough for many graduate students. In addition to focusing on a specialized research field, this is a time when we graduate students are starting families, buying a vehicle, signing up for a health care plan, starting up a retirement savings, or even just trying to balance a budget.

Some current graduate students were recently informed of a change to their funding status and that they might only be funded through their fifth year. This has become quite disconcerting for many, and we want to ensure every student has an understanding of their funding status; that is, we plan to work with the graduate school and the departments to clear up this funding status confusion.

Interpreting the University health care plan and what it covers, particularly with changes made due to the PPACA, can be puzzling as well. Our goal is to make information regarding this plan's benefits, details, spousal and dependent costs, dental costs, and women's health care easily accessible and well disseminated. Also, better educating interested students on retirement savings, personal budgeting, and general financial management are topics we will encourage and provide via collaborating with the graduate school and appropriate University offices.