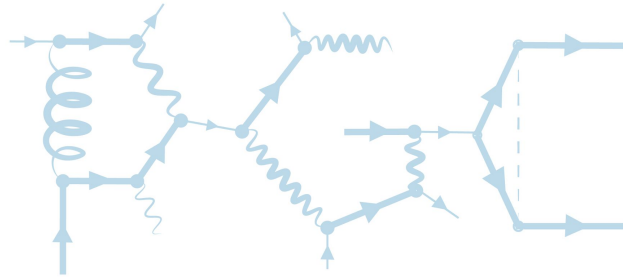


# PGC Faculty Meeting Presentation

## 10/09/2020



**Columbia Physics Grad Council**

Representatives from Physics Graduate Council  
(Bárbara, Matija, Ola, Sun, Tuan)

# Outline

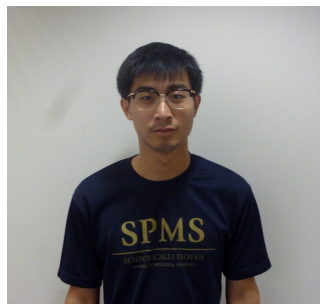
## Issues Addressed Today:

- Course Requirements
- Qualifying Exams
- First-Year Advising
- Mental Health
- International Students
- Advising Committees

# Current PGC Board



**President**  
Bárbara Cruvinel Santiago



**International Liaisons**  
Guanhao Sun and Matija Medvidović



**Social Chair**  
Ola Kusiak



**Union Liaison**  
Tuan Nguyen

# Course Requirements

- Changes were mentioned to the graduate committee early August.
- **Make field-specific course requirements more flexible.** Currently, **students have to choose 2 courses** out of: Astro I, Astro II, Particle Physics, CM I, CM II, QFT I.
  - Cases when a biophysics student had to take 2 CM courses or a particle physics person had to take astro
- Allow students to take these courses outside of the department and add QFT II or III to the list:
  - (An AMO person might want to take an optics course in applied physics, a biophysicist - a biology course, an experimental particle physicist - a computer science course, an astrophysicist - a course in the astronomy department)
- **We suggest creation of an approval form**
  - signed by the student's advisor and the DGS
- **Certain courses are not offered for two years in a row**

# Qualifying Exams

- So far, we have received no details on how 2021 Qualls will be given
  - Will we be able to socially distance students in person?
  - What about students abroad?
- We kindly request that the **Qualls Committee release details about 2021 Qualls in the next two weeks**
- If there is any uncertainty about how Columbia will operate in January, then we request that the Qualls committee share a tentative plan for each case
  - What would Qualls look like if Columbia policies continue as it has in the Fall?
  - What would Qualls look like if Columbia returns to all in-person classes?
  - What would Qualls look like if Columbia reverts to all online classes for grad students?

# Qualifying Exams

- The PGC ran a comprehensive survey on Qualls in the Spring
  - A report of the results should be out by November
- One important finding is that women were 20x more likely to hesitate accepting Columbia's admission offer than men, primarily due to Columbia's Qualls
- We're planning on hosting a town hall on Qualls this year
  - Essentially replacing the one that was canceled in Spring due to Covid
- In our survey we proposed two potential changes to Qualls:
  - Having only four sections, such as Classical Mechanics & Relativity, Electromagnetism, Quantum Mechanics, and Statistical Mechanics
  - Not having to retake any exam you've already passed
- Students overwhelmingly support both proposals

# First-Year Advising

- Students feel lost in their first year.
- Some have no research advisor in their first year.
- 2019 incoming class didn't have a DGS for a semester in their first year.
- The DGS alone cannot handle over 100 students and build a rapport with every single one of them.
- Suggestion: **a faculty member assigned to each first year**, so students have a more senior member of the department who knows them and they can reach out to. This is similar to Harvard's current setup.

# Mental Health

- Mental health crisis among the student body (especially in their first year and for underrepresented students)
- During the pandemic, **issues students faced included**: immigration, travel bans, isolation/depression, physical health problems, family issues, racial disputes in the US, political turmoil in the US and in their home countries, housing challenges, financial uncertainty, etc.
- We want the department leadership to:
  - **Issue a statement recognizing that the challenges students have faced** this year have severely impacted their mental health and well-being, stating that research productivity is not a priority right now and that faculty should be understanding and supportive of their students.
  - **Edit the department statement of principles** (which says labs were “undeterred by lockdown”) to focus less on productivity and more on department members’ mental well-being.

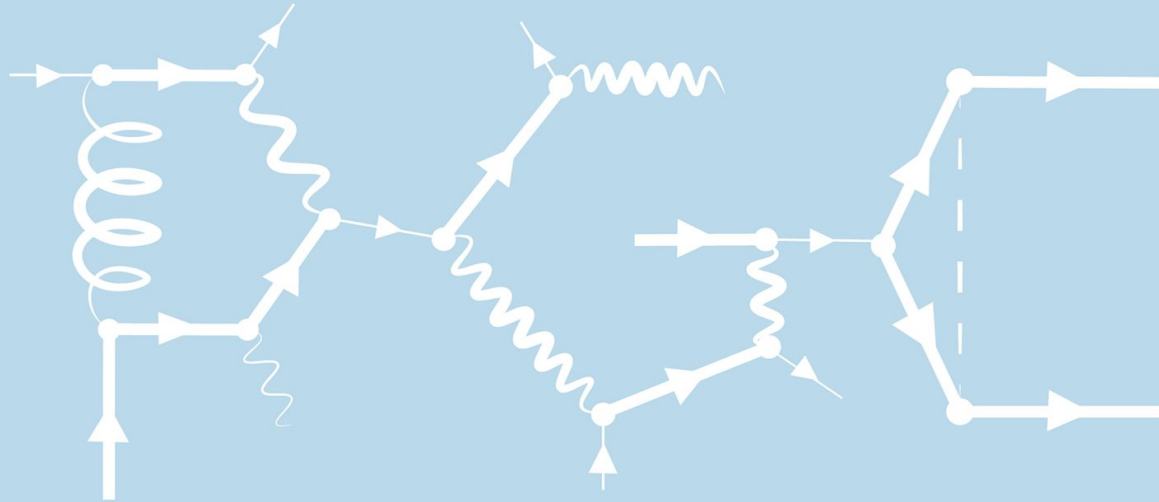
# International Students

- International students facing many problems in wake of COVID and immigration/pay rules
- A number of international students still stuck abroad
- Proposed DHS rule:
  - Legal stay in the US made more difficult and expensive
  - PGC: Keeping students informed and encouraging comments to gov't
  - Latest info: ISSO
- Chinese students (~1000) got their visas revoked in September
- Several other harmful rules proposed and overturned this summer
  - PGC: took part in lobbying calls and worked with the union to reverse them

# Advising Committees

- The Graduate Committee sent an email explaining details. The PGC followed up with another email offering tips.
- The Grad Committee should advise second years on this.
- Students were asked to form their committees and submit names by mid-September this year. The deadline should be mid-August next year.
- The Graduate Committee will follow up with the students
  - Who do not submit committee faculty names.
  - Who do not meet by the month after their assigned meeting month.
  - Whose committee raises concern about their progress (to offer support).
- It is also the advisor's responsibility to make sure committees are formed and meetings are held.

**Thank you for your time! Questions?  
Feel free to email any of us about anything.**



**Columbia Physics Grad Council**