Academic Year G2 Area Desk Assignments

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October 28, 2014

Summary

In the past several years, the Physics Graduate Student Council has been in charge of assigning desks in the G2 area to G2 and above students. The rationale behind this practice, as I understand, originated from the administration’s point of view that students are in a better position to judge the desk needs of other students than the administration itself and therefore students would in general do a better job of assigning limited number of desks to students in an optimal fashion. As a new member of the Council, I volunteered to do the assignment for the academic year 2014 – 2015.

In making the assignment, I followed the steps below:

• In mid-to-late July, I used the department survey system to conduct a survey among all G2 and above graduate students to understand students’ desk needs. The survey was conducted over a period of approximately 10 days. A survey for desk assignment from the year 2012 was still available on the department survey system. With only few modifications, I used the same format for the survey.

• After the survey deadline has passed, I closed the survey and made a tentative assignment. In the process, I learned that whereas more than 50 students answered they needed desks, there were only 37 desks available in the G2 area.

• Jacob, Lisa, and I met to discuss the issue and made a joint decision to give priority to students who would either not have desks elsewhere and/or who have not joined research groups yet. The rest were placed on the waiting list.

• G2 and above students who had desks in the G2 area but are moving out were asked to do so by August 8th and G1 students from the G1 area by August 15th. All students who are moving out were asked to return their keys to Lisa.

• Students were allowed to switch desks and report the change to Lisa and myself. After the first week of September, the final configuration was recorded. Incremental changes were made over time which were recorded and reported to Lisa.

Suggestions to the future Council

In the case the Council continues to take on the responsibility in the next academic year (2015 – 2016), I suggest the following directions for the future Council member who will take on the task.

• Start early: According to Lisa, this year the Council began the task later than usual. One important reason to begin earlier, in my experience, would be to give students more time to figure out their own desk needs and to give the Council member in charge more time to communicate with students to accommodate them better after making a tentative assignment.
Survey: The future survey should ask for the following information

- Name
- Year
- If have a desk in the G2 area, what is the desk number?
- If have a desk in the G2 area, do you wish to keep the desk?
- Currently in a group?
- Currently have a desk elsewhere? If not, can the student’s advisor find a desk for the student?
- Ask to specify with what the student will use the desk for.
- How often will the student use the desk?
- Ask for any particular preference. (Such as specific desk numbers or next to whom they wish to sit.)

Challenges: In the process, the Council member may encounter several difficulties and questions. Do not hesitate to discuss them with Lisa and Jacob.

Responsibilities: In making the assignment, I considered myself to be responsible for the following things (not an exhaustive list):

- Taking the survey.
- Make a tentative assignment.
- Communicate with students to figure out their desk needs and/or explaining to them the assignment process and/or why they won’t be assigned a desk this year if there is a shortage. All of this was to reduce communication overhead between myself and Lisa.
- Following up with various issues that may occur related to the task—that is, the job is not done the moment you announce the assignment!

Future Direction

The question as to whether the Council should continue to do the assignment in the future is to be revisited next year. I will lead the discussion among the current Council members before the first election planned in April, 2015.