



## **GSO SENATE MINUTES OF MEETING**

### **NOVEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup> 2020**

#### **Opening:**

The meeting is called to order by the Speaker of the Senate Helena van Nieuwenhuizen at 5:35 PM EST.

#### **Approval of Agenda**

#### **Approval of Minutes**

#### **Plan for Achieving Financial Sustainability:**

The Senate is addressed by Rosemaria Martinelli, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, regarding the University administration's plan for achieving Financial Sustainability. She talked about the challenges which the University faces in navigating through these challenging times. Some of them were extant before the pandemic, and the existing ones have been exacerbated. The plan is to engage the entire campus community to improve the University's financial position. The University has created five different task forces consisting of both faculty and administrative staff and spearheaded by the Executive Leadership. VP Martinelli briefly talked about these talk forces and what their specific objectives are. The plan for achieving financial sustainability will be implemented in different phases.

More information can be obtained on the [website](#).

Senator Chuankai Chen asked a followup question regarding how the University and the task forces plan on engaging the student community in this process, whether they will take feedback from the entire student body or just the student leaders and representatives?

VP Martinelli answered by saying that the administration plans on sending out surveys to the entire community (faculty, staff and students). They also plan on engaging graduate students and certain focus groups on specific issues and also to gain their perspective on it.

President Anand Aiyer asked another question regarding the representation of the various Humanities departments. VP Martinelli assured that this is not the case and that they have adequate representation on the various task forces and in the decision making process.

Treasurer RJ Wuagneux suggested that all the senators should check whether their departments have a representative member on the task force and to work with those members to come up with solutions to these unique problems. As the graduate students are not allowed to be active members of the task forces, so if there are any issues which require specific attention, then the GSO can facilitate such communication between the students and the task forces.

### **President's Report:**

President Aiyer began by expressing his gratitude towards President Maurie McInnis, Interim Provost Fotis Sotiropoulos and Dean Eric Wertheimer for their bold and decisive actions regarding the fee waiver for all the terminal degree students (PhD and MFA). He recognised the efforts of the Treasurer Assistant Christine Wang, International Student Advocate Gagan Somashekhar and the COVID - 19 Relief Fund Committee in processing all the applications. The newly appointed Policy Action Chairs Zared Shawver and Vamiq Mohammed were introduced and welcomed by President Aiyer.

The GSO Executive Committee is still waiting for an update on the fee relief for International students (mainly PhD students) who are not in the country and are unable to earn. The EC is also waiting for an update on the proposed one credit for full-time status for G5 students. President Anand stated that the EC has begun working on various Mental Health Initiatives. Also, he asked for volunteers to represent the GSO on the Assistant Diversity Chair Search Committee.

At the end of his report, President Anand talked about the GSO's commitment towards hosting various events (in person or online). A survey will be conducted to get the opinion of the graduate student body and what kind of event they would like the GSO to host for them.

Senator Caitlyn Cardetti raised a followup question on the '1 credit for full-time status' proposal and how that would affect student loans and their deferral, whether the necessary documentation would be provided for the same. President Anand requested her to write up a letter regarding this so that he could forward it to the Provost.

PAC Zared Shawver asked a question on whether the same proposal would affect the pay/salary of a PhD student's advisor. President Anand said that he would get more information on this.

### **Vice President's Report:**

Vice President Sean Mascarenhas also began his report by expressing his happiness on the fee waiver for terminal degree students. He will be looking into the issue of TOPP fee and the Health Services fee paid by the students who do not live on campus. Vice President Sean stated that the

GSO would not be hosting any in-person events until the next semester due to health and safety concerns. He said that he is working on events like movie nights, online concerts and online classes and he will be sharing more information on it soon.

The senators then discussed whether the GSO should host any online, in-person or hybrid events. The senators ultimately voted in favour of the GSO not hosting any in-person events this semester.

### **Treasurer's Report:**

Treasurer RJ gave a quick tour of the budget, and the breakdown of the total amount received via the student activity fee and how much amount has dispersed on events, Resource Access Project (RAP), Professional Development Fund (PDF) and the COVID-19 Relief funds. He also said that the GSO has some additional funds this year and he also expects quite a bit of surplus funds available for the next semester from the budget. Treasurer RJ stressed that the GSO should strongly continue advertising PDF and RAP as we have a lot of funds to disperse for just causes.

In his update, Treasurer RJ said that he is in talks with the Career Center to host an event on jobs and job opportunities. He is also working on an event which would explain the various resources made available to the graduate students by the GSO like reimbursement and funding opportunities, legal clinics etc. He also provided an update on the approval status of the PDF and GSA applications. Treasurer RJ is also planning to introduce a digital workaround for departmental allocation signature sheets as it is challenging to get in-person signatures for departmental verification given our current predicament.

A funding proposal was then presented by the Treasurer which was approved by the Senate. At the end of his report, RJ said that to apply for GSO Funding you don't have to be registered with Student Engagement and Activities. You can create your club or committee with a faculty advisor and apply for funding.

The Treasurer Assistant Christine Wang gave an update on the COVID-19 Relief Fund. She reported on the activities of the COVID-19 Relief Fund committee based on a timeline. She also said that the applications had been closed for this semester and the committee will take new applications in the next semester.

Senator Chuankai Chen asked a followup question on why the applications have been closed this semester which was addressed by Treasurer RJ saying that the deadline for submitting these applications has been extended multiple times during this semester. Also, a lot of the applications submitted are incomplete which causes a lot of problems in the process of approving them.

Therefore the decision to stop taking additional applications was to give the committee members ample amount of time to review the pending applications and approve them.

This point was reiterated by Senator Noele Certain saying that the decision to provide a deadline for submitting applications was made when the committee was formed, mainly not to overwhelm the applicants and the committee members and to ensure smooth functioning.

Senator Caitlyn Cardetti suggested that having a Google form instead of the current application form would make it better for the applicants to fill it out and upload the documents. It would also make life easier for the committee members to go through the application and approve it. Christine said that this would be discussed in the next committee meeting as they are also working on how to make the application process more streamlined.

President Anand suggested that we should have the applicants anonymise the application themselves as it will save a lot of time. Gagan and Christine have reached out to a Computer Science student who has a program which can help them anonymise the applications effectively and efficiently.

Treasurer RJ then went on to describe an amendment to the ICP regarding the COVID-19 Professional Development Fund Application which would provide temporary reimbursement for equipment necessary for professional development during the pandemic. He also said that further details have to be worked out by the budget committee and that everyone is welcome to give their inputs on the amendment.

The senators then asked questions regarding which equipment would qualify for reimbursement and then voted to approve the language of the amendment.

### **Secretary's Report:**

Secretary Aditya Patankar started his report by saying that he has finalised the list of committees which would have to be voted upon in today's Senate meeting. He also stated that if anybody has any issues with their committee assignment, then they should directly contact him to resolve the issue.

Secretary Aditya said that the GSO received a list of academic programs, from the bursar, which pay the graduate student activity fee. Using that he has compiled a list of various departments to which these educational programs are affiliated and that he plans to contact those departments that do not have senator representation. In his update, he also said that he is working with the International Student Advocate Gagan Somashekar to come up with a Mentorship Program for prospective students (both international and domestic). The senators then approved the finalised list of committees.

### **Speaker's Report:**

Speaker Helena van Nieuwenhuizen began her report by talking about the Distinguished Travel Award applications, saying that she has not received any applications at all. She proposed to combine the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 DTA application cycles since there were no applications during the fall semester. The senators voted and approved the proposal. The second thing which Speaker Helena talked about in her report was expanding the legal clinic to serve the undergraduate students and that she would like to work in collaboration with the USG for the same.

Senator Tristan Catalano and Senator Chuankai Chen asked questions about the number of undergraduate students who would be interested in the services of the legal clinic and also regarding the financial contribution of USG for the same. Speaker addressed these questions by saying that the USG will be contributing a fair amount of money proportional to the number of undergraduate student community which is larger than the graduate student community. She also plans on increasing the number of lawyers who provide specialised legal services. Speaker Helena said that the GSO would be signing a memorandum of understanding with the USG which will specify all the details such that there is no conflict in the future. Senator Francesca Polo suggested that it would be a good idea to send out feedback and survey forms regarding the legal clinic experience and what specialised legal services the students are interested in.

Speaker Helena also stressed on the fact that we need to expand the GSO legal clinics to include more lawyers. It would be better if the GSO could utilise the services of the lawyers already affiliated with Stony Brook University. The senators voted in favour of initiating the process of collaborating with the USG for an expanded legal clinic.

### **Unfinished Business:**

Senator Chuankai Chen explained his proposal to make amendments to CSH/BNL reimbursement options which also include Uber and Lyft service reimbursement along with reimbursements for private vehicle gas. Senator Chuankai proposed to make this available to all the students travelling to and from CSH/BNL for academic and professional reasons.

The Senate then discussed whether this proposal should also include students who have advanced to candidacy and don't necessarily need to be on both the main campus and either of CSH/BNL. There was also a discussion regarding making changes to the language to consider all the different situations possible. The Senate voted in favour of including this language in the original proposal.

Senator Tristan Catalano gave a brief update on the activities of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The committee is planning to meet with representatives from the SBU Food Pantry. The committee is also planning to host a town hall meeting for indigenous (Native Americans) people on campus. Still, they have no point of contact and would greatly appreciate it if someone helped in connecting with the necessary people.

**Announcements:**

There were no additional announcements.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned by Speaker of the Senate Helena van Nieuwenhuizen at 8:28 PM EST.