



GSO SENATE MINUTES OF MEETING

February 26th 2021

Opening:

The meeting is called to order by the Speaker of the Senate Helena van Nieuwenhuizen at 5:30 PM EST.

Adoption of the Agenda

Approval of the Minutes of Meeting

President's Report:

In his report, President Anand Aiyer reiterated the message to stay strong and united during these difficult times. He said that the GSO website is being updated with all the information, and if any of the Senators need any additional information, then they should directly contact the EC. President Aiyer went on to briefly describe the achievements of the current GSO along with ongoing projects in detail (Please refer to the senate meeting slides made available by the Speaker). At the end of his report, President Anand put forth the nomination of Alexia Cosby as the new GSO Vice President.

Following this, VP nominee Alexia introduced herself to the GSO Senate and described what she intends to do in her position as the GSO VP. Speaker Helena then passed a motion to approve Alexia as the new VP. The GSO Senate confirmed her as the new Vice President by unanimous approval.

President Anand Aiyer also nominated Senator Sisir Kovuri to the Board of Appeals, as the previous member Mr Rajat Kumar graduated. President Aiyer clarified that Sisir expressed his interest to join the Board of Appeals in the first round and was also interviewed for the same. The nomination of Senator Sisir Kovuri on the Board of Appeals was approved by the Senate.

Guest Speakers:

- Donna Buehler from the [SBU Ombuds Office](#)
- Forrest Bowling, the president of the [Graduate Career Association](#)

Policy Action Chair - State Affairs:

PAC for State Affairs Vamiq Mustahshan introduced two resolutions to the Senate. The first one was regarding the Resolution for Flexible Tuition, which has been introduced in the Governor's Budget. He clarified that the GSO position is that it understands that the University will be possibly increasing the tuition, but at the same time, the language introduced in the budget is such that it makes this increase a bit more predictable. The speaker opened the floor for any technical questions regarding the resolution followed by pro-con statements based on what the Senate decides to vote on. Senators asked PAC Vamiq for clarifying what the resolution is as the tuition and its increase is set by SUNY. Vamiq said that this resolution is not proposed by SUNY or the University but by the Governor in his budget, stating the Universities in the SUNY system will be increasing the tuition but in a predictable way, and the actual increase is still up for debate. And that SUNY will continue to increase tuition every year in order to continue being a competitive higher education and research institution. He stated that the flexible tuition increase plan has been in place for the past four years and is about to expire at the end of this year. If we don't endorse this plan, then the State and SUNY will have to come up with some new method for increasing tuition.

Senator Spencer Austin suggested that instead of just endorsing this tuition increase plan, why doesn't the GSO take a stand against fee increase altogether? The GSO's long term goal should be to fight for the abolishment of tuition. PAC Vamiq clarifies his support for Senator Spencer's suggestion to draft a proposal on the same lines.

Senator Hannah Waterman asked what would happen if the GSO did not support this resolution. PAC Vamiq replied to her question saying that even if the resolution passes the SUNY Chancellor or the Governor cannot say that the Stony Brook University GSO supports this resolution. The floor was opened to discussion based on pro-con statements regarding the bill

Senator John Klecker stated that the GSO should not endorse the resolution for flexible tuition since there are alternative ways and avenues for increasing the financial support to SUNY research institutions. The Speaker passed a motion to endorse the resolution for Flexible Tuition. The GSO Senate voted against endorsing the resolution.

The second resolution which PAC Vamiq presented to the Senate was to support the bill S3976 for the introduction of an access fee (required for access to the University library and other similar resources) for fully matriculated graduate students (above 30 credits) who are taking a leave of absence from their full-time studies. This bill also states that all the mandatory fees for such graduate students (GAs, TAs and RAs), except for the graduate student activity fee, should be abolished. He clarified GSO's stand regarding abolishing all the mandatory fees for all graduate students, not only the ones who are on the payroll. This is the same bill that the GSEU requested support from the GSO. Senator John Klecker being the GSEU liaison clarifies the GSEU's support regarding bill S3976 stating that this bill abolishes all the fees for graduate student employees and includes any master's students being employed by the University as GAs, RAs or TAs.

Senator Hannah Waterman asked whether we know if the access fee being charged is going directly to the library (or other resources). Just like the GSO is in support of abolishing all the fees, we should also try to get rid of the access fee unless it is directly funding the resources that the students are using during their leave of absence. Senator John Klecker said that he agrees with her on this and that he will go back and check whether the language can be updated to reflect the same. Speaker Helena then moved on to support the resolution put forward by PAC Vamiq and then the GSEU's memorandum put forth by Senator John Klecker. The Senate approved the motion to endorse them both.

PAC Vamiq Mustahsan then gave his report of the activities that he has been involved in along with the proposed projects he will be undertaking as the Policy Action Chair for State Affairs.

Vice Presidents Report:

VP Alexia said that she is extremely passionate about the Mental Health Initiative that she has been working on since joining the GSO EC as the interim Vice President. He has a series of events planned for reducing mental health stigma and spreading awareness regarding all the resources available on campus. She has also been working on a new grad-postdoc mentorship program in collaboration with GWISE, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and VP of Equity and Inclusion. This mentorship program will be useful for connecting graduate students with postdocs and faculty. VP Alexia also introduced Carol Garcia, the new Productions Director for the GSO EC. VP Alexia shared the details for two of the upcoming events in line with her mental health initiatives, Coping with Covid Coffee hour and the Imposter Syndrome Symposia. She also talked briefly about the 'Meaningfulness Cafe' event series co-lead by the Alda Center.

At the end of her report, VP Alexia urged all the Senators to get in touch with Caitlin Duffy the GSO's Social Media Manager, if they would like to share anything with the broader graduate student community via the GSO Newsletter.

Treasurer's Report:

At the beginning of his report, the GSO Treasurer RJ introduced the newly hired office managers, AJ Liberti and Monique de la Beij. He said that there were in total of 37 applicants for the position, out of which 2 were selected. RJ has been working with Tristan Catalano and Stephen Adelson in order to set up our own in-house GSO Food Pantry, maybe run by another entity but sponsored by the GSO. They have been discussing the possibility of having a Food Pantry Liaison. RJ requested the Senators to reach out to him if they have any ideas or suggestions.

RJ along with the Treasurer's Assistant Christine Wang, has been working to set up non-profit accounts with the Stony Brook Foundation. They have also been working on setting up the Chase Bank direct deposit and they hope to go live by mid-March. He then went on to show the state of the GSO's Finances. The GSO has issued 39 graduate student activity refunds, and we are still waiting for the \$10,000 from Citrix. RJ said that the GSO is going to have a lot of surplus at the end of the year because none of the funding lines (refunds, reimbursement, programming) have been completely utilised. The surplus PDF budget can be rolled over to the next year, which is a good thing.

Christine Wang, the Treasurer's Assistant, gave a short description and update about the COVID-19 Relief fund and its timeline. She said that the GSO had reimbursed around \$61,000 across 32 departments last semester. She also explained the reasons for the holdup in application processing and why sometimes it may take more time. And they hope that the direct deposit this semester may improve the efficiency and decrease the processing time.

The GSO Treasurer then put forth speaker series proposals by different graduate departments and organisations, which were approved by the Senate. The proposals approved by the Senate were:

- Behavioural Ecology Group Seminars - Speaker Series.
- Voices from the Chinese Diaspora in Spain - Speaker Series.
- Art History and Criticism Lectures - Speaker Series.

Policy Action Chair - Federal Affairs:

PAC for Federal Affairs Zared Shawver put forth the names of graduate students who have expressed their interest in being part of the Committee for Policy Action. A motion to approve the committee for Policy Action members was put forth by the Speaker, and it was approved unanimously by the Senate. Zared then went on to describe the projects/policies he has been working on/plans to work on at the Federal level. He went on to explain the bills and policies proposed by the Federal Government and how they impact graduate students, and what the GSO is hoping to achieve.

At the end of his report, Zared stated that he is planning to organise “Hill Days” with lawmakers and staffers and that he has received the EC accomplishments report for the last semester (except for ex-VP Sean Mascarenhas). He asked the senators whether they wanted these reports in a particular format since there is no specific guidance regarding this in the Constitution. It would be great for the future EC with the Senate and the Rules and Constitution Committee to formalise a template for these reports.

Secretary's Report:

Secretary Aditya Patankar gave an update on the graduate student mentorship program that he has been working on with the International Student Advocate Gagan Somashekhar and the Graduate Student Advocate Julia Brown. Based on the inputs from the Center for Inclusive Education, they have decided to just collect some statistics for this semester and try to implement the mentorship program next semester. The secretary also stated that he has been working on the SBU Survival guide, and any inputs regarding it would be appreciated. He will be sending an email to the current senators to check whether they are still interested in being the senators for their respective departments and has been actively working on the certification of new senators. The secretary has also been working on establishing a University Alumni Outreach chapter in Seattle and has been working with the GSO President on the same.

Speaker's Report:

In her report, Speaker Helena Van Nieuwenheuzen gave important updates regarding the GSO tax clinics and urged the Senators to forward the Sprintax codes to all the graduate students in their departments. She also asked the senators for suggestions regarding possible interviewees for the Grad Student Radio hour. Speaker Helena being the chair of the Rules and Constitution committee has been working with them to come up with amendments to the Constitution and

Bylaws and asked for any suggestions regarding the same. She is also planning on setting up an Immigration Clinic for students applying for OPT.

Unfinished Business:

Senator Ga-Ram Hwang suggested that the GSO should do something in order to raise awareness regarding COVID-19 vaccinations. Senator Noele Certain said that she is part of the 'Restarting Research' task force and said that only graduate students who teach in-person classes are eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccine, others are not. Senator William Thomas who is also a student representative on the Faculty Senate for the College of Arts and Sciences said that he raised this issue stating that the graduate students don't know what to do since they do teach in-person classes but they are not necessarily eligible for vaccinations and are unsure of the procedural requirements. He also said that the University is planning to have in-person classes where the capacity is less than 250 students. He said that the University is making provisions to make it easier for graduate students who work as TAs, RAs or GAs to apply for getting vaccinated.

Speaker Helena then moved to adjourn the meeting.