



## **Report of the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees**

Board of Trustees Executive Committee, December 4, 2014

Patrick Neary, Graduate Student Organization President

### **THE General Body – GSO Stance, Statement, Current Position**

The GSO Board issued a statement concerning THE General Body on Nov 12, detailing our position on the movement. We also released a [full accounting of the GSO's stances](#) on each of their demands, based on votes in the GSO Senate on related topics over the past three years. Both are available on the GSO's website ([gradorg.syr.edu](http://gradorg.syr.edu)). Overall, the GSO agrees with many of the overall themes of their demands, but not on all specific points. Furthermore, the GSO found that as of Nov 12, the students and administrators involved have been generally acting in good faith in negotiations. We have not endorsed or expressly supported the movement, but respect the longstanding tradition of student activism at Syracuse University.

In reviewing the final response from the Chancellor to THE General Body, we find many points of agreement throughout the document. While the GSO has a few small issues with some responses, we are broadly satisfied by the indicated desire to engage with the SA and GSO in longer discussions over how to implement the various agreed-upon solutions and actions. A few of our higher priority items on which we've found broad agreement are: broad commitments to improve mental health, raise the minimum TA/RA stipend by 7%, re-open comments on the vision and mission statements, and add more students to the Fast Forward teams. We appreciate the Chancellor's and his Executive Team's commitment to working with the student governments who collectively represent all students on campus.

The GSO is glad to see THE General Body move to a new phase, an encouraging step toward more sustainable actions. We are committed to working through established processes to enact changes and see promised changes are made, and generally hope all students are able to work through these processes. Additionally, with the coverage of recent events and the GSO's statement, many students have reached out to the GSO about issues and concerns we had not previously heard about and which we are now investigating. In particular, we have heard about a lack of medical insurance availability while TAs are on medical leave, comments on our communication efforts, and other items.

### **Budget and Tuition Group**

Regular meetings have been scheduled with the GSO and SA Presidents and other students, the Senior VP of Student Affairs, the Chancellor's Chief of Staff, the Provost, the Director of Budget and Planning, and the CFO. This group was formed by the Chancellor to discuss tuition increases and the budgetary need for said increases, as well as other budgetary issues. In particular, the GSO anticipates finalizing the minimum TA/RA stipend increases, a topic we've already begun productively discussing in the first

meeting. In the long term, we hope to use this group to increase the financial transparency of the university. This has been called for by a number of students and should restore some of the lost trust in the administration by demonstrating where tuition money is spent.

### **GSO Communications**

The GSO is committed to improving communication to the graduate student body. We have begun meeting with several communications directors to provide feedback on communication methods being used, especially recent announcements about the Fast Forward process. We have helped film several short videos about Fast Forward and gave input into the rollout of improvements to the Fast Forward website. The GSO has also pushed messages about the extended vision and mission statement comment period and opportunities to serve on the Fast Forward Working Groups to the student body via email and social media. With the increased efforts to engage directly with students, we hope to increase student buy-in with the entire process.

### **GSO Grant Program**

Since 2009, the GSO has run a student fee funded travel grant program for our fellow graduate students. This year, the program has seen significant growth, with a 90% increase in applicants over last year and a 41% increase over our largest applicant pool ever (all computed using Sept-Nov applicant data). This program has awarded over \$200,000 in grants over its lifetime and has proven to be one of our most popular and enduring programs. The GSO views the grant program as an excellent effort to directly benefit graduate students' professional goals. In addition, it ensures that every fee-paying graduate student can see a benefit from their fee, regardless of what they study or even where they are located. We are committed to continuing this program for the foreseeable future, as well as supporting any university efforts to improve opportunities for graduate student travel.

### **National Association of Graduate-Professional Students**

The GSO is a member of the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS – [nagps.org](http://nagps.org)), an association of graduate student governments across the nation. We have been active participants in many NAGPS activities this past year, including the recent Legislative Action Days in late September and the National Conference in early November. The GSO has exchanged best practices with other student leaders at these events, improving our own programming, communications, and advocacy efforts. Through NAGPS we advance issues critical to graduate students in Congress, especially those surrounding graduate student loan interest rates and the availability of subsidized Stafford loans, open access to government funded research, and the immigration status of international graduate students post-graduation. We are excited to have two Syracuse students elected to their Board of Directors for the coming year: Peta Long and Sam Leitermann.