



Report of the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees

Board of Trustees, May 9, 2015

Patrick Neary, Graduate Student Organization President

Student Health Insurance Requirement and Plan

Over the next two years the university is rolling out a new policy requiring all fulltime, matriculated students to hold appropriate health insurance. As part of this change, a new student health plan has been created. While the GSO supports efforts to ensure all our students have adequate access to healthcare, the rollout has been publicized and put into action in an extremely short timeline, with many policy decisions made without student input. Graduate students, especially international students and fellows, are impacted heavily by the changes being made. Some students will see themselves get better coverage but at a higher premium cost than their initial expectations when they came to Syracuse, while some fellows will see coverage changes as they are required to move from employee plans to the student plan or another plan of their choosing. After raising our issues, students are now included on the various implementation teams. Progress has been positive since then, as we have been able to raise points and help develop solutions, creating the best policy we can in this area. Communications continue to be a challenge, but with student involvement the GSO has been able to help answer students' questions and direct confused students toward appropriate offices.

Academic Strategic Plan

The Academic Strategic Plan draft presented to you represents a long public process to develop the university community's vision for the future of Syracuse University. This effort involved well over 1,000 individual comments submitted to the steering committee over the past year and direct participation of over 130 students, faculty, and staff on the committees and groups. The GSO is pleased the plan contains strong commitments to graduate programs, both masters and doctoral. While no plan can make everyone happy, we believe that it represents a broad participatory process and a bold vision for the future of the university.

Chancellor's Workgroup on Sexual Violence Prevention, Education and Advocacy

The Chancellor's Workgroup on Sexual Violence's final report, issued in December, was well received by the community. The GSO thanks Chancellor Syverud for accepting all the recommendations therein. We are currently looking for an implementation timeline. A timeline and public progress toward implementing the recommendations will go far in restoring the trust lost when the former Advocacy Center was closed last May.

Express Yourself

The five workgroups arising from the Express Yourself forum in October have worked diligently over the spring semester and issued initial reports. Each group produced a series of observations and recommendations, or is finalizing its recommendations. These recommendations include concrete plans and program suggestions. The GSO is very glad to see such significant work done on issues of diversity and inclusion, especially the groups' many specific, implementable ideas. Graduate students are eager to hear what will come of these ideas, particularly implementation timelines. The GSO supports suggestions to take a manageable number of the recommendations and implement them over the summer, in order to demonstrate that these reports are being taken seriously and that the university is taking concrete steps toward solutions.

Graduate Teaching and Research Stipends

The GSO reached an agreement with the university's upper administration this year on increases to the minimum graduate teaching and research assistantship stipends. After the first 7% increase took effect this year, we have jointly agreed on a 7% increase into next year and a 6.5% increase in the year following. At that point the minimum stipend will be at least \$14,814.15 for a nine month, 20 hour per week contract. We deeply appreciate the university's commitment to paying its graduate assistants fairly, considering the contract limitations imposed on students and the cost of living in the Syracuse area. The GSO will continue to monitor assistantship pay in the coming year, looking at the overall cost of living raises given to all assistants as well as following up on the final increase in the minimum stipend. We will also examine alternate work arrangements some school and colleges use that fall outside the traditional teaching or research assistantship pattern, as we have great concerns that some departments are using them to skirt the minimum stipend requirements.

The Cuse Conference

Held on April 19, the Cuse Conference was hosted jointly by SA, GSO, RHA, and ESF-USA. This conference brought students, faculty, staff, and administrative leaders together to discuss a variety of topics of concern. A central theme of the conference was finding common commitments from students, faculty, staff, and administrators, promoting a sense of joint community and responsibility. I personally thank the many university leaders who attended. The conference was a success, generating considerable discussions of concrete actions we can all take to improve Syracuse and the Syracuse experience.

Student Officer Elections

The GSO Senate held elections on the evening of April 22. Can Aslan (PhD student, Bioengineering) was elected as President for 2015-16. Can has been working with the GSO Board on several projects this year, including our outreach efforts and the recent health insurance changes. This year he also founded the ECS Graduate Student Organization, which represents the 1200 ECS grad students. I have the utmost confidence that he will serve ably and responsibly in the coming year. In addition, Sam Leitermann was reelected as Internal Vice President and Jose Muller was elected as the Comptroller. With a mix of new and returning Board members, the GSO will have an extremely strong leadership team in the coming year. At the same meeting the Senate approved our annual budget, allocating \$489,811.99 of expenses for the new fiscal year.

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students Conference

The GSO continues to be an active participant in the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students. Several of our students took part in the NAGPS Northeast Regional Conference at the University of Pittsburgh in April, exchanging information and learning about best practices from other graduate student governments from across the region. Rajesh Kumar, a PhD student in our Computer Science program, was elected the regional international student concerns chair. Peta Long (PhD, Mass Communications) currently serves as the Director of Communications on the NAGPS Board. Sam Leitermann (PhD, Mathematics) serves as the national Social Justice Chair on the NAGPS Board. Together, these graduate students continue a tradition of strong Syracuse representation within NAGPS.

I thank each and every one of you for your dedication to Syracuse University. I have had a wonderful experience working with the Board of Trustees on issues pertaining to graduate education over the past two years. I look forward to hearing from our new President, Can Aslan, about the exciting new work to take place next year.