



## **Graduate Student Organization President's Report**

Senate Organizational Meeting, September 3, 2014

Patrick Neary, GSO President

### **Fast Forward Syracuse**

The Chancellor, Kent Syverud, has created the Fast Forward Syracuse initiative, an effort to define and improve Syracuse University. This bold, fast-paced effort is comprised of three primary teams: (1) Strategic Planning Steering Committee, focused on creating a strategic plan for the university as a whole, defining what our values and priorities will be; (2) Campus Master Plan Advisory Board, creating a plan for the campus's buildings and priorities for new construction; and (3) Operational Excellence Steering Committee, working to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Collectively, these bodies will be making changes and defining the path Syracuse University will take over the next decade. Therefore, I lobbied for graduate student representatives on all these groups, and ancillary groups. I will represent the GSO on the Strategic Planning and Operational Excellence groups, with Sam Leitermann (Internal VP) representing us on the Campus Master Plan group. We also have representatives on most auxiliary support groups these have spawned.

These groups will be asking for a unified set of priorities from many groups on campus, including the graduate community through the GSO. As such, I am calling for a discussion of our priorities as graduate students. I will be asking each of our committees to prepare a small set of priorities and goals they want the university to take on through this process.

### **Advocacy Center**

On May 30, 2014, the Chancellor, Kent Syverud, communicated to the campus the shutdown of the Advocacy Center, a unit within Student Affairs that helps victims and survivors of sexual assault and relationship violence. Services were transferred to the Counseling Center, the Office of Student Assistance, and the Office of Health Promotion. This decision, made without any student input, was implemented by the following Wednesday, preventing students from effectively voicing their concerns before the closure. The new structure has considerable issues and concerns. Many students have spoken to the GSO and the administration about a loss of a safe and trusted space on campus, a loss of a sense of community, confusion over the change, and concerns about an ineffective system for true sexual assault advocacy. In addition, the nature of this decision – one made without student input or consideration and implemented on a highly accelerated timeline, is chilling. The GSO issued a joint statement with SA, and I have engaged Rebecca Kantrowitz, Dean of Student Affairs, the Campaign for an Advocacy Center, and SA to find solutions to these problems. I have made clear that the opaque method by which this decision was made is unacceptable, and have called for a review of the new system. A Workgroup on Sexual Violence Prevention, Education and Advocacy has been formed, on which the GSO has a representative (Sam Leitermann, Internal VP). In addition, I have lobbied for, and received confirmation on the creation of, a permanent Student Advisory Board. The board, with undergraduate and graduate representatives, would advise Rebecca Kantrowitz on decisions and actions within the division of Student Affairs, in an effort to prevent this type decision from occurring again.

### **Student Affairs Advisory Group**

The Operational Excellence group, Bain Consulting, and Rebecca Kantrowitz, Dean of Student Affairs, have all agreed that a student advisory group would be useful, working with Dean Kantrowitz on issues and decisions that arise within Student Affairs. This body, likely 15 members in size, with 4-5 graduate students and 10-11 undergraduates, will have GSO and other representatives on it. I will be looking for volunteers to serve on this critical body, which will meet roughly once every other week. I am also collecting and processing other graduate organizations or communities that should have a seat on this group. Please contact me at [gso@syr.edu](mailto:gso@syr.edu) if you are interested.

### **Maternity Leave & Childcare Stipend**

Early this summer I met with Kal Alston, Senior Vice President of Human Capital Development, and Eric Spina, Vice-Chancellor and Provost, to discuss the current situation with TA's maternity leave and contractual issues in general. At this meeting, all parties agreed that a more precise guide for departments was needed, and Kal Alston was to write up an official maternity leave policy for graduate student assistants. In addition, Eric Spina agreed that assistantship contracts need to be better standardized, and would look into problem situations that had developed recently.

Also, the Childcare Advisory Board has finished work on the new childcare stipend. Starting in the spring, students will be able to get a payment from the university for each qualifying child they have for approved childcare expenses. Details on timing and amounts will be forthcoming. This funding comes from the university's fringe benefit pool and not from student fees.

### **Orientations**

The GSO, for the first time, produced professional brochures for orientation programs. We participated in the new International Graduate Student activity fair, at which we talked to over 300 new students. We also participated in 35 different department or college-level orientation programs, speaking to over 1200 new graduate students and distributing brochures and information packets. This represents over 25% of the entire graduate student body. With this effort, for which I thank Peta Long, Sam Leitermann, Vantiel Elizabeth Duncan, Sarah Ledford, Amy Burnette, and Dan Moseson, the GSO has higher penetration and visibility amongst new students than ever before.

### **New Committee Structure**

At the end of spring 2014, the Executive Board was tasked with analyzing the GSO's committee and liaison structure and was instructed to report back at the first meeting of the fall semester. The Board found the existing committee structure lacks the flexibility to adapt to new developments within the university as well as new interests of the Senate and the student body, while also having such specificity to risk substantial inaction from year to year. We also found the existing liaison structure does not encourage proper reporting to the Senate of liaison actions or enables liaisons to determine what positions the Senate would like them to take. As such, a major restructuring is recommended, as per resolution 15.02.