



President's Report to the Senate

Senate Budget and Elections Special Meetings, April 22, 2015

Patrick Neary, President

A President's Report is unusual at the Budget and Elections meeting, but as my final meeting before the Senate, I felt it proper to issue one final report. The past two years have been a fantastic experience filled with many accomplishments made possible by our collective teamwork. It has been a pleasure to serve you and the entire graduate student community, and I look forward to assisting with our transition to a new Senate and Executive Board in the coming weeks.

Annual Budget

The budget (Resolution 15.20) is placed before you tonight as recommended by the Finance Committee. I thank all the members of the Finance Committee, Sarah Ledford, Comptroller, and Jose Muller, Financial Secretary, for their hard work in preparing the budget. It is always a difficult task and one that is crucial to our ongoing functioning. The budget is a serious task for all of us, as it represents our decisions on how we spend the Graduate Student Activity Fee.

I am extremely pleased with the budget presented this year, which represents a strong spending plan for 2015-2016. The GSO operates a wide range of programs, grants, and events, which all require some level of support and resources. I believe this budget appropriately funds these events, programs, and organizations. I heartily endorse its passage by the Senate.

Transition Plans

One of the most important tasks for any leader is to prepare and train the next leadership team. I look forward to working with the newly elected Executive Board and moving through the transition process. The old Board has plans to spend a considerable time (likely a weekend's worth) training and discussing future plans with the new Board. We will need to transition our knowledge on the GSO's and University's workings to the new individuals to ensure the GSO will maintain effectiveness going forward. In addition, I plan to introduce our new President and other officers as needed to various university administrators, to build on the personal connections my team and I have built in the past years. I expect the new Board to emerge ready for success in the new year.

Health Insurance Update

The health insurance situation is stabilizing. Students who have specific questions should now contact Health Services (Palma Cassano - pcassano@syr.edu or Ben Domingo - bjdoming@syr.edu). Generally, students should consult the health services website, health.syr.edu, for more information. Many specific points have been cleared up: employees will stay on the employee plans until the GSO and administration agree on something else, if we agree. Fellows are being moved off the employee plans due to legal requirements surrounding who can and cannot be on an employee health plan, coupled with the fact that fellows are not employees. The difference in premium costs and any payment plan charges will be covered by the Graduate School. Payment plans do exist, for all students in any situation, and therefore for students being charged for the insurance plan.

Many questions surrounding international students have been answered, and those students with more questions have been directed toward Health Services. The plan information will be released on May 1, we are currently waiting on state approvals and Aetna compliance to finish reviews, as well as a university review. Communication plans have been reviewed by myself and our ad-hoc committee, with Can Aslan on the university's communications committee for this change.

We have now moved on to long-term planning. This includes determining the students to go to the university/student insurance benefits committee. The ad-hoc committee also drafted a plan for how we will approach that committee. In particular, there are specific goals we have listed as well as a plan for an approval process. The committee expects to recommend to the Senate in the fall that we refuse to approve any further changes or transitions without a student referendum. The committee also expects to make a similar recommendation toward all non-employees and the composition of the Aetna plan for students in general.

Fast Forward

The Academic Strategic Plan short version has been updated to reflect the comments submitted by the university community. A revised version will be made public soon and will be presented to the Board of Trustees on May 8. Also, a full version is being prepared, to be ready at the end of the summer, expanding on the short version. Expect that version to come out in fall. Once these plans are approved, the university plans to create an implementation committee to lead our adoption of the priorities expressed in the document. This group and its subgroup will have student members, including graduate students.

The Campus Framework is also wrapping up, with presentations to the university community today and tomorrow. Given the long term nature of a campus framework, this plan will be slowly adopted over the coming years. Additionally, Operational Excellence continues to look at various business areas to find places to save money. Students in Whitman have been involved in creating business cases for the various scenarios we have been examining.

Provost Search

The University Senate on April 15 voted on the slate of individuals for the Provost search committee. I was selected as the graduate student representative. I encourage anyone thinking about a new Provost to contact me (pjneary@syr.edu). The committee has not met yet, I will update the Senate as it progresses.

With my service on the search committee, I will be continuing some representational duties past my term as President. These will be performed like any other Senator or other concerned graduate student, and subject to the usual approval processes involved. Seeing that I have been active in the GSO in some capacity for six years, I expected to transition out of an active role slowly. I will hand off all official duties as required and expected, but will continue to volunteer for occasional committees and other work, as I will not be graduating until May 2016 at the earliest.

Thank you all for your hard work, support, and tough questions this year. The GSO is stronger than ever before, due to your collaborative efforts. May the next year continue this growth!