



President's Report to the Senate

Senate Organizational Meeting, September 9, 2015

Can Aslan, GSO President

I would like to welcome all of you to the GSO Senate's first meeting of the new academic year, and encourage those who could not make it today to join us in our future meetings. I also would like to thank our former President, Patrick Neary, for his service to the graduate student body over the past several years. Together with the GSO Senators and Executive Board members, I look forward to serving the graduate students of Syracuse University this year and improving upon what has been built and accomplished by our predecessors.

Officer Elections

As per the GSO Constitution, we held our elections in April 2015. The Senate elected four officers to the Executive Board, six University Senators, and three Senators-at-Large. In today's meeting, we will be electing officers for the two remaining positions on the Executive Board, the Recording Secretary and Financial Secretary, five more University Senators to represent us in the University Senate, and three more Senators-at-Large to represent graduate students in the GSO Senate. We will also ask for volunteers to join the standing committees of the GSO. These committees vastly increase our capacity to work within several themes at once.

Most positions do not require any prior experience. Serving as an officer / senator is a great experience, in terms of professional development and self-improvement, and I encourage you to join us if you would like to learn more about and gain experience in student governance, while serving to the graduate student body at Syracuse University.

Academic Strategic Plan Implementation Oversight Committee (ASPIOC)

As part of the Fast Forward Syracuse initiative (fastforward.syr.edu), following the first phase of the Academic Strategic Plan, the planning phase, an oversight committee was formed to guide the implementation phase. The charges of the Oversight Committee include convening sub-committees and working groups, developing objectives and strategies, metrics, and an implementation timeline, providing oversight, and ensuring and reporting continuous progress.

The presidents of both undergraduate and graduate student organizations, SA and GSO, were asked to serve on the ASPIOC. The Committee will have several working groups, each of which will include faculty, staff, and student representatives. These working groups will be organized around the six overarching themes identified in the Academic Strategic Plan, including the student experience, discovery, internationalization, commitment to veterans and military-connected communities, innovation, and One University.

The deadline for the nominations for the implementation working groups is September 14, 2015. I ask the GSO Senate to help identify graduate students to serve on these working groups. If you are interested in serving on one of these working groups or know a fellow graduate student who would be interested, please reach out to me via e-mail (caslan@syr.edu), as soon as possible.

For more information on the initiative, please visit fastforward.syr.edu.

New Health Insurance Requirement: Updates

First, I would like to broadly explain what the new student health insurance requirement is for those who just started their studies at SU or are not subject to the requirement this year and would simply like an overview. You can also find previous reports by former presidents on the GSO website.

The University leadership has made the decision to require all students to have health insurance that is compliant with the Affordable Care Act (ACA) by Fall 2016. This decision was based on several factors, most importantly to ensure that students have good health insurance, preventing unexpected health care expenses from jeopardizing financial stability and completion of a degree. Syracuse University was one of the last private research institutions across the nation to implement this requirement. The academic year of 2015-16 was planned as the first phase of implementation, requiring all new full-time students, new and returning international students, and graduate fellows (new and continuing) to have ACA-compliant health insurance. The University has signed a contract with Gallagher Student Health, an independent insurance program administrator, and together built a customized student health plan provided by Aetna Student Health, a health insurance company. The customized plan is offered for \$1,890 to students who are subject to the requirement, and for \$2,742 to students who are not subject to the requirement this year. All students who are subject to the requirement were automatically enrolled in the Aetna Student Health Insurance Plan. Up until September 8, 2015, students were able to provide proof of acceptable (“comparable”) coverage purchased through a different health insurance provider and waive out of the Aetna plan.

When the University’s decision was announced, it also included the removal of TAs/RAs/GAs from the employee health insurance plan (POMCO). The GSO Senate has sent a letter of censure to the Chancellor relating to student employees being removed from POMCO and the increase in cost for international students. We received a response signed by Rebecca Reed Kantrowitz, Senior Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs, and Ben Ware, former Dean of Graduate School. The response included assurance of student involvement in the implementation process and planning for the following academic year, and eligibility of student employees to POMCO and keeping their eligibility until “a student health insurance plan is deemed agreeable by representatives of the GSO and the University administration.” At least one graduate student representative has been sitting on all student health insurance committees since March 2015, and more students will be asked to serve in the Student Health Insurance Benefits Group, which will be formed this month and charged with determining how we will move forward for 2016-17.

Students have expressed several concerns and issues with the new requirement and its implementation over the past six months. All concerns and issues have been promptly communicated to and shared with the working groups. I have observed an extraordinary effort by everyone serving in the working groups in coming up with solutions to every single issue, as quickly as humanly possible. One major concern was

—and might remain to be— the increase in cost of attendance for returning international students. The University still requires all international students to have ACA-compliant health insurance starting this year, but the Bursar's Office has agreed to work with students who have financial constraints to come up with manageable payment plans.

Students can visit the Syracuse University Health Services website (health.syr.edu) for FAQs on the health insurance requirement. Fellow can contact Gabby Chapman, Associate Dean of Graduate School, student employees can contact the HR Service Center, and international students can contact the Slutzker Center for further questions.

Syracuse Welcome Shuttle Service

An initiative, in collaboration between Enrollment Management, Office of First-Year and Transfer Programs, and the GSO, to transfer new incoming students from the Syracuse Airport and Regional Transportation Center to Syracuse University campus and campus area, has been successfully completed by the end of August 2015.

The Syracuse Welcome Shuttle Service provided a warmer welcome to incoming students by providing transportation from the airport and the train and bus station, while giving us a chance to connect with incoming students and introduce our organization and its services. Due to unforeseen changes in administration, I had to take on the role of project manager, setting up almost all elements of the program and running it.

Multiple e-mails to all incoming undergraduate and graduate students were sent with information about the transportation service and links to 'shuttle request forms' to collect arrival information. Students were communicated with directly to confirm requests and answer their questions. 11 student drivers, who were eligible graduate students, were hired to drive two 12-passenger vans from August 3rd to 27th between the hours of 10 am and 10 pm. A total of approximately 350 students were transported to the campus or accommodations near the campus. The total cost to the GSO, as approved by the Senate in April 2015, was \$4,000.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our student drivers for being very patient as we worked through all the issues, and thank them for all their service and efforts. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Nancy Cooper, Office Coordinator in Enrollment Management, Gabby Chapman, Associate Dean of Graduate School, and Stephanie Irwin, Director of Administration in Enrollment Management, for their tremendous help and support in setting up and running this project, even though none of them had been involved in the initial planning process.