



Report of the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees

Board of Trustees, Full Board Meeting, May 14, 2016

Can Aslan, Graduate Student Organization President

Free Speech Report

Background

In Fall 2014, all three student organizations at SU (Student Association, Student Bar Association, and Graduate Student Organization) passed virtually identical resolutions “supporting a change to the Syracuse University Computing and Electronic Policy’s definition of harassment so as to protect free speech.” Chancellor Syverud took immediate action and formed a working group to address this issue. The working group, led by Professor David Rubin, presented their report to Chancellor Syverud, who personally forwarded it to the student organizations and asked for a joint report by April 15, 2016, after reaching out to their constituents.

Update

It is my pleasure to report that the combined efforts of GSO, SA, SBA, and the University Senate to analyze and gather feedback on free speech policies at Syracuse University has been successfully completed, and a final, unified report was presented to Chancellor Syverud on April 22, 2016. It has been a privilege to work on this important task with Aysha Seedat, President of the Student Association, Cody Carbone, President of the Student Bar Association, Zachary Greenberg, SU Law student and member of the original Working Group on Free Speech, and all members of the University Senate Academic Affairs Committee. We believe that this work, in its entirety, is paramount in making sure that Syracuse University is among the top institutions in the world that promote freedom of expression, educating students, and advancing frontiers of human knowledge. We have the utmost confidence in Chancellor Syverud and the University leadership that all recommendations will be included in changes and amendments to policies regarding free speech at our University, and the GSO looks forward to provide support during the implementation phase.

Student Health Insurance

Background

The requirement for all students at Syracuse University to hold adequate, ACA-compliant health insurance was implemented in the beginning of the 2015-16 academic year with a one-year phase-in period that included all international and incoming students. The Student Health Insurance Committee met weekly and worked diligently for the past couple of years to ensure that the University sponsored an affordable health insurance plan for students. In the 2015-16 academic year, the University offered a Gold-rated

health insurance plan managed by Aetna Student Health at an annual premium of \$1,890. All students, international and domestic, will be subject to the new requirement in the next academic year.

Update

As recently approved by the Board of Trustees, next year's student health insurance plan was upgraded to a Platinum-rated plan at an annual premium of \$2,230, which includes significant improvements in benefits. The GSO continues to support the new requirement, however, we urge the University leadership to continue taking into account the financial burden the new requirement brought on a number of graduate students, particularly international graduate students, who are not bound by the ACA.

Graduate Student Health Insurance

The Graduate Student Employee Benefits Working Group continues to gather information, perform benchmarking analyses, and discuss health insurance options for graduate student employees. I would like to thank the members of the Working Group for their efforts in collecting information and being understanding of the intricate nature of graduate student life. Feedback from graduate employees on their continued eligibility for the SU employee health insurance plan next year has been incredibly positive. We look forward to continuing our work over the summer and into the new academic year.

Travel Policy

The implementation of the new travel policy, requiring all faculty, students, staff, and administrators traveling on 'official University business' using 'University funds,' resulted in an increased burden (mental and financial) on many individuals due to the widely-reported inefficiency of BTI / Concur. This process has particularly been burdensome on many graduate students due to lack of communications to graduate students and miscommunications between the departments and administrators, though these issues have mostly been alleviated. The Travel Team, consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, and a graduate student representative, has been meeting regularly to discuss feedback received from the SU community and how to move forward. The Travel Team has done a spectacular job in analyzing the data, including real-time comparisons during meetings and peer-institution benchmarking, and will soon be ready to make recommendations to the University leadership. We would like to strongly urge the University leadership to take into account the soon-to-be-made recommendations by the Travel Team in order to prevent further loss of work time, funds, and frustration among the SU community.

Child Care Task Force

The GSO has recently formed a task force to address the child care issues and needs of graduate students at SU. The GSO has worked on child care issues with the University leadership and offices in previous years, and would like to continue to keep child care a top priority on our agenda as we prepare to finalize this academic year and get ready for the next one. I would like to extend my gratitude to Chancellor Syverud, who agreed to re-form the Child Care Task Force once Provost Wheatly takes office.

“Enough is Enough” Legislation

Background

The GSO worked with Senior VP and Dean of Student Affairs Rebecca Kantrowitz and Office of Health Promotion on the requirements of the recently passed “Enough is Enough” legislation, “a new, uniform sexual assault policy to protect New York’s college students.” The legislation requires all officers of registered student organizations (RSOs) to complete a sexual and relationship violence training prior to recognition. A GSO policy and online system were created to have all current and future officers of registered organizations go through the training.

Update

RSO officers have been trained via the online training system on Blackboard prior to the re-registration deadline on April 4, 2016. GSO Senators have also completed their trainings prior to the final Senate meeting on April 13, 2016. The GSO will continue to work with the Office of Health Promotion to improve the online training system(s) and keep track of officer trainings next year.

New York State Park Passes (Empire Passports)

As in previous years, the GSO offered Empire Passports to graduate students at a subsidized price of \$20 (original value at \$65.) The Empire Passport “provides unlimited day use vehicle entry to most facilities operated by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.” There has been an incredible interest from graduate students each year, and this year, the GSO –once again– sold 450 passes in just four days.

GSO Picnics

The GSO hosted its annual spring picnic on April 24th at the Inn Complete. The 2016 GSO Spring Picnic brought together over 400 graduate students from across the University to wind down at the end of a busy year and enjoy free food and drinks, games, and music with their colleagues, friends, and families. We look forward to welcoming (back) graduate students in August at our annual Fall Picnic, which, historically, is attended by close to 900 graduate students.

GSO 2016-17 Budget and Officer Elections

The GSO held officer elections on April 13, 2016. The GSO Senate elected Rajesh Kumar, PhD student in Computer and Information Science and Engineering, to serve as President for the 2016-17 academic year. Rajesh has been heavily involved in student governance this year, and I am confident that he will do an excellent job in representing graduate students to the Board of Trustees and the University leadership. The GSO Senate also elected me, Can Aslan (Bioengineering PhD student), to serve as the Vice President of Internal Affairs; Peta Long (Mass Communications PhD student) to serve as the Vice President of External Affairs; and David Lemon (Biology PhD student) to serve as Comptroller next year. The newly-elected executive officers will take office on June 1, 2016. The remaining two executive officer positions (Recording and Financial Secretary) will be filled at the elections to be held in the beginning of the Fall 2016 semester.

Final Note

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Syverud, Interim Provost Liddy, Senior VP and Dean of Student Affairs Rebecca Kantrowitz, and many other members of the University leadership and administration with whom I had the privilege of meeting and working with throughout the year. It has truly been an immense experience for me. I have no doubt that our incoming GSO President, Rajesh Kumar, along with the rest of the GSO Executive Board, will represent and serve graduate students well. I look forward to continuing to take part in our continued collaborative efforts next year.