



President's Report to the Senate

Senate Meeting, January 25, 2017

Rajesh Kumar, GSO President

University Senate on GSO's Sanctuary Campus Resolution

The University Senate discussed the GSO resolution 17.05 in its last two meetings. It received a tremendous amount of support from faculty, staff, and student senators. The Senate called upon the Chancellor to respond to all points of the GSO's resolution for declaring SU a sanctuary campus. The University Senate passed the following resolution in their last meeting:

RESOLVED: The Senate appreciates the thoughtful comments from the Chancellor in his December 7th letter to the community concerning undocumented students at Syracuse University and particularly applauds his signing of the letter calling for continued support of DACA by the incoming US president's administration. Still, concerns and ambiguities remain. The Senate thus calls upon the Chancellor to respond publicly to the Senate as soon as possible concerning all points of resolution 17.05 passed by the Graduate Students Organization. And, in addition, to clarify any implications he sees for SU in the declaration by the City of Syracuse Mayor on January 12th that "the resources of this city, including the Syracuse Police Department, will not be used to help enforce federal anti-immigrant policies."

I am sincerely thankful to Walter Donner, Guillermo Guasp-Perez, and the team for drafting the resolution 17.05 and actively pursuing it including responding to the questions and concerns that the faculty and staff members had during the University Senate meetings. The Chancellor had addressed many of the concerns that are raised through our resolution during his [winter message](#) and University Senate meetings. We will receive Chancellor's written response to the use of DPS related point soon, however, he needs more time to respond to the other key points including university making arrangements for continuation of degree program in the event of arrest, imprisonment, and/or deportation, or due to student reluctance to travel to or appear on campus.

New Administrative Appointments

M. Dolan Evanovich has been appointed Senior Vice President for Enrollment and the Student Experience. I will be meeting with him on a regular basis to discuss issues related to career services, graduate student and employee grievances, and housing and safety issues. Peter Venable, who was serving as the Interim Dean of Graduate School and Interim Vice President of Research has been appointed as the Dean of Graduate School and Provost of

Graduate Studies. A national search for the Vice President for Research will be launched, soon. Peter, while serving as the Interim Dean of Graduate School, has been actively involved in addressing issues with health insurance, ombudsperson, career services, and grad employee stipend and benefits. Amir Rahnamay-Azar will join SU as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) starting on February 15, 2017. The GSO is looking forward to working with these new officials and get the graduate student's concerns addressed in a timely manner.

Career Services for Grads

We have arranged a forum on grad student career issues with senior members of the administration, including Vice Chancellor and Provost Michele Wheatly, Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School Peter Vanable, and Senior Vice President for Enrollment and the Student Experience M. Dolan Evanovich. The session will be held on **Tuesday, January 31, 3:00-4:00 pm in Lyman Hall 114**. The focus of the conversation is to tell the administration about the different needs of different kinds of graduate students. So we have invited Graduate students from all programs and disciplines to participate actively. We have received 26 responses so far, and looking for at least 25 more.

Therefore, we request GSO senators to come and participate in person. To participate, please provide your details [here](#) or send an email to gso@syr.edu with your name, department, program, and SU email address by January 27.

Please consider in advance the following questions:

- What kind of career-related needs do you have?
- What should Syracuse University do to provide services that will meet your needs?
- What kind of career-related resources—advisors, faculty, career services professionals or administrators—have you used so far during your time at Syracuse University?
- What was your experience with those services?

If you are unable to attend please make your opinion heard by answering the above questions through the [online form](#). Don't miss the chance to let the administration know your needs and concerns.

Advocacy, activism, and shared governance at department level

Some of the departments have policies that adversely affect graduate students, especially, Ph.D. student's life on campus. Most of the students that are affected by these policies assume that these policies are the law of the land and nothing can be done so they never complain. For example, it was brought to my notice that a department has been cutting the stipend for its Ph.D. first-year students by half solely based on the results of the first qualifying exam (QE1). The relevant policy states that "A student who fails in the first attempt may retake the exam in the following year, but may not receive a full (20 hr/wk) TA appointment during the second year". First of all, QE1 first attempt results should not be taken as the sole basis to cut the stipend as the concerned student is given another attempt and yet to prove his/her eligibility. Secondly, stipend cuts not only add to the suffering of the

respective graduate students but also impact their ability to deliver their responsibilities as a TA, GA, or an RA, and even focusing on their qualifying again. As a result, the quality of teaching, grading, and research may go down, the attrition rate might go very high.

The department went even beyond its policy and served letter of stipend reduction with immediate effect (in the middle of the semester) to one of the students in the afternoon on January 19th and were asked to respond (accept or reject) the offer by January 21st (Saturday). Thus, the students were given less than 36 hrs of time to decide on their course of action. It was noted that the students were given one year of full research assistantship while joining SU, and that is often one of the biggest factors affecting their decision to choose this university. The case was brought to my notice. I sought an immediate intervention by the higher authorities on the matter and got the immediate stipend cut decisions reversed.

In my view, the main reason for the existence of such policies is -- these policies have been created and enacted without involving or listening the student's point of view. Hence, the GSO needs to strengthen the advocacy and activism at the department level. I request departmental GSOs to actively participate in policy, and decision making process of their respective departments. Also, I request the member of the senate to work toward changing such policies and be vigilant in any of the matters that is adversely affecting graduate students.

Ombuds Office

Provost Wheatly announced during the December University Senate meeting that LaVonda Reed, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and her team have finalized the model for Ombudsperson office. She highlighted that the model does include mechanisms to address grievance of graduate students. According to LaVonda Reed, her team is currently working on the logistics of the office. The GSO keeps pushing to expedite the process of establishing the Office of Ombudsperson.

Graduate Assistant's Stipend Increase

The administration has agreed to increase the stipend of graduate assistants. The rate, duration, and method of the increase are still being negotiated. I will keep the senate posted on this matter.