



## **Report of the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees**

Board of Trustees Executive Committee, March 16, 2017

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### **GSO's Sanctuary Campus Resolution, DACA, and Travel Ban**

The GSO Senate unanimously passed a resolution (see Appendix 1) calling on the administration to declare Syracuse University a Sanctuary Campus. The key points of the resolution are : (1) make Syracuse University a sanctuary in order to support and protect students who are living in fear and uncertainty; (2) refuse to release information regarding the immigration status of our students, staff, and community members; (3) ensure institutional support for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and undocumented students on a strictly confidential basis; (4) in the event of arrest, imprisonment, and/or deportation, or due to student reluctance to travel or to appear on campus, the administration will make arrangements for online continuation of their degree programs; and (5) Syracuse University Department of Public Safety will not be used to help federal agents to enforce anti-immigration laws on campus.

The GSO thanks Chancellor Syverud for responding to the resolution through emails, winter address, and address to the University Senate. An ad-hoc committee has been created by the chancellor to study the concerns of DACA/Undocumented Students that addresses item 3 above. A subgroup from the University Senate Committee on Academic Affairs is exploring options to address item 4 above.

The travel ban executive order came as a shock for most of the graduate students. Through my interactions with international students at different forums and board meetings, I learned that most of the graduate students are worried about finding internships, jobs, visa status, F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT), continuation of financial support, travelling to conferences, home countries etc. The order has certainly left plenty of students in limbo and has created fear and mistrust. The GSO believes that the order is morally and ethically reprehensible and should not be tolerated. We are opposed to any such orders that are dangerous and damaging to the graduate students community across the nation.

### **Graduate Assistant Stipend Increase**

The agreement of the GSO with the administration for four consecutive (2014-17) increases in the **minimum stipend**, has enabled the university to bridge the gap of minimum stipend compared to its peers. As per the preliminary analysis provided by the administration, approximately 75% of SU graduate assistants are earning above the minimum stipend at SU. The analysis is based on data provided by the 28 peer institutions. However, the administration must keep increasing graduate employee stipends to close the gap in the **average stipends** compared to benchmark institutions.

Peter Venable, Associate Provost (Graduate Studies) and Dean of Graduate School affirmed the stipend increases for the academic year 2017-2018. He mentioned that the Schools and Colleges are expected to target a 2.5% overall increase to stipends for graduate students (including new admits) who have a benefits-eligible TA/GA/RA position and who are above the minimum stipend amount. He also mentioned that all schools/colleges have been advised to finalize stipend increments based on the above assumptions and asked to communicate with individual departments, as soon as possible, so that recruitment offers for incoming students can be finalized in a timely fashion.

The GSO senate welcomes the increase but believes that the increase percentage should have been more, as the gap in the **mode stipends** compared to benchmark institutions is quite large (~20%). In other words, *most of the peer institutions are offering 20% higher stipends than SU*. The GSO agrees with the administration that academic program-level benchmarking may be more effective and impactful for stipend increase. Therefore, the GSO requests the university administration to gather academic-program level stipend data from peer institutions and plan the increase accordingly to bridge the gap.

The GSO is thankful to the University leadership, especially Gwenn Judge, Peter Vanable, and Provost Wheatley for pursuing increases to graduate assistant stipends as evidenced by the closing gap in the minimum stipends compared to benchmark institutions.

### **Ombuds Office**

The University administration has agreed to our request to consider an Ombuds Office Model that includes mechanisms to address graduate student's grievances. LaVonda Reed, Associate Provost (Faculty Affairs), and Peter Vanable, Associate Provost (Graduate Studies) and Dean of Graduate School invited me to discuss the logistics, including the location, scope, reporting structure, and hours of availability. Associate Provost Reed mentioned that she will submit the final proposal to the Offices of the Provost and Chancellor by the end of this semester.

### **Childcare Subsidy**

Childcare support for graduate student parents has been an important concern for many years. The GSO appreciates Chancellor Syverud for recognizing the importance of providing proper childcare support for graduate students and faculty parents. Without proper childcare support, the graduate student parents face several difficulties; including not being able to attend classes that are offered beyond business hours; taking after-hours TA sessions; working on group homework, assignments, and exams; attending research group meetings; and fulfilling their responsibilities as teaching and/or research assistants, in a timely and effective manner. These problems sometimes lead to a poor GPA, poor productivity, anxiety, and mental health issues.

Availability and affordability have been the major concerns with the Early Education and Child Care Center and the Bernice Wright Nursery School located on South Campus. The EECCC uses a sliding scale to determine cost, adjusting the price based on parent income. The lowest fee is **\$134 a week**. The center takes a maximum of 60 children and the waitlist is about one to two years. More than 171 children are currently on wait list as the center follows a policy "once you get in, you're in until you graduate".

The short-term solution to the childcare issue may be to extend (reinstate) the childcare subsidy to the graduate student parents. The University offered childcare subsidy as a pilot program in Spring 2015. It was funded by the fringe benefits budget. Thirty-five students were awarded the subsidy. An amount of \$375 per eligible dependent child up to a maximum of \$750 per household (2 children) **per year** was awarded. In short, the pilot program costed approximately \$15,000. The Childcare Task Force of GSO can help with receiving, reviewing, and approving the subsidy applications, and GSO comptroller can help with the reimbursement process. The GSO urges the university administration to provide the funding and requests to find a permanent solution to childcare problem.

### **Graduate Student Activity Fee Increase**

The GSO senate unanimously passed a resolution (see Appendix 2) to increase the graduate student activity fee from \$40 per semester to \$50 per semester (\$100 per academic year). The finance committee cited the increase is due to increased GSO spending, specifically towards Service Providers, the Travel Grant Program, Registered Student Organizations (RSOs), and Special Programming. Moreover, the activity fee has been constant for past several years as well as revenues have been decreasing in line with

University enrollment figures. It may be worth noting that two similar resolutions were voted down by the GSO senate in the past

## **Appendix 1**

### **GSO Senate Resolution 17.05**

#### **A Resolution Calling for the Declaration of Syracuse University as a Sanctuary Campus**

**Whereas**, the Graduate Student Organization Senate recognizes the necessity to feel accepted, safe, and protected as part of the Syracuse community; and

**Whereas**, in a recent email to our community, Chancellor Syverud stated, "Syracuse University is built upon a deep sense of an inclusive community... a promise to include all voices, to listen to all viewpoints, and to embrace all members irrespective of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, citizenship, disability, veteran-military status and political views;" and

**Whereas**, our campus is home to a diverse group of students, staff, and workers. In order to realize that goal and to uphold the University's commitment to its values of diversity and inclusion, we must act to protect those members of our community who are most at-risk and vulnerable to the anticipated policies of mass deportation; and

**Whereas**, members of our community are likely to be affected by the president-elect's proposed anti-immigrant policy; therefore, be it

**Resolved**, that that the GSO calls on the Syracuse University administration to refuse to comply with immigration authorities regarding deportations or raids. Understanding that making our shared university a sanctuary is a concrete action that we can take to support and protect our students who are living in fear and uncertainty; and

**Resolved**, that the GSO calls on the Syracuse University Department of Public Safety to not act on behalf of federal agents to enforce immigration laws; and

**Resolved**, that the GSO calls for guaranteed privacy by refusing to release information regarding the immigration status of our students, staff, and community members; and

**Resolved**, that the GSO calls for the administrations to refuse any use of E-Verify; and

**Resolved**, that the GSO calls for the administration to assign an administrative office with the responsibility for counseling Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students on their educational situation and advertise that DACA student counseling services are available on a strictly confidential basis; and

**Resolved**, that in the event of arrest, imprisonment, and/or deportation, or due to student reluctance to travel to or appear on campus, the GSO calls on the administration to make arrangements for online continuation of their degree programs; and

**Resolved**, that the GSO urges that these measures are taken immediately so that DACA students can be assured of institutional support towards continuing in school next semester, retention, and completion of their degree programs; and

**Resolved**, that the GSO calls on the administration to invest in faculty and staff training to support undocumented students; and

**Resolved**, that the Syracuse University administration will respond in writing to these recommendations by the beginning of the spring semester.

## Appendix 2

### GSO Senate Resolution 17.06

#### A Resolution to Increase the Graduate Student Activity Fee

**Whereas**, the graduate student activity fee is currently \$40 per semester (\$80 per academic year) and has been constant for several years; and

**Whereas**, GSO spending levels have been generally increasing, specifically in the allocations toward Service Providers, the Travel Grant Program, Registered Student Organizations (RSOs), and Special Programming, while revenues have been decreasing in line with University enrollment figures; and

**Whereas**, the abovementioned services and programs, including RSO budgets, will need to be cut to balance the GSO's annual budget in the academic years to come, starting next academic year; and

**Whereas**, the GSO Constitution Article I, Section 13(r), gives the Senate power to "raise or lower the graduate student activity fee, adhering to reasonable timing requirements on fee changes imposed by the University;" therefore, be it

**Resolved**, that the Senate directs the GSO Comptroller to liaise with the University administration to raise the graduate student activity fee from \$40 per semester to \$50 per semester (\$100 per academic year.)