

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING: JUNE 14, 2012

MELISSA KIZINA, PRESIDENT OF THE GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION



I am pleased to provide you with my first report as the new President of the Graduate Student Organization. I had the privilege of meeting many of you during the Trustees events in May, and I look forward to working with you this academic year to continue to strengthen and improve the graduate student experience at Syracuse University.

The GSO made significant progress in a number of arenas in the last year under the leadership of Melissa Welshans, which included establishing a partnership with the Law School; streamlining the process for Graduate Student Organization approval and oversight; facilitating changes to TA and RA Award letters; updating the Benefits and Responsibilities Booklet; and aggregating a list of Crisis Resources for graduate students to our website, which represents a first step in providing grads with comprehensive resource for dealing with a variety of life crises.

In addition to maintaining our momentum, I have several goals that I would like to see our organization realize in the coming year:

Digitize all GSO-related forms and applications & revamp our website

With our newly-granted access to Frevvo, the graduate school's form client, the executive board intends to make all forms available electronically for the 2012-2013 academic year. The aims here are to help reduce the amount of paper used in our daily operations and to make all of our application processes more efficient. The new Executive Board is enthusiastic about revamping our web presence, making it more user-friendly and expanding our capacity to showcase student events online.

Ensure maximum childcare benefits for graduate students

While our relationship with our childcare providers on campus has improved in recent years, I'd like to work closely with our Family Issues Committee to ensure maximum access to childcare for graduate student parents. We have also discussed the option of exploring relationships with childcare providers outside of the university.

Assess the feasibility of implementing a campus-wide family leave policy for graduate students

While some departments make accommodations for maternity and/or paternity leave for graduate students, there are currently no set or standard policies at SU, though other institutions are making major headway in this arena.

I hope to open a conversation with the administration about providing guaranteed support for grad students who choose to start families while they are enrolled here. This project will begin

with extensive research into the policies that are increasingly being introduced on campuses nationwide, as well as the current practices of departments at Syracuse and of our sister institutions.

I firmly believe that as graduate school becomes necessary for an increasing number of career paths, a supportive campus-wide policy regarding family leave will be among the most important factors that will keep Syracuse competitive and ensure that our university is able to attract the best and brightest talent.

Pursue a more comprehensive safety system for classrooms

The tragic school shootings that have taken place over the past several years have raised awareness around issues of campus safety and the necessity of organized warning systems to minimize the number of people that might be placed in harm's way. We have witnessed several instances where students and teachers have avoided potentially fatal situations simply by being able to lock intruders out of classrooms, and I will be working to bring this extra level of safety to our campus.

The first steps in this pursuit will involve contact with our head of the Department of Public Safety, Tony Callisto, and research into the steps that other campuses have taken to implement locking systems on classroom doors.

This is one of those initiatives that is so often undertaken only after a tragedy has occurred. I believe that Syracuse University needs to take a close look at our emergency procedures and make certain that every possible measure is in place to ensure the safety of our students, instructors, and staff.

I see the preceding aspirations as my main foci in the year to come, but there are other irons in the GSO's fire as well. As always, continuing to work to broaden the GSO's impact on graduate students across disciplines through outreach and awareness-building will be a central objective.

I have set forth an ambitious agenda for the upcoming year that will rely on the support and feedback of our senate, the administration, and of course, the Trustees. I look forward to our meeting on June 14th and to working with this Board for the continual improvement and advancement of Syracuse University.