

President’s Report to the Senate

October 31, 2018 Regular Business Meeting

Jack Wilson, GSO President

**Fall 2018 Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days**

At the beginning of this month, Rajesh Kumar, Khem Sedhai, Rui Gomez, and I attended the Fall 2018 Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days (LAD). There, we met with staffers from 3 Senate and 5 House offices in two states, including the office of John Katko (NY-24). There, we advocated for domestic renewal of F-Type visas, expanding the length of Optional Practical Training for non-STEM majors, and programs to expand the use of open textbooks and open-access journals.

At the LAD, we learned much about how other schools go about advocating outside their universities. In short, our external advocacy organization will require structural improvements if we are to match our peers in effectiveness. I’ve identified multiple areas where we can improve and professionalize our external advocacy efforts. These include professionalizing and giving some authority to the committee tasked with external advocacy and the development of a policy platform. The creation of the policy platform would be the first step.

**Towards a Policy Platform**

A policy platform is, simply, a list of principles the organization collectively believes. Its purpose to guide and offer legitimacy to advocacy efforts by myself and other advocates. It also allows other individuals to know what we’re for or against as an organization.

I’ve attached first draft of a possible policy platform the GSO may adopt. The content is borrowed from our sister organization at MIT with their permission and encouragement. I request that each committee (excepting Finance and Travel Grant) go through this platform and recommend changes to items and sections relevant for each committee (there will be significant overlap in this). I’ll be presenting a final version for Senate approval at our November 28th meeting.

**Housing**

Starting this fall semester grads were given the option of staying on South Campus at a subsidized rate. Preliminary feedback has been positive, however we are keeping an eye out for improvements to the system. These issues include NYS-mandated random unannounced fire/safety inspections, availability of AC units over the summer, and availability of laundry services over the winter break.

Beyond that, I and members of the University administration are taking a step back and (re)considering the broad strategy for how best to ensure safe and affordable housing for grads. From that we can determine what further measures need to be taken.

**Slutzker Center**

After Pat Burak’s July 2nd announced dismissal from the position Director of the Slutzker Center, a search committee was formed comprised solely of faculty and staff. Final candidates will hopefully be named soon and we will have the opportunity to meet them before the search committee comprised solely of faculty and staff makes a decision. To that end, if there are any international students interested in participating in these meets please let me know.

The selection of a new director also affords the University an opportunity to grow the Center to meet its core mission. Over the past couple decades, the number of international students has grown manyfold and the bureaucratic overhead necessary to keep an international student at SU has grown by as much. The result is that the Slutzker Center now spends much more time doing that the things that are necessary in order to keep an international student here, and less time doing the things that it should be doing to ensure that international students thrive. In my most recent report to the Board of Trustees I have therefore asked for an expansion of the resources available to the Slutzker Center that matches the increased load that has been placed on it.