

55th GSO Senate

Meeting Minutes

Oct 12, 2022

**Executive Summary:** On Wednesday, October 12, 2022, the Graduate Student Organization held its second regular meeting of the Senate in Room 500 of the Hall of Languages from 5:30 PM to 8:30 PM. At the meeting, the director of Student Legal Services spoke about his office and the services to which students have access. Five at-large senators were elected to the GSO, and the GSO President gave a report summarizing the status of the push to increase the minimum stipend, the graduate housing initiative, and the honorary degree revocation process. Christopher Arnell, APS Biology and Chair of the GSO Graduate Employment Issues Committee, spoke about the problem with the current rate at which stipends are set for graduate students, and argued that the current minimum is too low. Vito Iaia, At-Large Senator, was confirmed as the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. The GSO also passed a motion to limit debate to 15 minutes per funding application at the present and future meetings. The GSO Diversity Committee’s name was changed to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Committee and its Committee Charge was updated. The next GSO meeting will be on Wednesday, Nov 9, 2022, at 5:30 PM in Newhouse Communications Center, 3-141.

1. Call to order - 5:37 PM
   1. 38 senators present
      1. 34 present
      2. 3 online
2. Land acknowledgement and opening remarks - 5:38 PM
   1. VP of Internal Affairs
      1. Happy 54th birthday GSO
      2. Robert’s Rules Cheat Sheet
         1. General notes
            1. Can request a recess at any moment
            2. “Point of personal privilege”
            3. To suspend further consideration, say “I move that we postpone the item” and we can postpone to a later time or indefinitely
            4. To introduce a primary motion, say “I move that”
3. **Guest speaker – Christopher Burke, Director of Student Legal Services – 5:46 PM**
   1. A not-for-profit law firm that represents the student body of Syracuse University and SUNY ESF. Founded in 1972, independent of the university and funded strictly through the GSO and the Student Association (Undergraduate). It is a free service.
   2. The firm works on land and tenant law and lease reviews. They can contact the landlord if a student is having issues, and can represent the student in court if the student is getting evicted.
   3. They also work on Title IX, criminal matters, felonies, traffic and speeding violations, and DWIs
   4. They do not represent students as plaintiffs, nor as immigration attorneys
   5. Questions – 5:56 PM
      1. How many students are seen? – VP of External Affairs
         1. See about 2,000 students and about 900 are grad students
      2. Could you help students get deposits back? – Senator
         1. Yes; can try to negotiate with landlord
   6. Concluded at 6:01 PM
4. **Move for recess for ten minutes – recess from 6:01 PM - 6:10 PM**
5. **Meeting called to order – 6:22 PM**
6. **Elections - 6:23 PM**
   1. At Large Senators
      1. Represent the entire graduate student body
      2. Attend all GSO Senate Meetings
      3. Actively serve on at least one GSO Standing committee
   2. Nominations
      1. Roger Rosena
      2. Dominic Wilkins
      3. Partha Sai Preetam Reddy
      4. Komal Sharma
      5. Pulak Jain
   3. A round of questions and answers commenced
      1. What committee would you like to serve on?
         1. Pulak – Outreach committee
         2. Komal – Diversity committee
         3. Partha – Academic program
         4. Dominic – Climate action
         5. Roger – PAC Grant Committee
7. **Results: all nominees were elected – 6:42 PM**
8. **President’s Report – 6:44 PM**
   1. Funding efforts moving forward
      1. Increasing the minimum stipend
         1. Current minimum is $16,485 over a 9-month academic year period. This equates to $1,831 a month
         2. Desired minimum is $18,612. This is based on a survey that the GSO conducted last year with the finding that a monthly stipend should be $2,068 per month.
      2. Graduate Housing Initiative
         1. The Graduate School & Housing Office will move forward with implementing a virtual tour option, in which students can view certain housing options and receive an overview of the housing process prior to arriving on campus.[[1]](#footnote-1)
      3. Honorary Degree Revocation
         1. In Spring 2022, the University Senate passed a resolution to rescind the Honorary Degree granted to Rudy Guiliani in 1989 by the Syracuse University College of Law. Several student University senators signed on to the resolution, including students from both the GSO and the Student Association (SA). Since then, Syracuse University has issued an honorary degree revocation report written by the Office of the Chancellor. It is currently under review by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, and the Chancellor’s Office has encouraged feedback.
   2. **Questions/comments**
      1. Christopher Arnell, APS Biology
         1. Spoke about the problem with the current rate at which stipends are set for graduate students, and argued that the current minimum is too low
            1. Noted that “with the resources that Syracuse University has, they should not be looking to other universities to follow but paving the way themselves and leading the pack. When looking to other universities for things like stipend amounts, Syracuse University overlooks the lived experiences of our own graduate employees.”
            2. He also included his own testimony:

“When speaking to my own Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, I asked them if they considered the current living wage when making decisions about stipend amounts for the various programs in the college. They told me they do not. They were also under the impression that the living wage was around $20,000/year. This showed me just how out of touch the administration is to the graduate employees’ lived experiences. Syracuse University stipulates in the graduate assistant handbook that a “full time” assistant cannot seek outside work. This forces us to hold our assistantship jobs as our sole source of income. And yet, Syracuse University does not pay a living wage. Now, this is either because they do not care to do so, or remain purposely ignorant to this fact. Regardless, it befits this Graduate Employee Issues Committee, this GSO assembly, and the president of the GSO to advocate for living wages here at Syracuse University and not try and match what poor wages are given at other institutions. To ask for anything less is an insult to those we represent, the graduate employees.”

* + - 1. Currently, the living wage in Syracuse NY for a single person with no dependents is $34,037 pre-tax ([MIT Living wage calculator](https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/45060)). The net living wage (the wage that one must receive (take-home) in their bank account each year to be earning a living wage) is $27,257. This assumes a tax rate of 19.92%. However, graduate employees do not pay FICA, which is set at 7.65% in 2022. As a result, the minimum that graduate students should be paid, if they are to receive a living wage, is $31,070 for a 12-month stipend and $23,302 for a 9-month stipend.
    1. Question:
       1. Who is responsible for implementing the proposed changes?
    2. Response:
       1. President

The estimate was based on the cost of living as of 2021, and then multiplied by 9

* + - * 1. The president will be the one advocating
        2. Assistantships are done by minimum pay calculations

1. **President’s report concluded at 7:03 PM**
2. **VP of Internal Affairs - 7:06 PM**
   1. State of the Senate
      1. Tested a new recruitment strategy involving the engagement of RGSO leadership for outreach; proving effective. We now have the largest Senate with the broadest representation in many years, and we hope to keep it growing, as well as to make this process repeatable year after year.
      2. Academic program senators – 46 certified
         1. 19 from historically under-represented programs
         2. 9 seats from last year left unfilled
         3. PAIRA elections confirmed
      3. Elected: 14 (+6?)
      4. Executive Board Members: 7
      5. Total Voting Members: 65 (+6) (Quorum: 22)
   2. State of the GSO Committees
      1. All standing committees up and running, well-staffed.
      2. All standing committee Chairs and Co/Vice-Chairs appointed.
      3. Exception: Graduate Pandemic Committee is inactive; IVP is considering appropriate action.
      4. Committees will be called to report to the Senate throughout the year, per the GSO Constitution.
      5. IVP has implemented a new Committee Meeting report form to better track committee attendance and projects, which will help with building institutional memory.
   3. State of the RGSOs
      1. 26 Academic/Departmental RGSOs
      2. 20 Non-Academic/Non-Departmental RGSOs
      3. Newly Approved RGSOs: Indigenous Graduate Student Association (August 2022); Graduate Student Film Club (September 2022)
      4. Main and Overflow RGSO Officer Training complete.
      5. A major Internal Affairs project for the year will be working to consolidate and update RGSO policy and handbook.
3. **Confirmation hearing for President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Vito Iaia – 7:10 PM**
   * 1. Vito spoke about his background as an at-large senator and previous experience as the co-chair of the graduate pandemic committee for two years, saying “that time taught me that there are so many motivated students that have invaluable ideas that can make a significant difference when implemented...likewise, as Pro Tem, I’d like to harness and bring to light all of your ideas.” He also alluded to what he plans to do in the position, saying that “I plan on continuing my study of parliamentary procedure in order to become a resource for new and seasoned senators who wish to further develop their skills…as President Pro Tempore of te Senate, I will help move the Senate to a new level of efficiency, ultimately enabling it to provide a more powerful resource for every graduate student at Syracuse University. I can’t wait t continue to foster a united graduate student organization that we can all be proud of”
     2. Confirmation results:
        1. 41 yes, 0 No, 1 Abstention
4. **VP of Internal Affairs Continued- 7:23pm**
   1. Update on Parliamentarian Search: potential candidate identified. Currently undergoing appointment process. If all goes well, Confirmation Hearing to occur as early as the next regular meeting.
5. **VP of External Affairs Report – 7:25 PM**
   1. Status of Outreach/Engagement and events since September
      1. Outreach and Engagement Committee
         1. 50 members, with roles such as event supervisors and event, outreach, and decorations coordinators, as well as digital designers
         2. Outreach – Tabling Events
            1. International students welcome event had an attendance of about 200 students. There were meal vouchers given at thee even
            2. New student welcome event had about 500 students in attendance, with giveaways such as mugs, stress balls, meal vouchers, and brochures.
      2. Previous events include the End of Summer Mixer and the Fall Picnic.
      3. Post-event survey results:
         1. 134 responses
            1. Overall (80%)
            2. Organization (89%)
            3. Venue (73%)
            4. Food (45%)
            5. Drinks selection (60%)
            6. Music (66%)
            7. Games (63%)
      4. GSO Senators Welcome Gala on October 13 from 7:30 PM – 11 PM at the Sheraton hotel
      5. Festival of lights on October 30 at the Drumlins Country Club
      6. Hockey Tickets
         1. 50 tickets at 50% discounted prices will be given out through a social media campaign
      7. Civic engagement
         1. Awareness: NYS Vote Social Media Post. “Where to go in Syracuse Brochure” in progress
6. **Recording Secretary – 8:07 PM**
   1. All September grant application decisions were released on October 17, and the next deadline is October 15. October decisions will be released in early November
7. **VP of Internal Affairs** 
   1. **Motion to limit debate to 15 minutes per funding application at the present and future meeting – 8:10 PM**
   2. Voting results:
      1. 33 yes, 1 no
8. **RSO funding request – 8:13 PM**
   1. The Biology Graduate Student Organization requested $3000
      1. Approve by majority vote – 8:18 PM
9. **Resolution 23.01 – 8:20 PM**
   1. A resolution to update the GSO Diversity Committee Name and Charge
      1. The Diversity Committee’s charge and name was updated to the following:
         1. Charge:
            1. “The Diversity Committee studies and suggests solutions to problems affecting Syracuse University graduate students regarding internal diversity. This includes problems of race, ethnicity, gender identity, assigned sex, sexual orientation, national origin, cultural identity, religion, class, disability, and age. The committee also encourages and implements educational efforts involving internal diversity for all members of campus to improve the graduate student experience. This committee will make periodic reports to the Senate on these topics, and coordinate with GSO University Senators serving on University Senate committees related to diversity.”
         2. Name:
            1. The committee’s name was updated to the “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Committee”.
      2. Author(s): Kellin Tasber, Chair of the GSO Diversity Committee
      3. Sponsor(s): Komal Sharma (Vice Chair of the GSO Diversity Committee), Ayse Durakoglu (APS Anthropology), Saman Modiri (APS Supply Chain Management)
      4. Passed - 31 Yes; 1 No; 2 Abstentions
10. **Announcements and remarks for the record – 8:34 PM**
    1. Next meeting is Wednesday, November 9, at 5:30 PM in Newhouse Communications Center, 3-141.

**Recording Secretary**: Abiodun Adeoye

1. Current housing search resources: <https://experience.syracuse.edu/student-living/off-campus/housing-search/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)