



Daniel J. Kimmel
122 Lyman Hall
gsopresident@syr.edu

GSO PRESIDENT'S REPORT 6 September 2023

Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees

In May 2023, the Board of Trustees voted to amend the [Syracuse University By-Laws](#) regarding the election process for the graduate student representative to the Board of Trustees.

Article II, Section I of the University By-Laws reads: "*One graduate student, elected annually by the Graduate Student Organization, shall serve as the Graduate Student Representative to the Board without the power to vote.*"¹ The GSO President traditionally served in this role due to their position as the elected representative and advocate of the graduate student body to the Syracuse University Administration and Board of Trustees.² The Board changed the seat to an *appointed* position and invested *the power to appoint* the representative in the Dean of the Graduate School. By all appearances, this decision was made without graduate student input.

The Dean of the Graduate School notified the GSO Executive Board of the decision on 30 June 2023. We immediately stated our objections to the change. The decision obstructs the graduate student body's ability to select *who* shall represent them to institutional power and *how* they shall be represented to that power. It places firmer control of student advocacy in the hands of the very power to which the representative is to advocate. We thus believe the decision infringes the [student right](#) to establish representation and violates the role and purpose of student government.³ We believe it damages the integrity of [shared governance](#) to which this institution is purportedly committed.

¹ As of writing this Report, the Syracuse University By-Laws on the University Website under Charter & Governing Documents still contain this wording.

² [GSO Constitution Article II, Section 4 \(b-d\)](#): "The President shall:... (b) Represent graduate students and the GSO to the Board of Trustees of the University, to the University administration, and to the Graduate School; (c) Prepare regular reports to the Board of Trustees in consultation with the Executive Board, which shall be made public on the GSO website; (d) Advocate on behalf of graduate students to the University administration..."

³ Additional Resource: [1967 Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students](#).

We sought clarification from the Dean of the Graduate School, as well as from the Board of Trustees directly, on their reasons for disenfranchising the graduate student body of its power to elect its own representative to the Board. The University Secretary to the Board of Trustees informed us on behalf of the Board that the change was the result of a “routine review” of the Syracuse University By-Laws intended to ensure that “the evolving needs of the Syracuse University community are being met.” Thus the Board voted to change the by-laws regarding graduate student representative selection in a way that “will give more graduate students the opportunity to express interest in this role” and in a way that “aligns more closely with how the College of Law selects a representative.”

We find these justifications to be inadequate.

It is difficult to see how the decision meets the “evolving needs” of the *graduate student community* when it appears no graduate students, nor their elected representatives, were consulted in making the decision. It is a mystery how the decision “increases opportunity” for *graduate students* now that the selection process for this key advocacy position no longer involves graduate students beyond individual applicants’ “persuasive” letters of interest, and now that the position is managed directly by the Dean of the Graduate School on behalf of the Board of Trustees rather than by the assembled graduate student body practicing its right to establish representation.⁴

The GSO Executive Board counter-offered methods of appointment that would share the power to appoint the representative with the graduate student assembly while we seek a more satisfactory resolution. The proposals were summarily denied.

Furthermore, SU College of Law graduate students did not possess a representative to the Board of Trustees as of the start of the 2020-2021 Academic Year. In that year, the GSO advocated for the Board to grant SU College of Law graduate students a representative. Furthermore, in collaboration with the [Student Association](#), the GSO advocated that the Undergraduate, Graduate, and College of Law representative seats be granted *voting rights* on the Board of Trustees.⁵

⁴ See 25 July 2023 email from the Dean of the Graduate School titled *Seeking Applicants for 2023-2024 Board of Trustees Graduate Student Representative*: “Based on newly adopted University guidelines, the graduate student representative to the Board will be selected by the Graduate School dean... Preference will be given to students with persuasive letters of interest, the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing, and the capacity to synthesize and prioritize student input... The graduate student representative will meet regularly with the Graduate School dean and staff, participate in select meetings and committee work related to graduate education, and seek diverse opportunities to solicit graduate student input... To apply, submit a letter of interest, resume or CV and the names of at least two faculty members who can serve as a professional reference.”

⁵ See [GSO Senate Resolution 21.01](#) (A Resolution, in Collaboration with the Undergraduate Student Association, to Support the Creation of Student Trustee Positions on the Board of Trustees) and [GSO Senate Resolution 21.02](#) (A Resolution in Support of Representation and Voting Rights for College of Law Graduate Students within the Board of Trustees). Resource: [GSO Resolutions](#).

Voting rights were not conferred. The Board granted College of Law graduate students a representative seat, but the decision did not allow them to directly elect their representative through the [Student Bar Association](#) or otherwise.⁶ The reason for that stipulation remains unclear. The Undergraduate Representatives to the Board of Trustees remain directly elected by undergraduate students. The President of the Student Association serves in one of their two allotted seats.

Citing “alignment” with the opaque rationale regarding how the College of Law representative is selected does little to explain or justify the decision to roll back the graduate student right to establish graduate student representation.

We believe that the power to elect the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Trustees should remain in the hands of graduate students and their assembled representatives. We believe that the College of Law graduate students should be permitted to choose their own representative, should they desire it. And we believe, continuing the spirit of recent student advocacy, that the non-voting seats on the Board of Trustees (e.g. faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate, and College of Law) should be granted voting rights within the Board.

Such actions would go a long way toward demonstrating that this is an institution committed to shared governance not in name alone—but in reality.

⁶ Article II, Section I of the University By-Laws reads: “*One third-year law student, selected annually by the Dean of the College of Law from among eligible applicants through a process managed by the student affairs function of the College of Law administration, shall serve as the Law Student Representative to the Board without the power to vote.*”