



## GSO Senate Resolution 24.01

### **A Resolution Opposing the Disenfranchisement of SU Graduate Students & Calling for Elected Representation and Voting Rights on SU's Board of Trustees**

**Author(s):** Daniel J. Kimmel (GSO President & Chief Executive Officer); CJ Arnell (GSO Vice President of Internal Affairs & Chair of the Senate)

**Sponsor(s):** Prasad Ranka (University Senator), Adia Santos (University Senator), John Greenlee (APS Earth Sciences), Siwapon Chotikasatein (APS Food Studies), Caleb Fouts (APS History), Joe Beckmann (APS Mathematics)

**Date(s):** 4 October 2023 (Introduced)

**Action(s):** Passed. (24 Yes, 1 No, 1 Abstain)

**Chair of the Senate:** CJ Arnell

**President Pro Tempore of the Senate:** Roger Rosena

**Parliamentarian:** N/A

**President of the Student Body:** Daniel J. Kimmel

**Whereas**, in May 2023, the Syracuse University 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;<sup>1</sup> and,

**Whereas**, the Board of Trustees' amendment disenfranchised Syracuse University graduate students of the right to elect their own representation to the Board and its committees<sup>2</sup> and invested the power of appointment in the Dean of the Graduate School instead; and,

**Whereas**, it appears that neither graduate students nor their elected representatives were consulted in the making of this decision; and,

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<sup>1</sup> [Syracuse University By-Laws](#) Article II, Section I: "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." This is the clause's original wording before the decision to amend; as of the date of this Resolution's writing, the publicly posted By-Laws still convey this original wording.

<sup>2</sup> The graduate student representative to the Board of Trustees (1) participates *ex officio* on the [Board Academic Affairs Committee](#) and (2) on the [Board Enrollment and Student Experience Committee](#), as well as (3) reports to the Board at [Executive Committee](#) and [full Board](#) meetings.

**Whereas**, the Dean of the Graduate School notified the newly elected GSO Executive Board of this decision on 30 June 2023, when the graduate student government (the GSO Senate) was out of session; and,

**Whereas**, the GSO Executive Board found the justifications of the decision to be inadequate<sup>3</sup> and immediately stated objections to the decision, and the GSO Senate likewise objected resoundingly at its first regular meeting on 6 September 2023; and,

**Whereas**, those objections include that that the decision: (1) infringes the graduate student body's right to select who shall represent them to institutional power, how they shall be represented, and on what issues; (2) institutes a deleterious conflict of interest by placing control of significant student advocacy in the hands of the power to whom the representative reports on behalf of graduate students; (3) and openly scorns the role of student government and damages graduate student trust in the institution; and,

**Whereas**, the selection process announced by the Dean of the Graduate School allows for no graduate student involvement beyond an individual applicants' "persuasive" letter of interest;<sup>4</sup> and,

**Whereas**, the GSO Executive Board proposed power-sharing options<sup>5</sup> that would allow graduate students and their elected representatives some direct say in who serves as the graduate student representative to the Board of Trustees while graduate students advocate for a satisfactory resolution in the interim; and,

**Whereas**, the proposed power-sharing options were dismissed with the statement that the selection process shall commence as announced; and,

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<sup>3</sup> The GSO Executive Board 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. They were informed 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." The Board thus 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."

<sup>4</sup> Announced in an email (25 July 2023) 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."

<sup>5</sup> For example, (1) permitting a member of the GSO Executive Board or Senate to sit on the selection committee, (2) gathering independent graduate student feedback on finalists, and (3) permitting the GSO Senate to hold student body elections and propose a slate of approved nominees from among whom the selection committee shall choose.

**Whereas**, in 2020-2021, the GSO advocated for the SU Board of Trustees to grant College of Law graduate students a representative and, 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;<sup>6</sup> and,

**Whereas**, voting rights were not granted at that time, and SU College of Law graduates were not permitted to elect their own representative unlike their SU undergraduate and graduate student counterparts for reasons unclear;<sup>7</sup> and,

**Whereas**, shared governance is a value to which Syracuse University is nominally committed, yet the reality and integrity of this value is subject to serious doubt when the SU Board of Trustees, the highest governing body in the institution,<sup>8</sup> arbitrarily grants or revokes rights to university constituents only when tolerable or when convenient to their power respectively, and denies (or limits) the right of elected representation and voting on the Board to the vast majority of governed constituents, including undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff;<sup>9</sup> and,

**Whereas**, enshrining the undergraduate, graduate, faculty, and staff's right to elected representation and voting on the Board of Trustees would demonstrate that this institution is committed to shared governance not only in words but in reality; and,

**Whereas**, we therefore advance this Resolution in good faith, in the hopes of being heard and not further dismissed, with the intent to spur positive change in the conditions of shared governance, in the spirit of creating a more transparent, inclusive, and accessible university community that is truly united in trust; and,

**Whereas**, we are supported in this endeavor by recent words of the Chancellor who, in his report to the University Senate on 27 September 2023 regarding the current challenges facing higher education, encouraged the assembly by saying that Syracuse University has a

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<sup>6</sup> See [GSO SR 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 SR 21.02](#): "A Resolution in Support of Representation and Voting Rights for College of Law Graduate Students within the Board of Trustees." These, and other Resolutions of the Graduate Student Organization, can be found on our website [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> [Syracuse University By-Laws](#) Article II, Section I: "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." Currently all student representatives, along with faculty and staff representatives, lack the power to vote.

<sup>8</sup> [Syracuse University By-Laws](#) Article I, Section 1: "Under New York Law, the Board of Trustees has the duty and plenary authority to manage and control the conduct of the University's affairs. In the event of a conflict or inconsistency between these Bylaws or the decisions of the Board and the bylaws or decisions of entities or affiliates of the University, these Bylaws and the Board's decisions shall govern and control."

<sup>9</sup> [Syracuse University By-Laws](#) Articles II & III make clear that the right to freely elect representation to the Board of Trustees is strongly delimited among faculty, denied to SU graduates (as of the Board's May 2023 decision), College of Law students, and Staff, and granted freely only to SU undergraduates. All these seats are "without the power to vote."

superior system of shared governance that will empower SU to rise above challenges and lead its peer institutions and, furthermore, stated that he intends to practice good faith and really listen to the university community in the hopes that others will do the same, for the deterioration of shared governance begins with the assumption that criticism is made with ill intent<sup>10</sup>—and the Chancellor is an honorable man; so be it,

**Resolved**, that, as a temporary measure while graduate students work to attain a satisfactory solution from the Board of Trustees, the GSO urges the Dean of the Graduate School to share the power of appointment with graduate students by:

- (1) inviting a member of the GSO Executive Board or Senate, selected by the GSO Senate, to serve on the Dean’s selection committee for the graduate student representative to the Board of Trustees; and,
- (2) permitting the GSO to hold open elections appointing the slate of candidates from among whom the selection committee and the Dean of the Graduate School shall choose the graduate student representative to the Board of Trustees.

**And be it, Resolved**, that the GSO urges the Syracuse University Board of Trustees to:

- (1) reverse their recent decision to invest the power to appoint the graduate student representative to the Board in the Dean of the Graduate School, thereby restoring SU graduate students their right to elect graduate representation to the Board;
- (2) permit SU College of Law students, faculty, and staff to elect their representation to the Board, should they desire it;
- (3) grant voting rights on the Board and its committees to the undergraduate, graduate, College of Law, faculty, and staff representatives; and,
- (4) commit henceforth, in a public declaration, to abstaining from changing the Syracuse University By-Laws without receiving feedback from impacted constituents, such as from the undergraduate and graduate student body and their elected representatives in the Student Association and Graduate Student Organization when the By-Laws in question pertain to the representation and rights of students.

**And be it, Ordered**,

- (1) that the GSO Executive Board send this Resolution to the general graduate student body within the week along with a petition form in support of this Resolution to gather signatures and feedback;

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<sup>10</sup> A paraphrase. The Chancellor’s report will be reflected in the [University Senate Minutes](#) for 27 September 2023, forthcoming as of the date of this Resolution’s writing.

- (2) that GSO Senators spread word about the petition, encourage constituents to read it and sign if they agree, and collect constituent feedback;
- (3) that the GSO Executive Board collaborate with GSO University Senators, members of the SU Student Association and College of Law Student Bar Association, and other interested parties among faculty and staff, to bring a version of this Resolution before the University Senate this Academic Year.