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GSO PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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Housing Resources

The GSO Executive Board developed a new [Housing Information](#) tab on the GSO website to make university resources on housing more accessible to graduates. Currently, the tab contains information on the [Syracuse University Off-Campus Housing Finder](#), a resource the University developed to help students find safe, certified and affordable housing. Only properties that adhere to the City of Syracuse' certificate of compliance and inspection regulations and exhibit no major code violations are allowed to be listed on the Syracuse University Off-Campus Housing Finder. This resource is distinct from OrangeHousing.com and similar websites that are not affiliated with Syracuse University.

12-Month Stipend Option & Student Health Insurance

Two years ago, the GSO Graduate Employment Issues Committee (GEIC) began working with the Graduate School to implement a program that would allow Teaching Assistants (TAs), Graduate Assistants (GAs), and Research Assistants (RAs) with 9-month contracts the option to spread their stipend payments over 12 months. This initiative aimed to provide stipend-receiving graduates with a steady income throughout the entire year.

The program included a proposal to extend the health insurance deduction schedule. Originally, health insurance payments were deducted over 6 months (12 installments), beginning in October and ending in March. In the new program, this period was extended to 9 months (18 installments), beginning in October and ending in June.

However, the program encountered a challenge when we discovered that the Graduate School could not extract payments beyond May 15th. Consequently, the Graduate School absorbed the cost of the June deduction of the previous year for graduates who opted for both the 12-month stipend and the extended health insurance payment schedule. Unfortunately, due to the May 15th restriction, the school reverted to the original six-month installment plan for health insurance premiums, even for students receiving stipend payments over 12 months.

The GEIC objected to this decision, reasoning that it would pose a significant challenge for graduate students, who are already must manage finances carefully due to modest stipends. The abrupt return to the shorter health insurance deduction schedule would exacerbate the financial strain on graduate students and impact their ability to maintain a steady income throughout the year.

The GEIC emphasized that the May 15th restriction is an internal issue specific to Syracuse University. Thus, the additional financial burden should not be shifted onto the shoulders of graduate students when an internal solution could be pursued.

In response to this advocacy, the Graduate School recently notified the GSO Executive Board that they have identified a workaround to address the issue. The specifics of the workaround are not yet known.

Legislative Agenda

The promise to identify and pursue needed organizational reforms constituted a significant aspect of my election platform. I find it prudent to share an outline of the reforms I hope to pursue this year along with members of the GSO Executive Board and Senate.

Internal Reform

- **Constitutional Convention:** As I announced at the end of last year, the GSO [Rules & Administration Committee](#) (RAC) will review the GSO Constitution in full this year. In line with the RAC's charge, the committee will identify inconsistencies, ambiguities and other organizational or procedural issues in the GSO Constitution and formulate comprehensive amendments for the consideration of the Senate by the end of this Session. The goal is to strengthen the procedural infrastructure of the GSO by making the GSO Constitution a consistent and clear governing document. Over the summer, the Vice President of Internal Affairs and I drafted a convention schedule and procedural plan. The RAC met last Friday to discuss and finalize the plan. It can be viewed at the end of this report (Appendix A).
- **GSO Policy Platform:** The [GSO Policy Platform](#) was created in 2018-2019 by the 51st GSO Senate (see [GSO Senate Resolution 19.10](#)). The Policy Platform expresses the GSO's official position on various advocacy items and empowers the GSO Executive Board to act on those items. It has not been revisited since its creation. Continuing my work on this matter from last year, I will work with the GSO Committee Chairs to comprehensively review the Policy Platform and draft any needed updates in the form of a Resolution for the consideration of the Senate by the end of this Session. Hopefully this will set a precedent for routine periodic review of the GSO Policy Platform in the future.

- **Recognized Graduate Student Organizations (RGSOs):** The terms and policies pertaining to student organizations recognized and funded by the GSO require clarification and updating. Of particular concern are RGSO budget policies, such as clarifying how RGSOs are classified for budget line allocation, regulating how RGSO budgets are used, and establishing guidelines for when unused RGSO budget lines can be re-allocated to give the GSO greater fiscal flexibility (see fiscal reform below). Also of concern are RGSO election timelines, renewal processes, and officer training. I will work with the Vice President of Internal Affairs and Comptroller on these matters, and some measures, such as an officer training exam, are already being tested.

Fiscal Reform

- **Professional, Academic, and Creative Work (PAC) Grant:** The PAC Grant is the most popular funding resource that the GSO offers and routinely requires significant budget allocations. The policies governing PAC Grant need to be updated to ensure that the GSO can continue to bear the financial commitment to the grant program. I will work with the Recording Secretary, the Comptroller, and their committees to formulate needed updates to grant policy. Additionally, I will work with them to determine if an increase in grant awards, in the face of clear graduate student demand and the increasing cost of professional and academic travel, is feasible. Some results of this work are already on the floor tonight in the form of [GSO Senate Resolution 24.02](#) on PAC grant application and reimbursement processes.
- **Special & GSO Programming:** Special Programming requests, including GSO Programming conducted through the Office of External Affairs, also require significant budget allocations. The policies governing Special and GSO Programming need clarified and reinforced to ensure that the GSO Senate appropriately adjudicates funding requests and equitably distributes funds. I will work with the Comptroller and Finance Committee to identify needed updates to special programming policy and draft a Resolution for the consideration of the Senate by the end of this Session. Items under consideration include: 1) requiring RGSOs to use allocated budgets toward their special programming requests, 2) establishing tiered special programming request caps, 3) and strengthening the per capita rule when determining funding allotments (see [GSO Fiscal Policy](#) Article II, Section C[f]).
- **Service Provider Audit:** By directive of the 55th GSO Senate (2022-2023), the Comptroller and Finance Committee will conduct an audit of all service providers this year "to determine the level and quality of service provided to graduate

students” and to find potential areas of cost reduction (see [GSO Senate Resolution 23.14](#), Stipulation 4 and 5). I will work with them on this matter to determine where we can lessen the GSO’s financial burden regarding providers while also ensuring that graduate students continue to receive vital services.

- **Graduate Student Activity Fee:** The Graduate Student Organization’s budget is funded entirely by the Graduate Student Activity Fee. The fee was last increased in 2016-2017 by the 49th GSO Senate to meet the rising costs of GSO Service Providers, the PAC (formerly Travel) Grant, and registered graduate student organization programming. They raised the fee from \$40.00 per semester to \$50.00 per semester (see [GSO Senate Resolution 17.06](#)). Today, half a decade later, the GSO faces much the same circumstances once more. This year, I will work with the Comptroller and members of the Finance Committee to determine if a modest fee increase, in concert with other fiscal reforms, is needed to help the GSO meet its financial obligations for at least the next five years and, if so, develop a well-reasoned proposal for the consideration of the Senate this Session. Assuredly, the aim is not to impose greater fees needlessly.

External Reform

- **GSO Branding:** Main concerns regarding GSO branding include 1) fostering the GSO’s professional appearance, 2) effectively informing graduate students of how the GSO benefits them, whether through funding, advocacy, or otherwise, and 3) increasing GSO recruitment success and community engagement. I have already met with the Vice Presidents of Internal and External Affairs and the Communication Secretary to begin a “better branding initiative.” Items under consideration include: establishing GSO website, public document, and email guidelines; ensuring that GSO committee work and funded events bear the GSO brand in some way; effectively engaging the *Daily Orange* and other avenues of student press; and increasing the transparency of GSO offerings and activities in our public communications. You have already seen some fruit of this work in the Vice President Internal’s *Senate Review* and the Vice President External’s *Community Board* emails, as well as the 23 September 2023 *Daily Orange* [Letter to the Editor](#) on GSO initiatives.

Overall, my legislative agenda aims to complement the reforms of the past two years intended to revitalize the GSO and strengthen its ability to meet its mandate effectively for years to come. However, as with past reforms, I cannot do it alone. The 56th GSO Senate has a real opportunity to elevate the organization and chart a path for its future success for the benefit of all graduate students at SU and SUNY-ESF. I look forward to you joining me in this work.

Appendix A: GSO Constitutional Convention Schedule & Procedural Plan



Est. 1968

Rules and Administration Committee AY23/24

Constitutional Convention Plan

Table of Contents

I. PREPARATORY PHASE:	2
A. ESTABLISHING LEGITIMACY:.....	2
B. GOALS:	2
C. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS:	2
D. AGENDA:.....	2
II. MEMBER SELECTION:	2
A. REPRESENTATION:	2
B. SIZE:	2
III. CONVENTION STRUCTURE:	2
A. CHAIR:	2
B. RECORD KEEPING AND TRANSPARENCY:	2
IV. DISCUSSION AND DECISION-MAKING:.....	3
A. MEETINGS:	3
B. CONSENSUS-BUILDING:	3
<i>i. Additions:</i>	3
C. VOTING:.....	3
<i>i. Minority Opinion:</i>	3
V. DRAFTING THE REVISED CONSTITUTION:.....	3
A. COMPILATION:	3
B. REVIEW:.....	3
VI. RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION:	3
A. PUBLIC AWARENESS:.....	3
B. RATIFICATION PROCESS:	4

I. Preparatory Phase:

- a. **Establishing Legitimacy:** The Rules and Administration Committee (RAC) possesses both the authority and legitimacy to consider and propose changes to the Graduate Student Organization Constitution (*GSOC*). This authority is firmly anchored in the *GSOC*'s explicit mandate for the RAC to "make a continuing study of the GSO's organization and operations and periodically recommend improvements regarding the same with a view toward strengthening the Senate, simplifying its operations, etc." (*GSOC* Article 1, Section 14b). By virtue of this mandate, the RAC's jurisdiction naturally extends to matters concerning constitutional amendments and revisions. This clarity ensures that any proposed changes to the constitution are approached with both authority and procedural soundness.
- b. **Goals:** Identify ambiguities, update outdated language (e.g. Academic Plan vs Academic Program), and address constitutional gaps and incongruencies.
- c. **Research and analysis:** Review the existing constitution thoroughly and identify areas that require modification or clarification. This will be the responsibility of everyone involved, there will be a shared document for line-by-line changes, notes, and comments.
- d. **Agenda:** The CCC will consist of 5 meetings and the crafting of a Resolution that will be presented during the December Regular Meeting and Voted on in the first meeting in the Spring Semester. Each meeting will cover (a) specific Article(s) within the *GSOC*.
 - i. *Meeting 1:* Article I-The Senate
 - ii. *Meeting 2:* Article II- The Executive Board
 - iii. *Meeting 3:* Article III- The Staff & Article IV- Removal of Officers
 - iv. *Meeting 4:* Article V- Amendments & Article VI- Miscellaneous
 - v. *Hearing:* Public Feedback
 - vi. *Meeting 5:* Overview, and Resolution Drafting/Approval
 - vii. *December Regular Senate Meeting:* Submit Resolution to the Senate
 - viii. *First Regular Senate Meeting in Spring:* Senate Votes on Resolution

II. Member Selection:

- a. **Representation:** The Rules and Administration Committee will form a subcommittee for the purpose of the constitutional convention this will consist of all the members of the RAC and others that both apply and are accepted by the RAC.
- b. **Size:** There shall be no more than 9 members of the committee to facilitate meaningful discussions and foster collaboration.
 - i. Automatic members include the RAC members: President, Internal Vice President, President Pro Tempore, Parliamentarian, and Invited members (2).
 - ii. The other 2 members will include any senator who applies and is accepted by the RAC.

III. Convention Structure:

- a. **Chair:** The chair of the Constitutional Convention Committee (CCC) (a special subcommittee of the RAC) will be the Vice President of Internal Affairs. Meetings will be scheduled in advance as far as possible.
- b. **Record Keeping and Transparency:** All meetings will be recorded for minute-keeping and transparency purposes. All CCC Meetings will also be considered under executive session (ES) and subject to the associated rules regarding ES with some exceptions. Any member of the Senate can join meetings¹, but to facilitate meaningful discussion, any person who is not a member of the official committee will not be allowed to participate unless the majority of members vote to allow it². Meeting dates will be published on the GSO website. Non-members will not be allowed

¹ This is one exception to executive session, normally only members of the deliberative assembly, committee or board itself are allowed to be present during executive session, in this instance, this was modified for transparency purposes.

² This is in an intentional exception to **RONR 50:27** Conduct of Business in Committees- "... During actual Deliberations of the committee, only committee members have the right to be present."

to vote in the meetings. All documents and files associated with this process will be kept in the shared drive. A public document will be made available and viewable by a member of the Senate to document the progress of the committee. This document will also be shared before the public hearing.

IV. Discussion and Decision-Making:

- a. **Meetings:** All meetings will be conducted in accordance with *RONR 50: 21-30* (Conduct of Business in Committees) unless this document, the current GSO Constitution (*GSOC*), or university by-laws dictate otherwise.
- b. **Consensus-building:** The shared document will have a list of specific lines in the constitution that the committee wishes to address; this will be in order (e.g. *GSOC Article II Section 4(k)* will be addressed after *GSOC Article I Section 13(t)*). If it is pointed out that a change in one section necessitates a change in a subsequent section, it will be put on the list in its appropriate place and discussed accordingly.
 - i. **Additions:** If there are proposed additions to the *GSOC*, the member will write out the addition and place it in the shared document in the place they feel it should be. For example, if the member wants to add to Article IV Section 2, they will place this in the appropriate section of the shared document and clearly mark it as an "Addition." The member must draft their reasoning behind the addition for both the committee and—if approved by the committee—the senate.
- c. **Voting:** Each finalized line edit will be voted upon by the members of the committee, and each decision will be a simple majority except for approval of the finalized section and finalized revised constitution. After each meeting, when line edits of each section are complete, the committee will vote on the finalized section and will require a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority to pass. The finalized proposal of the constitution shall be approved before going to the Senate. This will also require $\frac{3}{4}$ majority of the committee. In the event of a tie, the Parliamentarian will have the tie-breaking vote as such, the Parliamentarian will always vote last.
 - i. **The Parliamentarian's Vote:** The Parliamentarian's vote is impartial and devoid of personal preference. A "yes" vote is automatic if the Parliamentarian determines that the proposed changes do not conflict with any by-law, statute, policy, or resolution previously passed by the Senate. Conversely, a "no" vote from the Parliamentarian indicates a perceived conflict with the established by-laws, statutes, policies, or resolutions passed by the Senate. This serves as a cautionary measure against changes that may be inconsistent or incompatible with the governing framework.
 - ii. **Minority Opinion:** If there is division among members and those of descent wish to draft a minority opinion on the document as a whole or specific line edits, they are free to do so. This opinion will be disseminated to the Senate alongside the majority-approved document with explanations in the December Regular Senate Meeting and the First Regular Meeting of the Spring Semester.

V. Drafting the Revised Constitution:

- a. **Compilation:** As the discussions progress and decisions are made, a compilation of all the proposed changes and revisions will be distilled into a consolidated draft constitution. A document indicating each line change accompanied by an explanation will be given to the Senate along with the minority opinion if there is one.
- b. **Review:** Once the revised draft is complete, careful, independent review by each committee member will occur to ensure the changes adhere to University Policy and do not inadvertently introduce conflicts or inconsistencies.

VI. Ratification and Implementation:

- a. **Public awareness:** Throughout the process the committee must work with the External Vice-President and the Communications Secretary to conduct a public education campaign to inform the graduate population about the proposed revisions and their implications. This will be done

through the GSO Senate Review that will be sent out prior to the December and February Regular Meetings to encourage public dialogue and debates to promote understanding and garner support for the revised constitution.

- b. **Ratification process:** Please see **GSOC Article V**. If there are proposed changes to this section, the ratification process must adhere to the current language within the **GSOC** and not the proposed changes.