



GSO Senate Resolution 24.13

A Resolution Reregulating RGSO & Special Programming Budget Practices

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Sponsor(s): CJ Arnell (Vice President of Internal Affairs & Chair of the Senate); Becca Vinciguerra (Director of External Affairs); Abiodun Adeoye (General Secretary of the Senate); Aditee Malviya (Finance Secretary)

Date(s): 3 April 2024 (Introduced)

Action(s): Passed (20 Yes, 5 No, 3 Abstentions)

Chair of the Senate: CJ Arnell

President Pro Tempore of the Senate: Roger Rosena

Parliamentarian: R. Luke VanderSchaaff

President of the Student Body: Daniel J. Kimmel

Whereas, the 56th GSO Senate and Executive Board have committed to pursuing reasonable cuts and regulations that promote fiscal responsibility and the effective distribution of the graduate student activity fee,¹ including registered graduate student organization (RGSO) budget and Special Programming policies;² and,

¹ **SR 24.04**, *A Resolution to Increase the Graduate Student Activity Fee to Correct for Inflation*, final resolved clause: "Resolved, that the current GSO Executive Board and Senate will pursue other reasonable fiscal cuts and regulations, as forecast in (though not limited to) the GSO President's legislative agenda delivered on 4 October 2023, to ensure that another fee increase is not required for at least the next five years."

² **President's Report (4 October 2023)**, under Legislative Agenda, Internal and Fiscal Reform: "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)" and "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

Whereas, the Executive Board has reviewed the RGSO budget and Special Programming regulations outlined in the GSO Fiscal Policy (such as those considered below, though not exhaustively)³ and have determined that the following clarifications and updates would grant the GSO greater financial flexibility and promote responsible financial planning at both the GSO and RGSO levels; therefore be it,

Resolved, that the following Fiscal Policy regulations be adopted and added to or amended in the GSO Fiscal Policy, RGSO Handbook, and in all other places in which GSO Fiscal Policy regarding RGSO budgets & Special Programming are communicated (e.g. the GSO Website):

1. Academic (Departmental) RGSOs include only those representing all verified graduate student members of an academic department or program (or multiple academic departments or programs) at Syracuse University. These RGSOs should facilitate the election and maintenance of Academic Plan Senators for their associated department(s), as required to access funds.⁴
2. GSO Annual Budget allocations for Academic (Departmental) RGSOs shall be funded at the rate of \$25 per fee-paying graduate student.⁵ No Academic (Departmental) RGSO shall receive these per capita annual budget funds for graduate students in departments and programs already covered by another Academic (Departmental) RGSO.
3. Honor Societies are Non-Academic (Non-Departmental) RGSOs.⁶ GSO funds may not be used to pay for Honor Society dues.⁷

Programming need clarified and reinforced to ensure that the GSO Senate appropriately adjudicates funding requests and equitably distributes funds. ... 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."

³ **Appendix to the Resolution: Current State of GSO Fiscal Policy regarding RGSOs & Special Programming (Not Exhaustive).**

⁴ GSOC Article II, Section 4(d): "Academic plans must elect and maintain an Academic Plan Senator to be eligible to request funds from the GSO budget through their associated Recognized Graduate Student Organization."

⁵ I.e., increasing the current amount of \$25 per graduate student in accordance with the graduate student activity fee adjustment from \$50 to \$60 per semester. See GSO Senate Resolution 24.04, *A Resolution to Increase the Graduate Student Activity Fee to Correct for Inflation*.

⁶ This is an addition to the Non-Academic (Non-Departmental) RGSOs already listed in the RGSO Handbook, such as: cultural/international, political/advocacy, professional, religious, service, and special interest.

⁷ Clarifying GSO Fiscal Policy Article XII.D: "Gifts, Prizes, Dues, and Donations - These will be decided on a case-by-case basis but are unlikely to be approved."

4. GSO Annual Budget allocations shall be capped at \$2000 per Academic (Departmental) RGSO.⁸
5. RGSOs may not use their GSO budget allocations to supply grants (e.g., as conference travel grants in addition to the GSO PAC Grant program).
6. RGSOs must use their GSO Annual Budget allocation toward Special Programming requests, excluding any portion of the RGSO's annual allocation already approved for use through the GSO expense pre-approval process.
7. RGSO expense pre-approvals shall not be granted (a) outside of the Fiscal Year in which the funds are to be used, (b) when the Finance Committee is out of Session, and (c) before the required number of RGSO officers successfully complete annual required RGSO Officer Training.⁹ In sole exception to (b) of this rule, the Executive Board may grant RGSO expense pre-approvals when the Finance Committee is not in session if an RGSO's associated academic plan's degree requirements include mandatory summer sessions.
8. RGSO Special Programming requests primarily intended to facilitate the academic and professional development of graduates shall be capped at \$3000.¹⁰
9. RGSO Special Programming requests with a social purpose shall be capped at \$1000.¹¹
10. The Finance Committee may recommend an RGSO Special Programming amount for Senate approval that is higher than the cap if, with reasonable estimation, the ratio of \$25 per fee-paying graduate student served produces a number higher than the associated cap.¹² In such a case, they may recommend up to the number

⁸ I.e., lowering the current cap of \$5000 (in GSO Fiscal Policy Article II.B). The difference would be allocated to Special Programming per the 20% of total GSO operating budget minimum allocation rule.

⁹ **Recommended guidance to the Finance Committee on this condition:** In practice, this means that RGSO expense pre-approvals may not be granted over the summer or before mid-September, to ensure that the Comptroller has sufficient time to train the Finance Secretary (if applicable) and the Finance Committee and to ensure that RGSO officers are sufficiently trained.

¹⁰ **Recommended guidance to the Finance Committee on this condition:** academic and professional—e.g., conferences, speakers/guest lectures, teach-ins, skill development workshops, showcases (e.g., displaying students' professional, academic, or creative work), and so on. This list is not exhaustive. Common sense should guide.

¹¹ **Recommended guidance to the Finance Committee on this condition:** social—e.g., department/interest group specific gatherings (e.g., picnics, formals, dances, networking mixers, movie screenings, activity days, celebrations), induction ceremonies, meals not attached to professional or academic events (e.g., regular coffee hours), and so on. This list is not exhaustive. Common sense should guide.

¹² **Recommended guidance to the Finance Committee on this condition:** reasonable estimation—e.g., the RGSO has held the event in previous years, has data to demonstrate the average number of fee-paying graduate students that the event tends to draw, and has a clear rationale justifying the number they expect the event to draw this year. Cost-reduction and cost-sharing activities ought also to be demonstrated. This list is not exhaustive. Common sense should guide.

produced by the ratio, but no higher. Likewise, the Senate may approve an amount more than the cap up to the number produced by the ratio, but no higher. The Senate may only grant exception, i.e. approve an amount exceeding both the cap and the ratio, by Resolution with a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote-by-roll.

11. The Finance Committee ought to lower the RGSO Special Programming amount recommended for Senate approval if the amount requested by the RGSO is higher than the number produced, with reasonable estimation, by the ratio of \$25 per fee-paying graduate student served, unless the RGSO makes a compelling case for an amount that is higher than the ratio but lower than the associated cap (especially regarding requests primarily intended to facilitate the academic and professional growth of graduate students).
12. On principle, RGSO Special Programming supported by GSO funds should be open to all fee-paying graduate students. The Finance Committee may deny Special Programming applications (or items therein) that do not adhere to this principle, subject to appeal.¹³ The Comptroller must report all denied Special Programming requests at the next Regular Meeting of the Senate.
13. On principle, the GSO encourages departments and other university funding resources to earmark funds for graduate students, and we encourage the development of equitable cost-sharing relationships between the GSO, departments, and other university funding resources for the mutually beneficial support of their graduate students and the graduate student community.¹⁴ The Finance Committee ought to pursue equitable cost-sharing negotiations with departments and other university funding resources regarding RGSO Special Programming requests.
 - a. The Finance Committee may suspend consideration of an RGSO Special Programming request to pursue such negotiations.
 - b. The Finance Committee may recommend a preliminary RGSO Special Programming amount for Senate approval that is enough to cover the request's urgent, time-sensitive expenses (e.g., speaker travel, venue reservation, *et cetera*) while pursuing such negotiations, which must be made explicit in the recommendation.
 - c. In the latter event (i.e., b), the Finance Committee, if it deems necessary, may *move to amend the RGSO Special Programming request previously*

¹³ RGSOs affected have the right to appeal the decision of the Finance Committee to the Executive Board and, after that (if needed), to the Senate, as presently stated in the "Appeal Policy" (Fiscal Policy Article 11).

¹⁴ However, it is recognized that departmental and other sources of funding are not equally available across departments and disciplines, posing a real and significant inequity. For example, at present, STEM departments tend to be better funded than departments in the Humanities.

adopted (i) at a Meeting after that in which the preliminary funds were awarded (ii) to recommend adding funds to (but not subtracting funds from) the RGSO Special Programming request in question. This may be motioned only once per preliminary RGSO Special Programming amount awarded. The preliminary amount awarded and the additional amount added together must not exceed the cap and/or ratio of \$25 per fee-paying graduate student served pursuant the relevant stipulations and exceptions.

d. In deliberations regarding a *motion to amend the RGSO Special Programming request previously adopted*, the Senate may not under any circumstances reduce the preliminary amount previously awarded by the Senate, though it may dispose of the additional amount recommended by the Finance Committee in usual fashion.

14. The Finance Committee may approve Start-Up Funding for newly registered RGSOs without a Senate vote and, at the committee's discretion, with or without an interview of the new RGSO's representatives. The Comptroller must report all Start-Up funding approved at the next Regular Meeting of the Senate. The Senate reserves the right to override decisions of the Finance Committee.¹⁵
15. The Vice President of Internal Affairs must alert the Comptroller when informing an RGSO that they have fallen out of good standing.¹⁶

¹⁵ **GSOC Article II, Section 15(b):** "The Finance Committee may make recommendations on fiscal matters to the Senate, but the Senate maintains the sole power to establish GSO Fiscal Policy and to authorize the allocation and expenditure of GSO funds in line with it and University Policy."

¹⁶ This clarifies GSO Fiscal Policy, Article III.J (below) to ensure that the Comptroller has the specific knowledge required to enforce it.

Appendix to the Resolution: Current State of GSO Fiscal Policy regarding RGSOs & Special Programming (Not Exhaustive)

While members of the Executive Board reviewed the entire set of policies regarding registered graduate student organizations (RGSOs) and Special Programming, the following items presented as particularly relevant to this Resolution:

- (1) Standing policy at present states that (a) at least 20% of the GSO's total operating budget must be allocated to RGSO programming split between RGSO-specific annual budget lines and Special Programming, and that (b) RGSO annual budget allocations shall be funded at \$25 per verified graduate student member, capped at \$5,000 for "academic" (i.e., departmental) organizations and at \$300 for non-academic" (i.e., non-departmental) organizations, and that (c) RGSOs in good-standing may apply for additional GSO funds through Special Programming twice a year, which may contain requests pertaining to more than one event/item.¹⁷
- (2) There are currently (a) no explicit regulations requiring RGSOs to use their annual budget allocations either at all or before requesting additional GSO funding, and (b) no explicit regulations requiring RGSOs to use their remaining annual budget allocations toward items in Special Programming requests that they submit,¹⁸ and (c) no caps on Special Programming requests,¹⁹ and (c) only vague and inconsistent guidelines purportedly inspired by the GSO's principles regarding the kinds of items and events to be funded and amounts to be rewarded.²⁰

¹⁷ **GSO Fiscal Policy, Article II.B & II.C(a) and (b).**

¹⁸ **GSO Fiscal Policy, Article II.C** states: "Organizations must submit a budget for all their annual spending to be eligible to apply for Special Programming," which has been inconsistently enforced historically, and otherwise does not require RGSOs to expend their GSO annual budgets before requesting extra funding. See also **Article III.G(c)**: "Submit a full organizational budget specifying how all GSO funds allocated for the academic year will be or have been spent."

¹⁹ Mild exception, perhaps, being **GSO Fiscal Policy, Article II.C(f)**: "Cost per graduate student shall be a factor in the consideration of the application by the Finance Committee," which due to its acute ambiguity has been inconsistently enforced historically. See also **Article III.G(d)**: "Be prepared to justify the level of graduate student involvement and the benefits of the activity to the graduate student population and university community. Please provide a breakdown of all expected costs and a list of all additional sources of funds committed or received to date. As a rule, for groups that are a combination of graduate and undergraduate or law students, the GSO will fund the percentage of the event that is proportional to the percentage of graduate students involved in the organization."

²⁰ For example, **GSO Fiscal Policy, Article II.G**: "Service Availability - All funding of campus wide service organizations will be open to all fee-paying graduate students"; and **Article III.C**: "GSO funds awarded to organizations are primarily intended to facilitate the academic or professional growth of graduate students. Events with a social purpose must take place on University Property or within Onondaga County"; and, more explicitly but inconsistently enforced historically, **Article XII.C**: "Travel - Special programming funds may not be used to fund travel for individual students, groups, field trips, or other excursions off campus unless such travel has a professional or academic purpose."

- (3) The Comptroller is empowered to reallocate RGSO annual budget lines to Special Programming if an RGSO falls out of good standing for a duration of 14 days after the first Regular Meeting of the GSO Senate that Fiscal Year,²¹ but there is currently no mechanism ensuring that the Comptroller is informed when an RGSO falls out of good standing, and the Comptroller is otherwise unable to reallocate funds dedicated to RGSOs that do not use their budgets or signal intent to use their budgets,²² often resulting in significant amounts of unused funds left over at the end of the Fiscal Year that could have been dedicated to other items.

Overall, it is concluded that the GSO would gain greater financial flexibility, and would better ensure the equitable distribution of the graduate student activity fee, if GSO Fiscal Policy is updated with an eye toward (a) articulating clearer guidance for the GSO Finance Committee, Executive Board, and Senate to follow regarding RGSO budget and Special Programming deliberations, and toward (b) instituting regulations that set reasonable limits while also empowering members to both enforce policy and grant warranted exceptions in the distribution of GSO funds.

²¹ **GSO Fiscal Policy, Article III.J:** "RSO Standing Requirement - GSO funds allocated to organizations which are not in good standing for a period of 14 days at any time after the first regular meeting of the GSO Senate during the Fall semester will be returned to the GSO's Special Programming budget."

²² Compare the PAC Grant award forfeiture policy expressed in **GSO Senate Resolution 24.02, Section 3, A Resolution to Amend and Enforce GSO PAC Grant Policy:** "If reimbursement paperwork is not submitted within 30 days of completing the event travel, or before the end of the current Fiscal Year on June 30th, the award is forfeit," which sets reasonable limits on the use of allocated but unused GSO funds.