Graduate Student Senate  
Senate Meeting  
Friday May 3 2013  
Campus Center 904  

Minutes

Present:  
Officers: Hongmei Sun, Garth Schwellenbach, Robin Anderson  
Senators: Alexandra Prince, Sara Green, Nicholas Rossi, Tim Sutton, Zhongjin Li, Bradley Bolin, Gesine Hinterwalder, Krzystof Orzel, Joe Sapp, Gina Ocasion, Veronica Golden, Karen Sause.  
Staff: Ghazah Abbasi, Matt Ferrari, Adina Giannelli, Srinivas Lankala  
Others: David Vailancourt (Associate Dean of Students), John McCarthy (Dean of the Graduate School)

Hongmei Sun called the meeting to order at 2.02 PM and introduced the Dean of the Graduate School. Sara Green proposed to approve the minutes of the last meeting, Gesine Hinterwalder seconded:14 voted to approve with 1 abstention.

Election report: Garth Schwellenbach reported the election results and introduced the newly elected officers. Garth proposed a motion to ratify the election results and Bradley Bolin seconded. 15 voted to approve ratification, with 1 abstention.

Hongmei presented the SGA Student Bill of Rights that had been tabled at the last meeting: Nicholas Rossi proposed to move it from the table to discussion and Gesine seconded. 13 voted in favor and 2 abstained. Robin Anderson said there were several issues with the Bill of Rights: it has no teeth, it has a mainly educational purpose, there are already other documents that have the same measures, it has no legal basis if you’re booked under the code of student conduct and it is also highly individualistic with no mention of the campus as a community. Tim Sutton asked what the context of this bill of rights was, and why it was brought up now. Robin replied that the SGA had been working on it with SLSO for a long time. Krystof Orzel said that most of the document is redundant and agreed with Robin: he suggested that the Senate not endorse the document. Hongmei agreed as well. She said our endorsement also does not really add much to the document. Bradley Bolin asked why the SGA brought the document to the GSS at this time. David Vaillancourt said that typically if a body has enacted something, they ask other bodies to support or endorse it. Karen Sause said it should have been brought to our notice before they went ahead with finalizing it. Nicholas Rossi asked if the GSS endorsement would help in enacting it in any way. Robin said no, because it has already been enacted and it is here only for our endorsement. Nick Rossi moved to table the motion, Tim Sutton seconded. 15 voted for and 1 abstained.

Bylaws committee: Robin explained the role of the bylaws committee and their discussion of the bylaws change around proxy voting by alternate senators that was
introduced in the previous meeting. The committee had discussed the issues around process, time limits and relationship of the Senate with alternate senators. The committee had asked if it would dilute senate participation, and suggested that instead of a proxy, the senate should consider an absentee ballot vote. He suggested reconstituting the bylaws committee over the summer and looking at the absentee ballot process and any other bylaws changes needed. He recommended the 3 incoming officers as well as senators to constitute such a committee. Nicholas Rossi and Krzysztof Orzel volunteered to serve on the committee.

Funding and Progress Committee: Ghazah Abbasi spoke about the results of the survey around funding issues: there were 345 responses, the committee would work on it over the summer to collate results, and discuss issues such as transparency and graduate student needs. She said there was a small meeting among Social Science departments to share funding distribution policies across departments and the committee will do more of this for other schools next semester.

Hongmei presented a transition report of the Executive committee’s work this past year: they had increased senate participation in the senate meetings, used campus pulse and online platform for senate elections which was useful, increase participation in faculty senate committees, continued previous years’ work on graduate housing with the task force and advisory board, worked on UHS and healthcare issues, in conversation with UHS’ Jim Sheehan, and the SHIP committee, and organized several social events. In addition, Garth had streamlined the process of childcare funding and Robin worked with the student trustee on greater representation for graduate students on the Board of Trustees.

Adina Giannelli spoke about her goals for next year as Treasurer-elect: work with GSOs, budget, processes, A&F and other campus bodies, build on Robin’s work with GSOs, build relationships with CSD, with graduate student communities that do not have GSOs yet and help them start new organizations.

Ghazah presented her goals for next year as Vice-president-elect: work with what Garth has already streamlined in the childcare funding allocation process, build on successful senator election drive, serve on bylaws and other committees, increase graduate student participation on Faculty Senate committees, and chair the funding and progress committee.

Robin spoke about the overall direction for GSS next year, continuing work on UHS issues, creating women’s clinic, restarting the Campus Center Student Union Committee to deal with space issues for student activities, pursue the graduate student trustee question. He said the GSS is grateful to the two leaving officers, Hongmei and Garth, for working so hard to leave GSS a much more vibrant body that it was when they were elected two years ago. Amid applause, he presented gifts from the Senate to the two outgoing officers.
Hongmei invited John Mccarthy, the Dean of the Graduate school to talk about the strategic planning process and document. The dean said the Joint Task Force on Strategic Oversight had made some changes to the previos draft: he explained the context and the process, that the document is now before the faculty senate, that it gives general direction to the university. Once approved by the senate, it will be turned into specific tasks given to different parts of campus. It contains no discussion of money yet, so it is not really a strategic plan. The problems with the previous draft were that there was no mention of graduate education, or graduate research. The Graduate Council and the GSS representatives agreed on the suggestions for improvement: they said it focused primarily on undergraduate education and on faculty research but the revised draft takes into account the GSS’ suggestions to broaden the scope and have a specific focus on graduate education and research. Graduate education can be called a ‘resource of choice’ for professions. The new draft also has benefited from discussions on diversity and mentoring.

Ghazah said the revised draft is much improved and it was good that social sciences and humanities are mentioned as distinct from the natural sciences and engineering. She asked if more information is available on specific programs for interdisciplinary programs in social sciences like ISSR. The dean replied that the thinking behind interdisciplinarity is because social science programs have certain strengths that are useful to all of campus, so the focus is more on interdisciplinary research and initiatives. Research in humanities is a much harder question to explain to people. Ghazah said that another issue was that social science programs were growing faster than the growth in funding lines in the form of TAships, which for instance was 5 yrs in sociology, but less in other departments. The dean replied that the question of TA lines should be related to the ideal number of doctoral students and should not be related solely to undergrad class sizes.

Bradley asked if we shouldn’t be hiring more tenure track professors and graduate students rather than adjuncts to teach courses. The dean replied that we do want to strike a balance between tenured faculty and adjuncts, but the fact remains that, given our enrollment, we simply cannot afford to have all instruction by tenured faculty. Bradley said it was also a broader question of education, of job security and related issues of academic freedom. The dean said that this document is a way to move to a sustainable solution to your question. UMass has weathered the financial crisis better than most public universities and is in a good position to address this question.

Tim Sutton said the financial crisis encouraged a neoliberal approach to university administration, and this document continues in that neoliberal approach, by undermining programs that do not make money, and by a focus only on money and financial returns. This document should have addressed issues of costs of university administration and increase in student fees. The dean replied that this document is not a threat to freedom, it is the financial crisis that was a threat to freedom and this document is a way to address the crisis we are in. He pointed out that MSP, for instance has self-imposed accountability measures on themselves to pre-empt such an attack on academic freedom from outside.
Hongmei thanked the dean and reminded the senators that they can attend the faculty senate meeting on May 9 if they have questions. Robin reminded the senators about senator elections, online elections in fall and the possibility of alternate senators.

David Vaillllancourt thanked all senators who served this year and the three officers.

Hongmei invited all present to move to Berkshire DC for food.

Garth moved to adjourn, and Nicholas Rossi seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 3.20 PM.