Graduate Student Senate

Senate Meeting
Friday April 12 2013
Campus Center 903

Minutes

Present:
Officers: Hongmei Sun, Robin Anderson.
Staff: Ghazah Abbasi, Matt Ferrari, Adina Giannelli, Srinivas Lankala.
Others: David Vaillancourt (Associate Dean of Students), Xingjian Chen (Electronic and Computer Engineering), Lex Joy (Comparative Literature), Matt Berquist (SGA Attorney General), Aaron Karp (campaign for divestment from fossil fuels).

Hongmei Sun called the meeting to order at 2.10 PM.

Robin Anderson presented the GSS budget and line-item funding requests and the Finance committee’s recommendations. He invited questions about the funding and the GSS budget.

- Matthew Ryder asked Paula from the Crafts Center about the existing surplus funds in the Crafts Center.
- Sereres Johnston asked Robin Anderson about the amount of line-item funding available, and about GSOs that may be defunct.
- Rebecca asked Paula about the proportion of grad students who use the crafts center compared to undergraduates.
- Travis asked Nicole, the representative from the SORC about the number of GSOs using their services recently and asked if she could provide some examples of how a GSO could utilize the resources available. Nicole mentioned the EGO and the ISA as instances where the SORC has been able to work with GSOs in recent weeks. Hari, from the EGO said he wanted to place on record EGO’s gratitude for the help they had received from SORC. The president of the ISA also mentioned his appreciation of the services available at the SORC.
- Matthew Ryder asked why the GSS operations has such a large proportion of costs for labor and suggested that the staff positions be cut to 10 hours each. He said that this would be a more responsible use of the Senate tax since the labor costs are funded by graduate students. Robin replied that it would not be possible to cut staff hours and still do all the work that GSS currently does. Ghazah Abbasi said that GSS’ responsibility is to advocate for more funding for graduate students, not to cut existing positions that serve the graduate student body.
• Hongmei raised a point of order that this discussion should not form part of the vote on the Finance committee’s budget recommendations as it falls under the purview of the Executive committee and the Senate.
• Matt Ferrari said that a lot of the staff hours are also spent interacting with other campus committees and bodies, and it is not work that is directly seen by graduate students. Robin added that GSS staffing costs are in line with other similarly sized offices.
• To a question about the relation between the GWN position and the CWC, Robin answered that it is done to save the GSS from paying curriculum fee for the position.
• David Vaillancourt asked those present to recognize that the agencies requesting line-item funding are all ones which provide essential and much-needed services to all graduate students. Sereres agreed and said that this should not be seen only in terms of costs and funding, since the services at stake have a much larger significance in students’ lives.
• Travis noted that as a member of the Finance committee he could vouch for the careful work of the committee in studying each request and making its recommendations to the Senate.
• Una Tanovic moved to approve the GSS budget for 2013-14, and Xueting Jiang seconded. Matt Ryder moved to amend the motion in order to add a condition that the funding to the Crafts Center be delayed. Andrew Lapre seconded.
• Travis asked what the reason for the delay would be. Matt Ryder replied that he would like the Crafts Center to explain how they would use the surplus funds they already have and why they were requesting more funds.
• Faune Albert asked for clarification from other members of the Finance committee. Robin replied that the rest of the committee was in agreement that the Crafts Center’s proposal had merit, given its ongoing expenses, and that it was healthy for an agency to carry a surplus for emergency situations.
• Robin called for a vote on the proposed amendment to the motion. There were 10 votes in favor of the amendment, 16 opposed. The amendment was rejected. The original motion to approve the GSS budget was put to vote. 25 voted in favor, 3 opposed and 4 abstained. The motion was passed and the budget was approved.

Hongmei asked for a return to the main order of the agenda and presented the minutes of the last meeting.
• Matt Rossi proposed to approve the minutes and Travis seconded. The minutes were approved: 31 in favor, 0 opposed, 4 abstained.

Hongmei spoke about Jocelyn’s candidacy for the UAW Local 2322 Presidency and the importance of having a UMass grad student in the position. She also explained the election process which involved a postal ballot.
• Robin added that GEO members present should remember to update their addresses with the GEO office.
• Ghazah said Jocelyn is graduating but that it’s very important for her to win, given that the GEO office is having a lot of trouble in fulfilling their responsibilities to graduate employees. The UAW is sometimes not responsive to
our specific needs compared to the needs of members in other shops, and encouraged everyone to spread the word and support the campaign.

- Anders asked if GSS could help in sending out the e-mail to tell them about the election and update the postal address. Hongmei agreed it was a good idea to reinforce GEO’s own message.

Aaron Karp then made a presentation about the fossil fuel divestment campaign at UMass.

- Matt Ryder asked if it would hurt UMass financially and cause fees to increase.
- Sereres asked how much teeth this motion would have, and others present said it is not true that fossil fuels are more profitable, asked questions about the timeline for divestment and asked if it is our job to advise the University on financial matters.
- Tim Sutton said that divestment has a long history of being used as a political tool, such as for ending apartheid.
- Sereres moved that GSS support the campaign. Joy Jansen second, 27 in favor, 3 opposed, no abstentions. The motion passed.

Matt, the SGA attorney general made a short presentation about the Student Bill of Rights.

- Robin proposed that the discussion of the Student Bill of Rights be tabled until the next meeting, Travis seconded, all voted (30) in favor.

Joe Sapp proposed an amendment to the bylaws regarding proxy voting by alternate senators.

- Hongmei said it would be best to convene a bylaws committee to discuss the amendment and present its recommendations to the Senate.
- Michael Schoettle proposed that the Senate constitute a bylaws committee. Karen Sause seconded. 22 voted in favor, 1 opposed, no abstentions.
- Hongmei asked for volunteers to the committee.
- Alexandra Prince, Sara Green, Karen Sause and Joe Sapp volunteered to serve on the bylaws committee.

Kristen Wallentinne and Kristen Edwards brought up the issue of frequent thefts in the FAC building where the Music department is located. They said there was no sign that the thefts were being taken seriously and they have started a petition on the issue. They asked those present for input and advice.

- David Vaillancourt promised to contact the HFA dean to discuss the issue.

Hongmei Sun announced a reminder about the upcoming GSS officer elections, new senator elections, and the GSS bowling party in Northampton.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.45 PM.