

December 6, 2005 Senate Meeting Minutes

Meeting starts with 20 senators, 5 executive members.

Kris Baker, GSO speaker, informs the senate that the child care center gave their budget to the GSO, as they promised in the last senate meeting.

Agenda and November 8 minutes are unanimously approved, Kris will chair the meeting.

1) Dean L. Martin (LM) presentation

The internal auditors are in the process of making final reports and in general there are minor weaknesses to be taken care of. But a substantial number of “inappropriate” transactions were found and, although he cannot tell any details about what actions will be taken at the moment, he wanted to let the GSO senate know. He met with the university president, as the responsible for GSO activities, and together with the University Council, the police and the student judiciary, they are trying to find ways to take action. Administrative actions and the possibility of criminal procedures are being explored. This is a university issue, not just a GSO one, thus the number of parties involved.

Questions by the senators:

- Can we have some indications of what went wrong? The time frame of the offenses?
LM: The total amount of money involved is small for university standards, but it is a disturbing occurrence, given that it is activity fee money. There was a large number of transactions, over a long period of time – last 2 fiscal years. The auditors report only to the university, not the GSO, and once he knows more he will let the senate know.
- Do the GSO executives have any say in the actions that will be taken?
LM: No, only advisory, the president will decide. The current GSO executives are very cooperative though, the committee’s credit is restored at the present time.
- Will this issue affect the perception of the GSO by the students?
LM: It is a concern, and other volunteer organizations have been in question at times. But such things happen occasionally when large amounts of money are involved, and the only way to control them is by audits. He hopes that the current graduate students will be assured that the GSO executives, FSA and the university are using their money properly and that dishonesty is caught – cannot patrol completely! The message to the graduate community should be that “it is good that somebody is watching”.
- Is FSA audited yearly?
LM: External audits happen yearly, but they poll a very small number of transactions to catch the things that an internal audit would.
- How is this issue going to affect the mandatory activity fee? Would the students change their minds?
LM: It depends on how it will be presented to them.
- Will the proceedings get public to the student body?
LM: Yes, once action is taken. The exposure is not good for the university (especially in media), but if wrongdoings are there, it is good to let the community know nonetheless.
- Does the majority of the transactions involve graduate students getting funds they should not, or executives?
LM: Executives are by default involved in many transactions anyway, and they have been looked at, but he cannot say now.

2) Budget Committee report

Anirban Dutta, GSO treasurer, presents the funding requests, see relevant documentation:

- The Behavioral Ecology Group requests \$389 for their spring speaker series. Motion to approve this amount is approved unanimously.
- The Buddhism Study and Practice Group (BSPG) requests \$150 for a lecture on “Dealing with ego in buddhist psychology”. Motion to approve this amount by Ramona Walls, Ecology and Evolution senator. Miranda Moore, Economics senator, objects to the fact that the group is not present in the meeting to describe their event to the senate. Ramona withdraws her motion. Motion by Dan Woulfin, History senator, to table Ramona’s motion until someone from the BSPG shows up. Anirban comments that the event is before the next senate meeting, therefore, practically, the motion is tabled until the end of today’s meeting. Seconded by Ruchi Gupta, Chemistry senator. Vote: 15 for, 4 against, 1 abstain, motion passes.
- The BSPG requests \$150 for a lecture on “Aikido as a path to zen practice”. Motion to wait until someone from the group shows up by Miranda Moore, seconded by Ramona Walls, vote: 20 for, 1 against, motion passes.
- The Festival of Lights committee requests \$225 for their annual festival. Miranda Moore suggests that they put the sponsors on the flyers and the banner for the event hanging at the SAC. Also they did not send an email flyer to the GSO yet, most groups send such stuff well in advance, therefore probably many graduate students do not realize the festival is tomorrow. The committee representative says that the same banner is being used every year, so they cannot put the sponsor names on it, and that they did send an email flyer. Anirban says he got it, but did not forward it because the event was not approved by the GSO senate yet. For adequate advertising in the GSO senate list, they should have showed up in the November meeting. Motion to approve this amount by Dan Woulfin, seconded by Wendy Erb, Anthropology senator, vote: 21 for, motion passes.

Anirban presents some BC proposals:

- There is a new addition to the insurance line in the budget, for extra insurance mandated by a recent law of the State of NY. It was pointed out by the internal audit that it is missing, and there is no way around it. Together with Ron Willa from FSA, he contacted companies and it should not be more than about \$1,500 for coverage starting February until the end of the academic year.
Details given by Ron: It is a general liability insurance, covering things like accidents, slips, falls, etc, if someone sues GSO, which are actually unusual cases. It does not cover personal harm, eg. from GSO executives. It is not covered by university insurance because the GSO is a separate entity. The basic coverage is \$1M, we can get more if wanted. We still have \$5-10k projected surplus to pay for it. Right now this line has only \$300 for the “fidelity bond”, which covers employee theft.
The BC is informing the senate that they will have to overspend from this line, they are not changing the budget this year, therefore approval is not required. Next year’s budget proposal will be adjusted, as this is a recurring expense.
- The BC asks the senate to allow to overspend from speaker series line. They do not want to change the budget, as this would require an estimate of by how much, which is not easy to do. This is a very important line and we have many requests right now that would require exceeding the line, if we want to fund them. The projection is at the order of \$1,000 of overhead for the year. Other lines have money to compensate. Senate permission is required in this case, because the speaker series line has a cap of \$2,500 per semester right now. This amount was projected by last year’s \$2,700 spent, but this year we got more events, which is good, even though in some cases there are requests by the same groups in both semesters. Such cases were funded in the past, and if the events are good, we should support them regardless. Motion to allow the BC to recommend events above the spending limit of the speaker series line to the senate (then the senate will decide on an individual basis whether they want to overspend or not), by Dan Woulfin, seconded by Jada Hamilton, Psychology senator, vote: 24 for, motion passes.

- Andrei Antonenko, GSO president, informs the senate that the executive committee spent all the miscellaneous line on the “meet and greet” party of the start of the semester, by mistake – see November meeting’s minutes. This line is the only one for executives’ use, and is used for emergencies (eg. the money recently needed to put the newspaper online, or to print extra copies of the student-faculty relations survey) and/or at times that the senate is not in session, which was the case of the party. They are asking the senate’s permission to overspend this line by \$500, in order to have some money available for such emergencies, which is doable, since there are large unused amounts in the office supplies line, for example. Motion to approve \$500 of overspending by Dan Woulfin, seconded by Ruchi Gupta, vote: 24 for, motion passes.
- Anirban informs the senate that we have a proposal for bids for external (routine) auditors, and we will luckily get some bids by the end of March.

3) Rules and Constitution Committee report

Kris presents the proposals by the RCC that have been reviewed and agreed upon by the executive committee, seeking senate approval, see relevant documentation:

- Change the election bylaws to have online elections as a default, and the paper ones as a second option needing approval of the senate (now it is the other way round). Janette Ponticello, Psychology senator, comments that there should be explicit wording that 1 vote per person is ensured in the online elections, and makes a motion to ammend the election bylaws to this effect and present a new draft to the senate in the next meeting for approval. Seconded by Ruchi Gupta, unanimously approved.
- Add point 3 to the SCC part of the constitution, to allow the chair to convene a closed session of the committee at his/her discretion. Motion to approve by Miranda Moore, seconded by Dan Woulfin. Senators inquire whether it would be better for a certain percentage (1/2 or 2/3) of the committee to decide for a closed session instead of just the chair, but Ari Grossman, the GSA, points out that this beats the purpose of a closed session, as the committee will have to convene an open session to decide. Vote: for 24, motion passes.

4) Lounge Committee report

Chad Bender, the LC chair, presents the upcoming University Café events and encourages the senators to pick flyers for their departments: Meet and Greet on December 8, Sunday concert series, Moodras concert.

5) New business

- a) Andrei presents the Graduate Emergency Loan proposal, see relevant documentation. Having some money to loan to graduate students in an emergency is a very good idea heard before by Ari. There is a more concrete proposal now, put together by Ari and FSA and reviewed and agreed upon by the executive committee. The fund would have about \$40k in the start, \$10 of them provided by the GSO and then matched by the Graduate School, the Provost’s office and maybe more offices, and also maybe supported by individual contributions through SBF. We will have to put a lot of money in the fund, in order to be able to ask from others too. Only the GSO, though, will determine the rules for the loan dispersal, who gets it and how to get the money back. Such a fund used to exist in the past, but there were no effective rules on how to recover the money, so it run out fast. To discuss and determine all these rules, an ad-hoc committee of 5 people is proposed. Ari has to be in the committee, nominations for the other 4 members: Ramona Walls, Dumaine Williams (Pharmacology senator),

Ruchi Gupta, Rob Gersch (Genetics senator). Andrei recommends these 5 people to be in the new committee, motion to approve by Kristin Ericson, Anthropology senator, seconded by Andrew Farke, Anatomical Sciences senator, unanimously approved. The executives will work closely with the committee. The FSA has informed Anirban that they would like to meet about it sometime next week, the committee will see if this can be done.

- b) Andrei presents the Request for Proposal for Graduate Legal Services, see relevant documentation. The executive council discussed the initiative and thought it is a good idea to have free legal services provided to graduate students through the GSO. There is no proposal about money to allocate, we have no idea how much is needed yet, maybe \$6-7k for the whole year, including summer. The committee will collect bids and come to the senate with a more concrete proposal to discuss. The goal is to try to start the service on April 1st and see how it goes.

Questions/comments by senators:

- There was something like that provided in the past, a senator claims she used it, but the administration told the executives that there is nothing like such a service on campus right now, when they inquired.
 - We are considering the possibility of using graduate students of the law school or similar people, in order to save some money.
 - It would be difficult to include visa/immigration services, given the extra cost and the inexperience of local lawyers, but we can inquire in the interviews. The international office already provides a great deal of help in such cases, though.
 - It might be cheaper to share the lawyer that the USG uses, but Andrei's attempts to contact the USG went unanswered. He will try again. One concern in this scenario is that the USG has many more legal services than the graduate students need, and we would not like to pay for them.
- c) NYPIRG updates: Scott Zotto comments that they already run a legal clinic for landlord-tenant issues etc, the GSO could cooperate with them about item (b).

Past/ongoing NYPIRG events:

- Last Tuesday they held their pre-budget lobbying in Albany, 6-7 students from Long Island went and met others there. The main issue of relevance to graduate students they are fighting is to increase the graduate TAP.
 - Election day registration campaign: in NY the deadline to register is 25 days before the election, but, erroneously, the election campaigns start one day after that, which is an issue, mainly for students and minorities, who do not have much time to care and/or access to such information. The turnout in NY is very low (about 50%) and also many provisional ballots are turned down with this excuse. NYPIRG is trying to change this, to allow for people to register up to the election day. There are sign-ons available for the senators to sign and take some with them.
 - The used coats donation campaign for the homeless is still going on, the box is at the SAC.
 - If someone has to do community service after a court order, working with NYPIRG qualifies.
- Dan Woulfin presents NYPIRG's plans for next semester:
- They will have 2 grad student interns to help with the 7-8 ongoing campaigns, anyone who is interested to get involved should contact NYPIRG
 - Interested in working to expand the Student Empowerment series to Chapin and Schomburg apartment complexes – the previous “Credit Cards 101” event was a huge success, and graduate students could benefit from such events.
 - Dan is planning to work with the GSO housing committee for their housing survey.
 - Tomorrow there is the SB NYPIRG 25th anniversary, everybody is invited.
- d) Senators complain about the “Graduate” editor not showing up in the meeting and not having the November issue out yet. The executives will look into that and report in the next meeting.

A motion to adjourn is made and passed by unanimous consent. The meeting adjourns.