

March 14, 2006 Senate Meeting Minutes

Meeting starts with 24 senators, 5 executive members.

1) Welcome remarks

Andrei Antonenko, GSO president, informs the senate about projects the executive committee is working on:

- The new GSO website is up, senators are welcome to send their comments to Richard.
- Graduate student legal services: we got the bids from 5 law firms, their prices are around \$9-10k apart from one that is \$18k and one which is \$15k. We will schedule interviews with them for next week.
- The candidate GSO logos have been distributed to the senators, the executives will collect the ballots with the senator choices (only one per person) during the meeting and announce the result.

2) Approval of the agenda and minutes

The February 14 minutes are unanimously approved. Change to the agenda: remove the Lounge Committee report, agenda unanimously approved with this change.

3) Dean L. Martin (LM) presentation about honorary degrees

LM explains how honorary degrees work. They are doctorates for non-students, but other people important to the university that we want to honor. Great people have been honored up to now, like C.Reeve and C.N.Yang, and the goal is to collect a list of 10-15 nominees for the following year. There are 3 candidates for 2005, President Bush (who was crossed out after the tsunami and the Katrina hurricane), Bernard Harris (the first black astronaut) and former President Clinton. It is difficult to get students involved with the nomination and selection process, this year Andrei Antonenko, GSO president, is in the committee. GSO senators are encouraged to nominate people. The key for a successful nomination is a person that is sufficiently famous, but close to the university. Senators ask LM if it necessarily has to be someone famous, and not someone that has worked and published research in the university (like a staff member) but never got a degree. LM says that it has happened before in other universities, someone not famous, who contributed to the university life and students liked, to be given an honorary degree. Stony Brook did something similar recently, awarded an honorary PhD to writer Charles Johnson, who had studied in our university but never got his degree, but he soon after took an exam and earned a normal PhD too.

4) Budget Committee report

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

- The Latin American Graduate Students Association requests \$320 for a speaker series event titled "Miradas desde el Sur / Views from the South". The amount is approved unanimously.
- The Aladdin club had asked for funding for an event, but nobody showed up at the BC meeting, so the committee agreed to present the event to the senate without recommendation. Nobody from the club is at the senate meeting either, they have told Anirban in advance that all the organizers would be at a conference and could not attend the BC or the senate meeting. They have asked Alton Frabetti, Art

senator, to present their event. Alton explains that they are asking for \$150, \$100 for food and \$50 for a gift to the speaker, Harold Metcalf. Motion by Miranda Moore, Economics senator, not to fund the event. She decides to table the motion until someone from the club shows up to present the event to the senate. Seconded by Erin Cassese, Political science senator, unanimous consent to table the motion.

Anirban gives an update on financial issues:

- The committee will have to present next year's budget in the next senate meeting, they will meet every Monday to prepare it, senators should bring their proposals to them.
- Anirban, Andrei, Kris Baker, GSO speaker, and Ron Willa, the FSA accountant, interviewed the 4 cheapest external auditors and they have almost reached a decision of who to hire for next year's external audit. They will publicize their decision tomorrow.
- The FSA is the C&D agent for the GSO and part of the University café activity. They were paid \$22k in 2004-05 (\$28k with the café manager's health insurance) and they are asking for \$42k for the next year. The senators ask Ron for the reason for the increase in the fee. He says that a time and effort analysis of the last fiscal year showed that the services provided to the GSO by the FSA were worth \$40-45k. The increase proposed will not recover these expenses, they intend to get halfway there. Ron says that Anirban was "excited" to hear about the increase, and inquired about alternatives. One option for GSO is to give the part of the services of FSA to the café to Chartwells, and get a contract directly with them. According to Ron, this should lower the FSA fee to about \$21k, as FSA spends about 50% of their time on the café, and it is fine with him. He will discuss the issue with the executives. Anirban briefly explains to the senate how the contract with FSA and Chartwells about the café works: Chartwells takes care of most of the business (liquor license, food license, payroll, inventory) and gives a P&L summary to FSA every month, keeping 7.5% of the gross revenue. Then FSA adds the door cover of events, bands costs, phone and janitor salary, and bills GSO accordingly. Chartwells could pick up the door cover and bands costs, and the GSO can pay the phone and contract the janitor directly. Ari Grossman, the GSA, asks how much Chartwells might charge us for the extra work. Anirban says we do not know yet, we have to talk to them, but Ron suggests that they will most probably ask for the usual 7.5% on the door cover revenue, which we do not have to pay now that we have FSA. Senators seem to like the idea of getting FSA out of the café business, Ron says it is not so simple. Anirban concludes that the BC is still thinking and working on how to make things work, they will report more in the near future.

5) Social Concerns Committee report

Paul Fodor, GSO vice president, presents the report, see relevant documentation.

- o The survey about the construction of the hotel at the main entrance of the university is up on the website. We tried to keep it simple, send any comments via email to the committee. Ramona Walls, Ecology and Evolution senator, provided the history and helped with the survey. Questions:
 - o Is it only for graduate students? No, it is open, we will contact the USG to circulate it as well. Then, Miranda suggests, we should add a question if the person filling the survey is graduate or undergraduate.
 - o How do we advertise it? Through the senate list and the graduate program coordinators. Ari suggests to use USG as well, and also send it to the media.
- o Library budget cuts protest letter: Chris Noto presents the letter and the grim situation of the Stony Brook libraries: There is a proposal from the administration to cut \$600k per year from the libraries, whereas the costs rise by about 15% every year, well above inflation. The same trend is followed by the online issues of journals, not just books and periodicals. If the funding situation remains the same, it will affect the quality of studies and research in SBU dramatically, therefore the administration has to make a commitment to make our libraries decent. As this situation affects graduate students a lot, the committee proposes to the senate to sign the letter and send it to the administration. The executives

have reviewed and support the letter as well. If the GSO does not do anything, they will just ignore the issue. Chris is also making a website with details. Motion to support the letter by Erin, seconded by Dumaine Williams, Pharmacology senator, unanimously approved.

- Marching band proposal: Students from the Music department have informed the SCC that there is an effort from the president of the university to start a marching band, to which the students of the department are not too positive. The good part is that there will be 4 new TA positions created for the band, but we do not know for sure whether they will be new lines or transferred from elsewhere. On the bad side, this project will require \$400k just to start, which is an uncalled for expense right now. The SCC does not have enough information, we will find out more and report. Questions:
 - Miranda: who will fund it? We do not really know, but word of mouth says that the president claimed she will get private donors, but there is no commitment right now.
 - Why should the GSO care? Ramona: the Music graduate students are very upset, they claim that we do not have the basis for such a band, that it is a waste of money and that they would prefer to get a new faculty line for teaching. Chris comments that the Music department library is not functional any more due to the fund cuts and they do not get new material vital for their research and teaching, therefore a marching band is a wrong priority right now. Anirban says that if there are 4 new TA positions created, he can see no reason why the GSO should oppose. Sarah Feltham, Music senator, says that there is a concern that resources will be drained from elsewhere for the band to function, but there is no generalized opinion among the students about it. It is said that only one faculty member likes it. The concern was not brought to the SCC by her, but by some students of the department that want to remain anonymous, fearing retaliation.
 - Ari: how far is the decision process? The president wants the project to start in the fall 06 and it is already approved by the university senate. Ari says that if this is the case, they will get the funds and do it anyways, and there is no way for us to stop it.

Paul concludes that the issue was brought to the senate only for information purposes, there is no proposal or decision at this point. They will come back with more information at a future time.

- Pool hours: students wanted the pool hours extended, the SCC has contacted people in Campus Recreation already, got the schedule, and will try to work with them.
- Blue lights: the SCC was contacted by Scott Zotto from NYPIRG about the situation with safety on campus and the emergency blue lights with the phones. We contacted the police today, they do not seem to have a full map of the phones, will try to get one.

6) Housing Committee report

Dan Woulfin, History senator and HC chair, presents the Off Campus Housing Survey and a draft of an On Campus Housing one, see relevant documentation. The Off Campus survey will start on Thursday and the GSEU is going to help. Andrei asks why there are 3 surveys for housing, when we have a hard time publicizing one, and if there is a possibility to merge them. Dan clarifies that there is only one online, the Off Campus Housing one, one on paper, the On Campus one that will be delivered to the residents' mailboxes, and one report on Expense vs Income. There is no problem of overwhelming survey takers, as the samples are mutually exclusive, and Dan will take care of the distribution of the On Campus Housing Survey himself. It is difficult to combine the 2 surveys online, as one of them is a joint effort with NYPIRG, and it is difficult to change it with them. The On Campus survey is only for current residents, if someone has a comment from previous years, send it to Dan. There will soon be a HC page on the webpage with a complaint box as well. Ari compliments that the surveys are a good start, as the committee was not functional up to now.

The count of the senators' votes for the new GSO logo is over, results: D3-D4-E1 6 votes, C3 5 votes, the rest have less. The former wins, the executives will decide between the 3 color schemes, senators can email their suggestions. Motion by Miranda to vote between the 2 most popular logos, seconded by Liza Prazak, Molecular and Cellular Biology senator, vote: 6 for, 15 against, 1 abstain, motion fails.

7) GSEU liaison committee report

Victor Rosado, candidate GSEU Chief Steward for SBU, is invited to talk about the GSEU latest news.

- Membership campaign: there are Union elections and contract negotiations coming up, all TAs should sign the membership cards in order to be eligible to vote and have their voices heard. Filled cards should be given to Victor or Mike Murphy, the Business Agent candidate, if the students want they can send them to the Local themselves, but they should keep a copy. We got over 130 cards signed in the last month, the GSEU has about 300 members in Stony Brook now out of about 1200, we still have a lot to go.
- The GSEU is co-sponsoring protests against the library funding cuts, will go beyond letters to the administration.
- The election of the CS from the March meeting was overturned by the Union administration, there will be another meeting in April and we will hopefully get an officer elected.
- There was a grievance by a student from an under-represented department about work hours, it seems to be a general problem in that department that might affect around 20 TAs. Victor is working on it, the problem is that working hours are not grievable according to our contract, therefore the best the union can do is to use "previous practice" arguments and try to negotiate with the supervisor. If that does not work, we have to meet with the program director, then the Graduate School and finally take the case to arbitration, which would most likely not work, due to the nature of our contract. In the next contract negotiations, we will try to work with the other SUNYs to make the whole contract grievable. The contract cannot be amended, it has to be re-negotiated, and our best bet is a big, active membership.
- We started a discussion about the possibility of getting the RAs unionized. The RAs of the Albany and Buffalo SUNYs have voted for a union in the past, the issue was brought to ARP and it is on appeal now with not much hope to win, due to the similar negative decisions for the cases of NYU and Brown University. If we want this done, we have to start a grassroots effort in SBU, to assess the level of interest and form our arguments. There is a campaign going on to unionize other RF employees and it is going very well, it has the support of the professors and it is likely to succeed. In this case, the RAs will be the only ones without a union on campus. It is to their benefit, as a contract will secure the benefits that they have now and it is not likely to bring them down to the TAs level. The salaries can still be flexible by department, as it is now for the TAs, and the healthcare and bonuses can be negotiated up.

8) GSELF committee report

Dumaine presents the draft of the Graduate Student Emergency Loan Fund rules, see relevant documentation. The committee meetings are in general on Tuesdays at 9:30am, notifications will be sent and all senators are welcome to attend and offer their suggestions. Questions:

- What happens if the emergency shows up during intersession, when the student is not registered? You can register anytime online, this provision was put there to prevent students that are not coming back from taking the loan.
- What if there is no GSA or he/she is sick or out of town? Whoever substitutes the GSA according to the Graduate School will take the responsibility to release funds. Ari suggests that this cannot

work, as there is no substitute for the GSA, and there has to be a second person specified in the rules.

9) New business

(a) Committee nominations: Andrei makes the nominations:

- a. CARA treasurer Smitha Gadre for a voting member of the Housing Committee
- b. Gina Chiarella for the planning committee and Paul Fodor for the awards committee of the Campus Life Awards
- c. New ad hoc Library Liaison Committee: Chris Noto, Kassandra Hartford, Katherine Kaiser. This committee will follow up with the protest letter and work with the university on library issues. We will have to make it a standing committee eventually, but for that we have to change the constitution, which can only be done next semester.

All the new committee members are approved unanimously

(b) NYPIRG updates: Scott Zotto presents the past/ongoing/future NYPIRG events:

- E-fax campaign to ask the legislators not to raise tuition and give more funds for higher education is going on.
- “Jam If You Can”, the benefit concert to benefit the homeless, is still going to happen on Friday, March 31, but the venue has to change, as they could not get the University café.
- Students are encouraged to use the Small Claims Court Action Center for tenant-landlord issues.
- “Smart Moves, Your Rights, Your Lease, Your Deposit”, NYPIRG's second workshop in its Student Empowerment Series, endorsed by the Housing Committee, is scheduled for Thursday, March 16 at 7pm in SAC 308.

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