

May 3, 2005 Senate Meeting Minutes

Meeting starts with 24 senators, 5 executive members. Changes to the agenda:

Budget committee report (item e of committee reports) goes first of committee reports. Social Concerns Committee report (d) goes second.

Agenda and April 12 minutes were unanimously approved.

1) New bus routes

Terence Harrigan (TH), Director of Facilities and Services, gave an overview of the changes: 3 smaller routes of a frequency of 10-13min to replace the larger ones in order to provide better service and encourage the use of the SP lot by staff and others. Transfer from one to the other will be done in 3 transfer points, so only 1 stop will be needed to get anywhere, and the connections will be worked out (GPS locators are investigated as a way to track buses/delays). The scheme will roll back to the current one in the weekends and during inclement weather. The infirmary will also be served. The weekend mall route is too long, it will be split in 2, to also serve a set of cheaper stores (around Nicholls-Middle Country rd). 2 new buses were bought (now have a total of 10), 3 additional drivers were hired and the existing buses have been refurbished. The plan is to replace 3-5 of them every year with smaller, bio-diesel fueled ones. Also in the list is to upgrade the paratransit service (now only 2 vans) and upgrade the SP bus station. The route to Chapin will run from 5am to 12:30am. The 15 passenger vans were not convenient and will not be used any more. They have been given to departments that needed them, and Enterprise rentals can be used instead when needed.

A discussion on environment-friendly fuels followed: according to TH, bio-fuels are actually more expensive than conventional ones, but the switch is mandated by the State. Other alternatives mentioned by senators (compressed natural gas, bio-diesel-electric hybrid, fully electric) were either deemed impossible to implement, not DOE approved or never heard of, but open to explore. In order to cover the cost difference, senators asked if an increase in the transportation fee was being considered. TH said it was being looked at but no specific plans are laid, and pointed out that the fee has not changed since 1990.

Hiring student drivers to reduce the expenses has many drawbacks (union problems, availability and reliability issues), but it has been done before and they are exploring it.

A complaint was voiced that people who do not use the bus cannot find parking spots, since undergrads illegally take them, using parking permits they shouldn't have. TH said it is difficult to track who should have a tag and who actually has one, but progress in ticketing is ongoing.

2) Executive Committee members report

- Prasanna, GSO President: This was a good year, there were no impeachments or emergency meetings, and feedback was good. So, the basic job of the president was taken care of. For the technology fee issue, he got people in the relevant committees. Since September, the University Café has had a huge improvement. The 2 things he had promised to take care of:
 - Brought the issue of housing to the grad council, ethernet was installed, regular reports on Chapin apartments were given to GSO, consolidation problems were addressed during the contract discussions
 - For the transportation issue, he was a member of the transportation committee, saw that the roads were improved, the mall routes changed...
- Questions/comments to Prasanna:
- What are some initiatives that he took and he would like the new president to follow up on?
 - > communication between graduate students/GSO and administration.

- Apart from signs on walkways, what other changes have taken place to minimize traffic violations? There is still a lot of work to be done for transportation on campus: there are not enough stop signs and they are not enforced, to name a few.
- Monica, GSO Vice president: The committees that every executive participated in, and their action in them is what they should be judged by. So, Monica's committees:
 - The Social Concerns Committee (SCC) is chaired by the vice president. It took care of security issues on campus: lights were fixed, it is working with staff to properly handle emergency calls, more signs will be installed by summer and no complaints were received so far for these issues. There have been complaints about faculty-students relations, isolated in the start, but eventually recurrent, so they had to be investigated. As a result, SCC conducted a wide survey, whose results will be presented later in this meeting (see item 2b).
 - The University committees are a good way to represent graduate students and communicate with the administration.
 - As a representative from the GSO executive board she also participated in the University senate. This year we had a say in everything there (but the technology fee).
 - Student Health Advisory Committee: although not an official member of the SHAC, she helped out in the issue of the new mandatory health insurance. This measure doesn't affect grads too much, but still 30% of them could be affected and the committee could use an executive to fight against it. According to the financial aid office representative that SHAC talked to, no plans have yet been finalized to cover the approximately \$1000 cost of this mandatory insurance, therefore we have to try to make it optional and/or get a better deal. In this fight, the SHAC needs support from GSO, to promote their survey (which was setup with GSO help on our website – thanks to Domingo, the GSO webmaster), more people in their meetings, etc.
 - The President's Five Year Plan Graduate Education Committee deals exclusively with issues related to graduate education. It generates reports and makes recommendations to the president of the university. She is a member of this committee for the past 6 months.
- Rong, GSO Treasurer: We are financially stable – we have \$35k in reserve and \$15-20k surplus. As a result, RAP could potentially be raised next year to \$300. Program funding was increased, as well as outside funding for RAP. In the future, we have to approach the administration consistently to ask them for increased support, plan fundraising and start new initiatives.
- Andrei, GSO Speaker: He participated in the SCC and the Budget Committee, arranged the practical stuff for the meetings (invitations etc...)
- Ilektra, GSO Secretary: Joined the executive committee late (March), so she has not managed to do much yet. But she put the senate list to an order, now all senators get informed about stuff, and tried to follow up the issue of the technology fee increase. Also attended a couple of meetings of the SHAC with administration.

3) Committee reports

(a) Budget committee report:

Rong presented the few changes (mainly in the narrative) to the budget proposal from the last senate meeting, see relevant documentation. The 2 major changes are the raise of the allocation for RAP to \$90k/\$300 per person and that if the expenses of the lounge are less than the allocated amount, the difference will be rolled to the next year for lounge expenses, instead of being added to the general surplus (see page 12 of the proposed budget). A concern if the money allocated for RAP this year will cover everyone who applied, since many people tend to apply during the last month (there are only 200-230 people up to now), was voiced, but Rong said we will be able to cover them – in the worst case we have the surplus. A discussion on the raise of RAP allocation followed:

- 300 people that approximately apply every year are less than 5% of the grads, whereas \$90k is about 40% of the budget. It is irresponsible to raise RAP every time, it is better to increase the allocation for other programs with the surplus instead. On these grounds, Mark Coleman, senator from Anthropology, makes a motion to keep RAP allocation at \$250 per person. There is no second to the motion, so it fails.
- Rong claims raising RAP is not against the GSO mission. It would be nice to give \$250 to 500 people, but this is how many show up to apply for it, although it is well advertised. RAP is accessible to everybody, whereas club activities are somewhat more restricted, not many people care about them.
- Mark Coleman makes a motion to keep the line at \$90k, but give \$250 per person. Seconded by Aryeh Grossman, senator from Anthropology. Mark said he doesn't want to take the funds away from the students, but we should look at the further good. We should not spend our surplus so easily and risk bankruptcy, we should instead fund the clubs more, that represent a larger part of the community (ex. the Chinese community). There is a concern that we will not be able to cover everyone who applies for RAP, spend our surplus and have to roll it back next year. He also raised a concern that once the surplus is spent, there will be no additional funds to afford to pay a \$300 RAP allocation.
- \$250 are little but crucial for people to go to conferences, it is a minimum needed. Also, the number of students applying every year is quite stable at about 300, therefore if we raise the line to \$90k without increasing the per person amount, this money will not be spent. And raising the allocation by \$10k actually means that GSO has to pay for \$5k, due to the matching policy, so it is not that much. RAP should be the senate's main focus, as its being received by students from any department depends on the attendance of its senator.
- There was a concern that not many people know about RAP, thus it should be better advertised and we should get more people to apply for it, if we are going to raise the line. But it was also said that everybody knows it, at least it is said very clearly in the orientation, and the ones that apply are actually the ones that need the funding. There are no concrete statistics on that.
- A motion was unanimously passed to end the discussion. Mark amended his proposal to give \$300 to people that do not have any funding from their department and \$250 to the ones that have. Senators suggested that this is hard to check and we ultimately have to believe the advisor, so Mark took the amendment back. Vote for original motion, to keep the RAP line at \$90k, but give \$250 per person: 9 for, 12 against, 2 abstain, fails.
- Angeliki Pollatou, senator from Physics, makes a motion to keep the RAP line at \$90k but give \$275 per person. Mark seconds. Vote: 16 for, 5 against, 1 abstain, passes.
- There was a proposal to give some extra money (\$25) after the end of the year, when we know how much surplus we have, but it was deemed not a good idea, as going to a conference largely depends on the availability of funding beforehand.
- Motion by Miranda Moore, senator from Economics, to approve the budget, seconded by Tarah Dame, senator from Microbiology. Vote: 20 for, 1 against, 0 abstain, passes.
- There was a funding request, for a first-time event, a carnival-like kid-friendly party at the West apartments, with food, BBQ, game booths. It will be open to the whole campus, but just from Schomburg and West apartments, about 600 people are expected. They also have lots of other sources of funding, they ask GSO for \$500 for advertising/fliers. Motion to approve, seconded and passed with unanimous consent.

(b) SCC report:

Monicca presented the results of the Faculty-Student Relations survey, see relevant documentation. The School of Professional Development was not included in the survey because the Dean of SPD had not responded to emails asking to offer the survey at the school. There are recurring patterns in good and bad aspects of faculty-student relations, certain departments can be deemed problematic (ESM, ART, AMS) or good models (HBH). There are also isolated cases of faculty misbehaviour and bad attitude that have to be taken care of individually. Senators from History said that many of the problems of their department are due

to an incompetent graduate program director, who has luckily been changed recently. Annie Green, senator from Ecology and Evolution, reported that an email informing the students about the procedures to complain was circulated in her department today, as a response to the survey. The suggestions for improvement by the SCC were largely welcomed by the senate, discussion:

- Forcing faculty to sit in thesis committees is not a good idea, as the forced faculty may harm the student. But students still have to be protected by the possibility of not finding a committee at all, so the suggestion is rephrased as “the departments encourage faculty to be in thesis committees”. Also the GSO, GSA and departments should look into specific cases when they occur, and the Graduate School should monitor the faculty participation in committees and take action in particular departments (ex. SOC).

- In addition to eligibility requirements for a faculty member to become graduate director, there should be a university-wide time limit to the term. This can be difficult though, as nobody wants to be the director. Also a student representative should be required in every faculty meeting.

- No office can promise to solve a student’s problems. However, the ombuds office is quite powerful, due to its rule of confidentiality. Its existence should be widely advertised.

- The disparity in the TA/GA/RA salaries is a very complicated problem, that could maybe be negotiated with the 5-year-plan committee.

- Sexual harassment problems have to be investigated centrally, by the Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action or Ombuds office, in which case (if done correctly) the faculty cannot get away at least with training. Students have to be made aware of these services that are offered to them.

- There was an overwhelming demand that the new GSA follows up on identified problems, contacts the problematic departments and sees that problems are solved. Also for the next executive council to keep an eye on how the suggestions of the survey are implemented and to contact the good departments for suggestions.

- The next step for the SCC is to go to the administration with the report. They requested an extra \$200 for the printing and the amount was approved unanimously by the senate.

(c) Appointment of new committee members:

Kristin Ericson, anthropology senator, was appointed to the lounge committee, with unanimous consent. Jean Cadet, from the same committee, was made a non-voting member, as he never shows up.

Angeliki Pollatou, physics senator, was appointed the Survival Guide editor, with unanimous consent.

Ilektra Christidi, GSO secretary, was appointed to the Technology Fee steering committee, with unanimous consent.

A motion to adjourn was made and passed by unanimous consent. The meeting adjourned.