

GSO Senate – Minutes – March 12, 2008

The meeting begins with 27 Senators and 5 Executives.

1) Welcoming Remarks

President Naydan congratulated the senators and thanked them for coming.

2) Approval of the Agenda

Mark Rice (History) moved to approve the agenda. It was approved unanimously.

3) Approval of February Meeting Minutes

Mark Rice (History) motioned to approve the minutes. Approved unanimously.

4) Stipend Levels of Incoming Students

Dr. Laurence Martin, Dean of the Graduate School, presented his view on the stipend levels of incoming students. He started by describing the many steps taken by the University and the Graduate School over the last few years in order to raise the stipends of graduate students in Stony Brook. This year he decided to divide the presidential fellowships among the entire incoming cohort. Therefore the minimum stipend offered to incoming graduate students will be \$17,145, while the minimum stipend for students in advanced years will be \$15,145.

The Dean received a lot of questions and the discussion took over an hour and a half. The graduate students brought up a few major issues and contentions:

a) Why is this stipend given to first year students rather than to advanced students?

Dean Martin: This move was not considered, because of the attempt to offer competitive stipends for incoming students and draw in the best ones.

b) Students expressed concern that this policy will hurt the sense of conviviality among graduate students in many departments. Students will feel like they are not treated fairly

Dean Martin: this is similar to the situation to the situation of faculty. Some faculties get more than others, sometimes although they only came in. If you want to be competitive and draw good people, recruitment is the time to do it.

c) The students see that as a moral issue. They warned that this may backfire against the administration and its efforts to recruit, because current graduate students will express their disappointment and mistrust of the university to those considering coming here in future years.

Dean Martin: The institutional commitment of the administration and the president in particular, had been remarkable over the last few years. A lot of efforts were invested in improving the situation of all Stony Brook graduate

students. However, one of the things that are most important to the future of the university is bringing in the best graduate students possible. This is bound to improve the competitive environment of this institution, which eventually is the common goal of both students and administration.

d) What would have been the amount of money added to each graduate student if the available sum would have been allocated between all cohorts? How much would it cost the university to raise everyone's stipends by \$2,000?

Dean Martin: The addition to each student would have been \$500. The decision was that it would be better to give a \$2,000 increase to some and gradually get there for everyone, rather than have a \$500 increase. To bring everyone to a level of 17,145, the graduate school needs an additional \$1,500,000. These monies are simply not available. He would love to give everyone that amount, but the money is simply not there.

e) What about lowering the costs of housing?

Dean Martin: This is a staggering problem, which the University hasn't been able to come around so far, largely because of the laws of NY State. These laws force the University to build in certain ways that push housing prices up.

f) Is the increase going to be only for new students, or also for older students who are moving into new positions? (e.g. moving from a TA to an RA position).

Dean Martin: the increase is going to be only for incoming students.

g) These are very disturbing news to current graduate students. The current students are doing the same work, if not more, and this is very unjust. Current students feel that the school is not taking care of them and neglects their needs. This increase sends a message of disdain. In addition, an increase of \$2,000 is not high enough to make Stony Brook really competitive, and therefore does not justify the commotion and bad feelings it creates among current graduate students.

Dean Martin: Graduate students should not ignore the steps taken by the school over the last few years to improve their financial situation. The problem is that Stony Brook loses a lot of good candidates, because these students get higher stipends from other places. The stipend is not enough, and he knows that, but it is constantly improving.

h) This policy gives the message that the University cares more about recruitment than it does about RETAINMENT.

The feeling that this is an unfair resolution was brought up by many students. The most common feeling expressed was that the new students, if anything, should be paid LESS than current students, because they are probably doing less work and are less effective. In

addition, this new policy may hurt the relationships inside departments and produce many unhappy and disgruntled students, which is surely not what Dean Martin had in mind. Finally, many felt that the graduate student representative bodies should have at least been consulted with before the decision was made, and that after it was made it was poorly communicated. Many of us had to hear it through half rumors, instead of the graduate school manifesting its intentions and making them clear from the very beginning.

Dean Martin admitted that he is not sure that his decision was indeed the right one, but still believes that given the limited funds and the limited time he had to make the decision, students should at least understand why he decided to act as he did. He was actually surprised to receive such levels of animosity from graduate students, because he felt that the administration made every effort in recent years to improve the conditions of the students, and because he saw this as another step in this direction. He also emphasized that this increase could have gone to many other places in the University rather than to the graduate students. Overall, he believes that investing this money in graduate students, even if not in all of them, actually shows the commitment of the University to graduate students. This was certainly not done to upset current graduate students.

After Dean Martin left the meeting, President Naydan and the executive council distributed a resolution prepared in advance which calls the school to make every effort to include all graduate students from all cohorts in the \$2,000 stipend increase (SEE APNDIX 1 for the full resolution).

Mark Rice (History) motioned to approve the resolution. It passed with 24 in favor and 3 abstaining.

5) “Stay on Long Island” Presentation

A representative from the “Stay on Long Island” organization talked about the fact that it is really expensive to live in Long Island. There has been a Brain drain in Long Island over the last decade. They asked for the support and participation of Stony Brook students, and encouraged students to visit their website and contribute to their efforts.

6) Resolutions

a) Resolution on Technology Fee

Speaker Antonenko presented a resolution that implores the administration to wave off the Technology Fee for all graduate students, because unlike undergraduates, and much like the faculty, we need the technology in order to do our work. The resolution was approved unanimously (SEE APENDIX 2 FOR THE FULL RESOLUTION).

b) Resolution on Smoking Policy

VP Esparza presented a resolution on the smoking policy. There was a substantial compromise from both sides (those who initially wanted to have total ban on smoking in the University and those who wanted to leave things as they are) and the resolution now says that there will be no smoking in the academic mall, in additions to a few other changes. Jose motioned to approve the resolution. The motion passed: 11 in favor, 3 opposed, and 5 abstained (SEE APENDIX 3 FOR THE FULL RESOLUTION).

11) Internal Committee Reports

a) Budget Committee

Dave Roelfs (Sociology) presented instead of the GSO Treasurer Longobardi, who was away. Dave presented the budget situation shortly, and then moved to funding requests.

The senate discussed a few requests for funding of events and conferences:

- I. **Art History Department** – funding request for \$300 (out of a total budget of \$400) for a speaker series. Approved unanimously.
- II. **Women Studies Department** – Conference funding. Requesting \$1134 (out of a total \$2484). Approved Unanimously.
- III. **Computer Science department** – Asked for \$300 (out of total \$500) for posters and printing costs for a conference.
- IV. **Buddhism Study and Practice Group**. Asked for \$540 and \$440 for two different events. Both requests were approved unanimously.
- V. **School of Social Welfare** – asked for funding for traveling to Manhattan for a UN day. They asked to have a special bus going to the city at the cost of \$1,045. The motion did not go through the budget committee, and so it did not have the recommendation of the committee. Still, it passed unanimously.

At this point, due to the late hour, Dave Roelfs (Sociology) motioned to end the meeting. It passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Eran Shor

APENDIX 1

Resolution on \$17,145 Minimum Assistantship for all T.A.s and G.A.s

Whereas, Shirley Strum Kenny announced that Stony Brook University has increased the yearly stipend for graduate students by approximately 15% on May 25, 2007 for FY 2007-2008 commending the work Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants do as “greatly enrich[ing] the intellectual quality of our University, through both their teaching and their research;” and,

Whereas, incoming Stony Brook Ph.D students will be offered a minimum assistantship of \$17,145 for the 2008-2009 academic year while current graduate students’ assistantships will remain at \$15,145; and,

Whereas, Stony Brook University’s 2008-2013 Five Year Plan calculates that the cost of living in the Stony Brook area over the nine months of the academic year is \$16,077 for the 2006-2007 year and 17,550 for the 2008-2009 year and states that “the university should treat a significant increase in the TA stipend as a campus-wide priority;” and,

Whereas, the GSO supports the raise of the minimum assistantship for incoming students because of the extremely high cost of living on Long Island, **but** believes that all money for assistantships should be distributed fairly to Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants; and,

Whereas, the GSO believes that if a raise is given to first year students, it should be given to all Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants; therefore be it

Resolved, that the GSO expresses its appreciation to President Shirley Strum Kenny for the \$2,000 raise provided to all Stony Brook Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants at the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year; and be it further

Resolved, that the GSO asks that Stony Brook University raise the minimum assistantship offered to all Ph.D students working as Teaching Assistants and Graduate Assistants at Stony Brook to \$17,145 for the 2008-2009 academic year.

APENDIX 2

Resolution on Technology Fee for TAs, GAs, and RAs

Whereas, the technology fee has increased by 70% within the last 5 years, and will reach the level of \$171.50 in the Fall 2008 semester; and

Whereas, the graduate students employed by Stony Brook University as TAs, GAs, and RAs depend on technology, including the use of software, e-mail, and Internet in their work related responsibilities, such as grading, preparing for lectures/labs/recitations, conducting research for their PI, and others; and

Whereas, the number of Mac users drastically increased within the last few years, but nevertheless the Microsoft Operating systems, such as Windows Vista and Windows XP are provided to students for a nominal charge, while the Mac OS X discount for students is only about 23%, (\$99 versus \$129); be it

Resolved, that the GSO feels that the University should provide its employees, including TAs, GAs, and RAs, with the means to perform their job responsibilities, including free access to the internet, e-mail, and the necessary software; and be it further

Resolved, that GSO opposes the Technology fee being charged to TAs, GAs, and RAs on the above said grounds; and be it further

Resolved, that GSO feels that current software pricing policies put Mac users at a disadvantage, and asks the IT department to provide Apple's Operating Systems and other software to the students free or for a nominal charge; and be it further

Resolved, that for these reasons the GSO supports the GSEU in its campaign to get all Technology fees waived for all graduate student employees at Stony Brook University.

APENDIX 3

Resolution on the University Smoking Policy

Whereas the Campus Environment Committee of the University Senate at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, after two years of negotiations between graduate students, undergraduate students, faculty, and staff, has recommended that SUNY Stony Brook revise the smoking policy so as to prohibit smoking within 20 (twenty) feet from buildings and outdoor seating areas; and

Whereas the University Senate will be considering this policy proposal on 7 April 2008;

Be it resolved that the GSO strongly supports the proposed policy, which prohibits smoking within 20 (twenty) feet from buildings and improves the quality of life of students, faculty, and staff on the SUNY at Stony Brook campus by reducing second-hand smoke.

Be it further resolved that the GSO opposes any unilateral decisions made outside of the Campus Environment Committee, which is the official appointed body overseeing the development of an appropriate smoking policy.