

## **GSO Senate – Minutes – November 4, 2008**

The meeting begins with 28 Senators and 4 Executives

### **1) Approval of the Agenda and the October Minutes**

The Agenda was approved unanimously.

The October 7th 2008 minutes were approved unanimously.

A motion to temporarily appoint Alexandra Valdes (Marine Sciences alternate senator) as the secretary for today's meeting was approved unanimously. Secretary Colmenares is overseas on a Research Trip

### **2) Welcoming remarks**

President Naydan welcomed the senators, the Research Foundation (RF) representatives and Dean Martin to the meeting. She talked about the SBU president search committee meeting with the undergraduate and graduate students and that she was disappointed that not many students attended. She emphasized the importance of graduate students to contact her if there were any concerns about this presidential search.

### **3) Research Foundation Report**

Steve Riccobono Introduced the RF representatives and no formal presentation was given to the students. He mentioned that their goal for the night was to answer questions from the graduate student community. Therefore it was an open discussion that lasted approximately an hour between the RF, senators, and faculty members including Dean Martin. In general there were no conclusions between the students and the RF; the RF stated not being supportive of an intermediary (RA union) between the Research Assistants and the Research Foundation. Thus a motion to continue the discussion between all campus faculty, students and employees in a town hall meeting was approved. The discussions opened up with Kira Schuman (History) who asked "why the RF was spending money on hiring a union busting and how they are paying them?" which was answered by the VP of the RF stating that they hired a law firm specialized in labor law not union busting and that no information was available in terms of how much money has been spend or how it was being used. Later Senator Engel asked to the RF if they were supportive to the RA's having an union to which Steve Riccobono from the RF addressed by saying that RA's salaries were fixed by the Principal Investigator and the specific grant and that an union could not change that. Dean Martin also participated in the discussion by saying that he was neutral and that he was supportive to what it was best for the students. Then Senator Engel asked "why don't we feel the support from the RF to have an union?" to which the VP answered that the RF felt more comfortable without an intermediate between the RA and the RF, and for this he gave an example of RA acquiring health insurance benefits without an union present.

At this point of the discussion Speaker Longobardi had to appoint order to talk, to which a retired Professor from Chemistry spoke in favor of a RA union and gave an extensive description of unionization at SBU from faculty members and TA's. In addition he mentioned that the Research Foundation are no "goodwill people" and described the

“PI’s and RA’s relationship as conflictive because RA are seen as labor (money) and at the same time are students that need advise from their advisor/PI; thus the need for an union or an intermediary”. He finally concluded by asking what was wrong with having an intermediate?” To which the RF addressed by saying that there was information in their website to address these issues and a graduate student advocate. Dean Lawrence Martin also commented that the Graduate School does not address issues related between PI’s and RA’s and therefore the position of a graduate student advocate was created. Mr. Riccobono from the RF added that he does not know if having a union will solve the issues between PI’s and RA’s.

Paola Espinoza (Ecology and Evolution) asked the RF “How do you help RA’s with the increase cost of living in LI?” to which Mr. Riccobono from the RF answered that currently RA’s salaries are higher than TA’s salaries. Dean Martin added that PI’s in their grants have more flexibility for RA’s salaries compared to state established salaries for TA’s. Another senator asked “What about the fees that RA’s currently paid to which the TA’s have a waiver thanks to the GSEU?”, to which Mr. Riccobono responded that SBU determines the fees for the students, thus RF has nothing to do with it. The VP added that 19% of RA salaries are higher than TA’s. In addition, Dean Martin explained the differences between fees (e.g. technology and transportation). Kira Schuman (History) said that currently TA’s and GA’s do not pay for transportation and technology fees and pointed out an example of a RA from the SoMAS dept. who has used the current grievances procedures to establish a complain about her advisor and has find them unhelpful. Steve Riccobono responded that he knows the student and since she did not authorize to release the names of the involved parties they could not help her.

Matthew Engel (Biomedical Engineering) pointed out the differences between salaries and job descriptions among RA’s.

Young-ran An (Linguistics) asked “if having a union will make research worst?” to which the VP from the RF answered that “a union is not appropriate for the RA’s”. After that there were some exchanges between Senator Engel and the VP. At that point Dean Martin decided to speak and since there were no ends to the discussion Sozia Turek (Marine Sciences) made the motion for the GSO to organize a town hall meeting to continue the discussion between the GSO and the RF. Dean Martin said that the meeting needed to be general not only between the GSO and the RF because SBU needs to maintain neutrality. Juliet Kinney (Marine Sciences) made an amendment to the previous motion by inviting all the SBU community including faculty, staff and students to discuss the relationship between PI’s and RA’s. Senator Engel also asked to have at least a 24 hour period announcement of the meeting, after this the motion was finally approved.

The retired professor from the chemistry department described his wife experience in working with grievances/union issues and had two comments for the RF, one that appointed the current grievances policies for RA’s, and the second that the grants flexibility on RA salaries were like a “wobble room”.

Julie Riederer (Psychology) Asked the RF “why do you support the GSEU and not an union for the RA’s?”, to which the VP from the FR responded that he could not comment on the GSEU but that the RF will bargain with the union after in case the election results favor an union formation. Dean Martin added that “they have to work with the rules, so if they have to bargain with a union they will play by the rules”.

The president of the GSO decided to conclude the discussion by thanking senators Turek and Kinney for their motion and finished by saying that the GSO will organize a forum where everyone on campus could participate in. To the end the VP asked to have the last word to stay that the RF support the secret voting for a possible RA union.

#### **4) Internal Committee reports**

A motion to appoint Kate Klein as the Campus Recreation Center Advisory Board Representative and Kira Schuman as University Senator was approved unanimously

**a. Housing committee**

**b. Rules and Constitution Committee:** withdrawn from the agenda due to low quorum. To make the proposed changes it needed a quorum of at least 34 senators.

**c. Budget Committee:**

Treasurer Young

Funding requests

I) A representative from the Art department requested \$1749 for a lecture from Dr. Norman Bryson

II) A representative from the Behavioral Ecology Group requested \$862 for talk by Dr. Ian Gillby.

III) A representative from the Functional Morphology Group requested \$880 for a talk by Dr. Anthony Herrel

IV) Alexandra Valdes from Marine Sciences requested \$250 for an election night event in the university café to be held immediately after the November 4<sup>th</sup> GSO meeting is over. A motion to approve the funds passed unanimously.

All motions were approved.

**d. Social Concerns Committee:**

Vice-President Selterman had two main topics in his report. First about openness and dishonesty happening at the GSO and that President Naydan and himself would appreciate an honest and atmosphere at the GSO, he also mentioned that those who needed to hear his message left the meeting. Secondly he talked about the news of the University Community Standards committee in terms of new rules for disruptive students in class.

#### **5)GSEU update:**

Business Agent Victor Rosado was absent; Senator Schuman presented a flyer and announced the RA union website that explained the mechanisms that some employers use to discourage unionization

**7) New/old business**

An undergraduate representative of the NYIPRG announced that 70% of the students at SBU were registered for this elections, and that on Thursday November 13th there is going to be a meeting to discuss an increase in tuition.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jose Colmenares-Angulo

Graduate Student Organization Secretary

Alexandra Valdes-Wochinger

Alternate Senator for Marine Sciences / Temporary Secretary for the 11/04/2008 GSO meeting