

MINUTES¹

USG Senate Meeting

Thursday, February 10th, 2011

Meeting called to order at 7:11 pm. Meeting held in Wang Center – Room 201.

Agenda item 1.0: Attendance

The roll was called:

Senator Allen Abraham	Present
Senator Tahir Ahmad	Present
Senator Ory Baum	Present
Senator Spenser Cushing	Present
Senator Samuel Cushner	Present
Senator Ray Fan	Present
Senator Frank Fanizza	Present
Senator Christian Giraldo	Present
Senator Mahyar Kashan	Present
Senator Sidrah Khan	Present
Senator Thomas Kirnbauer	Absent
Senator Yan Leyfman	Present
Senator Deborah Machalow	Present
Senator Kirin Mahmud	Absent
Senator Shivani Rampersad	Present
Senator Masood Rustemi	Present

¹ Typically, minutes should only contain the essentials of a meeting. This includes the meeting time and location, a list of those who attended, as well as a record of all motions made and their outcome. Debate or even a summary of debate is usually not included. I include it here at the request of the Chair. Mistakes and omissions are likely, so Senators are encouraged to e-mail the Secretary with corrections prior to the next Senate meeting, so that the record reflects what was actually said at the meeting and so corrections can be made efficiently.

Senator Najee Simmons	Present
Senator Harminder Singh	Present
Senator Priya Sohi	Present
Senator Peter Stratoudakis	Present
Senator Russell Williams	Present

President Matthew Graham	Present
Executive Vice President Alexander Dimitriyadi (Chair)	Present
Treasurer Mark	Present
Vice President of Academic Affairs Forbes	Absent
Vice President of Clubs and Organizations Jennifer Chan	Absent
Vice President of Communications David Mazza	Present
Vice President of Student Life Peter Molloy	Absent
Senior Class Representative Dexter Daniel	Present
Junior Class Representative Emilissa Trotman	Absent
Sophomore Class Representative Neville Hall Jr.	Absent
Freshman Class Representative Rodriguez	Absent

Quorum established.

Agenda item 2.0: Announcements

The Chair announced that Senators or members of the gallery (during open agenda) should present legislation and/or statements from the podium. The Chair further announced that Senators should address all remarks to the Chair in order to improve decorum.

Agenda item 3.0: Approval of the Minutes from 2/3/2011

- A motion to amend the 2/3/11 minutes, striking “Absent” after “Senator Russell Williams” in Agenda item 1.0: Attendance, and replacing with “Present,” was approved by unanimous consent.
- A motion to amend the 2/3/11 minutes, striking “Cuhner” in the Roll Call breakdown section, and replacing with “Cushner,” was approved by unanimous consent.

- A motion to amend the 2/3/11 minutes, striking “Absent” after “Senator Ory Baum” in Agenda item 1.0: Attendance, and replacing with “Present,” was approved without objection.
- A motion to amend the 2/3/11 minutes, striking “Absent” after “Senator Spenser Cushing” in Agenda item 1.0: Attendance, and replacing with “Present,” was approved without objection.
- A motion to approve the minutes as amended was approved by unanimous consent.

Agenda item 4.0: President Pro Tempore Election

The previous election for President Pro Tempore (PPT,) held on 2/3/2011, was declared incomplete, as the USG Constitution requires a simple majority of the filled seats of the USG Senate in order to elect a President Pro Tempore. In the previous election, Senator Machalow secured 10 votes, but as there are 21 filled seats in the USG Senate, a vote of at least 11 Senators is required to elect a PPT.

- On the motion to elect the President Pro Tempore, the breakdown of votes is as follows:

Senator Abraham	Machalow
Senator Ahmad	Machalow
Senator Baum	Machalow
Senator Cushing	Machalow
Senator Cushner	Machalow
Senator Fan	Machalow
Senator Fanizza	Machalow
Senator Giraldo	Machalow
Senator Kashan	Machalow
Senator Khan	Machalow
Senator Kirnbauer	Absent
Senator Leyfman	Machalow
Senator Machalow	Abstain
Senator Mahmud	Absent
Senator Rampersad	Abraham
Senator Rustemi	Machalow
Senator Simmons	Machalow
Senator Singh	Machalow
Senator Stratoudakis	Machalow
Senator Sohi	Abraham
Senator Williams	Abstain

- Total votes for Senator Machalow: 15
- Total votes for Senator Abraham: 2
- Abstentions: 2
- Majority required: 11
- Outcome: Senator Machalow elected as President Pro Tempore of the USG Senate.

Agenda item 5.0: Open Agenda

- President Graham commended the USG Senate and all those responsible for the success of the Aziz Ansari event. He also encouraged Senators to support and attend upcoming events, such as the “Immortal Technique” concert and upcoming sporting events.
- The President passed out documents regarding the SUNY Budgetary situation.
 - The USG Senate is the “voice of the people.”
 - Stony Brook was hit particularly hard in terms of spending cuts – including the University Hospital and the Veterans Home.
 - Cuts in Stony Brook programs are likely in face of the proposed cuts.
 - “Moderate and predictable” tuition increases are being contemplated to make up budgetary falls.
 - I don’t think many students would be in support of tuition increases.
 - I believe we should have a discussion regarding our position on tuition increases. The way I look at it, one year we had tuition increases, 90% of the additional revenue was used by NY State.
 - “If we do advocate for tuition increases, we should be advocating that they all remain in the SUNY system” and not to contribute to other state projects.
 - TAP?
 - The University Senate passed a statement this past Monday, supporting advocacy for increasing student tuition. Both the USG and GSO President voted against the statement.
 - GSO passed a resolution on Wednesday, February 9th, 2011, which the USG President believes presents a better position than the University Senate’s statement.
 - Senator Machalow: Previous polling suggested that students desired scholarships and aid to increase to match increased tuition.
 - Senator Fanizza: I believe that we should also bring up the fact that students are fully informed regarding the impact of cuts in classes and other programs.
 - Senator Ahmad: At the end of the day, we can survey the students, and they will tell us, we don’t want to pay more money. I wouldn’t want to pay more money. But, I don’t want to spend another two years here. Surveying might be superfluous. I believe we need to consider a stance similar to GSO – listing the grievances with the past tuition hike and I would be happy to start writing a resolution, along with interested Senators, to craft something that lists our grievances as well as our requests/demands should tuition be increased.
 - Senator Simmons: I believe the President brought up a good point about how previous tuition increases and how the funding is allocated. The point is, it is part of our job to make all information about what the State is planning to do available as soon as we have it. We should be facilitating the ability of students to receive this information.

- President Graham: Classes are getting bigger and are being offered less. Students are being forced to take summer classes.
 - If we are paying our tuition – there is a fundamental philosophy that the State is missing, which is that they need to be giving us more aid. Why increase tuition? Why not simply allow us to retain more of our raised tuition.
- Senator Stratoudakis: My point is that, why is the State taking more of our money, since we and our parents have been paying taxes for years in order to support a lower tuition for state schools?
 - President Graham: I agree with the Senator’s thinking.
- Senator Abraham: I think one thing we can advocate for is supporting increases in out-of-state tuition, since our out-of-state tuition is comparatively low.
- VP Mazza: I agree with Senator Abraham. It is cheaper for a Pennsylvania State resident to attend Stony Brook at the out-of-state rate than it is to attend their state institution at its in-state rate.
 - If students really wanted tuition hikes, then they would be donating funds to the Stony Brook foundation. It is clearly not the case that they want to increase tuition, and statements to the contrary that students are clamoring for increases are completely absurd.
 - Hospitals are not profit centers and they should not be. Cuts to them are not justifiable either.
 - We need to provide the facts, and we need to provide a position that we get the tuition raised by Stony Brook students to SUNY before any tuition hikes are contemplated.
- Senator Ahmad: Perhaps we should poll or survey the students after providing all of our information regarding the cuts. Is it possible for us to create a survey or use the “Street Team” to poll students regarding this issue? I would be more than happy to draft a survey or questionnaire, so we can have the opinion of all students on this matter.
 - VP Mazza: One of the things I’d like to use them for is surveys, but I would be cautious about using them for a political issue.
- Senator Williams: My suggestion is, can we have an online survey, which the Street Team could promote to publicize the survey, encouraging students to register their thoughts on the survey.
 - VP Mazza: I do not have a problem with promoting the fact that a survey exists, but think it would be a bad idea to have them promote a particular stance.
- President Graham: There is a perception that “students want tuition hikes.” We should be aware of our position and make sure that it is stated clearly and is not open to manipulation.
- Senator Machalow: Perhaps one thing we can do while we are assessing how our constituents feel, that we should pass a resolution rebuking any suggestions about the position of students before it has already been made.

- Senator Kashan: I move that we should take an unofficial vote on whether or not there should be a survey to poll the students regarding their stance on the tuition issues?
 - Unofficial poll: Unanimous agreement.
- Senator Ahmad: Back to the survey – would it be a good idea to collect a dossier of facts on the situation, post them for the students to read through, and then collect survey information?
 - Senator Khan: I agree with Senator Ahmad. As of right now, I believe that most students would not know the issues and would be unable to give an informed opinion. The information could give arguments from all sides, so as not to skew the results.
- Senator Kashan: I believe that what Senator Khan said is a good point. We should give a balanced context, with no bias, in order for the results to be meaningful. We should not advocate for a vote on any specific direction, but to actually get an assessment of what students want.
- Senator Machalow: I absolutely agree that we should provide neutral information. It seems that the overwhelming majority of the students filling the survey were connected in some way to the USG. My question is, if we do provide them with any type of information, would we not still be getting skewed results?
 - Senator Kachan: That is a very valid point. I hope we could get a lot of students to access the survey, to get a wide cross section of student opinion.
- Senator Abraham: As Senator Kashan was saying, most students do not visit the site.
- Senator Machalow: I believe using the USG Facebook page and also taking time as Senators to promote it would be a good idea.
- Senator Williams: Is SOLAR out of the question?
 - EVP: I do not know if the University would allow us to use their resources in this matter.
- Senator Stratoudakis: Another way could be DC++, using that forum to advertise the survey.
- Senator Kashan: I believe we should use the same methods used to promote Aziz Ansari to promote this survey. Students need to be informed – we have to go to them to discuss these issues. We must push for that kind of advertisement and give them information through any means that would reach the maximum amount of students.
- Senator Machalow: All of these are great ideas. A question for the Chair – would you advise that we create an ad hoc committee to organize this sort of effort?
 - EVP: I would leave that up to the Senate and the President as to how to approach this effort. The Senate should decide how to do this effort.
- Senator Ahmad: I believe DC++ is a horrible idea. We do not need to attract unnecessary attention. I believe the ad hoc committee is also a terrible idea. I believe ALL Senators should be involved. We should all go to different clubs and organizations. We do not need to create a committee on this topic.
- President Graham: We might need a committee to decide what the survey says. Once we have that, it would be everyone’s job to promote it. The question is not that hard –

do you want to raise tuition or see things cut? We could also do other things – increasing out-of-state aid? Getting money back from the State that is raised through tuition but allocated to other State projects. There are many students who would not be able to afford college if tuition increases are made.

- Senator Khan: How possible is it to get tuition fees allocated to SUNY?
 - President: It does not hurt to try.
 - EVP: As student leaders, we should fight for the ideal and compromise towards the center. We should not fight for the center and compromise for the undesirable.
- President Graham: I believe it is important that we fight for the principles. The State should not be forcing students to pay their way out of these cuts.
 - I believe we should have a committee put together to discuss how to do this.
 - Next week, we will have someone from Southampton come to speak. I hope we would have lots of questions prepared in advance. The issue was huge last year, and the University does have plans for it, and there will be a presenter telling you about it next week.
 - Let us all go to GAME NIGHT!
- Meeting adjourned at 7:57 pm.