Wages & Benefits Stipend Proposal – February 2016

Purpose of proposal

The GSA has gone through many changes in recent years which has both encouraged and required our officers to work at a professional level to accomplish the GSA’s mission to provide advocacy, professional development, and services to graduate students. Structural changes have increased expectation, but compensation and accountability have lagged behind. This compensation proposal seeks to bring expectation, compensation, and accountability into a closer balance with one another. We recognize that there is no perfect formula for student government and expect that a compensation system will inevitably fail at certain points. But we also take very seriously the use of student funds so the following proposal lays out the logics of compensation and proposed mechanisms for accountability.

Introduction

The process of reviewing our compensation model began at the NAGPS Northeast Regional Conference in 2014. At this event three compensation models were described for student government:

1. Professional – Officers expected to complete duties or they will be held accountable like it’s a regular job.

Ex. At Syracuse University where the President is paid $18,000 a year (like a GTA at that school) and is expected to work a full time. Officers under the President made approx. $5,000. Syracuse’s budget is approximately double that of the UAlbany GSA.

2. Volunteer – Everyone works out of the goodness of their hearts. While gross misconduct or gross negligence can result in impeachment, it is understood that everyone is a volunteer doing the best they can.

Ex. Cornell University – everyone is unpaid.

3. “Thank you” model – This is a pseudo-volunteer model where officers get paid a “thank you for you service” stipend/grant. For example, at Carnegie Mellon University all officers get a $1,500 ($900 after taxes) grant for the full year of service.

The UAlbany GSA has been slightly dysfunctional over the years because we do not fit any of these models very well. We are a step above the “thank you” model in terms of compensation but our expectation level is much closer to professional. Because our expectations are
professional but compensation is low, our accountability mechanism cannot work because no one wants to attack the low compensation of someone they consider to be practically a volunteer. Additionally, oversight being in the hands of the Assembly is not an effective mechanism because the Assembly has no real way to know whether officers are meeting the expectation laid out in our governing documents, unless they pay special attention. These result in an uneven distribution of E-Board labor and can hurt the team/collaborative nature of E-Board that we strive for. This is not to say that an organization needs to fall perfectly into one of these three models. All GSA/Os are different and have different needs. The key is to bring accountability, compensation, and expectation as much in sync with one another as possible, and to regularly evaluate the balance of these elements.

The volunteer vs. professional vs. “thank you” models suggest that there is an element of compensation that needs to be considered on top of dollar amounts. While a paycheck is needed for any graduate student, we should also consider investment in our officers to be a form of compensation. At the end of the day – we cannot pay anyone as much as we would like ($18,000 to work full time in Syracuse is still a steal) but we can attempt to provide professional development, services, networking, and especially respect and appreciation for the officers that work hard for this organization. Some of this is embedded in taking on one of these positions, but included in this proposal are suggestions of ways to maximize their value for officers and for the GSA. However, not all of these possibilities could be developed in one proposal. So a section of this proposal includes suggestions for the 5 Year Master Planning Committee.

The Expectations

One of the important components of matching accountability-expectation-compensation is to only compensate people for what you can hold them accountable for. Ultimately, our officers may do much more than the governing documents require out of passion and commitment. If a requirement emerges not covered in our documents we should adjust the documents, not adjust the stipend for something implied when the successor may not do it and cannot be held accountable. That being said, there is a degree of “implication” which needs to be allowed because governing documents are not comprehensive job duties, they are descriptive and therefore some implied duties will be wrapped into this proposal but hopefully in a manageable sense. The GSA Constitution and Bylaws lay out responsibilities through many different terms. We extrapolated from these documents all of the responsibilities and then synthesized a set of basic types of responsibilities to help guide the compensation model:

1. **Meeting facilitation** – this includes officers holding meetings for their committees.
2. **Information management** – this includes responsibilities such as managing GSA grant applications, RGSO event applications, collecting and disseminating reports, advocacy information (data driven advocacy, social media campaigns, research generated for
resolution writing resolutions) etc. This also includes maintaining institutional memory through keeping a binder for one’s position and depositing key documents into the GSA “brain” or writing reports. Currently the only way institutional memory is outlined in the governing documents is through the requirement that each officer keep a binder for their position.

3. **Recruitment / Outreach** – This is one of the categories which had to be defined in a particular way to cover the responsibilities of our particular officers. Outreach and recruitment are not explicitly laid out in our governing documents. While these specific words are not used they are implied in certain requirements such as hiring and firing of staff (it takes a long time to go through 130 applications for 3 jobs), the responsibility for the President to recruit people for and make appointments to the Senate, University committees, the E-board, and any vacant seat aside from the Speaker and J-Board. All officers should consistently engage in recruitment and outreach efforts.

4. **Financials** – Financial responsibilities are referred to throughout our documents as: budgeting, payroll, accounting, auditing, and contract negotiation, verifying and approving expenses. While every GSA Officer has a budget line, Equity & Inclusion and Programming are going to use it at most 10 times a year. Some RGSOs enter more purchase requests than that in a month. The Grants Chair and the VP need to process and follow up on a rather large number of purchase requests in our system, while the President and Treasurer need to process and follow up on all of them. The responsibility for budgeting is that of the treasurer but in consultation with the President because they have oversight of the whole E-Board. Payroll is considered by University Auxiliary Services to be the responsibility of the President but our documents require that the treasurer also be responsible. Accounting and reconciliation of expenses are the treasurer’s job but regular auditing is embedded in verifying and approving expenses. Contract negotiation is the responsibility of the President but the treasurer’s finance committee should be budgeting for those contracts. The division of financial responsibilities is a perfect example of how compensation needs to be approximately related to expectation. As you will see in the excel spreadsheet that our estimation is that the Programming Chair and Equity & Inclusion Chair do not hold significant financial responsibilities and therefore receive no compensation in that area. Grants and Vice President, while not holding exactly equal financial responsibilities (because depending on the semester the number of grants vs. RGSO PRs can vary significantly), they hold general the same level of responsibility and therefore get equal compensation in this area. While the President and Treasurer’s responsibilities vary in nature and time commitment ultimately their financial responsibilities are to a degree much higher than that of Grants and Vice President and these responsibilities are able to be shared (the President is not going to negotiate a new printer contract without treasurer input) so they get same pay. **THIS IS THE TYPE OF LOGIC APPLIED FOR ALL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY**

5. **Planning and Executing** (strategic planning/agenda setting) – When the strategic planning amendments were added to our bylaws they were not properly described.
Attached to this proposal is a revision of our bylaws to be more explicit about how the strategic planning process should work. As head of the advocacy team, the GSA President is required to develop a strategic plan (including a vision statement) with the input of all of their advocacy team / GSA representatives. As head of the RGSOs the Vice President is supposed to write a strategic plan for professional development. The Equity & Inclusion Chair is supposed to oversee the development of both of these strategic plans to make sure they accomplish the commitment made in our governing documents to the values of equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice. These strategic plans are then supposed to be augmented by Officer Agendas which comprise the appendix of the plans. Officers should develop agendas and get their objectives incorporated into the strategic plan and they should also be developed specifically to achieve the plans written. This means that the EI Chair, VP, and President should be responsible for both writing the plan and an agenda and should be compensated more than those officers only responsible for developing agendas and giving input. High values are assigned to this area because the proposed oversight committee will not just look at whether the board wrote strategic plans and agendas but will also evaluate whether these officers are actively pursuing them.

6. **Programming / training** - This includes anything that involves organizing people for an event or training: RGSO training, Call-Congress days, Message-Congress days, orientation, year-end reception, film nights, programming we bring to the University through SUNY, NAGPS, etc. Attributing a value to this activity for E-Boards is inherently going to result in some inequality since RGSOs do a lot of programming, training, and professional development for the University community. One RGSO is likely to do more than in a year than any GSA Programming Chairperson. But one of the reasons it is important for us to pay for this work is because this programming is crucial for keeping us connected to our state and national networks, for doing outreach to important members of our internal networks, and for facilitating the structures which empower RGSOs to be the core of the GSA. One important part of this proposal are the future suggestions which recognize RGSOs as the soul of the GSA and set the priority of creating more resources, support, and perks for RGSO leadership.

7. **Oversight** (ex-officio responsibility) - This refers to responsibilities which extend beyond things like running a committee. In particular, it refers to powers such as the President and Equity & Inclusion Chair’s ability to sit on any executive committee. This ex-officio right is given to these positions so that they can monitor the activities of the E-Board. The President as the CEO and Chief Advocate, and the EI Chair, hold E-Board accountable to achieving our commitments to the strategic plan and to the values of equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice. The President is also responsible for the actions of the
Advocacy/Senate Team, and the office staff. The EI Chair has a level of oversight to exercise over the President regarding the office and advocacy team to make sure we are meeting the commitments in our governing documents but the President is entirely responsible for these three areas of the organization so their oversight is much more time consuming and should be compensated accordingly. This definition of oversight is rather specific because it is not the type of oversight which is able to be delegated. The President may delegate coordination with the Advocacy Team to the Lead Senator and the functioning of the office to the Lead Office Manager, but they are still ultimately responsible for those areas. The President is responsible for everything members of the E-Board, Office, and Advocacy team say and do. They are accountable to it regardless of what they delegate. In addition to compensation, this type of work activity affects the accountability aspect. The President is responsible for the E-Board, Advocacy Team, and office staff but only has firing power over the staff and Senate Council Reps. Senators and E-Board can only be removed by the Assembly.

8. **Liaising** - This responsibility is among the more ambiguous and yet pervasive in our governing documents. It ranges from the Grants Chair's responsibility to work with the Office of Research to find alternative grant opportunities for students to the President's responsibility to liaison with the administration, the NAGPS, the SUNY SA, the Student Association, the University Senate, the University Auxiliary Services, the Office of Student Involvement, ITS, telecommunications, Campus Center Management, the UUP, the GSEU, etc. This responsibility is also one which is continually changing and can be delegated in some forms. Compensation is assigned, like it is with the oversight responsibility, in part according to who is responsible for liaising even if some tasks in this area are delegated at times.

**Delegation**

No issue in the GSA is solely one officer’s responsibility. EVERY issue is more than one person’s responsibility. And the nature of GSA advocacy work requires strong team work. Ultimately, those who carry the responsibility of being stewards of this organization are the E-Board. While a Senator may take on a great initiative and do great things for the GSA, the scope of their focus is more limited. The E-Board each holds their own responsibilities for their positions but they all share the responsibility of leading the organization. This is the reason the E-Board always has and will continue to be paid more than representatives with narrower purviews. But this proposal also will formalize this responsibility.

While there are many shared responsibilities that can blur our sense of time commitments there are some roles which are clearer. The President has an ex-officio position on the UAS
Board, The Senate Executive Committee, Governance Council, the SUNY Student Assembly, and the Public Engagement Council. The UAS Board and Senator responsibilities are approximately even in terms of time commitments and workload so these reps are given a 500 stipend. If the President delegates their Senate responsibilities (meaning as a Senator and on one of the councils) then the designee should receive the 500 dollars. If the President decides not to delegate these responsibilities they should receive the 500 stipend on top of their regular stipend. The same logic should be applied if they keep their post on the UAS Board or delegate it.

Accountability

Assembly oversight - One possible reason why the GSA has been resistant to increasing stipends for its officers over the past few years could be the knowledge that the oversight mechanism is ineffective. The Assembly has no real way of monitoring the E-Board except through reports. It is possible to identify gross misconduct if it becomes public but it is not guaranteed to be public unless we assume officers will self-report misconduct. It is also difficult for the Assembly to know if an officer or Senator is being negligent. It is the recommendation of this committee that we consider bylaw amendments to adjust accountability measures. This amendment will include the creation of an oversight committee which will be charged with regularly assessing E-Board performance. This committee will be charged with reviewing officer reports which are submitted one week before the Assembly meeting and must use the bylaws and strategic plans to determine whether and officer’s stipend should be released that month. This needs to be a bylaw change which moves this power from that of the Judicial Board to the oversight committee. The President is free to include an officer on payroll as long as the oversight committee does not indicate that they should not release payment that month. This committee should be chaired by the Assembly Speaker and at least 4 more people (so it’s as large as the J-Board). The same actions being placed in the J-Board’s hands was inappropriate because it required one person to have to request mediation in order for a stipend to freeze to be considered. Oversight should be consistent. This regular oversight mechanism balances accountability more because it will cut down on unequal distribution of labor of the E-Board without E-Board having to report it to the Assembly. The Assembly should be regularly monitoring E-Board activity. Included at the end of this proposal is a rubric/checklist for the E-Board to write their reports and for the oversight committee to read their reports.

Presidential oversight - The President is stuck in a position of trying to run a team while also holding officers accountable even though they cannot fire people. The President, being in control of payroll, is empowered not to release a stipend if they feel that an officer is being negligent. The oversight committee is formed to do the same thing. The President may not be persecuted for interpreting the documents differently from the oversight committee but they may be held
accountable for not complying with the orders the oversight committee is empowered to give them.

Timing - The GSA officers serve a full year. The positions are not academic year positions but some officers in the past have treated them that way. However, their duties do vary during the summer. The number one responsibility for the Executive Board over the summer is yearly planning. Since the E-Board does not report to the Assembly over the summer there is no rubric for assessing them over the summer. In lieu of reports a new bylaw suggests that the oversight committee meet once via email to assess the progress of the yearly strategic plans and agendas. Included in this proposal is a rubric for assessing yearly planning and a bylaw changing the number of paychecks.

**Compensation**

Research on our peer SUNY institutions indicate that they spend 20% of their annual budget compensating officers while we only spend 12%. Conservative budget estimates suggest that 20% of our annual budget is $33,000. To match our peers $33,000 became the working number for us to break up money and assign it to responsibilities. The attached excel spreadsheet shows the compensation amount associated with each responsibility under each officer.

Aside from that direct compensation, we also believe it is crucial to invest in the officers who take on these higher level positions so that people have incentives to become involved in the GSA which are not solely monetary. This same concept should be extended to RGSO leadership. The following are incentives we believe should be adopted immediately.

Included in this proposal:

1- Graduation accessory and gift: Part of this stipend proposal we suggest that anyone who serves on a Senate Council, Judicial Board or as W&B Chair should receive a polo shirt and some type of regalia accessory (cord, sash, medal). Whether they receive a t-shirt or a polo, a medal or a sash the point is they should receive some gift they can use in a professional setting and something to wear at graduation. This type of gift simultaneously recognizes their service and also markets the GSA.

2- Development opportunities: The GSA E-Board, the Lead Senator, and the University Council rep should have first priority when it comes to attending NAGPS events. These events are structured to benefit student government organizations by developing their officers leadership skills. If all E-Board officers, the University Council rep, or the Lead Senator find themselves unable to attend the next group which should have preference are RGSO leadership which are those with the most potential to move up in the organization. If none of the E-Board, elected officers, or RGSO leadership wish to attend them the
general population of GSA members can be considered. The Executive Board should be the body which determines who gets to attend these events. As stewards of the organization they may set the objectives for the trip and decide who attends.

3- E-Board officers lose their right to apply for a GSA grant while in office. While they may start applying for grants once they are no longer in office they lose out on this benefit for a period of time. Our other major service is printing. This proposal suggests that those who serve on the Executive Board receive doubled print quotas for the remainder of their graduate career.

We also propose that the 5 Year Master Planning Committee consider developing the following incentives over this next year:

4- There are other development opportunities aside from NAGPS that the 5 year planning committee may wish to consider as part of incentive plans. For example, each officer could have a choice of getting NCBI training, Safe Space training, SKY meditation training, etc. so that they can acquire both skills which will serve them in the GSA as well as once they leave.

5- Creation of an Advisory Board: Modeled after the NAGPS Advisory Board, or a President’s Council, or simply an overall alumni network. This alumni network could be a resource for new officers and also as a professional network for outgoing officers.

6- Beyond the regalia accessories and personalized SWAG already included in this proposal the 5 year planning committee should consider budgeting and planning for a larger marketing initiatives / incentive plans.

7- RGSO labor grants: Rare is the scenario in which an RGSO maintains good standing and their President did not do anything. We believe that the 5 year planning committee should consider the idea of labor grants for those who do exceptional RGSO service.

8- The 5 year planning committee may want to consider allowing the President to appoint a Chief of Staff to support them in managing the E-Board just as the Lead Senator supports them with the Senate team, and the Lead Office Manager supports them in running the office. It would be important for this position to be appointed by the President, not elected.

9- The 5 year planning committee should consider setting up a more consistent recognition and awards process which includes a third party such as an Advisory Board judging applications for awards such as RGSO of the year or Individual Leadership Awards.

Bylaw Changes

ADD THE FOLLOWING

Graduate Student Association, University at Albany, State University of New York
Campus Center 307 & 308, 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222
Article 4 section 1:

The Executive Board is distinct from other GSA representatives because they are the stewards of the organization. Each E-Board member shall have both a stake and responsibility in the pursuit of the GSA mission and the vision. In addition to the responsibilities outlined in the following sections, all Executive Board members are expected to be advocates of the GSA and its interests. All Executive Board members are expected to support the GSA’s programming and advocacy efforts, as well as recruitment and retention goals.

The Executive Board shall be responsible for ensuring GSA representatives attend NAGPS and SUNY SA conferences and events. The Board shall be entitled to the opportunity to attend these events; should the available spots not be filled by the Board, they are responsible for selecting other attendees first from among interested RGSO Leadership and then the general GSA membership.

CHANGE THE FOLLOWING:

Oversight committee modeled after J-Board

Current:

Section 6: RGSO Funding and Officer Stipend Freezes: The Judicial Board shall have the power to mediate disputes, pursuant to the Constitution, Article VIII, Section 4. As part of these powers, The Judicial Board shall have the authority to order a freeze of an officer’s stipend. A member of the GSA shall present to the Judicial Board a written petition indicating the accused officer, the alleged dereliction of duty or other cause, and any evidence. The Judicial Board shall immediately notify the accused officer. The Judicial Board shall investigate the petition within the timeframe provided for Mediation in the Bylaws, Article V, Section 4. Upon conclusion of the investigation, the Judicial Board shall notify the accused of the resolution. The Judicial Board’s vote shall be unanimous to order a freeze of an officer’s stipend. If the Judicial Board orders a freeze in the officer’s stipend, no pay or other compensation will be issued to the Officer for the duration recommended by the Judicial Board, but not extending beyond the beginning of the next semester. Officer stipend freezes may be appealed to the GSA Assembly. Overrule of a stipend freeze shall require a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the GSA Assembly.

New:

Section 6: Officer Stipend Freezes: The Assembly Speaker shall chair an oversight committee of 5 people, including the Speaker, from 5 different Departments whose responsibility it is to evaluate Executive Board reports when they are posted 7 days before an Assembly meeting and to determine whether there has been any dereliction of duty. This oversight committee shall have the power, by a majority vote, to order the President to freeze an officer’s stipend for that month until such time as said officer completed the neglected duties and provides a report of such to the Oversight Committee. The
oversight committee shall immediately notify the accused officer. If an officer's stipend is frozen by the oversight committee twice, the committee shall be compelled to report this to the Assembly and recommend a censure of the neglectful officer. If the oversight committee identifies continued neglect of duties by an officer they are compelled to motion for impeachment. Even without the oversight committee's urging, the President, who is charged with the responsibility of chairing the Executive Board and issuing payroll, shall have the power to freeze or withhold pay to any officer who is neglecting their duties. Officer stipend freezes may be appealed to the GSA Assembly. Overrule of a stipend freeze shall require a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the GSA Assembly.

Current:

Section 5: Strategic Planning: Prior to the first Assembly Meeting of the academic year, the Executive Board shall convene to develop a year –long strategic plan for the operations of the GSA. The strategic plan shall include overall goals for both advocacy, including legislative, programmatic, and organizational; and professional development, including the effective use of GSA resources for RGSO funding, grants, programming, and Equity and Inclusion funding. In addition, each Executive Board member shall submit an agenda for the year with goals specific to their position to be included in the strategic plan. At least seven days prior to the first Assembly Meeting of the academic year, the strategic plan shall be sent out through the GSA Listserv and posted onto the GSA Website. The President shall present the strategic plan to the Assembly at the first Assembly Meeting of the academic year for Assembly approval. Once approved, the strategic plan shall be adopted as the official policy for the GSA for the following year, pursuant to the Constitution, Section VI, Article 1.

New:

Section 5: **Strategic Yearly** Planning: Prior to the first Assembly Meeting of the academic year, the Executive Board shall convene to develop a year –long **strategic yearly** plan for the operations of the GSA. The **strategic yearly** plan shall include overall goals for both advocacy, professional development, and service. The President should develop a vision statement for the advocacy and service component of the plan, and the Vice President should develop the vision statement for the professional development component of the plan. The Equity and Inclusion Chair should play an instrumental role in the development of both vision statements. All other officer should provide feedback and input. Every officer is required to develop an agenda which helps form and is informed by the vision statement. These agendas should outline the goals for the year specific to each position, including legislative, programmatic, and organizational; and professional development, including the effective use of GSA resources for RGSO funding, grants, programming, and Equity and Inclusion funding. In addition, each Executive Board member shall submit an agenda for the year with goals specific to their position to be included in the **strategic yearly** plan. At least seven days prior to the first Assembly Meeting of the academic year, the **yearly** the **strategic yearly** plan shall be sent out through the GSA Listserv and posted onto the GSA Website. The President shall present the **strategic yearly** plan to the Assembly at the first Assembly Meeting of the academic year for Assembly approval. Once approved, the **strategic yearly** plan shall be
adopted as the official policy for the GSA for the following year, pursuant to the Constitution, Section VI, Article 1.

Rationale language change – Strategic plan is confusing for some people. It is yearly planning so we should refer to it more plainly. The new language refers to the three aspects of our mission; advocacy, professional development, and service rather than a long list of different aspects of the GSA. It specifies the need for a vision statement which has been skipped over in the past and specifies who is responsible for it. I also specify who is responsible for guiding the planning process by identifying who leads in the areas of advocacy, service, and professional development.

Current:

Section 11: Officer Stipends:

The Executive Board shall receive stipends of an annualized amount, to be paid in eight (8) equal installments over the course of the academic year (during the months of September, October, November, December, February, March, April and May).

New:

Section 11: Officer Stipends:

The Executive Board shall receive stipends of an annualized amount, to be paid in nine (9) equal installments over the course of the academic year (during the months of September, October, November, December, February, March, April and May) and once outside the academic year in August.

Current:

Section 9: Assembly Speaker: The Assembly Speaker shall be elected from the GSA Assembly voting membership to serve for that academic year. The Assembly Speaker chairs and sets the agenda for GSA Assembly meetings, shall be responsible for attending all GSA Assembly meetings, and shall represent the GSA Assembly as a non-voting member at Executive Board meetings.

New:

Section 9: Assembly Speaker: The Assembly Speaker shall be elected from the GSA Assembly voting membership at the May meeting to serve for that academic calendar year. The Assembly Speaker chairs and sets the agenda for GSA Assembly meetings, shall be responsible for attending all GSA Assembly meetings, and shall represent the GSA Assembly as a non-voting member at Executive Board meetings. The Assembly Speaker shall also chair the oversight committee.
Rubrics

E-Board report checklist/rubric:

Has the office executed their duties in the following areas?

  liaising _________
  oversight _________
  programming/training _________
  meeting facilitation _________
  information management _________
  recruitment/outreach _________
  financials _________
  strategic planning / agenda setting / execution _________

*Note – Oversight only applies to EI and President. Financials DO NOT apply to programming and EI.

Rubric for assessing yearly planning:

  is there a vision statement? _________
  does the vision statement cover advocacy, professional development, and service? _________
  does the vision statement advance our commitments to equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice? _________
  does each officer have an agenda which corresponds to the vision statement? _________