Message from the GSA President

I’m proud to announce that we have had a successful semester. We established a new grants program, facilitated the President’s Forum in partnership with Student Association, purchased brand new equipment for our offices, and developed our relationships with other offices and organizations on campus. One of our great partners, the Office of Environmental Sustainability honored me by presenting me with a Terra Award for commitment to sustainability. I deeply appreciate their recognition, but my efforts have only been preliminary attempts to facilitate sustainability goals which could serve the graduate student population, such as a campus community garden.

For the GSA to follow through with our commitments to professional development, advocacy, multiculturalism, and sustainability, what we really need are more engaged students. I’m sure many of you are not aware of the ways in which you could get involved or how you could benefit from that service. After all, we are graduate students… we don’t have extra time. I’d like to take this opportunity to urge you to consider getting involved, both to join in solidarity with other graduate students on important projects such as GTA contract negotiations or our next President’s Forum, while also building the service/advocacy components of your CVs. Opportunities include serving on the GSA Wages & Benefits Committee, serving on the University Senate Councils, working with RGSOs, or simply voting in our elections next year.

Sincerely,
Caitlin Janiszewski

For information on how you can get involved please email the President at gsapresident@albany.edu
UUP: An Open Letter to Graduate Students

We are members of United University Professions (UUP): the professors, librarians, advisors, counselors, network technicians, coaches, financial aid advisors, and staff of other departments with whom you interact every day at UAlbany. We teach the classes and provide the services that make the University work.

In many cases, we are you; that is, a substantial number of our members are graduate student lecturers and staff members. We take enormous pride and satisfaction in our jobs, and strive to deliver high quality academic programs while ensuring a safe, rewarding campus life. We are reaching out to you because this year Governor Cuomo insisted upon a provision in our union contract that will certainly weaken the quality of education at SUNY. The provision requires all UUP members to take two days off of work without pay this semester. As he did with other public sector unions, Governor Cuomo has labeled these mandated furlough days, “Deficit Reduction Leave” (DRL). You likely are already familiar with—and feeling the pinch from—the State’s NYSUNY2020 plan, which has raised tuition costs by 30% over five years. In other words, New York State has elected to narrow its budget deficit by taking wages from public employees’ wages and by increasing the tuition of students and their families. Public higher education suffers as a consequence. Graduate students, in many cases, take a triple hit: paying higher tuition, having your (already deplorably small) salaries cut if you work as an instructor, and missing out on access to the faculty and staff on campus. We are writing this letter to you because there has been almost no public acknowledgement of these facts. Our members are required to comply with campus directives, and we regret any loss of services that are caused by this mandated furlough. Until the end of the semester, you may notice that faculty may not be available on certain days and that your access to campus services may be diminished. We ask for your understanding if you experience any negative impact from this work reduction. We also ask that you remember that the State insisted on these furloughs in order to reach a contract settlement. If UUP members participate in these mandatory furloughs it is not because we do not care about students. Quite the opposite; we object strenuously to a plan that prevents us from working and believe strongly that both current and future students are ill-served by the chronic underfunding of public higher education in New York.

On Being Taught by a GTA: Don’t Call Me “Professor”

While I appreciate and encourage students' desire to speak to me with respect, I am not a professor. I am a Graduate Teaching Assistant. This is an important distinction, and has far-reaching effects for both you and me. Here’s why:

- The salary for a full-time faculty member at SUNY ranges from $27,500 to $427,500 per semester. The base salary for GTAs, on the other hand, is around $4,150 per semester before taxes and fees. Since most professors each teach two classes at a time that means that I only make about 7% of a first rank professor’s salary per year.
- Relying on GTAs and adjuncts to teach undergraduate courses is a growing trend at SUNY, because part-time instructors are a cheap, flexible labor force that the university can use to help them save money. Even as your tuition costs are rising, the percentage of that money actually used to support your

Continued on pg. 3

- The Albany Chapter, UUP
UAlbany Financial Services
Repaying Your Loans

If you graduate, separate, or drop below half-time status (measured by enrollment of at least six credits or six credit equivalent); your federal student loans will enter repayment. Repayment may start immediately or at the conclusion of the loan’s grace period. There are various repayment plans available to you. We encourage you to visit the “Repay Your Loans” section of the Federal Student Aid website at www.studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans. This website provides a comprehensive and detailed description of all federal loan repayment programs available. The following information is intended to give you a brief overview of these plans:

- Standard Repayment Plan – payments are a fixed amount of at least $50/month for up to 10 years.
- Graduated Repayment Plan – payments are lower at first, then increase every two years. Plan is up to a 10 year period.
- Extended Repayment Plan – payments are fixed or graduated for up to a 25

Continued on pg. 5

On Being Taught by a GTA
Continued from pg. 2

education is dropping fast.

- SUNY’s growing reliance on GTAs impairs the quality of your education. We are not regular members of the faculty. We do not receive the salary, benefits, or job security of being professors. Our salaries do not cover the total amount of time it takes to prepare and teach classes, hold office hours, communicate with you outside of class, grade papers, or write letters of recommendation. GTAs are dedicated to you, the students, and so we perform these tasks regardless of the salary, but a lot of this is essentially volunteer labor.

Why Should You Care?

- Currently, more than 39% of all credits at SUNY Albany are not taught by full-time professors, but contingent or part-time adjuncts. That doesn’t even include Graduate Instructors like me who teach more than 17% of all credits offered here. This means you might go through two or more years of college without the opportunity to learn from a full-time professor!
- Although GTAs at SUNY work hard to create an environment in which you can get the most out of your classes, our working conditions hurt students and the university as a whole. When GTAs are overworked and underpaid, we have less time and energy to devote to you.
- Because of the limited number of years for which we are hired, it may be difficult or impossible for you to take another class with a GTA whose class you really enjoyed. Furthermore, it means that as your instructors, we are often forced to avoid giving you much needed help in order to rush through our own studies.

So Don’t Call Me “Professor”

You deserve to be taught by properly trained, properly compensated instructors whose full attention is on you and academic scholarship. This is not to say I am a bad teacher; rather, that we are all participating in a system that has not been set up to encourage or facilitate me being a better teacher. While I am happy and excited to be teaching this course, I ask that you help the class to be aware of these issues by not calling me “professor.”

I am part of a movement in the SUNY system that organizes to improve both GTAs’ working conditions and your learning conditions. I invite you to talk to me about how you can join this growing movement.
University at Albany Libraries Writing Resources

The Human Element:
The University Libraries vs. the Internet

How often do you use the library’s resources and services? Are you curious about what you might be finding and using at the library that you may be missing? Do you consider yourself an expert at Googling but are flummoxed when it comes to searching for scholarly journal articles?

Sure, the library spends a good deal of money (your tuition money!) on collecting top-quality, authoritative resources for you to use in your assignments and research. We in the libraries would argue that these resources are superior to those found on the wild and woolly World Wide Web. But you’ve done papers using only things you found on the Internet, you say? Sure, I’ll be the first to admit Google’s searching algorithm can turn up many resources that you can cobble together to create a passable paper or assignment.

I would argue that the Libraries have a secret weapon that blows Google out of the water. It all comes down to The Human Element: the librarians and library staff. How does the human element make the library superior to Googling?

First: There is a librarian with subject expertise in your discipline. (For a list of the librarian subject specialists see: www.library.albany.edu/subject/leaders/). You can make an appointment with your subject specialist and he or she will amaze you with specialized, unique resources you didn’t know about and strategies for finding higher quality scholarly journal articles, books and other resources—many of which are not found on the Internet.

Second: Reference librarians are available not only in person, but by telephone, email, instant message and even texting to answer your questions (www.library.albany.edu/help/im). Reference librarians can help with all kinds of questions about how to use the library and can help you with search terms, locating journal articles, even citing your sources. Try asking Google a question about the meaning of the results it retrieves.

Third: The libraries offer a number of services to help you obtain materials for your literature review, assignment or project. Did you know that through the UA Delivery service, we will scan and email to you journal articles which we only have in print? We can also request items for you from other libraries via Interlibrary Loan (www.illiad.albany.edu/illiad/) Did you know that if you are in a pinch and the book you need is in a nearby academic library, we can give you a card (called a DAP card) and you can go to that campus to borrow the book?

If you want a passable assignment, Google may provide you with enough to squeak by. We at the libraries want you to have the best information that is out there. Our librarians and staff provide that crucial Human Element which will help you ace that assignment, project or thesis!

Elaine M. Lasda Bergman
Bibliographer for Social Welfare, Gerontology and Dewey Reference
Dewey Graduate Library
Financial Services

Continued from pg. 3

year period. You must be considered a new borrower as of October 07, 1998.

- Income Based Repayment Plan (IBR) – you must have a partial financial hardship. The maximum monthly payment is 15% of discretionary income. Payments will change as your income changes. You have 25 years to repay under this plan. If balance is not paid after 25 years of qualifying payments, outstanding balance is forgiven.

- Pay As You Earn Repayment Plan – must have a financial hardship. Maximum monthly payment is 10% of discretionary income and payment changes as income changes. You have 20 years to repay under this plan. If balance is not paid after 20 years of qualifying payments, outstanding balance is forgiven. You must be a new borrower on or after October 01, 2007 and only have Direct Loans.

- Income Contingent Repayment Plan – payments fluctuate with income and are calculated each year based on adjusted gross income, family size, and total Direct Loan balance. You have 25 years to repay under this plan. If the balance is not paid after 25 years of qualifying payments, outstanding balance is forgiven. Only Direct Loans are eligible for this program.

- Income Sensitive Repayment Plan – monthly payment is based on annual income and payments change as income changes. You have up to 10 years to repay under this plan. Calculation for determining monthly payment will vary according to lender. Only Federal Family Education Loans are eligible for this program.

- Consolidation – combine multiple federal student loans into one loan. Interest becomes a weighted average of loans. This results in a single lower monthly repayment for up to 30 years.

- Loan forgiveness - you may qualify for loan forgiveness based on employment, disability or other circumstances. Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) is designated for those employed in certain public service positions. For criteria visit www.studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation.

- Loan cancellation – releases the borrower from their obligation to repay all or a designated portion of the principal and interest on a student loan. For criteria visit www.studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation.

Contact your federal loan servicer before repayment for more detailed information on repayment plans and to determine your exact repayment date. The exact repayment date is dependent upon your previous enrollment history and can be determined by the loan servicer. Please be aware, you may have more than one federal loan servicer. Visit the National Student Loan Data System’s website at www.nslds.ed.gov to view your loan history and for the contact information of your loan servicers. The UAlbany Student Financial Center is also available for information and to assist with your student loan needs.

Ever been couch surfing? Consider My Ride Board - A UAlbany student start-up company…

MyRideBoard.com's mission is to provide our members with the best ride-sharing services in the world.

MyRideBoard.com is a member-based travel and networking website that matches riders and drivers, enabling them to travel quickly and cheaply. It seeks to offer members more choices than they had before, when they relied on cars, buses, and trains. It seeks to form a community of members who are interested in sharing, and who are open to peer-to-peer collaboration and ride-sharing.