THE PURPLE PAPER

The Official Newsletter of UAlbany’s Graduate Student Association

A Message From the GSA President

CAITLIN JANISZEWSKI, PRESIDENT OF THE GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Dear Fellow Graduate Students,

The University at Albany has a rich history of student activism. It was the work of graduate and undergraduate student organizing many years ago which earned us our voting and participation rights in the University governance system so that we could advocate for social issues.

Today, there is a marked shift in the role of graduate student participation because now - we are the social issue. Many will jump to the conclusion that graduate student or students as a whole just do not care about University governance or participating in attempts to transform the culture of our academic community. But in my time as President of the GSA, I have never met a student who did not care about the issues that affect them, and 99 percent of the people I have interacted with have only withdrawn because they are overworked, underpaid, and stretched thin. But most of all they are disillusioned.

With the federal government eliminating TAP and unsubsidized loans for graduate students and unsubsidized loans, it is clear that our story does not resonate with legislators. These types of structural changes paired with increased institutional pressure to complete degrees faster with fewer resources - headed for a shrinking job market with huge debt places us as a group in a bubble of panic.

Within that bubble of panic the role of the graduate student government, the GSA, has not been to advocate for your interests, but to provide service. We have allowed ourselves to be relegated to a provider of basic services that the University should be providing anyway, rather than a fighter for student rights. The GSA has no intention of halting our printing service, but if there is one thing we do seek to stop in its tracks is our identity as a printing office.

We are a graduate student government with voting rights in the University Senate, the SUNY System Student Assembly, and the National Association of Graduate Professional Students. We have rights to various campus and administrative committees such as the regular Campus Safety Committee and the Public Engagement Committee, as well as the soon to be formed committees on GTA pay and Contingent (Adjunct) Faculty. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

HAPPENINGS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

(A QUICK WRAP-UP OF THINGS TO DO IN THE CAPITAL REGION)

ICE SKATING AT THE PLAZA
The skating rink at Albany’s Empire State Plaza is open until March from 11am to 8pm with free skating. Rentals are $4.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS IN WASHINGTON PARK
Albany’s Washington Park is decorated with dozens of holiday light displays every night until January 3, from 6pm to 10pm. To see the lights, it will cost $5-$75 depending on size of group.

POETRY SLAM
The Low Beat (on 665 Central Avenue in Albany) is hosting a poetry slam on Dec. 16 at 7pm. General price is $5, price with student ID is $3.
FINANCIAL AID FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

A Message From the Office of Financial Aid

As a graduate student at the University at Albany, you may qualify for Federal Student Aid.

Generally if you are a matriculated student, in a degree seeking program and registered for at least six credits, you may be able to receive Direct Unsubsidized Loans and/or Direct Grad PLUS Loans.

Remember, to be considered for these types of aid, you must file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Be certain to include the University at Albany’s federal school code 002835.

Shortly after your FAFSA is received by the Office of Financial Aid, your federal aid eligibility will be determined and you will be “packaged” with the applicable federal student aid. Monitor your to-do items section of MyUAlbany for important information pertaining to follow up documents that may be needed and other important application instructions.

Graduate students may be eligible for the following: Direct Unsubsidized Loans – Interest is fixed at 6.21 percent for loans first disbursed on or after July 01, 2014 and through June 30, 2015. Direct Grad PLUS Loans – Interest is fixed at 7.21 percent for loans first disbursed on or after July 01, 2014 and through June 30, 2015.

Note – in order to receive this loan, you must not have an adverse credit history.

If you have an adverse credit history, there may still be options for you. For additional information, go to Federal Student Aid’s website: https://studentaid.ed.gov/types/loans/plus. We will continue to keep you updated with new and important information that becomes available and pertains to your Direct Loans. Please frequently visit the “Alerts” section of the Student Financial Services website at: www.albany.edu/studentfinancialservices.

MESSAGE FROM PRES (CONT.)

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A shared vision, open communication, and a solid group of committed actors go a long way in affecting this campus. Not every graduate student has to be overwhelmingly engaged each semester of their graduate career for the GSA to be effective. But there is one thing every graduate student could do to radically transform and support the GSA - VOTE.

You may agree or disagree with things the GSA has done, but a very important reality for us to acknowledge is that the people you elect to positions such as my own are placed in a position to make a difference. Whether they follow through is another matter.

The next most important issue after earning our right to these positions on campus many years ago is voting for those representatives so that the administration and faculty actually have to view them as representative of student voices.

The most powerful tool the GSA has is your votes, your mandate that we are your representatives.

If you participate in no other fashion for your entire graduate career, no one will blame you. We know you are working, we know you have family, and you have school. But please, when the time comes in March/April for GSA elections - PLEASE VOTE.

Submit Your Opinions, Announcements, and News to THE PURPLE PAPER
EMAIL US AT GSAPR@ALBANY.EDU

THE PURPLE PAPER

The Purple Paper is the official publication of UAlbany’s Graduate Student Association.

We accept and welcome all content from the graduate student community here on campus. Just send your written or visual content to gsapr@albany.edu.

Follow the GSA on Social Media:
Twitter: @UAlbanyGSA
Facebook: Graduate Student Organization
DON’T PUT ALBANY’S FISCAL WOES ON THE BACK OF ITS STUDENTS

MARTIN ROBINSON, CONTRIBUTOR

The city of Albany is facing some tough fiscal times.

With the state unwilling to provide aid to its capital city, and a limited property tax base (approximately 46 percent of Albany properties pay taxes, with the rest non-taxpaying non-profits), Albany is expected to face budget deficits for multiple years.

I hope that in the city’s efforts to solve its fiscal problems that they don’t look at the city’s college students as potential “cash cows.”

Because the University at Albany and other area educational institutions are considered non-profit entities, they don’t pay any taxes. As a result, many of the city services that businesses and homeowners pay for in taxes, our college and other nonprofits get for practically free. Given that Albany property owners have some of the highest tax rates in the state there's little motivation to push any additional tax burden on to them.

However, with Albany facing budget deficits for the foreseeable future, the temptation to look to non-profits to solve the city’s fiscal woes will only increase. While New York State facilities are the largest contingent of non-profit entities in Albany, the colleges and universities in the city make up a large portion of these untaxable properties, in addition to utilizing a significant portion of city resources. So what does this all mean for students?

If the city of Albany is able to convince colleges, like the University at Albany, to make “voluntary contributions” to their annual budget, it seems unlikely that that money will be paid to the city by the colleges alone. These costs will more than likely be passed down to students in the form of additional tuition or other fees to be tacked on to our bills. Considering the annual tuition increases students here at the University are paying, as part of SUNY 2020’s “rational tuition plan” and tuition increases other area colleges are imposing on their students, this is something that we as students will need to pay attention to in the coming years.

Although it may be convenient to conclude that because our school is tax exempt that we students are getting a free-ride in terms of city services, it would be the wrong way to look at the situation. We as students contribute to Albany’s budget through the sales taxes we pay when we shop in many of the city’s retailers, such as those on Lark Street and Madison Avenue.

We contribute to the city’s budget through the property taxes we pay, which for many of us is included in the rent we pay. We also (annoyingly) contribute to the city’s budget through the occasional parking tickets or other fines that many of us may have received. So if the city needs to find sources of revenue, I, as a student would hope that Albany doesn’t put its financial burdens on the students who attend school here, as many of us have done nothing but choose to come to Albany to pursue an affordable education.

PICTURES OF THE CAMPUS AND LIFE ON IT

Photos by Bilal Khan.

If you want to submit your own photos, email us at:

gsapr@albany.edu