Graduate Student Association

Constitution

March 2021
ARTICLE I: PREAMBLE

The University at Albany Graduate Student Organization (GSO) was voted into existence in the Spring of 1990 to address the needs of the University at Albany graduate students. In 2013, its name was changed to the University at Albany Graduate Student Association (GSA). The documents governing its operation shall be divided into the Constitution, which shall contain the core principles of the GSA, and the Bylaws which shall contain the particulars by which the principles codified in the Constitution shall be applied.

ARTICLE II: NAME

The name of this organization shall be the University at Albany Graduate Student Association, hereinafter referred to as the GSA.

ARTICLE III: PURPOSE

Section 1: General Goals: The purpose of the GSA is to identify and protect the rights of graduate students, to advocate their interests and rights, and to provide services that enhance the social, academic, professional, and cultural environment of the University at Albany.

Section 2: Equity and Inclusion: The GSA affirms its commitment to the principles of equity and inclusion and acknowledges the pervasiveness of inequality in society and in higher education. The GSA considers itself a proactive and progressive organization and is committed to working towards the elimination of discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, color, religion or creed, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, economic status, veteran status, citizenship status, disability, national origin, gender identity, or any other factor unrelated to merit or qualifications.

ARTICLE IV: ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS

No part of the net earnings of the GSA shall be to the benefit of or be distributable to its members, trustees, officers, or other private persons, except where the GSA shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article III, Sections 1 and 2 hereof. No substantial part of the activities of the GSA shall be the participation or intervention in any political campaign on behalf of any political party or candidate seeking or holding public office (including the publishing or distribution of statements). The Graduate Student Association will conduct its activities in accordance with the policies of the University at Albany and the State University of New York as well as in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws.
ARTICLE V: MEMBERSHIP

All currently enrolled graduate students of the University at Albany who have been billed for the GSA activity fee are members of the GSA. All members of the GSA shall have the right to representation and participation in GSA activities and shall have the right to hold GSA positions if properly elected and/or appointed. No member of the GSA shall be denied these rights or otherwise discriminated against by the GSA or any of its members for any reason.

ARTICLE VI: THE GSA ASSEMBLY

Section 1: Responsibilities: The GSA Assembly shall act as the legislative body of the GSA. It shall be responsible for approving the budget; developing, approving, and adopting policy for the GSA; calling for GSA-related referendums; and approving GSA-related position appointments. GSA Assembly Representatives are responsible for relaying information between the GSA Assembly and their constituents, attending Assembly meetings, and advocating for the interests of the RGSO they represent.

Section 2: Representative Membership: Each Recognized Graduate Student Organization (RGSO) shall have one voting representative (and alternate) in the Assembly. A RGSO with forty (40) or more GSA members shall have one additional voting representative. A RGSO may select any of its members to serve as its voting representative(s) to the GSA Assembly, provided that individual is also a member of the GSA.

Every university department or intra-departmental program with GSA members is required to register as a RGSO in order to obtain voting representation in the Assembly. Departments that have other RGSOs that reside within them must have at least 50% of members that do not overlap in order for the department and the RGSO(s) to exist as separate RGSOs. Representatives and alternates must be chosen from graduate students enrolled in the department who are members of the GSA.

Section 3: Assembly Speaker: The GSA Assembly shall elect from the GSA membership the GSA Assembly Speaker to serve for the following academic year (Fall and Spring). The election of the Assembly Speaker shall take place at the last Assembly meeting of the Spring semester. The Assembly Speaker shall act as the chairperson for Assembly meetings and shall have the power to call a special session of the GSA Assembly. Additionally, the Assembly Speaker shall be responsible for attending all GSA Assembly meetings and Executive Board meetings. The Assembly Speaker shall not cast a vote at GSA Assembly meetings or at GSA Executive Board meetings. The Assembly Speaker shall no longer represent their RGSO, hold any office in the Executive Board, or serve as a member of the Judicial Board. The Assembly Speaker’s RGSO shall appoint a new voting representative to the GSA Assembly if necessary. Should the office of the Assembly Speaker be vacated, the Vice President shall act as interim Assembly Speaker until the GSA Assembly elects a new Assembly Speaker at the following Assembly Meeting. If the Assembly Speaker is rendered temporarily incapable of performing their duties, the Vice President shall act as interim Assembly Speaker until the Assembly Speaker is able to resume their duties.

Section 4: Meetings: The GSA Assembly shall conduct regular meetings on the first Friday of the following months: September, October, November, December, February, March, April, and May.
Meetings shall be publicly announced no less than one week in advance. All meetings shall be open to all members of the GSA. Only RGSO, university department, and intradepartmental program representatives may vote at GSA Assembly meetings. There shall be no votes by proxy. A quorum for conducting official business shall consist of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the recognized RGSO GSA Assembly representatives. The Assembly Speaker shall chair meetings of the GSA Assembly. Should the Assembly Speaker be unable to assume their duties, the Vice President shall act as chairperson of the GSA Assembly at that meeting.

Section 5: Parliamentary Procedure: GSA Assembly meetings shall operate along the principles of Robert's Rules of Order.

Section 6: Legislative Committees: The GSA Assembly has the power to create legislative committees for the purpose of gathering and/or processing information for presentation to the GSA Assembly and to other departments and/or offices. The Assembly Speaker will hold an ex-officio seat on each legislative committee. Individuals with conflicts of interest shall recuse themselves from committee activities in which they have a stake. If allotted funds, the committee chairperson shall have signature power on relevant disbursement forms.

Section 7: Audits: The GSA Assembly has the power to, at any time, call for an audit of the GSA records, finances, elections, or other circumstances as necessary.

Section 8: Impeachment: The GSA Assembly, with the validation of the J-Board, shall have the power to impeach and remove from office any GSA officeholder, upon conviction of financial impropriety, gross negligence, or gross misconduct, while performing duties related to their office.

ARTICLE VII: EXECUTIVE BOARD

Section 1: Positions: The Executive Board shall consist of six executive officers: the President; the Vice President; the Treasurer; the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Chair; the Programming Chair; and the Grants Chair. No member of the Executive Board shall be permitted to hold a second office within the GSA, to act as an officer of a RGSO, or serve as an Assembly Representative. The following offices must be held by different people: President, Vice President, Treasurer, Equity and Inclusion Chair, Grants Chair, Programming Chair, Graduate University Council Representative, Lead Senator, and Assembly Speaker. No more than ⅓ of the executive board can be a member of the same RGSO. In the event that more than ⅓ of those elected are a member of the same RGSO, the second most voted for candidate in the closest race(s) shall be put into office.

(a) President: The President shall act as Chief Executive Officer of the GSA and as its chief spokesperson and representative. The primary function of the President shall be to represent and defend GSA members and their interests to University leadership. The President shall have the power to appoint GSA members as the Grants Chair, Programming Chair, and to remaining seats on the University Senate consistent with the University Senate’s charter. These appointments are subject to approval by the GSA Assembly, but appointees may serve as interim actors actively until a confirmation vote passes or fails. If the vote fails, the President shall appoint a new interim officer to fill that position until a new confirmation vote passes or fails. The President has signature power on all vouchers.
(b) Vice President: The Vice President shall form and chair the RGSO Committee. The RGSO Committee shall be responsible for the reviewing and dispersal of funds related to RGSOs, determining whether RGSOs have met the requirements for continued GSA recognition, and determining whether new RGSO applicants have met the requirements to be recognized. In the event that the President is unable to perform their duties, the Vice President shall act as the interim Chief Executive Officer until the Special Election of a new President.

(c) Treasurer: The Treasurer shall be the Chief Financial Officer of the GSA. The Treasurer shall report on the financial status of the GSA to the Assembly at each meeting and officers upon request. The Treasurer has signature power on all vouchers.

(d) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Chair: The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Chair (EDI) shall form and chair the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. The EDI Chair will advise the Executive Board on ways to proactively ensure that strategic plans, officer agendas, and internal processes address issues of power inequality, as well as diversity and inclusion. The EDI Chair shall serve as an advisor to the GSA President, Lead Senator and other GSA Senators and representatives on issues of advocacy. The EDI Chair shall serve as a liaison with any campus entity which engages with the issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion.

(e) Grants Chair: The Grants Chair shall form and chair the Grants Committee. The Grants Committee will be responsible for the reviewing and dispersal of funds related to research and travel grants. No grant application by a non-member of the GSA will be honored.

(f) Programming Chair: The Programming Chair shall form and chair the Programming Committee. The Programming Committee will be responsible for the reviewing and dispersal of funds related to educational, cultural, and social events being conducted by the GSA as well as ensuring that those events are sufficiently advertised to the GSA membership.

Section 2: Executive Board Meetings: The Executive Board shall meet at least monthly. At each meeting, each officer shall report on their activities since the previous meeting and present for discussion and advisement their proposed agenda for the immediate future. Each officer shall have voting rights at these meetings. The Assembly Speaker shall also be required to attend Executive Board meetings as a non-voting member to represent the Assembly.

Section 3: Formal Power: The Executive Board may endorse vouchers and payments with a minimum of two legitimate signatures. Legitimate signatures include the signatures of the President and the Treasurer. In the event that the President and/or Treasurer are temporarily unable to exercise their signatory power, the relevant officer may grant signatory power to any other member of the Executive Board to ensure essential expenditures are completed. All signing parties are responsible for confirming that the expenditure is within the budget approved by the GSA Assembly and in compliance with the policies governing the GSA.

Section 4: Assembly Meetings: Each officer shall be required to attend and issue a report at each Assembly Meeting. Furthermore, each officer shall have a non-voting seat in the GSA Assembly but is permitted to make motions and speak on matters.

Section 5: Term of Office: Elected officers shall serve for one year beginning on June 1 and terminating at the end of May 31 of the following year.
Section 6: Executive Committees: The Executive Board has the power to create executive committees for the purpose of exercising powers granted to the Executive Board by the GSA Constitution, Bylaws, and Assembly. The President will hold an ex-officio seat on each executive committee. Individuals with conflicts of interest shall recuse themselves from committee activities in which they have a stake. If allotted funds, the committee chairperson shall have signature power on relevant disbursement forms.

Section 7: Contingency Plan:

a) The President shall have the authority to appoint an acting replacement to any vacant elected or appointed officer position, with the exception of the Assembly Speaker and Judicial Board members. Presidential appointments to vacant positions must be confirmed by the GSA Assembly.

b) In the event the President is unable to assume or carry out their duties, the Vice President shall assume the Presidency. Beyond the Vice President, the succession of authority is to the Assembly Speaker and the Treasurer. The first responsibility of the new President shall be to appoint an acting replacement to any other vacated offices of the Executive Board.

ARTICLE VIII: JUDICIAL BOARD

Section 1: Membership: The GSA Assembly shall elect from the GSA membership five Judicial Board members. No two Judicial Board members may share membership in the same RGSO. In the event two members of the same RGSO are elected to the Judicial Board, the Assembly shall vote to decide which person shall serve on the Judicial Board. The election of the Judicial Board shall take place at the first Assembly meeting of the Fall semester. No Judicial Board member shall serve simultaneously on the Judicial Board and as a RGSO or Representative in the GSA Assembly. No Judicial Board member will also serve on the Executive Board. Should a Judicial Board seat ever become vacated or a Judicial Board member be rendered incapable of performing their duties, a new Judicial Board member shall be elected at the next Assembly Meeting.

Section 2: Term of Office: The Judicial Board shall serve for one year beginning on June 1 and terminating at the end of May 31 of the following year. Any member of the Judicial Board who expects to graduate before their term of office is complete shall report their predicted graduation date to the GSA President and Assembly no less than two months in advance to enable the appointment and approval of a successor.

Section 3: Judicial Review: Any member of the GSA, having found contradiction or fault in the policies of the GSA, may petition for Judicial Review. The Judicial Board may convene to interpret the Constitution and Bylaws with authority to pass an immediate ruling on the conflict and recommend to the GSA Assembly amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws to prevent further conflict.

Section 4: Mediation: The Judicial Board shall act as a mediator in any dispute that is brought before them by a GSA member or a GSA officer in relation to the GSA. In the case that the Judicial Board finds the matter to be under the purview of another body and/or officer, the Judicial Board may refer the complainant to the corresponding representative. Any factor which limits the impartiality of a Judicial Board member shall be cause for that member to recuse themselves from mediating that dispute (see Article VIII, Section 6). If a compromise cannot be reached, the Judicial Board has the authority to force
an action by the GSA or any member to resolve the impasse. A two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Assembly may override a ruling of the Judicial Board in such instances.

Section 5: Impeachment: The Judicial Board shall preside over impeachment proceedings.

Section 6: Impartiality: Any factor which a Judicial Board member feels compromises their impartiality in rendering judgment shall be grounds for that Judicial Board member to recuse themselves from the matter. In the event a Judicial Board member fails to recuse themselves when their impartiality cannot be ensured, a three fifths majority of the Judicial Board may vote to remove the Judicial Board member whose impartiality is suspect from the relevant matter.

ARTICLE IX: ELECTIONS

Section 1: General Elections: A membership-wide election of the GSA shall be held annually, during the spring semester of the academic year. This shall be called a General Election. The primary purpose of the General Election shall be to elect certain executive officers and representative officers for the following term of office. Additionally, any referendums requiring approval by the GSA membership may be placed on the ballot, including Assembly-approved Constitutional amendments.

Section 2: Special Elections: A membership-wide election of the GSA may be called by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of the GSA Assembly. This shall be called a Special Election and will serve to allow the immediate filling of vacant elected offices during the current term and for any referendums requiring approval by the GSA membership to be placed on the ballot, including Assembly-approved Constitutional amendments.

Section 3: Assembly Elections: A GSA Assembly-wide election shall be held annually during the May meeting. The primary purpose of this election shall be to select the Assembly Speaker and members of the Judicial Board. The election of the Assembly Speaker will be conducted by the Judicial Board Chair, and the election of the Judicial Board will be conducted by the Assembly Speaker.

Section 4: Election Committee: The Assembly shall form an Election Committee no less than one month prior to any general election of the GSA. The Election Committee shall be responsible for coordinating with appropriate organizations within the University at Albany to facilitate the election as well as arranging for campaigning, debates, and other necessities of the election. The Election Committee will also be responsible for validating election results. The Election Committee shall choose a chair from among its members. Any GSA member running for office is not eligible to serve on the Election Committee.

Section 5: Elected Officers: The General Election shall serve to elect four members of the GSA Executive Board: the President; Vice President; Treasurer; and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Chair, as well as a Lead Senator and a University Council Representative. All elected officers shall serve for one year beginning on June 1 and terminating at the end of May 31 of the following year. The elections of the Lead Senator and University Council Representative shall take place concurrently with the election of the Executive Board. The terms of office for the Lead Senator and the University Council Representative shall be concurrent with those of the Executive Board.
The Lead Senator shall hold a seat on the University Senate in accordance with the University Senate’s charter and shall be responsible for attending all sessions of the Senate, serving as the chief point of contact for other GSA Senators, and reporting to the GSA Assembly on the deliberations and actions of the University Senate.

The University Council Representative shall hold a seat on the University Council in accordance with the University Council’s Bylaws and shall be responsible for attending all meetings of the University Council and reporting to the GSA Assembly on the deliberations and actions of the University Council.

Section 6: Nominations: Any member of the GSA has a right to run for elected office. Nominations, including self-nominations, must be submitted to the Election Committee.

Section 7: Term Limits: No individual may serve more than two terms in the same elected office or more than three total terms in any elected office.

ARTICLE X: SPECIAL PROCEDURES

Section 1: Unusual Circumstances: If unusual, unexpected, or unprecedented circumstances prevent the conduct of business as outlined in this Constitution and the associated Bylaws, the GSA President shall call upon the Assembly to form an Unusual Circumstances Committee.

Section 2: The Unusual Circumstances Committee: The Unusual Circumstances Committee shall consist of at least one and no more than two representatives each from the Executive Board, Judicial Board, and Assembly. The Unusual Circumstances Committee shall be empowered to take actions it deems necessary to as closely follow the protocols outlined in this Constitution and the associated Bylaws while accommodating the circumstances which necessitated the formation of the Unusual Circumstances Committee.

Section 3: Enforcement Mechanisms: In the event GSA Members elected or appointed to roles within the GSA fail to fulfill their obligations in their elected or appointed roles, the following punitive measures may be taken:

a) Executive Board members shall not receive their monthly stipend payment until the fulfillment of their obligations. These obligations include, but are not limited to, attending Assembly meetings, attending Executive Board meetings, submitting officer reports, and fulfilling their specific obligations as outlined in the Bylaws.

b) Judicial Board members shall not receive their bi-annual stipend payment until the fulfillment of their obligations.

c) Legislative Branch (Assembly) members who do not attend meetings representing their respective RGSOs will lose RGSO funding for their organization. Missing two Assembly meetings in any given semester will result in a forfeiting of half of their assigned annual RGSO funds.

Section 4: Diversity in Leaders within the GSA: The leader of each branch of the GSA - Executive, Legislative and Judicial - shall not be members of the same RGSO.
ARTICLE XI: AMENDMENT PROCESSES

Section 1: Constitution: The Constitution and any changes shall first be approved by three-quarters (3/4) of the GSA Assembly, then, in a membership-wide election, ratified by two-thirds (2/3) of those GSA members voting.

Section 2: Bylaws: The Bylaws and any amendment to them shall be adopted by two-thirds (2/3) of the GSA Assembly.