GSA Assembly Meeting  
1 May 2020

This document describes the outcomes of the votes for the 1 May 2020 Assembly Meeting as well as addresses any concerns that were submitted via the Google Form voting system. For this meeting, the April meeting summary, the Treasurer’s budget, and the proposed budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal year were approved.

Vote 1  
Do you approve of the April Meeting summary?

Yes- 15  No- 0  Abstain- 0

Vote 2  
Do you approve of the Treasurer's budget report?

Yes- 14  No- 0  Abstain- 1

Vote 3  
Do you approve of the GSA budget for fiscal year 2020-2021?

Yes- 13  No- 2  Abstain- 0

Feedback, Questions, or Public Comments (One response was made to these concerns as they are related and the response is italicized)

Concern 1  
The GSA’s refusal to refund member fees is a mis-prioritization on the part of the organization. The goal of the GSA is to serve its members. Under normal circumstances, that is done by providing printing access and lounge space using the member fees. In these highly unusual circumstances, when printing and lounge use are unsafe, the best use of GSA member fees to serve the members is to refund the fees. Every academic institution is currently facing financial stress, and yet they provided refunds for services students were unable to access. The GSA’s decision to buck this trend is a troubling demonstration that the GSA may be interested in serving its own interests over those of its members. The GSA should refund member fees. Failing that, they should at least explain what "financial stress" entails, as it currently doesn't clarify matters.

Concern 2  
I feel strongly that the graduate students should be refunded their GSA fees for the part of the year that they couldn't utilize the GSA's services. There are two reasons given in the President's report as to why the refund didn't happen: (1) The refund would only under $12 and (2) This would financially stress the GSA. Both of these reasons seem wholly inadequate to justify this decision. The fact that the refund is only $12 doesn't have any bearing on whether a refund is owed, and whether the GSA is financially stressed also seems to be entirely beside the point. The important point is that we, as graduate students, paid the money for certain services, and we didn't get them for a part of the year. The university is giving refunds for that reason (and will surely be in financial
trouble for doing this), but they recognize their obligation to return money to students for services they couldn't provide. It's much more important to give people the money back for the services that they didn't have access to than worry about how that affects the GSA. This is in the middle of a global pandemic, no less, where graduate students are losing jobs and going further into poverty. It's a matter of priorities, and the fact that the GSA didn't render us the services that we paid for means that there should be a refund.

Firstly, the GSA sympathizes with these requests during these difficult times, and therefore, this was a challenging decision to make. There are several reasons why the decision was made to not refund $12. Overall, the decision boiled down to the fact that $12 does not go a long way. While receiving $12 would help every graduate student with an expense at this time, it would hurt several students severely such as if they were expecting a grant to cover conference travel or a stipend for their work done for GSA as their job. Additionally, the GSA would be financially strained if refunding this money. If, after reading these reasons, there are still questions or concerns, please contact the GSA President and Treasurer.

While the GSA does provide an enormous service by offering printing and a lounge space, these are a small portion of the budget. The office space is provided to us at no cost; the only associated costs are supplies within the office. Additionally, printing costs about only 1-2% of our entire budget, leaving the rest of our budget to our other services such as grants, committee representation, and programming. However, it should also be noted that we have a contract for printing that we cannot get out.

While programming events are not continuing for this semester, grants and committee representation are still in full-swing. For example, students applied to grants for the deadline of March 1. Some of these students applied retroactively, in that they may have attended a conference in January for example, and we confirmed that GSA will give them a grant to cover a portion of their expenses. To put this in a number perspective, let’s say a given student received a $500 grant to cover expenses that they paid out of pocket for a conference, but we refund the $12 to all students and then have to tell the student receiving the $500 grant that they will now only be getting $12. This would severely impact that student. $500 can be someone’s monthly rent, while $12 essentially just can cover a few items at the grocery store. Additionally, while many conferences have been cancelled, some of these conferences are not refunding registration fees. Students in this situation who have applied for a March GSA grant are being reimbursed for that expense.

Another example of where money is still needed for GSA operations is for stipends. Many students are employed with the GSA such as office managers, representatives, senators, E-board members, and J-board members. These students expect to receive their paycheck as it is factored into their income. Similar to the grant case, a student expecting a check of $250 to help cover a car payment as an example will be in a poor financial situation if we only give them $12. These members employed with the GSA are still doing work for GSA and deserve to be paid.

On April 3, 2020, the GSA sent a letter to the Budget Director of the Office of Financial Management and Budget. At that time, when accounting for the remaining, necessary portion of the budget, which is primarily dominated by grant awards and operations, we expected to spend around $70,000 through the rest of the fiscal year. Since that date, based on the most recent ledger
the GSA received from UAS on April 24, the GSA has spent $22,301.19. Based on our internal records (including active purchase requests expected to be approved or already approved payments still awaiting to be sent out by UAS), we have spent / in the near future will have spent approximately $30,000. We still need to cover much of the projected spending including end of semester stipends and remaining grant awards. We anticipate spending on just these two items alone an additional $50,000.

One other issue that has arisen is the lower than expected income we received this year. Lower enrollment totals have effectively resulted in an income that will total about $10,000 less than the previously projected $185,000 from last summer. Considering this year’s higher than normal budget that already anticipated more spending than realized net income (primarily seeing increases in grant awards and programming in an effort to offset lower spending from the previous fiscal year), and potentially even lower enrollment next year, the situation becomes much tighter for the GSA. Reimbursing the student fees would ultimately jeopardize the GSA, as there would no longer be the funds to operate at a similar level next year. The current proposed budget for next year contains significant cuts already and reimbursing the student fees would make matters even worse due to the heightened financial stress on the GSA.

While discontinuation of programming and RGSO events is a completely understandable reason to want fees reimbursed, the (1) lower than expected income this year and potentially next year too increases uncertainty in the GSA’s future financial status, (2) GSA’s commitment to serving members of the graduate student community who were already informed of their grant awards for their research and professional development endeavors prior to the global pandemic, and (3) remaining stipends providing critical support to continue GSA operations and maintain financial wellbeing for our employees, officers, and committee members all must be considered with higher priority over the option to reimburse each graduate student individually.