GSA Assembly Meeting Minutes for February 5, 2021

The meeting began at 5:00pm and started with the GSA President introducing the following individuals:

1) Dr. Carol Kim, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affair
2) Todd Foreman, Vice President for Finance and Administration
3) Dr. Kevin Williams, Vice Provost and Dean for Graduate Studies
4) Clarence McNeill, Dean of Students

These university administrators were invited to discuss about planned budget cuts the university will face. Provost Carol Kim began the discussion by providing an overview which included:

- The university has an approximate $59 million deficit – the university has been operating under a slight deficit for a few years now, but it has been exacerbated by COVID-19
- The university has been battling a small deficit for years due to not reaching student enrollment targets
- Administration has been very open about the finances with students, faculty, and staff
- There is now a hiring freeze
- There is some uncertainty on how much state funding there will be, final numbers will be released around April 1. There may also be some federal support. However, the university cannot rely on any level of government for funding and must make budget cuts.

Questions from graduate students and the answers received include:

- Q1: How was COVID-19 specifically made financial matters worse?
  - A1: COVID-19 has been particularly hard on the funding received from room and board as many students are not living on-campus.
- Q2: Will there be cuts to any academic programs?
  - A2: No final decisions have been made on this yet, mainly due to the uncertainty about the amount of any state and/or federal funding. Administration has been working with deans and faculty to understand program budgets and how cuts can be made with hopefully not having to cut an entire program. Scholarships that pay for tuition for graduate students have been preserved for the 2021–2022 academic year.
- Q3: Given these budget cuts and thinking about the future, what is the future vision for UAlbany?
  - A3: There is a current working group on this exact topic. This group is working towards determining what the careers and skills for those careers that UAlbany students need to be equipped with in order to be the most successful. They are working to align future goals with the strategic plan, which includes encouraging research.

There were no other budget related questions, but some time remaining. Therefore, a few questions related to COVID-19 were able to be asked, which included:

- Q1: Regarding the pooled testing and if essentially working remotely, students have been asked to sign a waiver and pledge that they will not come to campus throughout the semester. However, sometimes it may be necessary to go to campus once a month say to get a library book. How can someone sign this waiver and then come to campus once a month?
• A1: The pooled testing is occurring to protect the entire campus community. If visits to campus are infrequent, it is only asked that someone submits a sample only when they come to campus. Sample deposit boxes are located outside several buildings so exposure to other people is nonexistent. While the waiver and pledge are written rigidly, it is flexible to an extent. It is only problematic if a student does not sign a waiver and pledge and then comes to campus – a student like this needs to make a decision on whether to be in-person or remote after first warning.
• Q2: Many graduate students are both students and employees. It seems the communication on procedures for possible COVID-19 exposure are slightly different. How should someone like this proceed?
• A2: This issue has recently came up and are working to fix it. Overall, someone like this should follow the student reporting procedures.

This concluded the discussion with university administration. The remaining agenda for the meeting continued.

1. Approval of the December 2020 meeting minutes

Discussion on this motion included:
• There were no questions nor comments on this. Therefore, the motion went to a vote.

Vote results:
Yes: 16  No: 0  Abstain: 0

Therefore, the motion on the approval of the December 2020 meeting minutes has passed.

2. The Assembly Speaker then asked if anyone wanted to add anything to the agenda, likely for a Public Comment Section. No one specifically said anything at this time.

3. Confirmation of the Equity and Inclusion Chair

Discussion on this motion included:
• The Interim Equity and Inclusion Chair briefly reiterated some points about herself that were in her bio that the Assembly received one week prior to this meeting.
• One question was asked about if she has any specific goals. The Interim responded that right now she is still getting her bearings in the position, but for the immediate future she wants to make sure that students know all the resources the university offers for support.

Vote results for the confirmation of the Equity and Inclusion Chair:
Yes: 16  No: 0  Abstain: 0

Therefore, the motion on the approval of the confirmation of the Equity and Inclusion Chair has passed.
4. Confirmation of the revisions to the GSA Constitution

The GSA President led the discussion on with along with input from other members that were on the committee to work on revisions. The main highlight were discussed, but Assembly members can see all tracked changes. Discussion on this motion included:

- The section on formal power and how the Assembly can bestow powers on the E-board seems vague. It may also now be alleviated by the new section on Special Procedures. It was decided the sentence should be removed.
- The new section on Special Procedures includes an enforcement mechanism of withholding someone’s pay if work is not done. There was a question on enforcement vs. impeachment. It was stated that enforcement may be a first step, but if used multiple times, then perhaps impeachment is necessary. It was also asked if the Unusual Circumstances Committee would need to be formed in order to enact this enforcement. The answer to this is no, it just fell into the same Article. Another question included would the stipend be withheld and then given once work completed, or not at all. This would be clarified in the Bylaws revisions since the Constitution outlines the power, but the Bylaws clarify how to actually proceed with the power.
- There were several other edits written by an Assembly member that needed to be addressed. Therefore, the motion was tabled. Over the next few weeks, the revisions committee will make those additional edits and begin revising the Bylaws. The vote on the Constitution will take place at the March meeting.

5. Officer Reports

Discussion included each officer briefly highlighting a few items from their reports. Some discussion specifics include:

- The GSA now has an IRS EIN number. There are several items still in progress on this, but the GSA President and Treasurer are actively working on this.

6. Approval of the Treasurer Report:

Discussion on this motion included:

- Need to understand why less than one-half of the expected income has come in so far, even though we are halfway through this academic year.
- A question raised was that there is a considerable amount of money that is unused, especially since we are roughly halfway through the year. How is the GSA planning to use this money? The treasurer stated that he has had discussions with representatives from the university. A large percentage of this unused money could be put into an emergency fund for the GSA and that we are ready to fight the university if they try to take the money. We want the GSA to either keep the money or return it to the graduate students or give it to a charity. Assembly approval will be needed.

Vote results:

Yes: 16  No: 0  Abstain: 0
Therefore, the motion on the approval of the Treasurer’s report has passed.

At this point, the formal agenda was finished. The Assembly Speaker asked if anyone had any last-minute questions or comments. Some things stated included:

- There is a new lead office manager
- The videos on mental health topics were not done prior to the beginning of the semester. This was partly due to that there were some questions as to how the semester would proceed (i.e., 100% virtual or hybrid). The videos will be released this month.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58pm.