April 2nd, 2021 Assembly Meeting Officer Reports

President: Florencia Silveira

The GSA resolution named “RESOLUTION TO ELIMINATE GRADUATE EMPLOYEE FEES” was sent to the following individuals on March 22nd, following the revisions discussed during the special Assembly meeting held on March 19th: Chris Poehlman (Senate secretary); Havidán Rodriguez (University President); Carol Kim (Provost); Todd Foreman (VP of Finance); Michael Christakis (VP of Academic Affairs); Kevin Williams (Dean of the Graduate School); Sean Rafferty (University Senate Chair); and Deborah LaFond (University Life Council Chair). The responses that had come in by March 23rd were positive and recipients expressed that they would be happy to discuss the topic of fees for graduate students with the GSA Assembly.

Ray Webb and Michael Jaromin from Student Activities attended the Executive Board meeting in March to discuss elections and graduate fees; the Elections Committee is now in contact with Ray, who oversees the elections process for all organizations. In addition to electing officers, the Elections Committee will oversee the vote on the revised Constitution and the referendum on mandatory GSA fees.

Met with the Dean of Students to discuss the threatening emails regarding university surveillance testing; graduate students who will be attending campus occasionally (not weekly) are asked to reach out to the Dean of Students directly, who will walk them through the process of acquiring a waiver for the weeks in which the students will not be visiting campus.

The Bylaws Revisions Committee is working on editing the Bylaws; this will take longer than anticipated because the document is rather lengthy, but if you have any feedback on the Bylaws that you would like to be incorporated into the revisions, please send it to gsapresident@albany.edu by April 5th.

The SPAC (Strategic Plan Advisory Council) committee continues to meet to discuss allocation of funds; the STAR awards, focusing on diversity and inclusion, are at the forefront of discussion, and they are due on March 31st. I will be recusing myself from the committee during the month of April because they will be reviewing submitted applications and my advisor will be submitting an application for a project in which I am heavily involved; another member of the Executive Board will be asked to attend.

The UAlbany Forward Together Task Force Steering Committee continues to meet weekly to provide updates regarding the COVID situation on campus. The University is planning on going back to “normal” for fall semester, meaning full capacity classes. Granted, this is all dependent upon what proportion of the University is vaccinated by that point, but my impression is that their
approach is that it is better to plan to be fully open for fall and then to pull back as needed than to plan for another largely remote semester and then realize that they can open campus.

A demo meeting was scheduled with representatives from VersatilePhD. We are in contact with the University to see if they are willing to purchase the annual subscription, since it would also benefit alumni and current faculty. University at Buffalo has been using the program for years, and it is a mere $4,000/year flat for the subscription for the entire University affiliated body.

A meeting took place with Mike Christakis (VP of Academic Affairs) and Todd Foreman (VP of Finance) to discuss fees, the labeling of the currently called “GSEU Comprehensive Fee,” and tuition increases. They are aware of the GSA resolution support the GSEU; the GSEU Comprehensive Fee and the SEVIS Fee (for international students) will be relabeled by Student Accounts to be something along the lines of “University Fee” and “ISSS Fee,” respectively. They also expressed extreme interest in the VersatilePhD subscription and will get in contact with Kevin Williams (Dean of the Graduate School) to discuss funding – possibly also involving the Career Services office. Mike Christakis, Todd Foreman, and Kevin Williams will be attending the GSA Executive Board meeting in April to discuss fees and questions.

Budget Metrics workshop groups met for a few weeks to discuss feedback across the five components of the metrics. Representatives from the GSA attended these workshop groups. Following the submission of final reports from these workshop groups, the Budget Metrics Steering Committee met 5 times in 7 days to finalize recommendations to the Provost regarding the budget metrics. A heavy emphasis was placed on representing the interests of different groups and on allocating weights; the weights were decreased in the financial gain measures and were increased for research engagement and diversity.

We now have office managers going into the GSA office to enable printing for graduate students; the office is currently open for 16 hours every week.

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**Vice President: Bria Taylor**

No report received.

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**Treasurer: Brennan Stutsrim**

**Executive Summary:**
Payroll through 3/3/2021 has been documented.
GSA’s legal counsel has filed with the NY Dept. of State for the incorporation of The University at Albany Graduate Student Association, Inc. and is awaiting consent from the NYS Education Department.

University Auxiliary Services confirmed that delay in income was likely due to students paying their fees right before the deadline. There is no waiting period between fees being paid by students and the money being transferred to the GSA.

The University at Albany Campus Designee has confirmed the rules with regards to leftover money from the GSA budget. SUNY rules dictate that student organizations that collect fees from students (such as GSA) are able to keep 10% of their yearly income for the next fiscal year. The remainder is to be refunded to graduate students or spent on items for future use, pending approval from the assembly.

A Purchase Request (PR) training session was held on 3/18/21 for RGSO’s that were newly created this semester or were unable to attend training sessions held in the fall. ANY OFFICER THAT ATTENDED A PR TRAINING IN THE FALL DOES NOT NEED TO ATTEND ANOTHER TRAINING.

Liaising:
- Emails with UAS and Student Activities
- Emails with RGSO leaders about upcoming potential events

Meetings:
- Met with representatives from University Auxiliary Services and Student Activities about EIN number and required insurance policies
- Met with Student Activities and Student Organization Resource Center to discuss student refunds and protocol for transferring responsibilities to new Treasurer.
- Met with Eboard to discuss current business of the GSA

Financial Activity:
- FY2020-2021 total income is expected to be $224,600
- FY2020-2021 income as of 24 March 2021 is $159,038.46
- FY2020-2021 total expenses as of 24 March 2021 is $48,697.27
- GSA Remaining balance as of 24 March 2021 is $161,812.42
Equity and Inclusion Chair: Shakera Tems

Liaising:
- MLK Celebration February 22nd at 7pm – 9pm
  - Meet and Greet with LaTosha Brown, Founder of Black Votes Matter. GSA had the opportunity to invite graduate students that expressed interest in attending
- MLK Celebration Review/ Debrief Meeting March 2nd at 2pm - 3pm

- University Speakers Series with Ibram X. Kendi with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the UAlbany Student Association
  - This event is still in the planning process. GSA EI has offer to do supplemental programming leading up to the event.

- Academic Affairs Metric Group – Research Excellence
  GSA EI Chair was invited to join the Research Excellence Academic Affairs metrics group from March 2nd to March 5th (10am, 8am, 2pm, 9am).

- Great Dance Unity/Diversity Wall Presentation – March 18th at 2pm

- Juneteenth Scholarship Application Review Committee – March 25th at 9am

Pending Activities/ Events:
- Women’s History Month Speaker
  The GSA Programming Chair, Graduate student Alison Martinez, GSA EI Chair met on Tuesday, March 23rd at 10:30am

- RGSO Student Fair Updates
  - Had some brief correspondence with the VP about gathering all of the RGSO contact information so that I can begin the planning process. If you would like to be a part of the fair please email me at gsainclusion@albany.edu, so that I can plan a short meeting with your RGSO representative.

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**Grants Chair: Christina Scharmer**

**Executive Summary:** The Grants Chair distributed applications for the Spring 2021 award cycle to committee members for review and provided training resources to new committee member. As discussed at the Assembly meeting on March 5, 2021, the grants chair did not require proof of GSA bill paid for grant submission. Proof of GSA bill paid will be required from each award recipient before they can claim their GSA grant award. The Grants Chair is working with the GSA treasurer to provide updates for award recipients who have not yet received their reimbursement checks. The grants chair is also working with one award recipient from Spring 2020 who did not receive his check due to relocating for the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Grants Chair also continues to communicate with grant applicants and reviewers via email.

**Oversight:**
- Tracking of grants funding line
• Creation, contact, and oversight of grants committee

Meetings:
• Grants Chair is available via appointment for virtual Zoom consultations. Weekly office hours to be determined.

Information Management
• All grants-information documents maintained on the GSA share page
• All grants-tracking updated in Financial Budget worksheet created by GSA Treasurer
• List of committee members maintained on GSA share page

Financial Activity
• All purchase requests for Fall 2020 award period have been submitted for reimbursement by the Grants Chair
• Grants chair working to reconcile reimbursement for grant recipient from Spring 2020 funding period.

Programming Chair: Dee Chin-Carty

No report received.

University Council Representative: Jordan McAdam

The last University Council meeting was March 5th. The highlights are as follows:

• Pooled testing currently has a .67% positivity rate. The university is planning for an in-person fall semester with mask wearing and surveillance.
• Budget
  o Now expecting a 5% budget cut versus 20% as previously expected.
  o Possibility of increased tuition and/or fees, which could occur as soon as the 2021-2022 year.
    • This is decided by the State, not UAlbany.
• The resolution on renaming Indian Quad was passed during the meeting.
Lead Senator: Emily Pacer

Commencement: As of now, the University is planning to host an in-person walk through graduation. This would allow each student to walk through various stations, receive giveaways, and walk the stage with a limited number of guests. Each department and school will have a designated date and time over the course of a week, so that things are staggered and spaced out to maintain proper COVID protocol. More details are coming soon from the University.

Discussion of our Resolution regarding the Elimination of Fees:
- For future legislation passed by the GSA sent to the Senate, it would be beneficial to include the official vote at the bottom of the resolution. Also, the GSA should come up with a resolution numbering system, perhaps based on Month/Year to keep track of our resolutions that are passed.

- Unfortunately, the topic was last on the agenda, and discussion was tabled for the next Senate Meeting due to time constraints. But the University Senate wants to know what actions they should take regarding our resolution/how they can help us. Conversations in the ULC (University Life Council) will be taking place regarding our resolution at their next meeting as well. The ULC is a committee within the University Senate.

- Overall, I think the Senate responded well to our concerns. They want to work with us to find creative solutions to address the issue of fees. They may not support elimination of all fees but perhaps the University could implement programs/grants/scholarships that could help pay for them (Stony Brook implemented scholarships for fees for doctoral students). Also, the University Senate can advocate on our behalf to departments that students with full tuition waivers are still required to pay fees (which some departments/faculty/PIs are unaware of).

- I will have more updates as the University Senate/ULC continues to include our issue in future discussions. Is there anything else about this issue that I can bring forth to the University Senate/ULC for the next meeting? (Next Meeting scheduled: April 21st)

Judicial Board Chair: Anwesha Sarkar

No complaints were received by the Judicial Board as of March 22, 2021.

UAS: Dee Chin-Carty

No report received.
Wages and Benefits: Andrew Gill

- We’re continuing to do research on a living wage for graduate workers and have begun writing our report. The report will not be as comprehensive as we would’ve liked due to time constraints (the semester is over halfway through!), but our goal is to complete as much of the report as we can by the May Assembly meeting. Any input/assistance is welcome.

- Versatile PhD service (as mentioned in my last report). We would like to move forward with pursuing a university subscription for this service. Below is some more detailed information (courtesy of Evan Malone of the Philosophy Department) about what comes with a subscription:

The Versatile PhD website contains free content available to all, and premium content available by institutional subscription. Most of the content that people seem to find helpful requires an institutional subscription. The free content that the website has includes access to some member-posted job listings, forum access, and the member directory (though the search functions are limited and require an institutional subscription), along with the public pages of the PhD Career Finder, an interactive tool that lets users explore careers based on their academic discipline.

This premium content appears to be available for free to students, faculty, staff, and post-docs of affiliated universities. The premium content presents detailed inside information about each career represented, offered by PhDs and ABDs actually in those careers: their stories, advice, inside information about their fields, detailed accounts of the hiring process, and even the resumes and cover letters they used to get their first jobs in these fields. This includes the experiences and advice of humanities, social science, and STEM PhD’s. All premium content is 100% original; nothing is copied or aggregated from other sites. Nearly all authors are members of the Versatile PhD community and can be contacted by PM through the site. This also means that there is no way to access this information outside of using an institutional affiliation.

There are a number of features available with an institutional affiliation, including opportunities for networking; special forums, webinars, and courses to help candidates better prepare for a job search; a SmartJobs feature, which provides new career ideas and opportunities for candidates; a My Plan feature, which provides a personalized board of dated goals for your graduate journey; and more.

- We’re concerned about a worrying trend developing surrounding GAs and TAs and the non-renewal of contracts. What departments and colleges/schools are frequently doing is using TA and GA lines to recruit candidates to come to UAlbany while telling students that contracts are typically renewed for up to 4 years. Then they inform students during the Spring semester (after it’s too late to transfer to a different program) that they will not be renewed for the next year. These decisions are very often unrelated to job performance and unfairly punish students by encouraging them to come to UAlbany and then turning around
and making them pay full tuition and lose their stipends, health insurance, and valuable experience. The committee views these practices as deceitful and unethical.

The GSEU is having trouble filing and winning grievances for graduate employees in some of these cases since these are standard practices. This is a problem that exists in a few different departments; however, the School of Public Health seems to be doing this at a particularly high rate.