

THE 29TH SESSION OF THE REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE

GRADUATE STUDENT
GOVERNMENT



Assembly Meeting Minutes
16 April 2010
1:00PM

Prepared by Jacqueline Orlando (CRWR)
Benjamin Banneker Room, Stamp Student Union

I. Approval of Minutes

Karin French (VPLA) called the meeting to order at 1:10PM. Seeing no objections, she asked the assembly for unanimous approval of the March meeting minutes as posted. She also asked the assembly members to sign-in to the sheet.

II. Executive Reports

Anupama Kothari, President

My report is divided into an update on the grad meal plan and a summary of the tuition increases for the FY10-11 academic year. I will devote the major portion of my report to the tuition increases for the FY 10-11 academic year

Grad Meal Plan: Dining Services has just informed me that the grad meal plan is almost ready. The meal plan can be used anywhere on and around campus that accepts UMD meal plans. Grad students can choose a dollar amount between \$250 and \$500 for the plan. A small application fee will be charged to cover the administrative costs, but this fee will be waived for students who register from the summer through fall. Also, no taxes will be charged on food and beverage purchases. Finally, unlike undergraduate meal plan pints, grad meal plans points will not expire for 2 years. The Director of Campus Dining Services will be speaking to us at the next GSG meeting and you can ask her specific questions about the plan.

Tuition Increases (Fy10-11): You will recall that in the fall of 2009, I reported all proposed increases in mandatory fees to the GSG assembly and sought feedback from the assembly at a special session. The university had proposed 3 new mandatory fees including the facilities fee, the health fee and the library fee. Based on assembly feedback, I voted against all three fees at the Committee for the Review of Students Fees (CRSF) meeting held in Fall 2009. But despite almost the student representatives on the CRSF voting against the fees, the faculty (who constitute majority of the CRSF) voted for the fees and the fees passed.

Additionally, you will also recall that the library fee was meant to update the collections and the databases of the library. This week, we were informed that the university bundled the library fee into the technology fee and at the Board of Regents meeting, a technology fee increase of almost \$95 was being proposed. I testified at the Board of Regents meeting today against the graduate tuition increase of 6% (compared to a 3% increase in undergraduate tuition. I also raised concerns about increases in MBA tuition (17%) and the fee increases (particularly the library fee).

Regretfully, the Board of Regents approved all the increases.

Aaron Tobiason, Vice President for Academic Affairs

GRID: Graduate Research Interaction Day took place on April 7. We had more than 170 students submit research proposals, and we were able to accept approximately 130 presentations. More than 120 individuals registered to attend one of the panels, and the lunch plenary session,

which had seating for 200, was full. We also saw an impressive crowd of approximately 350 for the awards ceremony and keynote address, which is a tremendous crowd for a student-run event. Ultimately, more than \$15,000 in prize money was awarded to 32 of the best student presenters. The keynote address was recorded, and a video will soon be up online for those who were unable to attend Dr. Fetter's talk.

Tomek has created an online feedback form, and we are gathering reactions from conference participants that will allow us to make GRID even better next year. Based on this feedback and reports from the various subcommittees of the GRID Planning Committee, I am working on a detailed report that will provide guidelines for future iterations of the conference. I am also working with the Ways and Means Committee to propose amendments to the GSG Bylaws which will help codify GRID timelines and procedures. Planning GRID is a tremendous amount of work, and we are exploring ways to compensate the conference organizer(s) in the future, likely by establishing an honorarium for the individual(s) who serve as GRID coordinator.

Lenisa Joseph, Vice President for Student Affairs

We don't have much to report but there is an upcoming grad health fair in May so please look out for that.

Bethany Applebaum, Vice President for Community Development

Since the last meeting, I have been looking for sponsorships for Grad Pub. Campus Recreation Services kindly agreed to sponsor the grad pub this afternoon. I am still working on the last two grad pubs, but Anu and I have a couple of ideas. Also, the SSC has been planning for the dodgeball tournament, which will be at 4pm on April 30th in Ritchie Coliseum. We hope to see you all there! The SSC has also started to look into the DVD circulation program and will have a report for the next assembly meeting.

Tomek Kott, Vice President for Committee Affairs

Committees: Most committees are wrapping up their business for the year in the next month or so, and I look forward to working with them to transition into the next academic year smoothly.

Academic Affairs: As part of our continued effort to ensure that graduate student research is being noticed around campus, we have been gathering information from GRID winners and the GRID plenary panel to use in emailing the Office of Research for publication in their newsletter. This was an initiative attempted once a year ago, and we would like to follow up on that success. We are also working with the Assembly on gathering information about different shareholder committees at the program, department, school, or college level. We plan to contact those members who seem to have best practices, and work with Assembly members to improve the lines of communication between the administration and the

Elections: The election process is running smoothly, with a few errors here and there. These are overwhelmingly user errors, and points to a lack of good guidance from the Elections committee and on the website. We are gathering feedback and plan on making things much more

straightforward in the future. So far, many people have voted already, and we are hoping for a stronger turnout that will furthermore allow us to validate the Referenda.

GRID: I worked with the GPC to make sure that all information, such as accepted presenters, themes, abstracts, and the schedule were all uploaded and available online. I will be working with Aaron and the GPC to make sure that the winners from the event are posted and that the video from the talk is available online. I also helped man the registration desk on the day of GRID for two hours.

Committee Reports

Diversity Committee

Brown bag focused on issues of diversity for graduate students. It went well, a few grad students from around campus and the ombudsperson. There still aren't any real solid answers to any of our issues, like decreasing number of PhD offers to diverse candidates.

Ryan Richards, Vice President for Financial Affairs

The Budget and Finance Committee had three EFR submissions, but one was submitted too late for consideration and another GSO is not registered with STARS so we couldn't vote on anything.

The BFC did approve EFR 29.13 for the Association of Doctoral Students from the Smith School in the amount of \$300. They held a pizza luncheon on 4/13 and we are waiting for their event report.

Karin asked for unanimous consent from the assembly to suspend the agenda while we wait for our guest speaker and move on to Aaron's resolution GSGA29-R10.

III. New Business

A. GSGA29-R10: A Resolution Calling upon the Departments of Theatre and Dance, the College of Arts and Humanities, and the University Senate to Preserve Shared Governance in the Proposed School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

As the resolution was still being considered by the Ways and Means Committee, Aaron made a motion to call up this resolution to consider it among the assembly. The assembly approved the motion. He introduced the resolution and explained that Theater and Dance departments are planning on merging and there has been a plan to make a new school with merged administrative structure. There are several other mergers being considered among the university, and people are uniformly upset that they have not been able to weigh in on the changes. This resolution asks that the new school would have some voting representation on committees. The staff and undergraduate students are excluded from voting and serving on committees, which is needed to ensure shared governance principles in the new school.

Susan Allen (COMM) commented that she serves on the faculty advisory committee but we are not voting members. These plans were brought to us in February or March, and she apologized for not knowing that this was an issue. She and the other member asked what the impact would be of the changes for those students in the department, but didn't get much information.

Aaron agreed that this was precisely the problem and no one knew anything about it until after the decisions were made.

The motion to approve the resolution was made and seconded. Seeing no debate, the assembly voted on the resolution and GSGA29-R10 passed unanimously.

B. Implications of Graduate Student Unionization

Guest speaker: Dr. Ann G. Wylie, Vice President, Administrative Affairs

Dr. Wylie arrived at 1:28 to give the assembly her thoughts on unionization of graduate students.

Dr. Wylie: I'm not actively engaged in this topic but when I was dean of the graduate school for two years I had a role in establishing the graduate student government as an independent body. I'm glad to see a vibrant group of graduate students involved in this body and that you aren't on the budget of the university and so can avoid those possible biases that come along with that.

My thought is that unionization will destroy graduate student government.

If you unionize, you will not be allowed to discuss things like terms and conditions of employment with the administration because those are the rules of unionization. Before deciding to unionize, look at the things you want to bring to the administration in the next few years and consider if those would be union issues or not. With unions, just one or two persons at the bargaining table represent you.

Unionizing will also not effect your wages. The unions that we have on campus do not bargain for wage increases and you will have no ability to bargain independently for them. There are things you can get at, like uniformity across campus and you might make progress, but the state gives us the wage increases. You will have to consider what you will be giving up versus what you will gain by unionizing.

I don't know what's happening now, no one is getting wage increases for the past three years, but we have protected you from furloughs because we don't see you as employees, we see you as students. If you unionize, you become employees; you have to understand that the institution might see you differently. I see you as partners, but that's just the way I feel about graduate students. Those are the pocketbook issues to consider.

I think unionizing will impact your role with the faculty members who advise you. I know there are bad apples among faculty, but there are a lot of people who really do care about graduate student and they do promote you. But they don't want you to be an employee because that's a different situation. This is a concern to think about before unionizing.

Regarding service fees, the union wanted service fees this year and they didn't get them but they're coming. Service fees are 1-2% of your wages that the union will take. We don't actually have that many people paying service fees right now. Of all the exempt employees, only 4.8% pay dues, 95% don't pay anything for that representation. So the union wants you to pay dues, and you're all poor so you're not going to pay dues. This is an important consideration.

FICA is 7.65% and right now you are exempt. If you are moved into the category of employee you will possibly have to pay that.

I did some browsing on the web, and here's the way University of California describes their wages for graduate students. Say you make \$15,000 for an academic year, nine months, working 20 hours a week. Right away that is about \$18,000 for 12 months part time, which is \$36,000 for a full time employee, which won't give you a lot of sympathy as we pay plenty of employees less than that.

I think you should determine what issues are driving the consideration for unionization. What do you not have that you want? I think you have the power to obtain what you want as a graduate student government. I don't believe you have been thwarted at every turn on what you've asked for. I believe you have been extremely successful. You couldn't do that because that would become a union issue. If you want, talk to faculty and staff about what the union has brought for them because it's not wages. The grass always seems greener, but I hope you'll think. I care about you. If you unionize it won't mean that much to the university because the bottom line comes from the state.

Aaron Tobiason: I understand as you say that unions don't bargain with the university for wages. Do the unions bargain with the state?

Dr. Wylie: The unions are powerless to get additional wages because if we don't have the money from the state we can't provide it. That's how it's always been here in this state with unions.

David Colon-Cabrera (Anthropology): Regarding the relationship between faculty members and graduate students, can you speak about how specifically this might change if graduate students are now employees?

Dr. Wylie: Maybe I'm old fashioned, but when I look at my graduate students I see them as me 35 years ago. They are struggling and poor and I was all those things. I want to encourage their development, but if they are just my employee it's just not the same.

David: But I'd still be with my same advisor and we have a good relationship so would there really be a change from year to year?

Dr. Wylie: I don't think anything would change if you have already established a relationship with your advisor. But if you are pushed to take union action, I think your relationship will change. This is a concern that faculty feel. That's one area where I don't know exactly how it

will all come out, but these financial issues are real, along with the destruction of the graduate student government.

Blessing Okoroafor: Are you generally against unions?

Dr. Wylie: I look at the history of America and I have no philosophical objection to unions because they have created the strong middle class in this country.

Michael Scholten (Physics): When I was looking into the family leave issue I found that a lot of other schools who have unions have that policy. I thought family leave was something that would not be considered without us having a union. But the administration has responded to the assembly about this issue, which shows that they were willing to discuss something like this with us without a union and it speaks highly of the administration.

Susan Allen (Communications): I appreciate the bottom line financial issues but I have perceived an inequity across the campus about teaching loads and other conditions of employment. This is my fifth year and I haven't seen much change in trying to equalize those issues even though the assembly has tried to change them. These are important issues for graduate students that are just about their bottom line pay. How would you address those issues?

Dr. Wylie: When I was dean of the school, students came to me complaining of these issues and the survey that went out was under my watch. I raised issues with some of the colleges who had changed the teaching load without discussing it with the TAs. We didn't have a strong GSG at that time. Now you do. I think those issues should come here. If your work load is being raised without your acknowledgement, that's something you should scream bloody murder about.

There are some variations of pay across campus. We can't give everyone the same level of pay that the lowest level person makes today. We wouldn't be able to recruit people in the sciences if we did that. What if we give everyone the same wage and it's the highest wage? Then regrettably that would mean we'd have to cut down the number of TAs we have. So what we have is a happy medium. Find out what the differences are between departments; take a survey. TAs are part of our instructional budget. There should be some parity, maybe not absolute equality, but there are some things you can do. We have pay ranges in every job we have in our unions. Some people are paid at one end and some at the other. It would be the same for TAs if you unionize. Bring the data forward.

Henrike Lenguth (American Studies): The service fees would be about \$25, but the student fees that the university is asking us for would be in the hundreds, so that seems pretty low compared to the fees that the university would ask for.

Dr. Wylie: The service fees would be in addition to the student fees. And some of those increased fees are because of your own graduate student government executives. You all have to pay increased wages for your GSG president.

Anu noted that there was just a slight cost of living raise last year.

Todd Reynolds asked Dr. Wiley to clarify her argument that if there were a union the graduate student government would go away. He read a section from the unionizing agreement that states the previous groups would continue to exist and so long as the union approves it the GSG could still bargain with the administration for terms and conditions of employment.

Dr. Wylie reiterated that the graduate student government could not deal directly with the administration for terms and conditions; anything they do would always have to go through the union.

Anupama: What we can now bargain about for terms and conditions of employment? I agree that if there is a sympathetic graduate dean then we can work things out but very often that isn't the case. We have been approached by constituents about workload issues, but as we have learned there is a conflict of interest for the ombudsperson because that office reports directly to the graduate school. We need a place to start. The graduate school has been sympathetic to the maternity leave policy, but we need things to proceed at a faster pace.

Dr. Wylie: I'm not going to argue with anyone about this, but I want you to know the reasons I think you should consider when it comes to unionizing.

Aaron said he shares the university's take on graduate students being apprentices. But in those situations where we have assistants working for their advisors as a TA, that relationship is necessarily going to be hierarchical. Your advisor has all the power in that situation and you are an at-will employee without contracts. In the same way it was wise to make the GSG an independent body from the university, might it also be prudent to un-tether those professor-student relationships and allow the union to act as a third party to mediate some situations?

Dr. Wylie described her own situation with her advisor when she was in graduate school, who was her friend and a person who believed in her and she wouldn't want anyone else between them in that relationship. I'm sure there are a million stories, and maybe you need someone to help you out. It's very easy to drive issues around anecdotes, but this is a very important decision.

Todd asked for any evidence or data that speaks to the relationship between faculty and advisees, and while Dr. Wylie couldn't provide any, he commented that the data actually says the relationship between graduate students and faculty actually improves.

Thanking the assembly for their time, Dr. Wylie left the room.

IV. Representatives' Forum

Susan Allen (Comm) commented that she doesn't want anyone's workload to increase or his pay to decrease. She expressed her concern that we would be pitted against one another for this issue and doesn't know how to fix this issue, but didn't want to speak to what anyone else is getting for teaching hours or pay rate. We are getting nowhere on this issue by talking to our Deans, who just keep making empty promises.

Anu wanted to speak about the GSG stipends and point out that we did not ask for any increase this year, and when the proposal for graduate student fees went on the table this year we were surprised to see that there is a 1% increase in wages for GSG stipends but that didn't come through us. We make some of the lowest stipends at the university, and it's all public knowledge. Each person pays about \$7 toward that stipend, much less than what we all pay for technology fees.

David Colon-Cabrera commented that we don't want to be at the mercy of the university, whether or not we decide to unionize.

Graham Marquart (Neuroscience) asked what actual powers we have at the GSG: I don't see what we'd lose by unionizing. What are these great powers that she was talking about?

Anu said that the graduate grievance procedure was the outcome of our threat to unionize. We negotiated and yelled and we pushed to get that grievance procedure but it took the threat of unionization to make that happen and she wanted to point that out to the assembly. We can negotiate for maternity leave, but I'm almost confident that the press had something to do with that. An article not favoring the university's side of things came out in the Washington Post and the faculty really advocated for us, I'm happy to say. We can advocate but I don't think we can negotiate for pay and workload. We've gone to the graduate school and had the matter referred back to the departments so nothing ever happens in our favor.

Gregory Rheault (Education) asked what the union could do in those situations.

Todd said that the university doesn't have the power to set stipends, but that is not particular to Maryland, that's what they say at all state schools. The union's position at all these institutions is that the university is the state and they have the power to go back to the state with those negotiations. Another way to do it is to tap into reserve funds so worked together to find the funds for subsidizing health care and other raises.

Gregory continued about redressing grievances. How would a union have any more clout than the university's own internal process?

Todd answered that in a grievance process with a union, there are the same sort of steps about employer and dean, but then you go to an objective third party arbiter who would not be employed by the university, instead of the final third step here with the ombudsperson who is an employee of the university. It's a more objective system.

Henrike wanted to comment that the relationship between employer and employee could still be nurturing, just as with professors and grad students.

Karin French would point to all the undergrad employees and noted that those are not contentious relationships but instead are nurturing.

Susan Allen noted that she passed on an article about unionizing to her constituents. Grad students see unionizing as a choice between being affiliated with faculty or affiliated with the

union. There are some psychological issues and it is possible that there would be a rift between students and advisors.

Henrike said it made it seem like faculty oppose unionization, but is there a way we can find that out ahead of time, and bring in faculty as allies?

Todd mentioned the service fees. Service fees are something that every graduate student would pay to the union regardless of whether they participate. The union would have to have a certain number of members before a service fee could be charged, and right now it's illegal in Maryland. The union would fight for you no matter what, and you don't have to pay. Todd mentioned also that his relationship with faculty was not hurt and was really clarified thanks to a union.

Anu brought up future issues that the GSG will raise, and we don't have much power. Health insurance is something that will come up in the future, and the administration was thinking that we might not need such great health insurance because we're younger. Health insurance is something that would probably be addressed by a union. Michael said that maternity leave was receiving quick attention, but the meeting where it was supposed to be discussed has now been canceled. We need a clear route to follow to give us rights.

Gregory asked if there are any studies done about how many people would want to join the union because he hadn't even heard about the issue of unionizing among my constituents.

Todd said there has been a movement among graduate students here since the nineties. The AFT pays his salary to talk to grads about unionization and it's still in that building mode of talking to people face to face about their concerns and issues. It's been off and on since he was a grad student back when it was called GALOL.

Blessing said she's been to a lot of meetings where everyone talks about unionizing but this might be a good forum to see where everyone stands on unionizing.

Susan said that the majority of her constituents are against or indifferent on unions.

Henrike mentioned that international students have concerns about unionizing. Anu said that international students are most often the victims of doing work that is not within our purview for fear of losing their work.

Aaron said that he is philosophically against unionizing, but as graduate students we have very little formal power and so he's still open to the possibility of introducing the employer-employee relationship as it may become more attractive than the status quo.

Liz Nguyen said that in the Chemistry department, many students are either against or indifferent to unionizing because we are on the upper end of salary and worry that unionizing would cause problems there by equalizing pay for everyone.

Karin French noted that Dr. Wylie was focusing a lot on salaries, but most complaints aren't necessarily about salary but are more about working conditions. Henrike added that for

international students, taking a loan isn't an option and in her department of American Studies many constituents would support a push for better work conditions.

Todd said that we are still in the educational mode. The union would negotiate for minimums, but there is nothing that says the university can't go above those minimums. Sciences are frequently worried that unionizing would lower their salaries, but there is nothing philosophically or materially present that would prevent the university from paying them higher for their work.

Graham said that he is in favor of unions but he feels that his constituents aren't in favor because they have not yet been in the real world and don't understand what a union can bring. He thinks that they would be in favor of what a union could do for us if they understood fully.

Moving on to a new subject, Aaron told the assembly that an email survey was going out in the near future asking for information about committee structure in your programs. He is trying to gather data about how many committees exist that allow graduate students to participate in them. So please respond as best as you can.

For the meal plan, Aaron asked if it is correct that it would cost you \$25 to load money every time? That seems like a lot.

Gregory said that it might be something like \$25 fee for \$500 on the plan. You can't use it for anything besides food. Jacqueline Orlando asked what the difference was between the meal plan and Terrapin Express, and Anu explained that you still pay tax if you use Terrapin Express, and Patrick Williams commented that there are restaurants around College Park who also accept the meal plan.

David Colon-Cabrera returned to the union idea and expressed his concerns that we do not have a voice on campus, to which Aaron asked if those issues were related to academia or employment. David said it's both. We have this grievance procedure that no one has yet used. We need someone to be courageous to see if this grievance procedure works. Anu said that she received a letter from the university and was not capable of making the grievance procedure actually work for her. If you hear of anyone who uses the process, please let us know because it doesn't end with the ombudsperson, it goes all the way up to the president. Todd knew of sociology students who went through the process and Aaron asked if they would be willing to come and talk with us.

Seeing no further discussion or announcements, Karin French called the meeting to adjourn at 2:35PM.