



University  
of Vermont



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Tuesday, February 27, 2024, Time: 7:00 pm

Recording Link: [Graduate Student Senate Meeting Recording](#)

## In attendance

**Senators:** Alison Hall, Bren Cable, Diego Javier-Jimenez, Emily McDonnell, Emma Myric, Gift O moruyi, Goodness Rex Nze-Igwe, Jenan Husain, Joy Emmanuel, Matthew Breunig, Mona Davo udimehr, Muhammad Adeel Arif, Muhammad Adil, Niara Hicks, Parisa Suchdev, Pawan Bastola, Stephen Marshall, Toyib Aremu, Vanessa Ballard.

**Guests:** Baxter Worthing, Celia Mojica, Christina Dixon, Franly Ulerio-Nunez, Rosaura Chapina, Mandy Nix, Neil Traft, Rachel Norris.

**Executive Council Attendees:** Cara Simone, Ijaz Ul Haq, Masoumeh Khodaverdi, Omid Sedighi, Yasaman Pedari.

32 total numbers attended.

## Agenda:

GSS Senate Agenda for the Second Spring Meeting: February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

- I. Roll Call
- II. Call to Order

The meeting at 7:00 pm was called to order by Vice-President, Cara Simone

- III. **Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes (February 6, 2024)**

Emma Myric moved the motion to approve the previous minutes, it was seconded by Omid Sedi ghi.

- IV. Officers Reports
  - a. **President**

The President of GSS and Chair of the Student Affairs Committee, Ijaz UI Haq expressed gratitude for the attendance at the meeting and thanked Cara for her work on the survey. He discussed the process of generating survey questions and emphasized the importance of engagement and accountability among members. He reported positive feedback on a proposed graduate student fee increase and stressed the significance of ongoing communication with students. Additionally, he highlighted efforts to enhance collaboration with the Graduate Student Union. He concluded by encouraging continued teamwork and fostering a respectful and engaged community.

**b. Vice President**

Cara mentioned that the survey was receiving a robust response to the initiative they were conducting, which was great. However, she emphasized that since it had only been a few hours after sending the survey to all graduate students, drawing any conclusions at this early stage would be premature. Despite this, she expressed optimism about the response rate and anticipated having valuable data to understand graduate student needs more comprehensively.

**c. Treasurer**

Yasaman Pedari, the GSS Treasurer, provided an update on the budget, mentioning the expenditure on three coffee breaks so far (\$449.92 each) and the addition of hot cider for upcoming coffee hours, based on a suggestion from a graduate student. She noted the variation in the budget due to this addition (\$495.92 for the remaining four). Additionally, she mentioned the recent boardroom cafe night (\$853.58), the reservation of Orlando's for March 22nd (\$1200), a yoga event scheduled for the following week, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 4-5 PM (\$70), and a craft night sponsored by the student organization for occupational therapy students on March 6th (\$104.69).

**VI. Committee Reports**

**a. Standing Committee reports**  
**Events Committee**

Niara Hicks from the Events Committee mentioned upcoming events. She shared that there will be a yoga event on March 5th from 4:00 to 5:00 at Gutterson Fieldhouse on campus. The event's theme is destressing in the middle of the semester. The event will feature Vinyasa yoga, which involves matching movement with breath and is beginner-friendly.

**Basic Needs Committee**

Emma Myrick mentioned her role as a graduate student representative on the basic needs committee in collaboration with Erica Caloiero, Vice Provost for Student Affairs, and outlined the committee's goals for the semester. She highlighted efforts to identify resources to address basic needs for students, identify areas lacking in support, and develop a shared definition of basic needs. Emma also invited contributions from the Senate members, suggesting the inclusion of safety concerns for graduate teaching assistants, discussions on salaries and stipends, and the importance of the ongoing survey to gather data on basic needs gaps for graduate students. She expressed openness to ideas and input from others and offered her availability for further discussions or suggestions by contacting her.

### III. Old Business:

#### a. Resolution 2024-2-06

Cara discussed the proposal of a Senate resolution to increase GSS fees for graduate students from \$7-\$10 per semester to \$15-\$25. The current funding allocation has been deemed insufficient to sustain and expand the quality and range of services, activities, and resources necessary for the holistic development of the graduate student community. This increase aims to enhance the organization's viability. Emphasizing the importance of supporting GSS, which oversees 22 clubs and 6 committees crucial for graduate student experiences, expressed a desire for at least a half-time staff member to assist with events, website management, and financial tasks. Highlighting the struggle with graduate student engagement within the student governance structure, Cara expressed a desire to compensate more individuals involved beyond just the Eboard. She compared their governance model to that of SGA, emphasizing the need for sustainable funding to support various initiatives. Mentioning efforts to explore additional funding sources, such as joining the Love Year club through the UVM Foundation, Cara reiterated the challenges faced due to limited resources and the goal to create a governance model that represents all graduate students' interests. She acknowledged feedback supporting the fee increase from the survey.

#### i. Discussion

Rosaura Chapina shared her perspective on the messaging surrounding a potential increase in the graduate student fee mentioned in the survey. She noted feeling that the survey emphasized the financial burden on graduate students while simultaneously proposing a fee increase, a juxtaposition she disagreed with. Rosaura advocated for efforts to decrease fees rather than increase them. She voiced concern about the potential long-term consequences of fee increases warning against a pattern of continuous rises. Additionally, Rosaura rejected comparisons between the graduate student fee and that of the Student Government Association (SGA), citing differences in experiences and tuition types between undergraduates and graduate students. She emphasized the research-oriented nature and longer duration of graduate programs compared to undergraduate studies. She emphasized a reliance on donations and the importance of actively seeking support from individuals as a solution.

Ijaz expressed concerns about the budget constraints faced by the GSS clubs, noting that Eboard had run out of funds in the previous semester and faced increasing demands from an expanding number of clubs. He highlighted the challenge of allocating limited funds among numerous clubs, some of which required more than the allocated amount (\$500). This allocation left little budget for organizing larger events that could accommodate more students. He also discussed the logistical challenges of event coordination and communication, suggesting the need to hire a part-time person for these tasks. Additionally, he mentioned the need to delegate certain responsibilities, such as event coordination, to individuals who can focus on them more effectively, rather than burdening treasurers with additional tasks beyond their primary duties.

Muhammad Adil expressed concerns regarding the limited budget allocated to the GSS club, MSA (Muslim Student Association) compared to other student organizations like SSI. He mentioned that MSA typically receives less funding than SSI. Adil highlighted the challenge this poses for MSA in organizing events throughout the year, as the money is insufficient to cover even a small event. He emphasized the disparity in funding allocation and its impact on the

ability of MSA to host meaningful activities for its members, emphasizing that clubs need more money.

Yasaman expressed her opinion on the fee increase, highlighting a concern about the lack of continuity in knowledge and experience within the organization. She mentioned that while she doesn't have strong opinions on whether the fee should be increased or not, she found Rosie's mention of donations received to be significant. Yasaman suggested that the lack of awareness about such opportunities for funding indicates a gap in knowledge transfer from previous eboards within the organization. She emphasized the need for someone who is not a graduate student to ensure that institutional knowledge and experience are passed on effectively to future members of the organization, thus preventing the need to reinvent processes. While Yasaman didn't explicitly endorse or oppose the fee increase, she concluded by affirming the necessity of having such a person in the organization for better continuity and efficiency.

Alison Hall expressed her concerns about the proposed fee increase, stating that it would place an additional burden on students. She clarified that the fee is not directly associated with the University. When Cara mentioned tuition remission, Alison indicated that she does not receive tuition remission herself, suggesting that she pays the graduate student senate fee as a biology student every semester (\$10). Alison emphasized that she believes she represents the majority of students in her situation, implying that many students are affected by this fee.

Mandy Nix expressed her perspective on the fee issue, emphasizing that her individual viewpoint should not bias others' approaches to the fee. She mentioned that the fee would be covered by the University of Vermont rather than directly burdening graduate students.

Cara clarified that while they aim to collaborate with GSU, GSU will negotiate wages and benefits for students considered University of Vermont employees. She stated that the proposed fee increase isn't exorbitant compared to current comprehensive fees, but it will be substantially higher for students receiving stipends, as it will replace comprehensive fees. Alison Hall pointed out that while union fees are mandatory, joining the union and paying fees are optional. However, Cara reiterated that grad students employed by UVM and covered by the union will be expected to pay union fees regardless of their vote. Ijaz added that the fee constitutes around 2% of a paycheck, equating to roughly \$700 annually.

Jenan Husain emphasized the importance of representing the opinions of their respective programs rather than personal opinions in the discussion. She encouraged engaging with fellow program members to gather their perspectives. Jenan expressed support for the idea of the university absorbing the additional fee if they were willing to eliminate the comprehensive fee. Jenan highlighted the need for discussions on logistics and practicalities surrounding fee structures.

Toyib Aremu reiterated his stance from the previous week, expressing skepticism about the need for a fee increase despite considering new possibilities for funding GSS. He highlighted the financial challenges faced by graduate students and questioned the justification for the proposed \$15 fee increase. Toyib emphasized the importance of understanding past spending and remaining transparent about budgetary decisions. He expressed his reservations about the fee increase, stressing the need for more compelling reasons to justify it, especially considering the financial constraints of graduate students. Toyib concluded by suggesting the disclosure of past spending data for transparency purposes.

Vanessa Ballard shared her perspective on the fee increase, highlighting her involvement with the College of Nursing and Health Sciences committee. She noted a decline in interprofessional education events due to COVID-19 and emphasized the importance of networking opportunities for graduate students. Vanessa advocated for the fee increase, stating that it could fund events facilitating networking and professional development. She argued that such opportunities are crucial for graduate students and suggested that the benefits of increased fees outweigh the cost, especially considering other expenses like lab fees. Vanessa expressed support for hiring a part-time position to ensure continuity in initiatives beyond the current board's tenure. She emphasized the importance of long-term planning and sustainability in organizational efforts.

*Cara Simone suggested extending the meeting to hear from GSU, supported by Alison Hall and seconded by Stephen Alrich Marshall.*

Baxter Worthing provided an update on the Graduate Student Union's (GSU) recent proceedings regarding their classification as workers. He reported that the Vermont Labor Relations Board preliminarily approved GSU's full bargaining unit, allowing all graduate student workers at the University of Vermont to join the union. However, there is ongoing questioning regarding the inclusion of fellows or trainees. Baxter clarified that the decision on fellows or trainees' inclusion would be known soon and encouraged those with questions to reach out to GSU for clarification. He announced an upcoming election on March 26 & 27 for the union, which will include an in-person at the Davis center with details to be provided soon.

Adjournment

Adjournment 8:10 pm

**Next Meeting: March 19, 2024, 7:00 -8:00 PM**  
**Mode: Online, Microsoft Teams**