



Graduate Student Association
 University of Rhode Island
Senate Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: January 31, 2025

Location: Hamilton Senate Chamber, Memorial Union (3rd floor, Room 300)

Time: 5:02-5:43 pm

Members in Attendance: (Executive Council)

Karolina Wojcik	President
Quinn Tucker	Vice President
Mariam Oladepo	Treasurer
Evelyn Mensah	Secretary
Marianne Otoo	GAU Liason

Members in Attendance (Senate)

Florence Fields	Graduate Student Conference
Abby Smith	Constitution and By-Laws/Palimentaryarian
Priscilla Kissi-Appiah	Events
Harvey Hayes	Publicity
Ghazal Nessari Poortak	Graduate Student Conference
Tracy Santos	Events
Haitao Wang	Events
Amirali Momeni	Graduate Student Conference
Lindsay Grose	Graduate Student Conference
Ali Raoufi	Graduate Student Conference
Margaret Grady	Events
Rebecca Chan - Chao	Events
Emily Kenyon	Budget and Finance
Ruth Akorli	Graduate Student Conference
Joseph Owusu-Sarfo	Publicity
Natakki Jones	Events
Mary Allbee	Events

Olga Skende	Graduate Student Conference
Ololade Gbadebo	Publicity
Mariyam Abbas	Constitution and By-Laws
Peace Uche	Graduate Student Conference
Terpase Gbaa	Publicity
Victor Olaoye	Budget and Finance
Manjeet Kumar Heeragowlikar	Constitution and By-Laws
Taylor Elpers	Events
Blythe Albanese	Graduate Student Conference
Oluwatobi Opesade	Budget and Finance
Samuel Osei Kofi Osafo	Graduate Student Conference
Fred Addo	Publicity

I. **Call to Order.**

The GSA's first Senate meeting for the Spring semester was held in person on January 31, 2025. The vice president, the chair of the senate, Quinn Tucker, called the meeting to order at 5:02 pm. New senators were welcomed, and attendees were reminded to scan a QR code to mark their attendance. Quinn encouraged the senators to introduce themselves to the new senators. He then handed over the meeting agenda to the Parliamentarian, Abby Smith, who led the discussion on approving the meeting minutes from the previous meeting.

II. **Approval of November 22nd, 2024, Senate Meeting Minutes.**

Ghazal Nessari Poortak moved to approve the November 22, 2024, Senate minutes, which Emily Kenyon seconded. The minute was approved unanimously without amendments or comments. Approved with no opposition and no abstention. Abby Smith invited the executive board and committee chairs to give an update.

III. **Executive Board Reports**

- a. **Treasurer:** Expenses for December and January: Regalia and Conference reimbursement checks. GSA purchases: camera and its accessories by the publicity committee, events (Christmas party), executive members and senators' remunerations, check booklets. The treasurer provided an update on the budget, mentioning that there were some expenses that had not yet been approved because some checks had not been cashed. There was also a mention of a meeting with the federal government regarding oversight of past expenses.
- b. **Secretary:** Changes to the Constitution were made and voted on virtually during the break. The updated Constitution is now available on the association's website. Information about the Graduate Student Conference's new email account for the conference. The email is to ensure communications, and the account comes with storage for conference-related documents and the association's files.

- c. **President:** The president reported on the activities of the executive council, including meetings and ongoing 24/7 communication modality. Participation of the executives and senators in various university committees. Information on faculty senate activities. Updates on proposals from the faculty senate regarding course classifications and online teaching requirements. Recent changes and additions to the GSA website. Information on various funding opportunities was added to the GSA website, including open-access funding and scholarships. Meetings with the dean and associate dean of graduate school and faculty advisor Cara Mitnick to discuss the graduate student conference, commencement, and graduation dinner. Announced a charity cornhole tournament invitation from the undergraduate senate, with details on participation and proceeds.
- d. **Vice President:** Recruitment efforts led to 13 new senators, ensuring representation from every college at URI. Five senators were removed for non-participation. The limit of senators is set for budgetary reasons. Three new senators from Oceanography. The Senate is now larger than the undergraduate student government, with a total of 48 senators. Recruitment ended yesterday at noon. The website was updated with new senators. Ghazal inquired about the committee assignments for new senators. Quinn confirmed that all committee chairs were emailed about new senators. Ghazal noted that with 13 new senators, only one was assigned to her committee. Quinn explained that most new senators were assigned to the Events Committee due to previous vacancies.

IV. Committee Reports

- A. **Events:** The committee chair was not present, and no prior information was ent. No representative was present to provide an update, but reports were distributed.
- B. **Graduate Student Conference:** Ghazal, a co-chair, provided updates on confirmed keynote speakers, including Dr. James Anderson of Northwestern University and Dr. Skelcuk Sirin of New York University. She stated that the committee has one new senator. She mentioned \$1500 in funding from different colleges and ongoing efforts to secure more funding. Encourage students to submit abstracts for the conference. She stated that English students are required to submit abstracts as part of their course. Met with the graduate school to help announce the conference through the graduate school newsletter. Parking spots are secured for the conference. The abstract and review team has started giving responses to submitted abstracts. The menu for the conference is set up.
- C. **Publicity:** Information on planned events and the need for additional support was presented by the chair, Terpase Gbaa. Training sessions are scheduled for February 8 and 15 from 11 AM to 2 PM at Fogarty. Committee member Ololade will train us on camera gadgets. The spotlight showcase is open to all graduate students from every department interested in sharing their research work (a QR code was shared). The chair shared concerns about budget challenges, upcoming events like the conference, and the need for more volunteers.
- D. **Constitution and By-Laws:** The chair, Kirk Brown, stated that the committee will not only focus on necessary grammatical changes, readability, and clarification of the Constitution but on interpretation of the Constitution and

By-Laws. Plans to gather input from the Senate on priorities of the association to work on.

- E. **Budget and Finance:** The chair, Victor Olaoye, provided a budget breakdown: The approved budget was \$68,495.71, with a current balance of \$49,167.13 (see addendum). He provided a detailed financial report on the association's expenditures and balances and specific figures for each committee's budget and spending. Quinn stated that the budget details would be added as an addendum to the minutes.

V. **New Business:**

- A. **Senate size and student ratio:** Kirk requested that Quinn allow him to lead a discussion on the senate/committee's priorities. Kirk emphasized the importance of determining the most critical areas for the GSA Senate to focus on and any changes needed, including budget and expenses. He also stated input on which tasks were important and how many senators were needed to accomplish them. The discussion was open for further input and suggestions. Discussion on the importance of community and research for graduate students. Abby highlighted the importance of events and the conference for student interaction. Ghazal stressed the need for community building among graduate students, especially international students, and the significance of the conference for exposing students to different research. Marianne suggested focusing on graduate research reimbursement and incentives for presenting at external conferences. Consideration of the growing number of online and master's students. Quinn noted a significant shift in the university's demographics, with a record number of graduate school applicants and potential approval of a medical school. Quinn explained the shift in URI's education priorities, with an increase in master's and online students, and the need for inclusivity for online students.
- B. **President Parlange Invite:** Karolina provided an overview of the proposed property use regulations and updates from an ad hoc task force. She mentioned that the draft has been revised based on 470 comments received from the University community, with 126 from faculty and 310 from students. The administration has removed language indicating termination of employment for policy violations, and the document now includes references to the university manual, graduate student manual, and the URI student handbook. Karolina also noted that the section on postings and signs has been stricken, and the document has been endorsed by the Faculty Senate. She plans to invite President Parlange to the next senate meeting (February 28th) to lead a discussion and answer any questions on the revised university regulations and free expression policies. The documents: proposed property use regulations (draft), updated document with the help of an ad hoc task force, and memo regarding task force activities will be shared with the senate before the next meeting to adequately prepare for the discussion. Quinn inquired from Karolina about the president confirming his visit, and Karolina confirmed that President Parlange's visit has been rescheduled. Quinn explained that the invitation of the president or any faculty aligns with the Constitution and By-Laws to invite guest speakers.

- C. **Approval of Nominations and Elections Committee:** Quinn stated the need to approve the formation of the committee as requested from a prior meeting held in Fall 2024. Quinn took on the responsibility of forming the committee and its chair. The structure of the committee is one chair and two senators. The committee will handle executive board elections, not senator elections. Elections will be held later in the semester. Quinn stated that the committee will not hold any discussions or debates and that it is for the Constitution and By-Laws committee to hold discussions on regulations as he referenced the Constitution article 3 section 1 and the by-law article 5 section 3. Motioned by Kirk, seconded by Ghazal. Approved with no opposition and no abstention.
- D. **Approval of Nominations and Elections Chairperson:** Quinn mentioned that Mariyam Abbas, a committee member of the Constitution and By-Laws, was recommended by Kirk, the chair of the committee, to be approved as the chair of the Nominations and Elections Committee. Mariyam Abbas introduced herself. Motioned by Victor, seconded by Rebecca Chan–Chao and Margaret Grady. Approved with no opposition and no abstention.

VI. Adjournment

Quinn appreciated everyone's presence. The meeting was adjourned at 5:43 p.m. after a motion by Rebecca Chan–Chao and a second from Florence Fields. The motion passed unanimously.

Addendum

Committee Reports (meetings held or activities done before the senate meeting)

- A. **Budget and Finance:** The budget and finance committee met on Wednesday, January 22, 2025. During the meeting, we took the opportunity to touch base with each other and inquire about our well-being. Our focus was on reviewing the GSA budget and ensuring financial balance. We meticulously tracked expenses for each committee's events and initiatives, calculating the remaining funds allocated to each GSA committee. We also tracked the fall senator's remuneration and made the necessary balance. Furthermore, we strategized for our upcoming meetings in 2025 and reached a consensus on an appropriate meeting schedule that accommodates all committee members. Attendance: Victor (Chair), Mariam (E-board member, Treasurer), Emily, Nicollette, and Oluwatobi.
- B. **Events:** The January 25th, 2025 meeting entailed discussions on upcoming event planning for February: cultural potluck (potential collaboration with the international office or improv comedy). March: Bowling night. April: The annual dinner is scheduled for April 5 (exact details are yet to be finalized). Potential collaboration with the outing club: An email was sent to explore future collaboration opportunities. However, we will not rely solely on this option. Action items: Follow up with the international office for the cultural potluck. Confirm booking and logistics for the improv comedy show. Finalize plans for the annual dinner by determining the venue, catering, and activities. Review budget status and discuss potential large-scale events. Decide soon on the improv comedy event to ensure it can still be arranged. Attendees: Akissi, Pravin Kama, Waqar Alam.
- C. **Graduate Student Conference (January 2025):** We have a new member on our committee, Amirali Momeni, who will be working with Dorris. We have been promised 1500 US dollars in sponsorship from different departments but have yet to hear back from some of the departments we have contacted for sponsorship. The English graduate students in ENG511 have been assigned to apply for GradCon. The co-chairs will be meeting with the graduate school on January 31. The completed transportation or parking form has been sent to the president of GSA. Abstracts are being reviewed, and responses are being sent out. The menu for the event has been set and sent out to URI catering for price evaluation.
- D. **Constitution and By-Laws:** We have started to discuss amendments to the By-Laws in our working document and in a 1/17/25 Zoom meeting where we discussed priorities for the Spring. We have found several sections of the document that leave substantial grey areas, which seem to be impacting the GSA's ability to function. Potential priorities that were shared on the call: drafting explicit executive council election procedures, fixing the interaction between interim appointments and GSA term limits, clarifying the process of senator nomination and selection, and revisiting remuneration (including the size of the senate and the interaction with the GSA budget). The committee is researching these topics and welcomes the feedback of the entire GSA Senate concerning the items on this list, their priority, and their relation to higher-level concepts like the purpose of the GSA. Other notable topics discussed were: the structure of committees and the appropriate ways to run Senate meetings, committee meetings, and executive council meetings, the problem of how to increase the engagement that the GSA receives from the rest of the university (administration, departments, etc.), the challenges related to a general lack of

institutional knowledge within the GSA-related to the lapse and reinstatement of the organization.

- E. **Publicity:** To ensure we're well-prepared and familiar with the new equipment, Ololade has kindly agreed to provide camera training sessions. These will be held on Saturday, February 8, and Saturday, February 15 (the second and third Saturdays of February). Time: 11 am to 2 pm. Venue: TA/RA Office Fogarty Hall. We are inviting other members of GSA to attend the training and acquire the skills to support the Publicity Committee when needed. We also request those with knowledge of video editing to join us.

GSA 2024 BUDGET

S/N		2024 Proposed	2024 Adjusted	Spent	Balance
1	Constitution and By-Laws	\$ -	\$ -		
2	Publicity	\$ 9,299.71	\$ 4,745.71	\$ 3,890.46	\$ 855.25
3	Graduate Student Conference	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 7,000.00		\$ 7,000.00
4	Events	\$ 17,625.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 1,546.66	\$ 8,453.34
5	Fall Renumeration	\$ 8,800.00	\$ 8,800.00	\$ 7,173.10	\$ 1,626.90
6	Spring Renumeration	\$ 9,800.00	\$ 9,800.00		\$ 9,800.00
7	Conference Reimbursement	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 3,322.00	\$ 6,678.00
8	Regalia Reimbursement	\$ 9,000.00	\$ 9,000.00	\$ 2,545.00	\$ 6,455.00
9	Bonding Issurance	\$ 300.00	\$ 300.00		\$ 300.00
10	Envelope and Stamps	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00	\$ 98.25	\$ 1.75
11	Graduate Student Group Funding	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00		\$ 3,000.00
12	GSA Graduation Dinner	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 3,500.00		\$ 3,500.00
13	Non-profit status	\$ 750.00	\$ 750.00		\$ 750.00
14	GSA meetings (6)	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 753.11	\$ 746.89
	TOTAL	\$ 88,674.71	\$ 68,495.71	\$ 19,328.58	\$ 49,167.13