



Graduate Student Association
University of Rhode Island
Senate Meeting Minutes

Date: March 14, 2025

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

Time: 2:11-3:35 pm

Members in Attendance:

Executive Council

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

Senate

Tracy Santos	Events
Taylor Elpers	Events
Victor Olaoye	Budget and Finance
Joseph Owusu-Sarfo	Publicity
Margaret Grady	Nomination and Election
Olga Skende	Graduate Student Conference
Florence Fields	Graduate Student Conference
Samuel Osei Kofi Osafo	Graduate Student Conference
Ghazal Nessari Poortak	Graduate Student Conference
Sarah Behm	Constitution and By-Laws
Mary Allbee	Events
Manjeet Kumar Heeragowlikar	Constitution and By-Laws
Rebecca Chan-Chao	Nomination and Election
Kirk Brown	Constitution and By-Laws
Terpase Gbaa	Publicity
Oluwatobi Opesade	Budget and Finance
Amirali Momeni	Graduate Student Conference
Abigail Smith	Constitution and By-Laws/Parliamentarian
Ruth Akorli	Graduate Student Conference
Md Abdullah al Rumon	Budget and Finance

I. Call to Order.

The GSA's second Senate meeting for the spring semester took place in person on March 14, 2025. Quinn Tucker, the vice president and chair of the Senate, called the meeting to order at 2:11 pm. He thanked the senators for attending despite it being spring break and would explain why the February meeting had to be rescheduled for today. Abigail Smith, the parliamentarian, oversaw the agenda.

II. Approval of January 31st, 2025, Senate Meeting Minutes.

Sarah Behm moved to approve the Senate minutes from January 31, 2025, which Kirk Brown seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously without any amendments, comments, opposition, or abstentions. Abigail invited the executive board and committee chairs to provide their updates.

III. Executive Board Reports

- a. GAU Liaison:** Marianne provided updates on the ongoing contract negotiations with the university administration. So far, two meetings have been held: the first to establish the ground rules and the second to present the proposal. This proposal addresses issues related to housing, stipends, health insurance, and meal assistance at the Rams Den for graduate students, primarily graduate assistants. The administration accepted the proposal, and they will present their results on March 18. She encouraged all graduate students to complete a survey to support the proposals and mentioned that the GAU has been assigned to contact Rhode Island state representatives and senators during their negotiation process. Additionally, she noted that due to the frozen research funds from the new government, which have impacted the support for graduate students attending conferences, conference reimbursement opportunities are available through the GAU. This is limited to GAU members but serves as supplementary funding beyond what the GSA offers, following a question from Margaret Grady regarding the eligibility of these funds. Mariam, the treasurer, stated that the GSA only provides conference reimbursement once per academic year.
- b. Treasurer:** Mariam presented the February report on the association's expenses, which included checks from last semester, regalia reimbursements, conference reimbursements for the current semester, food expenses from senate meetings, remuneration for some senators, and the filing of GSA taxes. The upcoming March report will detail the allocation of tax funds. Additionally, she requested an increase in the regalia reimbursement funds, as the current amount only supports a small fraction of graduate students graduating this spring. Quinn noted that this request would be added to the agenda under new business.
- c. Secretary:** Evelyn announced the conclusion of the abstract submission period for an upcoming conference. She encouraged members of the senate to attend and support the conference, even if they were not presenting. She mentioned that a feedback form regarding the February event had been sent out for participants to complete. Additionally, she referred to the general emails sent out the previous

month, as well as upcoming emails about the conference, the cornhole tournament, GSA regalia, and the GAU survey.

- d. **Vice President:** Quinn reminded the senator about the importance of following proper communication channels when interacting with outside student groups or within the association. He emphasized the need to keep him informed when addressing specific issues. Additionally, he mentioned the scheduling of Senate meetings and the necessity of rescheduling for any senators who missed a meeting.

IV. Committee Reports

- a. **Events** (Mary, committee member): The committee reported that the February bowling event was a success, with 64 attendees surpassing the expected 40. They provided free games, food, and giveaways. The next event in March will be a potluck at the multicultural center, inviting all graduate students to enjoy dishes from various countries and cultures. The committee also met with a representative from the conference committee about a potential gala at the end of the conference. They expressed concerns that combining the gala with the conference might diminish its purpose of celebrating graduate students' achievements at the end of the academic year. Further discussions will occur in the next meeting, with details to be shared with the Senate.
- b. **Graduate Student Conference** (Ghazal & Samuel): Ghazal reported that 73 abstracts have been received for the conference, the first in a long time, and thanked everyone for their efforts. She encouraged all senators to attend in support of graduate students. The keynote speakers have been finalized, and the venue has changed from the Swan and Edwards halls to the Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences (CBLS) and Avedisian Hall. Ghazal provided a budget breakdown, including honorariums, accommodations, flights, and a dinner with a jazz band, and requested additional funds. Quinn noted this will be addressed under new business. Ghazal also mentioned an opportunity for graduate students to engage with undergraduates on a panel. Karolina stated the committee initially requested 12,000 but received only \$7,000 after budget cuts, asking if the remaining funds could be allocated. Abigail inquired if all of 12000 had been spent, and Ghazal confirmed it had not. Quinn stated there will be a vote on this later.
- c. **Publicity** (Terpase): Preparing for conference coverage with major activities and short publicity videos. Acquiring an additional camera for better coverage, focusing on key parts of the event. Encouraging student attendance by not making the conference virtual, along with the ongoing graduate spotlight initiative.
- d. **Constitution and By-Laws** (Kirk): The chair discussed key issues regarding the GSA's operations, urging caution with university email due to potential FOIA requests. The Constitution and Bylaws Committee is finalizing proposals for the executive election process, addressing remuneration wording that might impact international students' legal status, and revising the term of office language. A proposal to change "remuneration" to "stipend" and eliminate meeting attendance requirements was introduced, prompting a need for a vote. There was clarification

on international students' work hours, with concerns raised by Ghazal and Victor, but Kirk confirmed that the changes would not affect their working hours.

- e. **Budget and Finance** (Victor): Assessing budget needs revealed that additional funds are required for regalia. The chair reported on funding allocations for regalia reimbursement and the graduate student conference. The regalia reimbursement quickly reached capacity, limiting coverage for more students. He suggested reallocating unused budget items, and Treasurer Mariam agreed. Funds for graduate student group funding remain untouched. Quinn proposed adding this to the agenda for consideration and voting. Victor, the committee chair, requested a record of budget expenses for the conference before releasing the remaining funds. Abigail asked if the regalia is an issue, and Mariam noted that the regalia is an issue due to more spring graduates, necessitating immediate action. Quinn wanted a budget breakdown, but Mariam warned that delays could mean students miss the regalia discount. An immediate vote for regalia funds is needed before the code expires. Karolina inquired about student group requests, but Mariam confirmed there have been none, so the funds are still available.
- f. **Nominations and Elections** (Rebecca, committee member): The Nominations and Elections Committee has announced that the nomination forms are ready as they prepare for the upcoming nominations and elections of new executives. They are set to begin the process but are currently waiting for approval of the amended election procedures. Quinn mentioned that this topic would be discussed later under the new business agenda item, where clarification on the election procedures will also be provided.

V. New Business

- a. **By-Laws Article V Section 4 & VII Section 3 Amendment** (Kirk): The constitution and bylaws committee proposed two amendments:
 - Clarifying interim appointments and term limits by removing "provided that they attend a minimum of 3 meetings per semester."
 - Changing "remuneration" to "stipend" for officer compensation to comply with legal guidance for international students.The first amendment was motioned by Sarah and seconded by Kirk; the second was by Rebecca and seconded by Ghazal. Both passed unanimously. Quinn stated that these require executive board approval.
- b. **By-Laws Article V Section 1 [Amendment](#)** (Quinn): An amendment was proposed to simplify the elections process and open Executive Board positions to all graduate students, sparking debate on eligibility and nominations. Proposer Quinn retracted the amendment for further consideration. Marianne raised the issue of opening senate meetings to the entire graduate student body, suggesting GSA announcements be added to the graduate school news. Detailed election processes and nomination requirements were discussed, highlighting changes made post-COVID. Some members advocated for constitutional amendments to ensure equity and representation, while others raised concerns about the current interpretation of the constitution. The discussion was tabled for further review. Quinn clarified the roles of nominations and the e-board, noting that both senator and graduate student nominations should be considered. He introduced revised

bylaws due to wording issues while emphasizing the need for broader graduate student participation.

c. Additional funds for Regalia Reimbursement and Graduate Student

Conference: The Senate discussed and approved changes to the budget, which included allocating additional funds for regalia reimbursement and conference expenses. They agreed to move \$2,500 from graduate student group funding, as suggested by Victor and supported by Mariam, to cover regalia reimbursement. Additionally, they approved another \$2,500 for the same purpose. There was significant discussion about the importance of regalia reimbursement as a key component of the organization's operations. A motion to add the regalia reimbursement funds to the agenda as new business was made by Kirk and seconded by Sarah. The initial \$2,500 from the graduate student group funding was motioned by Margaret and seconded by Rebecca. The motion to add the second \$2,500 to the agenda was moved by Rebecca and seconded by Margaret. Furthermore, the second \$2,500 was proposed from another source within the GSA budget, as suggested by Victor, and was motioned by Sarah and seconded by Rebecca. All motions were approved unanimously. Karolina mentioned that she had to explain to Cara about the limited funds allocated for regalia. Florence sought clarification on the regalia discount, to which Mariam responded that the discount was intended to reduce the total cost of regalia rather than covering all expenses. A motion was also passed to allocate additional funds for the conference. The total budget for the conference was discussed, with specific allocations for various expenses. An additional \$5,000 was approved for conference expenses. The motion to add this to the agenda was made by Rebecca and seconded by Sarah. Victor asked Ghazal for a budget breakdown record and recalled Ghazal stating that they would receive sponsorship for the conference. Ghazal noted that during the October senate meeting, the graduate student conference committee requested \$12,000, but due to budget adjustments, they only received \$7,000; hence, the need for additional funds without monetary sponsorship. The motion to add the remaining \$5,000 to the conference budget was made by Rebecca and seconded by Victor and Margaret. All motions were approved. Passed!

VI. Announcements

- a.** Marianne announced the GAU form to gather information on housing, parking, and food insecurity for contract negotiations. She requested the secretary to resend the announcement to graduate students for completion, and the secretary agreed to do so.
- b.** Karolina announced that President Parlange will join the senate on April 25th for URI updates.
- c.** Quinn informed the Senate that every senator is expected to attend the Graduate Student Conference (GSC) on March 29th and to support the event. Emphasis was placed on the importance of participation and backing for the organization's activities. Karolina suggested that graduate students who teach classes should encourage their students to attend the conference and offer extra credit to those who do. Ghazal noted that some senators would be presenting during the

conference, highlighting the need for greater student involvement during the event.

VII. Adjournment

Quinn appreciated everyone's presence. The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m. after a motion by Rebecca Chan–Chao and a second from Margaret Grady. The motion passed unanimously.

Addendum (Election Amendment)

To: Graduate Student Senate

Re: Constitution and By-Laws Amendment

As we approach the end of the academic year, we write to you about the election cycle within our constitution and bylaws. Those familiar understand that it is ill-defined and continues to support barriers to entry that reinforce inequitable practices that seemingly challenge growing student populations. We write to challenge the many ideas floating around our association and point to more equitable and fair practices for the graduate student body.

Who should be eligible to run for an executive board member position?

- There are many conflicting views on this, with some believing it should be senators who can run for office, but we challenge this assumption. There is **no indication of this noted in the guiding documents**, and if such wording is assumed, the same could be argued for the inverse, especially given precedence from our most recent years.
- We want it to be noted that this is an ill-thought-out plan that is **heavily reliant upon a vice president** who is successful in their recruitment efforts of senators and who has not otherwise compromised the GSA through lack of involvement. If there is a small number of senators, the pool of potential candidates becomes slim. The argument that senators are more experienced does not entirely matter when the pool of potential candidates that can run is smaller, given that you shut out students who may have experience in leadership roles outside of the GSA.
- We will also note the obvious issue for master's and online students. Master's students outnumber PhD students by a growing margin at URI, and a policy that would limit recruitment to senators limits them the most. Most are unaware of the GSA upon entering URI and therefore rarely participate; therefore, they would not be allowed to run for an executive board position in their second year before they graduate. Then, online students started to make up a much more significant percentage of the graduate student population. Though they are not on campus, they pay our fee and are no less part of our community.

The Procedure

- The process of our elections is arbitrary and confusing when it should be straightforward. We must push for inclusivity whenever possible, and utilizing what procedures are being proposed will limit involvement. Setting up such rules that grant all students the right to self-nominate is important for the future. There have been arguments about attracting the most capable candidates. But it can be argued that our constitution (or current GSA officers) should NOT dictate what potential candidates can be elected. Instead, opening it up for candidates to demonstrate their capabilities via their self-nomination and therefore allowing graduate students to select who they think is best is the most equitable way to run this process.
- This speaks to another key point, allowing the graduate students to decide. These decisions should be in their hands, not ours. The entire community should have a say in who runs what charges them. These recommendations and opinions stand as a testament to our collective ideas. The GSA has been and should remain a reflection of the collective work and ideas of all graduate students.

Respectfully,

Quinn Tucker, Vice President

Evelyn Mensah, Secretary

Mariam Oladepo, Treasurer

Evans Boateng Boakye, Social Media Manager/Event Coordinator Assistant

Marianne Otoo, GAU Liaison

Waqar Alam, Event Coordinator

Addendum (Committee Reports March 2025)

Events Committee Meeting

Date: February 7, 2025

Location: Online

1. Attendees:

- Waqar Alam
- Akissi Nelly Aka
- Rebecca Chan-Chao
- Tracy Santos
- Maggie Grady
- Priscilla Kissi-Appiah
- Taylors Elpers
- Philip Yang
- Doris Keziah N'Dassi

2. Agenda:

- The Grad con committee and the events committee collaborate for the gala
- The February event

3. Key Points Discussed:

- The Grad Con Gala. Different expectations concerning the Grad Con Gala at the end of the conference by the Event committee. Main event for the grad students at the end of the semester
- February Event: Bowling Night. Venue Location: Old Mountain Lanes, 756 Kingstown Rd, Wakefield, RI, 02879. Dates: February 23, 2025. Time: from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

4. Decisions Made:

- Prize Baskets for the top 3 scores at the Bowling Night

5. Next Steps:

- Schedule of next meeting
- Discussion of the next event
- Discussion of the end-of-semester Gala

Prepared By:

Akissi Nelly Aka

Chair of the Events Committee.

Graduate Student Conference Committee Report

The submission period is over. We have received 73 abstracts. 45 poster presentations and 43 oral presentations will take place on the day of the conference. Poster/flyer designed and confirmed. Monda Raquel Webb (third and confirmed keynote speaker) will be giving her talk at Avedisian Hall in collaboration with the Dr. Rose Butler Brown Conference, organized by the URI Women's Center. Dr. Rose Butler Brown Conference Graduate Students panel needs volunteers. Digital content for GSC is in process with the help of the Publicity Committee, as well as our members, Shay and Amirali. Request to Behtom, our webmaster, to update the website. Request for a budget raise.

GSA BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (FEBRUARY)—VICTOR I. OLAOYE

The Budget and Finance Committee had its meeting on Wednesday, March 5, 2025. The meeting began with a check-in on one another's well-being and reflections on the semester so far. All committee members are doing well and are looking forward to taking a break during the upcoming spring recess.

The primary focus of the discussion was the funds allocated for regalia reimbursement. It became evident that the approved funds would not be sufficient to cover most of URI's potential spring graduates. Upon reviewing the regalia reimbursement form that was sent out to be filled by potential spring graduates, we found that within just two days, approximately 130 responses had already been submitted. Considering that there are around 500 potential spring graduates, the committee is proposing two possible solutions, pending approval from the Senate:

- Reallocate unused approved funds to support regalia reimbursement. For instance, the Graduate School group funding, which amounts to approximately \$3,000, has yet to be utilized.
- Approve additional funding to better support students graduating in the spring.

All these would be based on the Senate's approval. Thank you.

Attendance:

Victor (Chair)

Mariam (E-board member, Treasurer)

Nicollette

Tobi

Constitution and By-Laws Committee

The Constitution and By-Laws Committee has been tasked with some very important decisions this semester, decisions that, if handled incorrectly, will have a lasting negative impact on the GSA Senate and Executive Council. In response to the seriousness of the charge of this committee, we met twice since the last GSA Senate meeting and participated in significant asynchronous discussions throughout February. In the 2/17/25 Zoom call, we talked through Executive Council election considerations, including eligibility, election timeline, voting, and term limits. We were also first made aware of a potential legal issue that will require the GSA to modify the Constitution to avoid serious consequences for GSA senators. Separate amendments were drafted to deal with these separate issues, and discussions on both the elections and the legal issues have not yet reached a consensus within the committee. There was another Zoom meeting on 3/7/25 where these unresolved issues were again discussed, and remuneration updates were also brought forward.

The Constitution and By-Laws Committee has an amendment about senator and executive council term limits for the GSA Senate to vote on at this meeting, and we also require more feedback from the GSA Senate on their needs and expectations with regards to Executive Council voting. We hope that the wisdom of the Senate can help provide an equitable solution that will be appreciated by all parties.

Nomination and Election Committee Report

The Nominations and Elections Committee has made initial progress in establishing and organizing its workflow. Our nomination forms are ready, and we have prepared email templates to facilitate both the nomination process and the announcement of results. In addition, we have welcomed and updated new committee members on their roles and responsibilities.

All key tasks and deadlines are outlined in a comprehensive spreadsheet to keep everyone on track. We are ready to proceed with opening the nominations and ensure all relevant communications are sent out promptly.

Mariyam Abbas,
Chair, N&E Committee,
Graduate Student Association.

REPORT FROM PUBLICITY COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting Date: February 13th, 2025

Time: 6:30–7:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

Video Coverage of Grad Conference: The members agreed on the importance of the conference coverage. The plan is to carry out a short video of the major highlights of the conference and post it on our social media handles. We have also acquired an additional camera from one of our members to increase area coverage. The plan is to station one camera at the speaker and move one around the crowd. All publicity members are encouraged to avail themselves and assist as needed.

Live Coverage of Grad Conference: The meeting saw that, since the desire was to ensure in-person participation at the conference, there was no need to go live on our social media handles.

Update from Conference Committee: Our representative at the meeting informed the publicity team of the major update, including banners and drafting of scripts for video ads for the Grad conference.

Graduate Research Spotlights: The names of those who indicated participation interest have been handed over to the social media manager. They should expect his presence in their labs at a suitable time.

Terpase Gbaa
Chair Publicity Committee

ATTENDANCE

TERPASE STEPHEN GBAA
EVANS BOATENG-BOAKYE
OWUSU-SARFO JOSEPH
FRED BAFFOUR ADDO
LOLOADE GBADEBO

COMMITTEE CHAIR
E-BOARD REPRESENTATIVE
MEMBER
MEMBER
MEMBER