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URI STUDENT SENATE – GENERAL ASSEMBLY MINUTES February 23, 2022

A. CALL TO ORDER

Speaker Bove called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Present: Asante, Beazley, Blake, Bove, Breene, Buono, Chadronet, Collins, Cushman, Del Bonis, Eustis, Gamache, Gibson, Goswami, James, Johnson N, Johnson O, Kiernan, Montoya, Peckham, Rider, Scotti, Shindler, Siegle, Summerson, Tyson.

Absent: Aidala, Alyati, Bose (Excused), Gibbs (Excused), Kittel (Excused), Murray (Excused), Palmer, Thiel, Williams.

Guests: Reynolds, Cardany, Stiles, Hoover,

C. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Chair Kiernan motioned to approve the agenda. Seconded by Senator Gibson.
Motion Passes

D. READING AND APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Chair Kiernan motioned to approve the minutes. Second by Chair Gamache.
Motion Passes

E. ANNOUNCEMENTS

F. PUBLIC FORUM

Faculty Senate President Dr Audrey Cardenay

Interim Vice President Ellen Reynolds

Cardany: Would like to get perspective on the mask mandate. Currently reaching out to faculty. Want to listen to the senate's thoughts on possible mask options and COVID protocols overall.

Reynolds: COVID numbers are improving everyday. With the Omicron variants, there is a high transmission in the

community and at URI. With the Delta variant there are less hospitalizations. Time to look at mitigation strategies and what can be relaxed in some places. Really want to get the senate's opinion.

Hoover: Popular topic for both senate and students in general. If you are fully vaccinated and boosted you should not have to follow 100% COVID protocols.

Peckham: For students who are not vaccinated/boosted, who is going to enforce mask-wearing. Her professor thought it was unfair for professors to have to do it.

Cardany: Instructors are not allowed to know who is vaccinated or not. Only allowed to know percentages. Instructors cannot tell students to put their masks on if they are not vaccinated. It is the responsibility of everyone to enforce mask wearing.

Peckham: If the mandate were to be lifted, how will we be able to enforce people wearing masks if they are not vaccinated?

Reynolds: If you had a policy in place that only non-vaccinated people needed to wear masks, there would be no way to enforce it. It's on the students to wear the masks. The risk is on the students. Transmission rate of Omicron is significantly high and it is affecting both vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

Cardany: It is unenforceable if that is what the University plans to do, it would be upon the individual to wear the masks.

Peckham: My biggest concern is for people who have family members who are at-risk. I am having a difficult time understanding how the students who are putting others at-risk are not held accountable.

Reynolds: Talking about optional masking, the change will be that people who want to wear masks will. I would love to hear if people have ideas about how to enforce masks.

Rider: About the listening phase, is this a decision of preference or safety? We are not qualified to make these kinds of decisions. Do you want our opinions about what is safe or whether or not we want to wear masks?

Cardany: We want the student perspective. We will listen to your opinions. It's helpful to know what student opinions and perspectives are so we can anticipate and respond to them. We are not asking you to tell us what to do about health and safety. We will do that listening and take that over to leadership and the president will ultimately make that decision.

Montoya: In the past couple weeks has the CDC's opinion also changed on masks?

Reynolds: We're receiving new data everyday. We're expecting the Director of the CDC to come out with a new indoor masking guideline. That will be very telling to us. There are going to be less mandates from the RI Dept of Health. We have some key dates coming up: The emergency powers of the governor of RI. The University is always poised to change. We can pivot if we have to.

Asante: Could you tell me the percentage of unvaccinated students on campus?

Reynolds: I believe it's on the COVID tracker.

Asante: I feel confident in saying that the University should think about removing the mask mandate because with the data we have around 95% of the campus vaccinated, and if you look at the state, we're doing better than the state. At this point, if we've been doing our part as students, I think the University should strongly consider removing

the mask mandate.

O. Johnson: Should the University get rid of the mask mandate or make it just so unvaxxed people need to wear masks, will testing still be enforced?

Reynolds: We made a transition so that students only have to test once a week and there is no discussion about changing that guideline.

Blake: Is the testing being enforced for unvaccinated people?

Reynolds: Yes. There are several phases for people who are not in compliance.

Blake: If the mask mandate did get lifted, will there be the option to continue wearing masks?

Cardany: People should take personal responsibility for their health. We ask the community not to peer pressure about people choosing to wear a mask. There is also the idea that maybe some spaces the mask mandate be lifted and others not. There might be other risk factors taken into account.

Bove: What is the current course of action for students who are unvaccinated and do not have an exemption.

Reynolds: They would be unable to make any changes in their account. It is consistent with other immunizations that are required.

Bove: If I'm not vaccinated and do not have an exemption, could students apply beyond the due date?

Reynolds: I would hope that everyone has submitted an exemption at this point in the semester. If something were to change in their status, that would be considered as well with the understanding that they need to be compliant with the exemption.

Summerson: If the mandate is lifted and becomes optional, could professors require masks in their classrooms?

Cardany: That's part of the discussion. Faculty would most likely have the right to require a mask in their classrooms if they wish to. No decision has been made about the mask option yet. That is part of what the faculty will be discussing. Faculty is thinking about both their safety and the students.

Summerson: I can't think of any academic setting where transmission would not be high. I think we should be lifting the mask mandate but the science behind that doesn't make sense at the same time. I don't understand how you could require masks in some settings and not in others.

Cardany: We are exploring different options and that is a conversation that people are having. How will we handle people who are not vaccinated? How will we handle classrooms? Nothing is decided yet.

Reynolds: There will be certain places where you will be required to wear a mask, like Health Services and University transportation. No decisions have been made at the University level but those are definite.

Montoya: What if I choose to have a religious exemption after one or more vaccines?

Reynolds: People are asking for exemptions if they just became aware of something that goes against their religious beliefs.

Montoya: Would it be a good idea to just remove the mandate from residents halls and have the mandate in academic settings?

Reynolds: We're looking at all our options.

Cardany: That is on the list. No decisions have been made.

Tyson: Will the University go back to covering the hotel costs for COVID positive people?

Reynolds: As of right now, the isolation and quarantining may change. I suspect we may focus more on congregate living situations. It's probable. The contract ends on March 31. We have limited spaces that we use for resident students. Off campus students may have a different approach to isolation.

James: If we remove the mandate, there will be an initial increase in cases. The hotels pose financial challenges for some students. Is removing the mask mandate a risk that the University is willing to take? There is no way to predict what will happen.

Cardany: The leadership is what makes that decision. When the president takes in all this information, he will ultimately make the decision. I cannot answer that.

James: It is something to be considered.

Goswami: I am paranoid and I think I would wear my mask regardless. I recommend that even if we remove the mandate, you should explicitly state that masks are optional and can still be worn. We should not remove other restrictions, like spacing.

Cardany: Spatial distancing will still remain. So if a mask mandate were to become optional, you would recommend that other rules not be lifted?

Goswami: Yes.

Buono: What is the protocol for students who are unvaccinated?

Reynold: We will monitor that.

Gamache: Off-campus students are agreeing with the state-wide mandate of not wearing masks. I think masks should be optional on campus.

Peckham: Will the mandate be lifted after Spring Break?

Cardenay: We will have to consider that?

Rider: The decision should be what is necessary from a safety standpoint. If it is necessary in classrooms for the safety of the student body, so be it.

Kiernan: I see students congregating off-campus, and I think it shows that a good majority of students are okay with decreasing restrictions. I don't think it should be completely stripped away. I suggest that if we were to stop with the masks, go back to testing twice a week or testing once a week for the entire student body. I think that could be helpful to the safety of campus.

Rizk: How will the policy be affected for international students? Are the regulations going to be the same for on and off-campus students?

Cardany: We will need to take a look at that when decisions are made.

Reynolds: I think the regulation you are mentioning is for people coming into the U.S. but that has been lifted if

someone is fully vaccinated, but I would need to confirm it.

G. REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

- SOC

Siegle: Re-Recognition, stipend review, and thanks to people who helped at the booth.

- External Affairs Committee

No report.

- Academic Affairs Committee

Shindler: Faculty senate meeting tomorrow from 3-5. I will be in the senate office. I recommend going.

- Cultural Affairs Committee

Tyson: Love our Roots event. Thanks to everyone who helped out. I'm looking into having the poster brought to the multicultural center. I sent the bookstore your book recommendations, so that will be happening. No movie night this Friday. Next month is Women's History Month, all funds will go to a resource center in South County. Bake Sale. Cultural complaint box being put in place. Any suggestions for the committee to work on can be put there.

Gamache: Do you have the contact for the DVRSC?

Tyson: Yes.

- Campus Affairs Committee

Gamache: Abby Rider emailed me saying she would keep in contact through her assistant. Planning a time to meet. Going to meet with External Affairs by the start of next week regarding the parking situation.

Bove: The transit committee met last week, could you provide an update?

Gamache: There are students parking at the lot in the train station and they're all going to get towed or ticketed if they don't move. The SKPD has been reporting it. Students have been walking and that's a concern. Permit sales have been increasing. They are looking into new marking ideas for the safe rides, which are available from 8-12 at night. Looking into expanding hours and flexibility around events. Looking into the issues on frat circle. Students are no longer parking in front of the dumpster. Looking into "dash cars" on campus, almost like a go-kart. They require more infrastructure. The scooters last year got shut down so I think this will follow. Capital projects will be happening over the summer. Rhody Rides are going well. Disability access and inclusion has been going well as well.

- Executive Committee

Hoover: Doing budget stuff. Getting ready to work with stipends. Report from President Taiwo: Madyson Ramsay has resigned as VP and anyone interested in taking the position should contact her.

Bove: Can you update us on the frozen accounts from last week?

Hoover: Cheryl and I are going to remove the freeze now that they have met and retrained with her. Cheryl is happy with the retraining and they should be good to go.

H. REPORT OF THE COURT

I. REPORTS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Elections:

Stiles: Nominations closed yesterday. Many candidates for each position.

J. SPECIAL ORDERS

K. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

L. NEW BUSINESS

SS-21/22-32 – BILL CALLING FOR THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF “URI NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)” AS A SENATE- RECOGNIZED ORGANIZATION

Whereas, the “URI National Association for Music Education (NAfME)” mission statement is “to promote and advocate for music education on campus and in the state.”, and
Whereas, URI National Association for Music Education (NAfME) meets the requirements to be a senate-recognized student organization, and
Whereas, it is custom for the senate to do so, now therefore be it,
Resolved, that the University of Rhode Island Student Senate acknowledges URI National Association for Music Education (NAFME) as a recognized organization, and be it further,
Resolved, that URI National Association for Music Education (NAfME) is provided with the first-year financial benefits package of \$100 which is to be paid out over the course of the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

SPONSOR:	Student Organizations Committee
BILL HANDLER:	Chairwoman Siegle
DATE:	February 23, 2022
RECOMMENDATION:	(5-0-0)
EXPIRATION:	Valid Until Next Re-Recognition
ACTION:	Vote Next Week

Senator Gibson motioned to immediately consider the bill. Seconded by Chair Siegle.

Motion Passes

Bill Passes

SS-21/22-33 Resolution Declaring the Student Senate’s Recommendation Pertaining to the University of Rhode Island’s Universal Indoor Mask Mandate

Whereas, on February 11, 2022, Governor Daniel J. McKee allowed Executive Order 21-116 “Protecting Public Health by Wearing Masks or Face Coverings or Obtaining Proof of Vaccination in Indoor Public Spaces” to expire, effectively terminating Rhode Island’s statewide indoor mask mandate, and

Whereas, Governor McKee will allow Executive Order 21-87 “Requiring Masks in Schools” to expire on March 4, 2022, effectively terminating Rhode Island’s statewide universal indoor mask mandate for k-12 schools, and
Whereas, Rhode Island has seen a 95.5% decrease in COVID-19 cases since January’s omicron driven infection peak, and

Whereas, a universal indoor mask mandate currently remains in effect at the University of Rhode Island, and
Whereas, the University of Rhode Island currently mandates its students and employees to be fully vaccinated and boosted again COVID-19, and

Whereas, approximately 94% of faculty, staff, and students at the University of Rhode Island are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, now therefore be it,

Resolved, that the University of Rhode Island Student Senate recommends the termination of the university’s universal indoor mask mandate for faculty, staff, and students who have either received a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine or been deemed fully vaccinated within the last six months, and be it further,

Resolved, that the University of Rhode Island Student Senate recommends that an indoor mask mandate remain in place for faculty, staff, and students who are unvaccinated, as well as those who were fully vaccinated more than six months ago and have not received their booster dose of the COVID-19. This includes those with religious or medical exemptions, and be it further,

Resolved, that the University of Rhode Island Student Senate recommends the continuation of the university’s current COVID-19 testing mandates remain in place for unvaccinated individuals.

SPONSORS:	Speaker Bove, Chairs Tyson, Shindler, Senators Peckham, Summerson
BILL HANDLER:	Speaker Bove
DATE:	February 23, 2022
RECOMMENDATION:	(5 – 0 – 0)
EXPIRATION:	Valid Until Reviewed
ACTION:	Vote Tonight

Montoya: Removing the mask mandate completely seems irresponsible.

Kiernan: I have been affected by COVID. People are still getting it, but it’s largely unvaccinated people. I think it makes sense to remove the mask mandate in some aspects, like in residence halls. Those students are all living together anyway. I understand that the masks should still be in place in some sense.

Shindler: This is only a resolution.

O. Johnson: Students off-campus are still not wearing masks. People are going to parties and bars willingly. Students who are at-risk or know people who are at-risk can still wear them.

Peckham: This bill is just the general student opinion. As a senate it is our responsibility because a majority of students do not want it.

Gamache: I think this is where we are moving forward as a state, and the school will continue to move in that direction. Certain areas will still be protected. It’s more of a burden on the staff.

Tyson: We do not understand the process of the decisions, but we understand from a student perspective.

Asante: I agree that we are not healthcare experts, but we do have a voice in this as students. I think this bill is needed, especially because we attend a public university. Students are going to start actively not following the rule because the state of RI says we don’t have to wear masks. I don’t want students to be confused. Unless its for

health/religious reasons, its personal choice.

Chadronet: This resolution is not a great idea, but as a representative of the student body, I think we should consider this bill. We'll leave the decisions on safety to the professionals.

Gibson: In regard to unvaccinated students, there are people with medical reasons. There are students who will feel unsafe, but we are not making the decision.

Montoya: This bill was going to be our general recommendation, but it is important to clarify actual recommendations because telling unvaxxed people to wear masks is impossible. I would be okay with removing the mask mandate in residence halls, but we should still wear them in academic spaces.

Peckham: I motion to call the question.

Kiernan: Second.

Motion Fails.

Gibson: I think we should amend the motion to removing masks in certain contexts.

Bove: I motion to add a resolved line that the senate recommends that healthcare professionals take individual places into consideration.

Gibson: Second.

Hoover: I don't agree. I think we should keep the bill as broad as possible.

Montoya: I think the bill without the amendment is specific. A broad recommendation would be more like the amendment.

Gibson: We don't know what the majority of students would want. Maybe we could consider a campus survey. We can't claim that this bill represents everyone.

Shindler: I motion to call the question.

Kiernan: Second.

Motion to Call the Question Passes.

Motion to Amend Passes.

James: How can we lift the mandate and require unvaccinated people to wear masks?

Gibson: We discussed that there is no way to enforce it.

Hoover: Why are we passing this bill if we don't know what the students want.

Bove: The University needs a recommendation.

Kiernan: I agree with a student-wide survey. We represent a lot of students but there are also people on campus who are not represented.

Tyson: Wouldn't the leadership need a recommendation like somewhat soon?

Bove: They want to make this decision quickly. They did not give a timeline.

Siegle: Motion to table the bill

Kiernan: Second.

O. Johnson: I don't want the leadership to make a decision without our input.

Shindler: I don't think they would make a decision without us.

N. Johnson: Motion to call the question on the motion to table.

Siegle: Second.

Gamache: Point of information can Campus Committee put a survey out regardless of the bill?

Bove: Yes.

Motion to Call the Question Passes.

Motion to Table Passes.

M. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND OPEN FORUM

Carl: Each year the senate is tasked with coordinating the process for selecting the senior class speaker. I will need five people to help with that over the next week so we can get moving on it. Another issue, when you are conducting non-student senate business, please do not use the student senate listserv.

Peckham: If we're going to talk about COVID, please wear the masks correctly. Be responsible and wear it properly.

Summerson: If you are working on the Women's Summit, please meet afterwards.

Tyson: (For Carl) how many candidates are going to give speeches.

Carl: Typically five.

Collins: Thank you all for professional discussion.

Bove: Debate is common. We have not debated an issue like this one since my first semester here. Everyone conducted themselves respectfully and did a great job.

Breene: I'm going to go to my professor and get a consensus from the classes I'm in about their opinions

N. ADJOURNMENT

Speaker Bove adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.