

Steering Meeting *Minutes*

April 3, 2020

4:30 PM

Attendance:

Giacomo Bianchino (Chair), Roderick Hurley, Adam Kocurek, Elizabeth Che, Mary Jean McNamara, Michael Greer, Ming Chen, Sharanya Dutta, Sonja Gandert, Raj Korpan, Jane Guskin

GB called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM

I. Approval of Agenda

AK: moves to approve the agenda

SD: seconds the motion

No Discussion

Vote: Approved unanimously

II. Approval of Minutes of March 6, 2020

MJM: moves to approve the minutes

MG: seconds.

No Discussion

Vote: Approved unanimously

III. Executive Committee Reports

A. Co-Chair for Student Affairs (Elizabeth Che)

- Election ballots are now open (April 1 - May 15, 2020 at 11:59pm ET).
 - Ballot can be accessed: <https://eballot4.votenet.com/dsc>
 - eBallot information email scheduled to be sent out on Monday 4/6
 - Please help spread the word about elections! There are 2 amendment ratifications that require 10% DSO response to pass with simple majority (according to Article IX.1).
- Help chartered organizations obtain active status by signing their rosters:
<http://cunydisc.org/works/chartered-organizations/list>
- Chartered Orgs - Holding off deactivation process? Considering holding off on “deactivating” chartered organizations until the next semester. I think it would be difficult and not convenient for chartered orgs to meet/gather at this time.
- Chartered Orgs - Holding off room re-organization: Was working on having inactive chartered orgs vacate their offices and move in active chartered orgs but this is no longer feasible this semester. Will have to wait until next semester or when it becomes safe and accessible to enter the GC. I can still begin to take office space requests and inform the inactive groups about their expectation to vacate the offices but not expect them to physically do so until further notice.
- Haven't gotten around to making the OpenCUNY site for election bios. It is on my to do list.

Discussion:

RH: We should be lenient given the circumstances and give active status to all orgs that had active status last Fall.

EC: I could extend the deadline for activations, but it will affect their reimbursement requests because Chart orgs need to be activated to be reimbursed. What does RK think about that? He would need to okay it.

RK: It would be good to extend the activation til the Fall and waive the requirement for reimbursements. Org leaders have asked about purchasing Zoom accounts to host events.

EC: I'll make a note of that.

GB: I echo all the points about leniency on requirements.

B. Co-Chair for Communications (Rod Hurley)

Updates

- First, I want to encourage everyone to put safety and wellness above all else during this time; both physical and mental wellness, for yourself and for those around you. There is no prescription for what we are experiencing, and while there will still be some tasks to do, it should hopefully be possible to do these without adding to our duress. If not, please let me know.
- New GC President announced - Robin L. Garrell, vice provost for graduate education and graduate division dean at UCLA; tenure begins August 1. I plan to request a teleconference with them in the near future.
- We haven't had any meetings with OSA since the one in February, but they have been very responsive via email. I will try to arrange a teleconference for after the Spring break.
- So far this semester we haven't received any DSC-specific communication from admin, not the usual requests from the president and provost to meet. Given everything that is going on, I think we need to send them something on students' behalf, and also request a teleconference.
- CUNY BoT recently approved new measures around the covid-19 crisis. These include:
 - Establishing a Chancellor's Emergency Relief fund
 - Purchase of iPads and Laptops for student loans
 - STF reduction/refund
 - Option for credit/no-credit grading
 - Credit/Refund of dorm fees
- I compiled a [list of support and funding resources](#) and sent this out to students. Please let me know if you come across things that should be added.
- We received a response from the Wellness Center regarding our request for a meeting. They requested, and I agreed, that we can plan to meet when the current crisis situation has abated somewhat.
- We received a request to support the [student petition for emergency funding](#). Several DSC reps have signed this individually.
- [The Advocate](#) has put out a job announcement for a new managing editor. They plan to release the next issue online, and have the covid-19 pandemic as the theme.

Upcoming

- All DSC Steering Committee and Plenary Meetings will be held via teleconference until further notice.
- The elections ballot open from April 1 to May 15. Please vote and remind students in your programs to vote. This is an extension of the of the regular voting period. This means that we

have to reschedule the May plenary meeting for incoming reps, which was scheduled for May 15. We can discuss a new date, and whether we want to still have the May plenary meeting for outgoing reps on the 15th.

- April 8 - 16 - "Spring Break" for the GC. At other campuses spring break is April 8-10.
- April 24 - DSC Plenary Meeting. Please let me know if you have any items to be put on the agenda.

Discussion:

GB: What do you think of the new President? In terms of labor relations etc?

RH: Raj and I were on the search committee and we both felt good about this choice. She has an excellent reputation for defending students. She has a good background for advocating for graduate student funding, and for diversity of graduate students.

RK: I like her as a person and feel she will be a good advocate for both students and faculty. She has experience as an advisor and understands the needs of grad students. I am hopeful but I don't know how she is with labor relations.

We need to ask Muyskens about the budget cuts. There seems to be a discrepancy in the cr/no credit policy that we need to check up on

JG: I think maybe that's because at GC you need to get a C to pass a class.

MC: Thanks for putting together the resource list. City College has a list with other general things that we may be able to add to the list.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sg5wIqKU9dUqmt62IGqxtWVccHSRUCChUrBBm3upvH8/edit?usp=sharing>

MJM: I echo the need to make our presence felt with admin, especially now that there will be a change in presidents. We also need to be human in the midst of this, especially with the interim provost being unwell.

RK: Have we heard anything from the Child Care Center?

RH: No, but we need to find out

RK: We should definitely support the nursing program at least

MJM: I was wondering if space was being used by the city for hospitals

JG: In terms of places within CUNY being used by the city: The CSI, Hunter, and CCNY dorms are all being converted to emergency hospitals.

GB: Would be great to hear from students who live in the dorms

JG: I'm trying to reach out to those students, as well as workers. I don't know what working conditions are like.

C. Co-Chair for Business (Raj Korpan)

- Board of Trustees passed resolution to waive 50% of Spring 2020 SAF - this means our budget is being cut by about 25% for the year. As a result, all the proposals that I talked about at the last plenary are now off the table, and instead we have to make cuts across the board. I am going to present a revised budget based on this. But I have also been in touch with the OSA to find out how this will work exactly, since most of the SAF has already been deposited into our bank account, and most students have paid. Does that mean we will need to wire the money back and they will set up a system to refund students? I will continue to try to get to the bottom of this.
- Still working through all the repercussions of the current crisis. Because all on-campus activities have been canceled, I have been trying to come up with a policy on how students, groups, and organizations and still spend their allocated funds. For grants, I've decided that we should honor the grant recipients by allowing them to use the grants during the next academic year. For

allocations, I have been trying to figure out if we can donate the funds to non-profit groups, I am waiting on an answer about this from OSA.

- Further changes due to the crisis, originally, the check request process was to continue mostly normally, except that checks would all be mailed out. I was notified by the Business Office that they won't even be doing that any longer as they want to minimize the number of people on campus. So they are now planning to wire funds from our bank account to recipients. This means I will now need all recipients to fill out a form with their bank account information, I will be sending out more information soon.

Discussion:

RH: In terms of us donating money, I would prefer to donate to something that would benefit our students rather than the community at large.

SD: For those of us who have already submitted check requests, do we have to redo it with bank accounts now?

RK: I will use the existing process, but I'll send the form for bank information. You can keep filling out stipend requests as before so I can keep track.

JG: The ad hoc accessibility committee wants to know if they can have an independent Zoom account that isn't a CUNY-based account.

RK: We don't have a specific budget line for that committee, but it could maybe come from the meetings line. Have them email me.

D. USS Delegate (Jane Guskin)

- The Cuomo budget is bad. USS is claiming victory that it doesn't include a plan for 5 years of tuition increases, hopes that planned tuition hike for the fall can still be stopped through student action.
- BoT meeting on Monday 3/30: see Rod's report, above.
- Next USS plenary (via Zoom) is Sunday, April 19, 12pm.
- GC cutting fellowships for next cohort.
- [Sign-on letter for emergency funding for PhD students.](#)
- From student-led Free CUNY movement: 5 demands to heal the CUNY community in this pandemic: <https://tinyurl.com/CUNY5demands>
- Rank and File Action formulating worker-focused demands for all titles in PSC plus non-PSC members (cleaning staff, etc.). Do any of us have contacts with cleaning staff at GC or any other campuses?
- GC Registrar sent out letters to everyone not making Satisfactory Academic Progress saying we can't register for Fall.
- Ad Hoc Accessibility committee is working on a survey that will address accessibility challenges to distance learning as a first step toward pressing demands on that front. Request for Zoom account.
- I sent an email to 10 plenary attendees re: rewards; have heard back from some, waiting to hear back from others and will accommodate requests for which \$15 e-gift card each person wants.

Discussion:

RH: Moves to endorse the letter supporting the emergency fund for students

RK: Seconds the motion

Discussion:

RK: We need to support this, but we should also have a plan for how we will take this forward to the Chancellor and President and represent students

AK: Just to reiterate the point that we should definitely endorse this and put together a letter to send to administration.

JG: I think that unless anyone has strong objections, we should support it as it stands, we can clarify in our own statements. Should support it unequivocally.

Vote: Motion passes unanimously.

MG: I am unclear about the letter about admissions. What about people who are on the waitlist?

JG: To my understanding, none of those people will get offers. Cohorts will effectively be cut. No one will get funding upgrades for offers already received.

SD: I agree that cohorts will be cut. I think waitlist people will count as having received an offer.

RK: In my department, the top choices get offers. The waitlist people don't get offers until they hear from the first choices. I want to know why they are not upgrading people to available fellowships.

JG: They're trying to save money. Maybe we can push for them to put any money they save toward the demand for emergency funding for existing students?

MJM: I think this is a sign that they are closing down the GC. News is circulating about selling the building, etc.

MC: I was on the waitlist. People who have offers will decide on whether to decline offers until the last second. In this case, the people in the waitlist will suffer. There are still 3 days before the final deadline, and the administrators might reach out to the applicants about this new situation, and the waitlist applicants still have chances to get admitted.

MG: We should push back against this. Maybe send an email today about this

GB: I agree that we should talk about how we want to respond to this.

SD: I agree that we should fight this but the fact that it's a weekend may give them the excuse not to respond.

E. UFS Liaison (Mary Jean McNamara)

- The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, 3/31, in a virtual Plenary. About 100 senators attended and voted on a resolution to urge the Chancellery to honor the shared governance agreement between Faculty and the Administration. The resolution cited the lack of communication regarding the decision to close CUNY, the switch to a virtual platform for most courses, and the subsequent recalibration period. Faculty are demanding that the Administration be transparent about requirements for upcoming semesters with respect to the designation of "hybrid" courses in the event there is another outbreak of COVID-19 in the fall.
- The Board of Trustees meeting that was scheduled to be held virtually so that all members of the CUNY community could observe the meeting was held via teleconference which made the meeting inaccessible to only those who were given access. At the meeting, the Board passed a resolution to grant a tuition refund to the Law School students and 33k for the purchase of Chrome tablets to be distributed to students without the capability to participate in courses that have been converted to online courses. At the UFS Plenary, some Faculty noted that Chrome tablets are incompatible with Blackboard, which was refuted by Matt Sapienza, VP for Finance for CUNY Central.

- The Chair of the Faculty Senate, Professor Martin Burke, (GC/Lehman - History), shared with the Faculty his grave concerns about the NYS budget shortfall of 4 billion-18 billion and how this will likely impact CUNY and SUNY.
- Members of the Faculty Senate voiced their concerns over the fall semester and the plan to offer all classes as "hybrid" courses. This would be a way for CUNY to continue to charge students full tuition in the event that another outbreak forces the closure of campuses. Technically, one Faculty member pointed out, a hybrid course requires that the in-person class meetings comprise at least 30% of all class meetings.

Discussion:

JG: Is anything happening with the code of conduct? I want to make sure that they don't sneak things in.

MJM: Academic Free Speech people brought it up. No meeting yet to discuss.

RK: Was there any talk about the summer session classes?

MJM: They will all be online

SG: Have they given justification for the law school tuition reimbursement?

MJM: Seems they were the only ones who requested it.

JG: The CUNY Law students also wrote a separate policy that suits their needs.

IV. Steering Officer Reports

A. Officer for Funding (Sonja Gandert)

- No new proposals received for most recent grant cycle
- I have been communicating with applicants on a case-by-case basis about the possibility of carrying over their funding in the fall if their events are rescheduled. This applies to events that are moved online, as well.
- Happy to help out with our emergency funding applications or the resources list for the website.
- Does anyone know if the GC will be honoring the summer research fellowships it awarded (DSRG, Provost's, ERI, etc.) I have not seen this information communicated anywhere and I wonder if it would be worth looking into.

Discussion:

AK: I got an ERI and DSRG to do research that is essential. The office told me that the money will be disbursed, and they are requesting that travel be pushed back to the Fall if possible.

MJM: Can students still submit grant applications?

SG: No, the last deadline was in March.

MC: Are there any updates on the IRB requirements for the DSRG?

SG: That's a good point. We should write to them and find out.

Also, Start-up grants are still available - \$200 but we don't have a lot of money for this.

RK: We can mention it if students ask.

B. Officer for Governance & Membership (Adam Kocurek)

- We filled a number of the open At-Large Representative seats, as well as added new Program Representative seats. Although these reps cannot do much for their departments right now due to the pandemic, they can help us reach quorum with all future voting matters.
- We still have three open At-Large Representative seats (Carolina Heredia has resigned), and an open Program Representative seat for Data Science.

- I have not heard back from the Data Science department regarding my inquest to fill their seat.

No Discussion

C. Officer for Health & Wellness (Ming Chen)

- The Wellness Referral Service - Director of the Wellness Center, Robert Hatcher, said he will keep in touch, but haven't decided on the meeting date
- NYSHIP Telehealth Service
 - The NYSHIP Telehealth service, LiveHealth Online, provides our students with virtual medical consulting opportunities. The students will be able to consult certified doctors and therapists with their health concerns in a video chat.
 - NYSHIP Enrollees can login to www.empireblue.com/nys to get a coupon code to cover the full cost of their LiveHealth Online visits.
 - Sending out an email about how to use the NYSHIP Telehealth Service through the DSC listserv
- Virtual Workshop: Self Care for Graduate Students - April 3 (Friday), 10:30 AM to 12 PM

Discussion:

AK: I recently enrolled in NYSHIP but moved from address. Do you know if electronic cards can be sent out?

MC: Before the outbreak you could apply for a new card and have it sent to a new address. You also need to change your address in the system by emailing Scott Voorhees.

RK: Is NYSHIP or the State covering/waiving copays for mental health?

MC: I will ask Scott

D. Officer for Outreach (Sharanya Dutta)

- Hoping to get an update from NYSHIP about COVID-19 test and treatment coverage
- Tax filing deadline extended to July 15--both federal and state
- Summer fellowship and other checks—what will be the process for international students who had to pick up these checks in person? Last word from Allan Tsang was that there's no way to give fellowship checks to international students by direct deposit. Can they be mailed, like the 1042-S? Now it looks like that won't be the case. Going to email Allan Tsang again to find out. Many students are not in the city/at mailing addresses right now anyway.
- Rent strike? Can we help/how can we help? Are the petitions going around even applicable to nonresidents/immigrants?

Discussion:

MC: I also didn't get any updates about whether NYSHIP covers covid-19 testing and treatment.

SD: I've reached out to the people at CUNY who organize NYSHIP and haven't gotten a response.

GB: People around the city are organizing a rent strike. I'm coordinating a community forum for this. I think this has to be done at a local level, but we can find if students want to get involved in this because it could be helpful.

JG: I heard of a possible CUNY-wide strike but not a rent strike.

E. Officer for Student Life & Services (Giacomo Bianchino)

- Student event: trivia or some kind of games night? How to coordinate this
- Can we set-up a remote academics platform for students to share work in a short video (or full lecture) that can then be disseminated online?

- GC-wide forum on digital learning and decolonising/queering classrooms?
- Have we heard from any students who have been moved from their dorm? Are any GC students over in queens?

Discussion:

MG: There are several online group gaming platforms that could be used. We could invite people to a trivia event.

MC: Monopoly is available online, as well as Risk. I can share the links to these.

RK: I think trivia is a good idea, but the other games work might better for small groups.

SG: I agree about trivia. And we could use break groups.

MJM: I think a trivia game could be incorporated into a podcast.

GB: I live the podcast idea and we can find out whether students are interested in this. This could encourage conversations across the disciplines.

F. Officer for Technology & Library (Michael Greer)

Things I Have asked IT

- Devices? Laptops/tablets - Recalibration Period for Educational Equity was supposedly to deliver these to students in need but GC students haven't heard anything and at least two are in dire need of a device.
- Zoom pro accounts for students?
- More software online (on Virtual Desktop, I guess).
 - How much of our software *is* on virtual desktop?
 - What else can we get on there and how quickly?
- Ask for details from STF meeting so I can share with student body
- Asked for budget again

Things I have asked Library

- Devices? Laptops/tablets?
- Returning books issue

Things I'm putting on the back seat:

- CUNY2020, Object Library, Study Spaces Initiative

Discussion:

MJM: Did you receive any information about books out on loan?

MG: They will extend loans without charge

RK: On the petition I noticed students saying that they needed physical books from the library to do orals, which haven't been cancelled. Can books be shipped to students?

MG: I will find out about that

JG: A plenary attendee who won a gift card also mentioned that they have to acquire a book for orals. I heard that some publishers are making books available online but I don't know exactly what resources are available.

MG: I can find out if there is a list of which publishers are doing that, and what other resources are available.

GB: I think Jstor and other publishers are opening access to some things

AK: Jstor does have some stuff open now

SG: They were actually making things available that were open source before

MG: Could we do reimbursements for book purchases instead of the gift cards?

JG: The student who asked about the book asked if they could use the award toward a book purchase, but can I make that

offer to the others about reimbursement?

RK: Yes we can discuss that.

V. New Business

A. Statement on Covid-19 Crisis

RH: Email was sent to students earlier in the week.

B. Letter to GC Administration regarding impact of Covid-19 crisis on GC students

GB: Topics we want to address are admissions, and healthcare

AK: MG and I will start the document and share it.

MG: I think that should be 2 separate emails

RH: I agree

C. Plans for the rest of the semester

JG: What about tasks? Are emails being answered?

AK: We should invite representatives to give us ideas for what is needed

RH: There haven't been a lot of emails from students and very little activity on Works.

VI. Announcements

EC: Remember to vote!

VII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:42