September Senator Report

Autumn is often seen as a season of change, heralded by the changing leaves and a new semester. This autumn is no different, as there is an array of projects we have been working on that are going to be adjusting the dynamics of our college moving forward. At the end of the SGA 2017-18 Administration, we were involved in a collaboration with the Senators from the WellStar College of Health and Human services that intended to improve the accessibility and quality of advising students receive. The resolution centered around the sheer volume of students compared to the number of advisors and the lack of dedicated Pre-Health Advising at our university to guide students who aspire to work in healthcare. Not only did it pass unanimously in the Senate, but we brought it to the desks of Chris Hutt, the director of Academic Affairs, the Deans of both the College of Science and Mathematics and the WellStar College of Health and Human Services, and eventually, the desk of our new President Whitten.

Thanks to the dedication and collaboration of so many, we have been able to get logistics approved for Pre-Health Advising at Kennesaw State University. Director Delany has relayed information from Chris Hutt who confirms that there will be a temporary advisor moved to be a dedicated Pre-Health advisor until a permanent and dedicated advisor can be hired in Fiscal year 2019. An array of Pre-health RSO’s in the College of Science and Mathematics have presented relief in the conclusively of the passing and look forward to the change.
Reformation is not limited to advising. In our college, the greatest number of students working at KSU occupy the role of Chemistry Teaching Assistants (TA). This means they assist lab instructors during chemistry labs and prepare chemicals, neutralize wastes, and maintain safe laboratory standards during teaching labs. Unfortunately, while the wages of their peers in the Supplemental Instruction program (SI) and the Learning Assistant programs (LA) were raised to $10 in the past 5 years, the pay for TA’s remained at the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. I myself began as a chemistry TA for both campuses and their pay after taxes were not adequate reflections of their work. Once priority registration was diminished in Spring 2016, an exodus of TA occurred, and labs quickly became short supply. Many veteran TA left to enter those same SI and LA programs that paid higher rates, leading to a brain drain within our college.

After discussing the reasons for the TA exodus and wages with the three chemistry lab coordinators over the course of 2 years, we began to collaborate with the Lead Lab Coordinator Ben Huck in order to consider raising wages. The issue was again brought up during a Student Advisory Board meeting with Dean Anderson in Spring and Summer of 2018. During this time, our college also received a new grant for Diversity that had a clause requiring funds be allocated in some way for students working within our college. Through careful deliberation, we were able to allocate portions of these funds for the expansion of the LA program and the increase in pay quality for the TA program. We’re proud to announce that as of Fall 2018, Chemistry Department TA will see an increase in their pay up to $10 an hour based on the number of labs they have served. Once the baseline quantity has been met by the individual, they will see their wages raised permanently for the duration of their work. As Kennesaw HR begin to process the adjustments, we will keep you posted as the raises are implemented to each TA.
There is a lot of change we have accomplished, but there is still more work to be done. During a tabling on September 13th in Clendenin Building we had approximately 10 people discuss concerns at our table, with a majority citing advising quality and lack of Pre-Health guidance. One issue brought to the table also included the wages of Student Assistants in the Biology Department who are paid the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour compared to their now variable wage chemistry counterparts. We will begin looking into the matter and discuss possibilities with the Biology Lab Coordinators moving forward.

On September 6th we had the first CSM Student Advisory Board Meeting for the 2018-19 year, at which point updates on advising were requested and provided. Dean Anderson provided notice that the new HHMI grant mentioned above would be used to create a student focus group called the Dean’s Scholars which would include members of the CSM Student Advisory Board and beyond to assess for how students feel their experience at KSU has been. Updates from the Summer Grade Appeals Proceedings were also discussed. As a new school year means students who have graduated from the Advisory Board need to have their seats filled, an application form was sent out college wide and new members were selected by myself and Senator Heller to ensure accurate representation of our student body. We are honored to have so many dedicated students in our communities who applied for the competitive positions and would love to see all of them involved in SGA moving forward.

A topic that has been discussed both within the CSM Student Advisory Board and the SGA General Body Meetings has been the nature of the VIC Grade Distribution Curves. There is a precedent for grade distributions for each professor to be displayed to students across Georgia, which show the percentages of A’s, B’s, C’s, D’s, F’s, and W’s a professor stratifies in their courses. This enables students to make an informed decision based on statistics rather than
relying solely on word of mouth or academic rating websites. During the summer, the grade distributions were made private from students with no warning. When people began to reach out for more information, there was little improvement. A caucus has developed within SGA in order to better understand the nature of this change and work to alleviate concerns both from the university and students. At this time, we have met and are aware of FERPA concerns to privacy regarding the display of grade percentages per professor. We will be in communication and collaboration with the necessary parties to see what can be done to modify distribution displays to ensure that the tool can be safely returned to the hands of students.

Of note, the SGA Governance Committee met on September 26 to discuss policy changes and case by case examinations within the organization. The meeting went smoothly with extensive discussion on each topic. We look forward to the progress that will be presented to the Senate in the coming months.

The path to progress begins with a single voice, but if you feel your community can be improved, then make a motion. It will not happen overnight, and for a long time it may feel like a lonely road to take. Eventually, though, rest assured that more voices will join yours and you will find a way to ensure all parties involved are satisfied. Like the changing of the seasons, each shift is gradual and may go unnoticed until the weather adjusts to the impacts created. Entire forests will display hues that could make a flower jealous, but never forget that the chemical cascade begins with a single leaf. The legacies we return to our communities are the colors that will outlive our tenure, and, in the end, a beautiful forest is all we can hope for. End of Report.

R Rahman