

BU GSO – Special Session: Spring COVID Policies

Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 17, 2022

Time: 6:00 pm

1. Welcome (President – Arcadia Ewell)

- Join Slack Channel for GSO Reps: https://join.slack.com/t/bugso2021/shared_invite/zt-obqpc210-gxJTsxWWkWL7n4ioaAfkiw
- Join the GSO mailing list: <https://www.bu.edu/gso/join-our-mailing-list/>

2. GSO Webpage for COVID Resources (President)

- GSO has developed a [COVID-19 BU Policies and City Resources webpage](#) – this will go live soon. It includes:
 - Current BU Spring Semester policies regarding vaccination and masks as well as what to do in the event of a positive test or close contact.
 - Boston Area Resources on vaccine and testing locations and help for residents adversely impacted by pandemic
 - Information for international students on returning to campus, including testing and vaccination requirements

3. Open Forum on BU COVID Policies (GSO representatives and additional graduate student attendees)

- Students expressed concerns with the administration regarding the following:
 - Cessation of contact tracing despite increase of positive tests
 - Lack of discretion as graduate instructors to determine conditions of teaching without layers of approval. This is particularly an issue for those who have a disability or are immunocompromised (or live with high-risk individuals). The university allowed certain accommodations for disabilities last year that they do not allow this year, despite the continuing seriousness of the pandemic
 - Lack of clarity from university regarding when/how to record lectures and discussions. There is also dissatisfaction with the university acknowledging the impact that COVID is having by allowing recording but not addressing other teaching options
 - Lack of clarity from the university regarding the new policy to provide KN95 masks to students – will this last through the semester or is this a short-term response? Will the university mandate the use of these masks, in line with other local universities?
- GSO Meetings for Spring Semester (President)

- Given the rise in COVID cases due to the Omicron variant, the GSO Eboard suggests returning to a remote format for GSO meetings this semester (until conditions improve significantly)
- All attendees are asked to vote on whether to hold meetings in-person, remote, or hybrid, given that meetings are open to all members of the graduate student body
- Vote result: In-person (0/47); Remote (33/47); Hybrid (14/47).
- GSO will move forward with remote meetings for the spring

4. GSO Executive Board Proposed Action Items (President and attendees)

- The president introduced three proposed action items that meeting attendees discussed and then GSO representatives voted on:
 - Letter from GSO to the administration: Student Requests Regarding Spring 2022 Semester and Public Safety Amidst COVID-19
 - Letter draft asks administration to consider returning to a remote learning format for the first two weeks of the semester, resume the contact tracing program, offer a hybrid option for instruction, offer more affordable parking permits for graduate students who may feel unsafe using public transportation, and offer LfA option to international students
 - Comments:
 - Add in statement regarding the ability for high-risk TF and faculty instructors to participate remotely/use their discretion to determine what is safe for them. Hybrid requires in-person instruction, so be careful with requesting this.
 - Make language more direct, stronger; be strategic in requests
 - Possibly remove request regarding parking, since it may be easier option for administration to respond to and take away from bigger issue requests
 - Remote teaching would benefit those international students who have been forced to defer due to travel restrictions in their home countries
 - Consider how graduate students might take more direct action to encourage administration response, including withholding labor
 - Vote taken on sending letter to administration with edits made from today's suggestions
 - Vote result: In favor (22/22); Opposed (0/22)
 - GSO will send the edited letter
 - GSO to sign onto and support distribution of a grad student-generated petition

- Graduate student teachers have generated petition asking for BU to provide options for remote teaching until below 1% positive cases, provide PPE, and provide social distancing options for in-person
- Petition link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSepSUyw7tu-bIBLDv6W8l1Pf7QBBsymtdPp2RvFm_f67TVVNA/viewform
- Vote taken to officially sign petition as the Graduate Student Organization
- Vote result: Sign it (26/26); Don't sign it (0/26)
- GSO will sign petition. GSO representatives should also circulate the petition in their departments.
- GSO to release an official statement on Spring 2022 policies
 - Statement draft: The Graduate Student Organization believes the current policies and procedures for the Spring 2022 semester do not fully ensure effective and safe learning environments. We urge the administration to consider temporary remote classes for the first two weeks of the semester. Additionally, we have proposed several other encouraged courses of action including LfA style classes for international or quarantining students, the resumption of contact tracing procedures, and discounted parking permits for graduate students. It is our hope that the University will take into consideration the needs of its graduate student body, faculty & staff in the coming weeks as we navigate COVID-19 and the Omicron variant together.
 - Comments:
 - Strengthen language and make sure requests align with those in edited version of letter (including accommodations for high-risk instructors and the option to use their discretion)
 - Include examples from other area universities for pressure
 - Vote taken to officially release the statement or not
 - Vote result: Release (25/27); Don't release (2/27)
 - GSO will release an updated statement
- GSO will ask for a response to these requests within a short window of time (around 10 days); no response will trigger another statement from the GSO

5. Final business (President)

- Slides from meeting will be distributed
- Meeting notes will include link to approved petition for distribution

Attendees:

GSO EBoard attending: President, Arcadia Ewell; Vice President, Monan Ma; Secretary, Meghan Townes; Treasurer, Krishna Ammini; Travel Grants Chair, Joshua Fox-Fuller; International Student Relations Chair, Stan Debruyn

Attendees: Makenzie Coker, Gana Ndiaye, Sarah Lewinger, Connor O'Brien, James Fifer, Guangmei Liu, Maya Chakravorty, Kangjoon Cho, Byeo Rhee Bak, Yuetian Wu, Maggie Boyd, Keara Sebold, Erin Rosengren, Okrah Oppong, John (Jae Hyung) Sim, Nathaniel Braddock, Gizem Kaftan, Nishaat Mukadam, Ellie Ash, Leping Wang, Ayshwarya Venkataramana, Heather Mooney, Esther Yoon, Michael Tannous, Meredith Barber, Liz Neill, Florian Bodamer, Peter Kotiuga, Andy Huynh, Max Chapnick, Megan Chen, Bharat Gogineni, Noa Saunders, Johan Martinez-Fuentes, Allie Murphy, Alicia Matz, David Andrade, Caryne Nicholas, Frannie McBrian, Genna Kane, Jordan Pickard, Kate Finnerty, Katie Mai, Maria Zabaneh, Nicola Kriefall, Orion Ojala, Riana Howard, Ashley Shen, Zhijie Hong, Qingyuan Chai