



State University of New York
College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Board of Trustees Sustainable Finance Committee Meeting
May 2, 2022 – 2:00 p.m.
229 Bray Hall/Videoconference

MINUTES

In Attendance:

Trustee William Fisher, Sustainable Finance Committee Chair
Trustee John Bartow
Ragan Squier, Board Secretary

Invited Guests:

Jenny Frank, Graduate Student representing GSEU
Kelly Berger, College Counsel (viewing Livestream)
David Dzwonkowski, Director of Business Affairs
Mark Lichtenstein, Executive Operating Officer
Nichole Dougherty, Administrative Assistant 2

Absent:

Trustee Vita DeMarchi

Call to Order and Roll Call:

Committee Chair Fisher called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. Secretary Squier took the roll call. With two voting members of the Sustainable Finance Committee in attendance, Trustee Fisher confirmed a quorum. The meeting format was hybrid with participation from 229 Bray Hall and via Zoom. The meeting was also livestreamed and recorded in compliance with the Open Meetings Law.

1. Approval of Minutes from the December 2, 2021 Meeting:

A draft of the minutes from the December 2, 2021 Sustainable Finance Committee meeting was emailed to the Committee for review prior to the meeting.

- Trustee Fisher called for a motion to approve the minutes from the Sustainable Finance Committee meeting on December 2, 2021. A motion was made by Trustee Bartow and seconded by Trustee Fisher. Hearing no discussion, Trustee Fisher called for a vote – the committee unanimously passed the motion to approve the December 2, 2021 minutes.

2. Review of Processes Surrounding Billing Deadlines for Graduates Students (GSEU organizer Jenny Frank):

- Trustee Fisher reported that GSEU representatives continue to submit requests to be added to the agenda for ESF Board of Trustees meetings. He noted that it would be difficult to allocate time for a full presentation from GSEU representatives during the full Board meeting and that representatives were invited to the Sustainable Finance Committee which can allow for adequate time to discuss their concerns. Trustee Fisher will include information from their discussion as part of his Chair's report at the full Board meeting. Trustee Fisher also discussed the importance of the graduate programs at ESF and



the goal to grow PhDs to 25 by 2025. He noted that graduate students benefit the College by helping to increase research. He also reminded the Committee and invited guests that the role of the Board of Trustees is to make recommendations to the College Administrators. Trustee Fisher noted that a new Chief Financial Officer will begin on July 1st. He noted that David Dzwonkowski is representing the Business Office for this meeting, along with Mark Lichtenstein representing the Office of the President.

- J. Frank presented on behalf to the Graduate Student Employees Union. She provided an outline of meetings/meeting outcomes between ESF Administration and the GSEU, she noted the GSEU's appreciation for ESF Administration's willingness to work with them, but also noted a lack of communication and transparency.
- The GSEU's current requests include:
 - Moving the ESF graduate fees deadline to a later date: October 15th for the fall semester, March 15th for the spring semester.
 - The current due date for the fall semester is August 15th with a late fee incurred if not paid by that time.
 - Fees are due before the first paycheck for graduate students is typically received (late September).
 - Only 1 late fee waiver per student is allowed.
 - Adjustment of deadline would also allow for billing adjustments to be made prior to a late fee being applied to the student bill.
 - Better communication to graduate students and more transparency.
 - GSEU recommended using the Graduate Student Listserv.
 - GSEU also recommended a comprehensive website.
- J. Frank noted the following information about current conditions:
 - The payment plan includes an additional charge and is not an ideal long-term solution for the billing Issues being presented.
 - Graduate students employed by ESF earn a stipend of \$16-\$18K.
 - Stipend is well below \$34K living wage for a single adult in Syracuse (as calculated by the MIT living wage calculator).
 - Many graduate students experience economic instability.
 - Amending the fees deadlines would allow graduate students to better focus on research and academics.
 - GSEU is open to suggestions and other solutions to help reduce the financial burden for graduate students.
- M. Lichtenstein reported that progress has been made and the deadline for the graduate student fee for the fall has been moved to October 15th.
 - D. Dzwonkowski clarified that the billing due date will still be listed as August 15th, but that ESF will not apply late fees to the graduate student fees until October 15th.
- J. Frank requested that the information about late fees be clearly communicated to students.
 - D. Dzwonkowski committed to communicating the information to graduate students.



- Trustee Fisher reported that he will discuss the information regarding the graduate fee deadline and late fees at the Board of Trustees meeting to help communicate the information to the ESF community.
- Trustee Fisher requested that R. Squier work with Rose Osborne regarding her schedule to be added to the Board of Trustees meeting agenda to present for 10 minutes on behalf of the GSEU.
- D. Dzwonkowski noted that he was not aware of any changes that had been made regarding the billing deadlines and late fees for the spring semester.
- D. Dzwonkowski noted and that he was unsure if the same first paycheck issues apply during the spring semester.
 - J. Frank reported that employment changes, such as from graduate assistantship to a research assistantship, can create a pay lag during the spring semester.
- M. Lichtenstein discussed additional financial obstacles that ESF graduate students have encountered and noted that the College is looking into ways to reduce or eliminate these obstacles.
 - College is looking into establishing a process that can be used to pay large expenses associated with graduate travel up front rather than using a system or reimbursement to the students.
 - Administration will work with the Graduate Office to look for other areas that can be improved.

3. Review of College Finances: State Operating Budget 2021-2022 (Director of Business Affairs, David Dzwonkowski):

- Accessory Instruction Budget: Trustee Fisher noted that the cost of Accessory Instruction has gone up significantly over the past few years and questioned the reason for the increase. The current annual budget is \$2M. Trustee Fisher noted that addressing this expense could help ESF get a lot closer to a balanced budget.
 - ESF/SU contract changed in 2019, we were previously billed a flat rate and are now charged for NET credit hours.
 - ESF is charged the University College rate – this is a significant discount and benefit to ESF.
 - ESF students take more courses at SU than SU students at ESF.
 - It was suggested the Curriculum Committee should avoid creating programs that require classes from SU.
 - ESF recently added a physics class that had previously been required for students and was only offered by SU.
 - ESF should focus to increase the number of SU students taking courses at ESF and reduce the number of courses that ESF students need from SU.
- J. Bartow questioned if it was possible for the College to review the courses that ESF students are taking at SU and also noted that being able to take diverse courses at SU is a benefit that attracts students to ESF. It was also questioned if ESF students could be charged a fee for any courses taken at SU.
 - There are currently 2 classes that are required, physics with lab and geospatial engineering.
- IT Services Budget (Service Agreement between SUNY and Syracuse University):
 - Same basis, cost has doubled.
 - The SU contract initially included a 50% discount, then 25%, then 10%, and no longer includes any discount.
 - ESF has also been investing in its own IT services.



- SU should provide a detailed breakdown of our usage with an opportunity to opt out of our current package.
 - Payments to SUNY have also gone up to a range of \$200-250K/year for services that we receive from the State.
 - ESF also has some one-off IT expenses that are beyond an agreement with SU or SUNY.
- It was noted that ESF IT Department has found the value of services to be worth the expense, however with the increase in the costs, Trustee Fisher recommended having the new CFO review the SU contract along with the other IT expenditures and compare the IT cost per capita to other similar sized SUNY campuses. Trustee Fisher asked J. Frank if students are aware of how IT services are provided to students at ESF and recommended that the College survey the students (as they are customers of these services that are being provided), she responded that she was not aware.
 - M. Lichtenstein noted that there was formerly an Academic Governance Technology Committee that would periodically review the IT services, the Committee is not currently active.
4. **New Business:** Committee Chair Fisher opened the floor for new business.
- No new business.

Adjournment

With no further discussion, Chair Fisher called for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Trustee Bartow and seconded by Chair Fisher. Meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Nichole Dougherty.