



18th Meeting of the 2024-2025 Student Government Association Senate
February 4th, 2025 | 7:00 PM | Livak Ballroom

Call to Order

This meeting was called to order by Speaker Kennedy Connors.

Roll Call

Senators Grace, Torres, and Renallo not present.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes approved unanimously.

Public Forum

Marie Johnson – Providing Overview on Student Financial Services

- Director of Student Financial Services for 16 years, been at the University for over 30 years working in Student Finance.
 - We award federal and institutional financial aid through merit scholarships, endowments, loans, emergency fund, refunds, etc.
 - Oversee Student Employment Office for on-campus undergraduate employment and Federal Work Study.
- We use technology a lot and try to make the language we use as accessible as possible where we can.

- One of our biggest challenges is that finances can be stressful and people tend to stay away when they have to resolve something. That can put us in a situation where options fall off the table. We hope to get our staff out to be where you can meet them and demystify our office.
- I hope you can help us find ways to let students feel more comfortable with us and see us as approachable, understanding, and empathetic.

Chair Jones: One primary concern is uncertainty and fear if people will be able to continue to take out financial aid and afford to go here. Doing workshops or outreach with panels to address these concerns in a productive way would be beneficial.

- **Response:** We are fully staffed now and would love to be involved in panels like that.

Senator Laychak: There was an article from the Washington Post discussing the current federal administration drafting an order to dismantle the Department of Education. Do you know how that might affect your office and the students you serve?

- **Response:** I will be in DC next week with top aid administrators from around the country. I don't want to jump too much into politics. There are things happening now that are not normal in how they are done. Typically congress would need to act to defund, dismantle, or appropriate funds to a new department.
 - In terms of higher education, they might move the federal student aid portfolio under the Department of Treasury. I have some hope because the direct student loan program is a federal fund, so if they cut that program and there wasn't revenue from that they would have to make it up in some other way.

- There is risk to programs like the Supplemental Opportunity Education Grant, which is typically for the lowest category within the Pell Grant structure. That is a cost share program with 75% of funding coming from the federal government.
- Similarly the Federal Work Study program. We are committed to our students and that is a key program for many students, if something changed we would figure out a way to continue supporting students.

Senator York: I found your last answer very reassuring. I have heard a lot of anxiety about the new administration and uncertainty with funding. It would be helpful if possible for you to continue discussing this with workshops and put information on your website as well.

Senator Demeo: Many students last year had challenges with the revised FAFSA. Do you have a plan in place if challenges continue this year?

- **Response:** We do not anticipate problems this year. Last year was a nightmare and everyone was getting information at the same time we were. This was coming from two laws which required the Department of Education to work with the IRS and to rework the FAFSA to reduce the number of questions significantly. They scrapped everything which was a problem, but now any further changes would be minor.
 - If something happened and the FAFSA became unavailable to determine financial aid eligibility, we are collecting a supplemental application form this year to get estimated aid offers out much earlier.

Senator Esbin: I have heard students having difficulty with reaching out to staff in the SFS office. Your current model is drop in hours rather than assigned counselors. Is there a possibility to have a dedicated counselor that students could stick with for more complicated cases?

- **Response:** When we merged into the new model, we broke apart a model that you described. That can work great when the dedicated counselor still works there and isn't sick or out of office or on vacation. We aren't expecting new counselors to answer questions they don't know, we don't guess at anything because there are more experienced people who can always help. Sometimes there are people who you might be more comfortable with because you've worked with them in the past and we will often try to keep that continuity when possible.

Treasurer Sorensen: In the past, we talked about break housing and the outdated financial aid capacity for each student. Could you provide more insight on that?

- **Response:** We can't include break housing or other costs when a student is not actively enrolled in our Costs of Attendance. There was a passage of Emergency Aid being excluded from the Cost of Attendance which allows us to help more students. We try to be creative without thumbing our nose to any regulations. I'm not aware of a student who needs assistance for break housing that we weren't able to provide support for.

Treasurer Sorensen: Have you received any direction from General Counsel, Administration, or Board of Trustees regarding moving forward with your office's work and Executive Orders?

- **Response:** Last Tuesday was an exciting day because there was a notice that came out saying federal loans and grants would go on pause at 5pm. We drew down all the funds we could to last as long as possible, we actually advance funds and reimburse ourselves but wanted to be in the best position to keep continuity. We have experienced government shutdowns and to the extent we can extend ourselves we will provide aid as much as possible.

President Teferra: You present at New Student Orientation, but that week can be stressful. Do you reach out in any freshman seminars or later on to interact with first year students?

- **Response:** That is the only time that is facilitated, but I am open to that. The tricky part is that we don't draw a crowd, we have done events but people don't come and I want to invest our time in the most useful way. If there is a specific area where you feel like we would be helpful, we would love that opportunity. We used to have liaisons for each identity center and college and we are working on building that back out.

President Teferra: My suggestion would be to attend freshman seminars in September or October where you can reach more students. Regarding student employment, how is information about that spread other than word of mouth?

- **Response:** That is a good question which I will take back to the team.

Chair Arnone: You mentioned that FAFSA has changed a lot. When I chose to come here, I knew what my financial aid was in March but this year I didn't know until July. There was a large difference which I had to scramble to make it work. Do you have any advice?

- **Response:** We were definitely delayed transferring to the new algorithm that the federal aid program was using. The commitment we make is, to the extent financial circumstances stay the same from year to year, that the aid offer should remain the same. Sometimes people don't understand the questions that they are filling out and we need to work with them to understand why there needs to be an adjustment.

Chair Arnone: I know this wasn't the intention, from my perspective I made a decision and then the cost went way up when I was coming back.

- **Response:** We are using 2-year old tax information with the FAFSA and that can often catch people off guard if situations change. This would be a good thing to include in our educational seminars.

Chair Jones: Can you expand on what the options are for students if their circumstances change?

- **Response:** One example is a job loss which means the information is outdated. Sometimes we need to wait a while to estimate new circumstances like severance, unemployment, or a new job. We need to estimate aid as best we can to see if an increase is possible.

Old Business

Bill Recognizing Fermentation Club, sponsored by Chair Halvorson

- Hoping to create a space for baking and cooking using yeast.

BILL: Passed unanimously, Chair Halvorson abstained

Bill Recognizing UVM Poetry Club, sponsored by Chair Halvorson

- The goal is to give students an opportunity to come together once a week and improve their writing or share their poetry with constructive criticism if they want. We would like to host a show of some sort as well.

Chair Jones: Thank you for coming in! Have you talked to any departments or have any in mind to collaborate?

- **Response:** We have not yet, but would definitely be interested.

BILL: Passed unanimously, Chair Halvorson abstained

Bill Recognizing UVM Doctors Without Borders, sponsored by Senator Demeo

BILL: **Passed** unanimously, Senator Demeo abstained

Bill Recognizing UVM Roller Skating & Blading Club, sponsored by Senator Demeo

BILL: **Passed** unanimously, Senator Demeo abstained

Emergency Business

Swearing in of New Senators

- Senator Woodward sworn in by Speaker Connors.

New Business

Bill Recognizing Archery Club

Senatorial Forum

Chair Espejo – Discussing SVAM Planning

- April is Sexual Violence Awareness Month, part of my duty as Chair of CODIE is to plan this with Dr. Elliot Ruggles.
- SVAM is a month of learning and recognition, building skills throughout the month through education of ourselves and our peers.
- When I was applying to college I saw a lot about UVM being bad and why people were transferring. Very few people now remember the incidents that happened in the Spring of

2021. We are trying to highlight and educate students about the history of activism that happened on our campus.

- We will have a Tunnel Takeover, with a display in the Davis Tunnel showing archival posters and pictures.
- An alumni panel with one current sophomore-senior, one fresh alumni (2-5 years), a somewhat seasoned alumni (5-10 years), and a more seasoned alumni (10-15 years).
- We want to have a healing workshop with an alumni.
- Earth Week can partner with SVAM potentially.
- Denim & Donuts with Civic Engagement. Last year there was Painting a Denim Square. This year we would like to write nice messages on Denim Squares to turn into a quilt.
- I want to reach out to you all to form an ad hoc committee. We are looking for liaisons for Campus Rec, PIVOT, LivingWell, digital archives (one person on social media, one person handling digital historical archives), identity centers, and finances.

Senator Esbin: How does the newly elected Senate in April change your planning?

- **Response:** A lot of the planning is happening now, March will just be solidifying things. I don't think elections will affect that.

President Teferra: For context, in past years Senators who are not returning often choose to stay involved with projects.

Chair Modun: It is a hectic and confusing time during elections, but the old Senators can still continue helping.

Vice President Bednarik: Something relating to a tunnel takeover could be highlighting what has come out of the circumstances like student art or expression outside of the historical documentation. You could see if the Fleming Museum is interested in dedicating a space for that.

Senator Oreck: Sexual violence work tends to have two components, awareness and prevention. A lot of this is focused on awareness, are there other projects going on with PIVOT or other things focused on prevention?

- **Response:** What I put on the slides is focusing on awareness projects that we are doing with Dr. Ruggles. We also want to do more outreach with clubs and PIVOT specifically.

President Teferra: Speaking of highlighting work that was a direct result of Spring 2021, PIVOT is a direct result of that. It is a training program which consists of two courses certifying students to run peer workshops on sexual violence prevention.

Senator Tracy: Could you give us a two sentence blurb of what happened in Spring 2021?

- **Response:** There were walkouts during classes and protests. Chalk written on the sidewalk saying how UVM doesn't care and is protecting athletes. There are articles online that I would recommend doing more research into.

Treasurer Sorensen: VTDigger and The Cynic have articles about what happened. Basically, there were high profile cases of alleged sexual assault including a basketball player. It became a big deal that was perceived as the school protecting athletes and not believing survivors. There was a list of 10 demands, you could see which demands have been met and have a suggestion box with new demands potentially.

Chair Knopp: Bringing art into this would be a very interesting aspect. How can SGA get involved outside of the ad hoc? Can we volunteer for things like Take Back the Night?

- **Response:** I will put sign-up sheets for tabling and different opportunities in the Teams. We don't directly plan Take Back the Night but it is a great event.

Senator Paquette: Speaker Connors and I are on the Sexual Violence Prevention Council. If you have ideas or questions for us to present at committee meetings, feel free to reach out.

Chair Jones: In past years, HOPE Works was receptive to collaborating with SGA for SVAM planning relating to Take Back the Night.

Chair Modun & Chair Jones – Sharing Week of Kindness Updates

- **Chair Modun:** This is happening next week, so we are excited to share final details.
- **Chair Jones:** Week of Kindness is a week to engage in self care and kindness in the community. It addresses a gap in community building. The past two years it was held in October, but we are trying to give everyone a cheer-up in the middle of February.
- **Chair Modun:** This came together through collaboration with CSAW, PR, and the ad hoc committee.
 - Each day has a theme: belonging, service, natural, self-care, and love. There is tabling every day which is meant to be themed and promoting an event going on later in the day.
- **Chair Jones:** Monday is Belonging Day, we want to encourage engagement with identity groups and promote outreach and learning that comes with being kind.
 - Tuesday is Service Day, promoting altruism and volunteer work with a Blanket Making event where all blankets will be donated to the UVM Children's Hospital.
 - Wednesday is Natural Day, promoting environmental and sustainable practices.
 - Thursday is Self-Care Day, working on setting boundaries and self-care activities.
 - Friday is Valentine's Day and Love Day, we want to promote all types of love including romantic, platonic, familial, and beyond with a Flower Making event.
- **Chair Modun:** The Identity Group Fair on Monday will be promoting all the identity centers and resources on campus. There will be a S'mores and Snowman Competition

outside the Davis Center on Wednesday. For the Self-Care Fair, we will have a claw machine, spinning wheel, pinball machine, popcorn machine, and more.

- **Chair Jones:** We will also have a collaboration with UVM Dining at some of the cafes with a special drink and a themed cup sleeve.
- **Chair Modun:** Someone asked us about Marriage Pact as a collaboration with Week of Kindness. It is not officially related but I believe it is coming out around the same time.
- We have a calendar and official poster with a cute tomato mascot. I will distribute those in the Teams and then be posting them on Instagram.
- **Chair Jones:** Our ad hoc committee members did a great job but we do need more help for tabling specifically so please sign up for everything on the spreadsheet.

Chair Espejo: Are any of the cafes taking requests for the special drink?

- **Response (Chair Modun):** We met with them and gave them suggestions, you could send more but it might not be enough time.

Chair Arnone: Henderson's does staff drinks of the week, I might be able to put in a word.

- **Response (Chair Jones):** They are the only one we haven't been able to reach yet. The four UVM dining cafes

Senator Oreck: We are still trying to get in contact with the Marriage Pact so don't lose hope.

Senator Steele: Emeritus Senator Keppel says she can work the blanket making as well

Executive Reports

Speaker Connors

- PIVOT has a lot of initiatives, including tabling. We are also hosting workshops now as the first round of people.

- I was not at Retreat, but I will give a short presentation now.
 - I made the motion cards last semester, if you have any questions about it please come ask me.
 - We have two forms of legislation: bills which have an actionable step and resolutions which form the opinion of SGA but can be stronger if they do include actionable steps. If you have questions about writing legislation, I can put you in touch with people who have worked on a lot before.
 - Each Senator is allowed three absences, please reach out to me to let me know if you have to miss a meeting or leave early. When you are at meetings or in the Galaxy Space, make sure you are representing yourself and SGA well.
- Thank you everyone who came to Groundhog Day, there was a great turnout.

Vice President Bednarik

- All the presentation materials from Retreat will be in the Teams. Thank you to everyone who came on Saturday.
- Speaker Connors mentioned that showing up is important and I agree. If you know that you can't make something, please let me and others know well in advance.

President Teferra

- Happy Tuesday! Happy Black History Month!
- There has been interest in the Thrift Store Initiative and Spring Move Out Project to reduce waste. Senators Powell and Gottfurcht are working on that.
- Meeting with a student involved in the Planetary Health Initiative to talk about the campus shuttle system.

- Give a quick hi to the incoming Student Trustee, McKenzie Hart. It is exciting to have an undergraduate student in that role now.
- Similar to Senator Esbin's comment about Athletics, a few of us are meeting to see how we can get more engagement and break down barriers with athletes and other students.
- The admin and staff email is going out tomorrow.
- My office hours will be Monday 10:30-12 and Tuesday 5-6pm.
- SGA Mosaic breakfast is this Friday 9-11am. Please come out, it is really important to show up for the communities we represent. BSU Fashion Show is also in a few weeks, February 22nd.

Treasurer Sorensen

- Preparing the budgeting process. All budgets are due by 3pm tomorrow.
- Three weeks from now we will hopefully get budgets back to clubs and start the appeals process to finalize and vote on March 25th.
- The LUVMyClub link is still open to sign up until February 17th.
- Shoutout to Senator Woodward for winning the second runoff in SGA history. If you are a senior or aren't running again, you can join me, President Teferra, and Senator Peterson on the Elections Committee.

Senator Esbin: If I haven't gone to a budget advising session yet, what do I do?

- **Response:** One more last chance budget advising session 12-3pm in the Galaxy Space.

Committee Reports

Public Relations Committee

- We have established roles for each committee member and laid out a calendar.

- We will hold a media day in two weeks for SGA to hold promotions. We are thinking of doing it on February 17th and 18th in the afternoon. This is part of a campaign to increase understanding of our role and impact on SGA.
- We are also sitting down with the Cynic soon so let me know if you are interested in being interviewed.
- Thank you to everyone who served on the Week of Kindness ad hoc committee, make sure to show up for the events and tabling.
- We have a folder in the Teams where you can put photos and videos related to Senate.
- If you want us to post anything, fill out the request form in the Teams.
- Fun Fact of the Week: Bees dance to communicate with each other.

Committee on the Environment

- We've been talking about ideas for Earth Week.
- Meeting with ResLife next week about the drinking fountain project.
- Senator Wheaton is helping with the accessible trails project.
- Senator Forrest is working with AA on a project.
- Senators Gottfurcht and Powell are working with Corey Berman on the thrift store project.
 - We organized the clothes from cage cleanup. We will be doing weekly or bi-weekly popup clothing swaps in the Galaxy Space.

Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

- Yesterday I talked with Dr. Ruggles about SVAM and getting an ad hoc up and running. I will put that in the Teams.
- Senator Theroux and I are meeting with WAGE to plan MARCH! which will be April 1st.

- Senator Petracek had a meeting with a nutritionist here about updating labels in the dining halls for visibility and clarity.
- Senator Osei got approved for a budget going towards Drag Queen Bingo on February 27th and Trivia Night on February 12th.
- Senator Theroux is planning to meet with Aurora Hurd from WAGE to discuss a reproductive rights focus group.
- Specific Food Item at UVM of the Week: Skinny Pancake Breakfast Sammy with extra pesto mayo and pork sausage.

Committee on Legislative and Community Affairs

- Moving forward with our committee-wide initiative to extend ourselves to clubs.
- Senator Laychak is meeting with Emergency Services to get the suicide hotline implemented as a button in the LiveSafe app.
- Senator Reeder is part of a seating ad hoc committee to discuss adding more, accessible, and better seating around campus.
- Community Coalition this Friday at 12 Colchester Ave, 3-4:30pm. Discussing recent political changes affecting Burlington community members and students.

Committee on Student Action and Well-Being

- Senator Steele is continuing getting more holidays included for different religious groups.
- Senator Onorato is working on getting teeth behind the Vector training.
- Excited to introduce Senators Woodward, Marchant, and Brito Del Valle.
- Artist of the Week: COIN.

Club Affairs Committee

- Congratulations Senator Alarafi for working on her first club.

- Busy reaching out to clubs getting them into good standing before budgeting is done.
- We agreed to update the new club process.
- Shoutout to Senators Torres and Demeo for getting clubs approved.
- If you are confused about clubs and our process, reach out.

Senator Demeo: If I want to check whether my club is in good standing, where would I go?

- **Response:** If you sign in on the UVM Clubs homepage, it's the link on the right.

Academic Affairs Committee

- We have been busy planning out what the semester looks like for us.
- Students expressed concern regarding grading policies with classes. It doesn't make sense that they can change the grading scale halfway through the semester. We are working on developing a standard manual.
- We will be conducting a survey in preparation for the course registration waitlist coming out in 2026.
- We are getting money to spread study skills into other colleges through the Study Skills Grant, and advising Jay Dickinson where that money should go and how it can be spent.

Finance Committee

- Budgeting this weekend.

Senatorial Comments/Announcements

Senator Esbin: I had a meeting with Krista Balogh, one of the Associate Athletic Directors, to gauge if we want to have a group SGA outing to a hockey or other athletic event.

Senator Steele: Tomorrow is the day for blanket trimming. Information is in the Teams. Bring your own scissors, there will be snacks.

Treasurer Sorensen: Vice Provost Caloiero is giving SGA \$10,000 to help with our budget shortfall, particularly for expanding access to outdoors for underrepresented groups. I have been talking with people about the best ways to use this funding.

Senator Forrest: This weekend is Balfolk for Contra which runs dances, 6:45 on Saturday at Mann Hall on Trinity.

Chair Halvorson: Student Legal Services is opening applications for internships next year that you get credit for. Due February 28th.

Chair Jones: I was reached out to about serving on a Neurodiversity Panel relating to faculty and courses. If you are comfortable sharing experiences, come talk with me.

Chair Knopp: Sign up for Mosaic Center Breakfast, then go to Community Coalition.

Senator Osei: I want RAs to do bulletin boards with a Black History Month theme. Tell your RA if you are in a dorm.

Adjournment