



20th Meeting of the 2024-2025 Student Government Association Senate
February 18th, 2025 | 7:00 PM | Livak Ballroom

Call to Order

This meeting was called to order by Speaker Kennedy Connors.

Roll Call

Senators York, Osei, Espejo, Garcia, Toomey, and Zubarev not present.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes approved unanimously.

Public Forum

Aimee Alexander – From Civic Engagement, Discussing Executive Orders

- Here to answer any questions I can relating to the event last week on Separation of Powers.
- I am new to the office but I was a high school history and government policy teacher for the last 23 years.
- Since last week there has been new news that you might be interested in.

Chair Jones: Thank you for coming in. Could you discuss what the process looks like when an executive order is put forward and blocked by a court?

- **Response:** Executive orders aren't laws, they are just a statement on what the president would like to happen. Courts can put an injunction and then the president can appeal that up to the Supreme Court. Once they issue a decision, the question is if the administration will follow it and they have said that they would.

Senator Esbin: Would you be able to provide a summary of what was discussed for those who weren't able to watch the video yet?

- **Response:** Professor Alex Garlick from the Political Science department came and talked about executive orders first, going over what they are. It is not a law, but rather the president saying something they would like to happen. Each president often overturns many orders from previous presidents.
 - Then Professor Pablo Bose from the Geography department talked about the history of immigration and what that looks like at this moment. I thought one of the most interesting things was a slide showing immigration patterns over time, we have had moments when it stopped or increased.
 - I highly recommend going if they have another event because students and faculty could ask questions of UVM leadership about what is going on and what they are doing about it.
 - We also had video messages from Representative Becca Balint and Senator Peter Welch.

Senator Oreck: I was able to go and found it super interesting. A lot of the answers from professors, President Prelock, and others were that they didn't know and that was concerning to me. I'm wondering how concerning it is for the Office of Civic Engagement and professors in this field that you don't know so much?

- **Response:** On Friday, the Civil Rights Department issued a “Dear Colleague” letter to universities about affirmative action in admissions and clarifying this administration’s interpretation of things like affinity centers or separate graduations. Today, I was on a call with the Council on Education and they said a “Dear Colleague” letter is not law and every university has these programs so it would take a long time to come after every program and remove funding.
 - There was a lawsuit filed against that letter. There are processes for handling these things, mostly slowly through the legal system but they are working to respond.

Treasurer Sorensen: For people who don’t know, could you give a brief overview of what your responsibilities are and how that interfaces with executive orders?

- **Response:** There are three pillars:
 - Election Education: we had a campaign getting students ready to vote before the election in the fall. We had great voter turnout on campus.
 - Community Service: getting students involved in community organizations and through clubs and organizations.
 - Social Justice Education: we have historically run the Social Justice Grounding Retreat. This isn’t happening this year because of timing, but there will be a book club partnering with the Office of Inclusive Excellence.
 - Our office is right downstairs across from SGA and we would love to talk with you or answer questions.

Treasurer Sorensen: You mentioned processes regarding federal funding, if the administration would withhold funding from UVM even illegally, is there a course of action?

- **Response:** I have no answer for that because it is wild. I expect that the University would have a plan in that case. There was a question asked at the event about how SGA would be affected specifically, you would be ok because you are funded through student fees.

Senator Talhouk: Can you expand on how ICE interacts with private and public spaces and how UVM being a public institution affects that?

- **Response:** I don't know if I can because I am not an expert. Professor Bose said there is a public image of ICE which is meant to be scary, but we haven't seen that much action in Vermont. I would recommend emailing him more specific questions.

Senator Laychak: The day after this event, I met with a small group of trans students. They felt that the University would too easily fold to these orders, so I'm wondering what length the administration will go to to protect students?

- **Response:** The answer we got last week was that until someone comes here and tells us to stop or change things, we will have business as usual. I don't know the contingency plan if that does happen and it would be a good question for General Counsel.

Senator Lee: Being a part of the Office of Civic Engagement, what do you expect from SGA or other leaders to help settle the nerves and uncertainty of students?

- **Response:** One of the best things you can do is to be in community with each other. That's why I liked the Q&A section because people could answer questions on the spot instead of guessing. SGA is in a great position to get students together and talk about these things trying to find commonality. Our office has been looking at community service specifically, trying to spotlight community service organizations. It feels like we can give back and find a sense of belonging when people are being targeted and isolated.

Senator Grace: I had a question about the “Dear Colleague” letter. It sounds like you are saying UVM will be ignoring those recommendations, is that the general opinion of other colleges?

- **Response:** That was the advice from the Council of Education, to sit and wait for what happens. The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education filed a lawsuit against that letter.
- **Lina Balcom:** That was the recommendation, that doesn’t mean that is what our administration is going to do. We will hear that and consider how to respond.

Chair Jones: What, if any, communications your office is having with Wendy Koenig and the Vermont Attorney General regarding pushing back on initiatives affecting students?

- **Response:** We are a non-partisan office, so we can only provide information. Wendy Koenig can provide better insight into that. For students who might not be from Vermont, you can contact the congressional delegation from your home state as well.

Old Business

Bill Recognizing Archery Club

Senator Alarafi: Motion to table.

- Motion **passed**.

Bill Recognizing UVM Society of Ecological Restoration, sponsored by Senator Paquette

- Focused on how college students can help to restore ecosystems that have been damaged and design infrastructure to make us more sustainable.

BILL: Passed unanimously, Senator Paquette abstained

Emergency Business

Resolution Calling for UVM Administration to Develop Protections for Students, Faculty, & Staff

Chair Jones: Motion to table.

- Motion **passed**.

Bill Allocating Funds to Snowboard Team, sponsored by Chair Rice

- Snowboard Team is requesting \$43,531.73 to fund their Nationals event, we are allocating \$10,329.22.

BILL: **Passed** unanimously, Chair Rice abstained

New Business

Bill Amending Article IV, Section E, Part VI of the SGA Constitution

Bill Recognizing Women's Flag Football Club

Senatorial Forum

President Teferra & Senator Laychak – Reviewing SGA Strategic Plan

- **President Teferra:** We are here to talk about the Strategic Plan. Through some conversations last year Emeritus President Olivia Eisenberg developed a survey similar to the Campus Climate Survey to monitor issues and see where students are at. This is meant to hold administration and also ourselves accountable.
- **Senator Laychak:** We want to make some improvements to the 2023 plan, it had one survey which was very open ended. This got a lot of information out of students but

didn't have a plan for how to use it. We want to take a more empirical approach that asks quantitative questions alongside the more open-ended questions. What are the issues, why are they happening, and to whom?

- **President Teferra:** Data collection is supposed to happen every other year in the fall: one statistical sample survey and one open-ended student questionnaire with categorical and quantitative questions. It is fully anonymous. Then in the spring, analyzing that data, doing focus groups, and compiling the report.
- **Senator Laychak:** The statistical sample survey would be made up of between 30 and 1,217 students, around 10% of the population. It could be random or stratified across majors, college, year, etc. We want to include incentives to fill out the survey to get the numbers up.
 - The second questionnaire is more open-ended questions and will go out to the whole student body.
- **President Teferra:** Then we would have focus groups with clubs, organizations, and other student groups to find why they think an issue is occurring and how different groups are impacted. Last time there wasn't much of a plan for monitoring issues and how they develop, so we are working on that. We want this to inform SGA objectives going forward.
- **Senator Laychak:** Finally, everything would get compiled into one document which gets sent out every two years.
- **President Teferra:** Originally there was an ad hoc committee headed by the SGA President to set out a timeline, reach out to admin, create questions, interpret the data, and help write the final Strategic Plan. Since this will be taking place in the next session,

think about joining this committee if you plan to run again. I will have more conversations about this with whoever my successor.

Chair Modun: Thank you for talking about this. This is a multi-semester/year project, how do you ensure that it continues? Also, why do we need to do another survey with more data when we already came in from different groups with many ideas? Why do we need this additional data to set goals?

- **Response (President Teferra):** This happened last year but it is not formally in the Constitution, right now it is informally being passed down in the transition reports but if we find value in it then it could be added as a responsibility of the president.
- **Response (Senator Laychak):** This is useful for monitoring trends that aren't monitored for students. I can't think of any survey that is asking how often students are staying home because of mental health for example. We are all elected for certain reasons, but it is good to get this feedback and perspective regularly to hear about broader issues that we might not know about individually.

Chair Halvorson: I want to commend Senator Laychak for taking such a big role in this. Why are you sticking with the bi-annual approach? Data might be better to get every year because of turnover.

- **Response (President Teferra):** The thought process is that having the survey go out and interpreting the data can take a long time, so by the time an actionable plan is produced that eats up much of the year and it could be inefficient to start that process over again.

Senator Marchant: Given the recent presidential election and lots of uncertainty with executive orders, how can the Strategic Plan provide flexibility with quick changes in policy? It takes time

to find trends and analyze data, but things can change quickly so are there steps being taken to provide space to pivot with that?

- **Response (President Teferra):** Executive orders or other things may affect this plan. As much as we want this project to represent the leading goals of SGA, it is a more high level plan and our day-to-day tasks will continue. More sudden changes can be dealt with immediately through other actions.

Chair Knopp: Thank you for bringing this to Senate and keeping the standard of continuity. I want to highlight that this should be led by Senators and the problems we want to solve.

Reaching out to all of our committees about what they want to hear more about would be good.

- **Response (President Teferra):** That is part of what the ad hoc does. I can't remember how it was formed, but the intention should be to have a diverse committee which addresses different sections of campus.

Senator Wheaton: I think this is a great idea. You said this is used to guide recommendations to administration, is there a plan to present this to the student body?

- **Response (Senator Laychak):** I think at the least we would send out an email with the results. The ad hoc would talk more about it.

Chair Jones: I believe there was an email sent out last year

- **Response (President Teferra):** As this plan goes on, discussing different ways such as Instagram would be beneficial

Senator Wheaton: I would recommend a webpage with a goal tracker.

- **Response (President Teferra):** Someone mentioned that UMass has a project tracker on their website similar to that.

Senator Esbin: How does this relate to data governance? With the changing climate inherent to college campuses, how do we know that there will be follow through and consistency?

- **Response (President Teferra):** In terms of demographics, the survey has all optional questions but there are demographic questions to monitor trends based on different groups. Emeritus President Eisenberg talked with the Office of Institutional Research about this already.
- **Response (Senator Laychak):** We would follow any policy the school has relating to data governance.

Chair Jones: As someone on SGA for multiple years, it is easy to get stuck in our own ideas of what students want or need without engaging directly with our constituents. It is good to put our energy towards what students want and this is a way to do that. If we see a consistent concern and then a decline, that could be a good indication that we are doing a good job.

Senator Tracy: If there could be pie charts and graphs on a website to show data that would be great. I think the name Strategic Plan is vague and kind of nefarious, maybe a different name to describe it would be good.

- **Response (President Teferra):** Thank you for the feedback.

Vice President Bednarik: Emeritus President Eisenberg compiled the data into a very user friendly format which would be followed similarly.

Chair Modun: What goals were set by the last plan and what progress has been made toward those?

- **Response (Senator Laychak):** There weren't really concrete goals set, so that would be something to improve on.

Treasurer Sorensen – LUVMyClub

- LUVMyClub is put on every year by SGA, UVM Foundation and the Student Alumni Association. Every club can sign up and send emails to donors and alumni asking for donations.
- Last year we raised over \$100,000 with 107 clubs signed up, this year there are 172 so hopefully we can break the donation record.
- For the first time ever, SGA is also participating to raise money for ourselves. If we raise more money through this, that can fund our projects and free up more money for clubs.
- My ask of you all is to advertise this on Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and anywhere else. I will post templates in the Teams that you can use.
- Also every donation has a 5% processing fee so tell people about that.

Vice President Bednarik: Since this is separate from the Student Activity Fee funding we get, do you anticipate any criticism from clubs?

- **Response:** We will not be eligible for any prizes because we distribute the prize money, otherwise I don't see an issue with us participating.

Senator Esbin: I love the template design, who created it?

Chair Modun: Senator Steele did.

Senator Renallo: Will this be used to fund clubs as well or just the Project Fund?

- **Response:** I set an ambitious \$10,000 goal because that is what we put in the Project Fund every year. The idea would be that the amount raised would be the Project Fund for the next year.

Chair Halvorson: If anybody here gets pushback, you can tell them that we are not taking money from any club, this is just alumni choosing to give to SGA specifically.

Senator Theroux – Amendment to the Constitution

- Chair Espejo was supposed to discuss the bill introduced this week amending the Constitution. We are changing the name of our Committee as a result of recent executive orders. You can reach out to Chair Espejo with more comments or questions.

Executive Reports

Speaker Connors

- Shout out Senator Theroux for introducing the first bill amending the Constitution this year. Judicial will have more bills coming up.
 - We have meetings at 8:30pm on Sundays so expect a second email after that.

Vice President Bednarik

- I recommend that everyone watches the video of last Tuesday's event relating to our Public Forum guest.
- I am working on SGA merch, which has student art on it this year. You will still get it if you don't run again.
- Office tours are next week, this is mandatory for new Senators and open for anyone else as well. A signup link will be in the Teams. This is a great way to get to know the SGA Galaxy Space and the people who work there.
- Tomorrow, President Teferra and I have a Governance Leaders Breakfast at 8am. If you have anything you want us to discuss there, let us know.
- Working with ResLife to inform suite residents that there will be an RA living with you. It can be a big surprise and awkward.

- Reach out to me if you are interested in running for Vice President.
- Take pictures with me at the BSU Fashion Show!

President Teferra

- Happy Tuesday!
- Thank you for the feedback on Senatorial Forum about the Strategic Plan.
- I met with admin and union members who wrote a letter about the executive orders. I sent a summary of the meeting in the Teams on Friday night. It can give you a better understanding of what they are doing and what is legally allowed because General Counsel was there.
- We invited Wendy Koenig to come in to Public Forum to speak on this as well.
- Working on a survey to send out to all of you about your experience on SGA so far.
- Hoping to see everyone at the BSU Fashion Show!

Treasurer Sorensen

- Once a link goes out to donate for LUVMyClub you can track the progress there.
- Working on budgeting.
- Putting together elections advertising materials, and will present about that soon.
- If you are interested in being Treasurer next year, come talk to me.

Committee Reports

Public Relations Committee

- Chair Garcia and I have been working to schedule a candidate forum for City Council elections. It is Thursday from 7-8:30 in the UVM Recital Hall on Redstone Campus.

- Week of Kindness was a huge success, thank you to everyone who helped out.
Specifically thank you to Chair Jones and the rest of the Week of Kindness Committee, office staff, and Lina Balcom. We have another meeting to debrief and discuss next steps.
- If you have things you want posted to Instagram the form is now in the Teams.
- Fun Fact of the Week: Sloths can hold their breath longer than dolphins, for 40 minutes.

Senator Oreck: Shoutout from the Week of Kindness Committee to Chair Modun and Chair Jones. They put a lot of time and effort into something very beautiful for the community.

Committee on the Environment

- We had the first clothing swap last week, it was very successful and got rid of more than half of the clothes that were left over. We are putting out boxes in every dorm and the Davis Center to collect clothes. Working to find a permanent place to store them.
- Finalized projects for Earth Week.
- Senators Forrest and Gottfurcht are working on the Curriculum Project.
- Senators Gottfurcht and Powell are working on the long-term Thrift Store Project.
- Senator Wheaton is working on the Accessible Trails Project and composting problem.
- I submitted a design and planning proposal about the drinking fountains. When we get word back I will submit a SCF proposal.

Vice President Bednarik: You mentioned a box in Davis for off-campus students, have you considered Waterman as a closer to town location?

- **Response:** Good idea, thank you.

Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

- Senator Theroux reading for Chair Espejo:
- There are still spots open on the SVAM ad hoc, please sign up.

- Shoutout Senator Osei for Trivia at Brennan's, don't forget about Drag Bingo coming up.
- Something That Is Not In of the Week: Snow.

Committee on Legislative and Community Affairs

- Senator Talhouk reading for Chair Garcia:
- Working on projects and getting good progress done.
- Fun Fact of the Week: Elevator shafts were installed in buildings before elevators were even invented.

Committee on Student Action and Well-Being

- Thank you to everyone who was involved in Week of Kindness. Very happy with the success and reach across campus. We're looking to send out a survey about what people liked and didn't like to get feedback.
- Senator Steele is meeting with Thomas Borchert about religious calendars.
- Senator Brito Del Valle is working with LivingWell to implement a Health and Wellbeing Newsletter.

Club Affairs Committee

- Working on getting clubs back in good standing and getting new clubs recognized. There is a deadline of February 28th and clubs will be inactivated with the opportunity to come back after changeover in April so we don't have to focus on that at the end of session.
- We tabled a bill twice, if they haven't completed the required tasks then we will table the bill to confirm a club. This allows us to recognize a club as early as possible but not before it is ready.

Academic Affairs Committee

- Within the next week, we're meeting with representatives of the study skills program. We are working on the student-facing side and how they are reaching students that qualify.
- Also developing a survey for students who have problems registering for courses that they need. If you have any ideas for that, we would appreciate it.
- President Teferra and I are planning for National Library Week, meeting with Fletcher Free Library. This will be in early April.
- Reminders to take care of yourselves as we get close to midterms. Use the tutoring center and LivingWell, as well as any other resources.

Finance Committee

- Working on budgeting.

Senatorial Comments/Announcements

Senator Lee: Tri-Delta has Delta Desserts on Saturday at 2-6pm. Tickets are \$5 for all you can eat desserts.

Senator Onorato: Reminder that next Tuesday 4-5pm is part two of media day.

Senator Steele: The last two regular season home games for Women's Hockey are this weekend. I believe Saturday is Senior Night for the team and Friday night is Senior Night for the Ice Cats.

Senator Forrest: There is another Contra dance this Saturday at 6:45pm in Mann Hall on Trinity.

Chair Knopp: UVM's second annual Hackathon is happening all day 8:30am-9pm.

Adjournment