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Senate to Vote on Allowing UGS Council Voting Privileges, Reveal Resolution Encouraging Administrators to Solicit Student Input in Budget Decisions

(AUSTIN) – On Thursday, April 15, during its biweekly General Assembly meeting, the Senate of College Councils will vote on two pieces of legislation – 1) S.B. 602: Recognizing Undergraduate Studies Council as a Full Voting Member of the Senate of College Councils; and 2) S.R. 618: In Support of the Joint Master Degree Program in Information Studies and Latin American Studies. Both pieces of legislation were proposed to the College Councils during the General Assembly meeting on April 1.

Originally brought before the General Assembly earlier this semester but withdrawn shortly after by Undergraduate Studies Council President Dorrel Willis, S.B. 602 would induct the Undergraduate Studies Council as “official members of the Senate of College Councils” and grant the Council “full voting privileges equivalent to all other councils represented in the Senate of College Councils.”

“The School of Undergraduate Studies is now a significant undergraduate population on our campus and it is important that this group of students have a voice,” Senate President Chelsea Adler said. “Making the Undergraduate Studies Council a voting member of the Senate Assembly is the best way to insure that the students of UGS are represented.”

Although currently a non-voting member of the Senate, the Undergraduate Studies Council has to meet five requirements for “full Senate inclusion.” These requirements are:

1. Strive to represent all UGS students through active communication and engage student population by hosting events, forums, etc.
2. Continued support from the School of Undergraduate Studies
3. Dedicated membership of at least 15 students, not including officers
4. Quality attendance at Senate General Assembly Meetings (within reason) and quality attendance at Financial Directors’, Presidents’ and Senate Representatives’ meetings
5. Representation from all UGS areas such as BDP, Longhorn Scholars, FIGs, etc.

S.B. 602 is authored by Willis and Senate Vice President Drew Finke and is sponsored by the Undergraduate Studies Council and the Senate Executive Board.

Along with S.B. 602, the General Assembly will consider S.R. 618 on Thursday night. Authored by several members from the School of Information, the Resolution “supports the approval and implementation of the Joint Master Degree Program in Information Studies and Latin American Studies” and “encourages the development of more student-initiated college-bridging programs.”

“We feel that such a joint degree will be a natural fit as both programs are ranked very high nationally, and because the Benson Latin American Collection here on campus, the largest Latin American-themed research library in the United States, provides wonderful support to both fields,” Beau Steenken, Director for the Student Association for the School of Information (SASI), said.

The idea for a joint degree program between the School of Information and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) is a direct result of a student-initiated effort and the Resolution seeks to “open doors and invite students to participate fully in both fields and reap the benefits each program has to offer.”

The final piece of legislation that will be up for discussion during Thursday evening’s General Assembly meeting is S.R. 1001: In Support of Student Involvement and Transparency in Reductions to Academic Opportunities.

Authored by Senate Policy Director David Liu, Academic Enrichment Committee Co-Chair Emily Van Duyn and Curriculum Committee Co-Chair Kelly Zhang, the Resolution “strongly encourages University administrators, when making decisions that reduce the quality and quantity of student academic opportunities, to actively solicit student input at the departmental and college levels” and “requests that University administrators provide a publicly accessible explanation to students whenever cuts are made to academic programs that limit the academic opportunities available to them.”

The Resolution cites the cutting of the Vietnamese language program, and the process surrounding said decision, as an example of the lack of transparency and student involvement in some of the recent budget decisions.

Furthermore, the Resolution states that “students, as the ones primarily affected by reductions in academic opportunities, ought to have the right to voice their opinions in what reductions are being made and to understand which reductions are being made and for what reasons.” S.R. references the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University and the Commission of 125 as sources that reinforce the idea that student involvement is necessary to the University.

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