

Senate back in session for Fall 2016 semester

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COPY EDITOR

Illinois Tech's Student Government Association (SGA), the organization which is charged with representing the general opinion of the student body to top university administration and engaging in projects to improve the student experience, witnessed a short-term record turnout during its Executive Board elections this Spring. Those elections, which resulted in the appointment of Hamze Leo Sukkar to the position of student body President, set an optimistic tone for the level of continuing engagement between SGA and the students it represents, and discussions were held by the organization's new Executive Board over summer to establish how best to proceed with changes that could increase SGA's effectiveness in its activities.

Those discussions within the Board resulted in a formal proposal of amendments to SGA's constitution, slated for introduction at the first Senate meeting of the semester, and the important business for that meeting did not end there. Sung Min Choi Hong, the new Chair of Finance Board, was present at the Wednesday night meeting to put forward his new Finance Board Advisor nominees, and San Dinh, Sukkar's nominee for Judicial Board's Chief Justice, was scheduled to speak and be voted into that position, replacing Gina Qualter (who was concurrently one of the nominees for a Finance Board Advisor position). While some of the decisions from that meeting could largely be considered formalities (San Dinh's nomination was originally intended to be confirmed last semester, and each Finance Board nominee had already been vetted by a selection committee composed of a subset of the SGA Senate), all the topics considered were of great importance to the inner structure of SGA, which in turn reflects on the organization's ability to efficiently carry out its work.

The crucial nature of the debates and votes scheduled for Wednesday's meeting did not prevent SGA from suffering in the face of an annual challenge: keeping engagement high among a body of Senators whose terms were coming to an end in less than one month. At the 9:15 start of the meeting, only ten of the group's twenty-four Senators (who represent their academic colleges or specially-designated groups like the Graduate Student Association, Greek Council, and Residence Hall Association) were present. To make matters worse, after a full summer away from SGA business, there was nobody present who could present a definitive answer about which of those twenty-four Senate seats were

considered active, and whether the number of Senators present constituted the quorum necessary to carry out votes. In fact, largely unstructured debate over quorum took up more time than any other topic during the meeting, weaving its way in and out of the agenda between planned items. Eventually, after in-person and online consultation with former Executive Vice President Mete Morris, former VP of Communications Subarno Saha, and outgoing Chief Justice Gina Qualter, it was determined that quorum consisted of half the Senate, but that since one Senator was on an exchange program, two had resigned, and one had graduated, the ten individuals present at the meeting's start were just enough to constitute a constitutionally permissible voting group.

Asked to remark on his motivations for seeking appointment to the position of Chief Justice, nominee San Dinh admitted that he was not much for public speaking, and chose to talk mostly about his history of membership in SGA (including his time as a Judicial Board justice) and his commitment to the organization's future. The speech was very brief, and after being asked to leave the room for discussion and a vote of the Senators present, he was quickly brought back in after the Senate agreed to ask further, more specific questions of him. Questioned about where he thought Judicial Board held weaknesses and how those weaknesses could be addressed, San Dinh pointed to the often hectic way that hearings had been arranged in previous semesters, frequently causing low total turnout among Justices at any particular hearing, or even frequent rescheduling before a single hearing could be held. When asked about whether he felt prepared to tackle SGA constitutional issues should they arise (a relevant topic of inquiry, since Judicial Board's business deals largely with student organization appeals of Finance Board decisions), the candidate said he had only a passing familiarity with the organization's constitution at the moment, but would be committed to delving deeply into any policies that were brought into question.

A vote was held on the topic of San Dinh's confirmation, but results were postponed for the majority of the meeting while quorum information was being determined. At the meeting's end, it was revealed that his appointment had been approved, officially relieving Gina Qualter of her duties to Judicial Board.

Next, the Senate heard briefly from Sung Min Choi Hong, presenting all but one of his Finance Board nominees. Each candidate was given the chance to speak individually, revealing diverse backgrounds and levels of experience with SGA systems and finance in

general. One, notably, was a graduate student in Finance at Stuart School of Business, hoping to join Finance Board in part as an extension of their education. The one major parallel between those who were present, though, was their willingness to admit that they had been largely unfamiliar with Finance Board rules and processes prior to their nominations, a point that prompted remarks from Sung Min Choi Hong about the intensive training the group had undergone in the preceding weeks to acquaint them with the workings of Finance Board.

While the present Senators largely seemed confident in the present crop after a brief Q&A session, they were stymied by a portion of SGA's constitution which requires Finance Board advisors to be voted in as a slate, meaning that they would need to vote the absent nominee through as well if they wished to carry out the vote that day. Because a motion had been made and seconded to bring the question to a vote prior to anyone remembering the slate rule, Executive Vice President Sonia Kamdar eventually chose to restore order by reminding the Senate that the same vote could be brought forward at a future meeting. While this would be disadvantageous for Finance Board (which currently lacks the minimum required membership to vote on its own internal matters), it would allow the Senate to consider and discuss the final candidate at its meeting on the 7th of September. Finally, the slate was handed a "no" vote for the time being, though it was broadly understood that the Finance Board Advisor nominees in attendance were considered qualified for the position.

The final substantial discussion of the night came when covering the SGA Executive Board's proposed constitutional amendments, which had been emailed to Senators two days prior for consideration. The proposed changes included the elimination of the position of Parliamentarian, which had not been filled the previous year, and its replacement with a general Secretary by the President. The Vice President would also assume some of the Parliamentarian's prior duties under the new constitutional language. Additionally, the VP of Academic Affairs had duties added to their position regarding attendance at meetings of the University Faculty Council (initially misnamed "Undergraduate Faculty Committee" in the version of the amendment that was emailed to Senators) and Undergraduate Studies Committee, attendance that had been established in the past but never codified.

Aside from simply bringing the organization's laws in line with its traditional activities, though, some of the proposed

changes dealt with more significant matters. Two new sections, 3.3.1 and 8.4, laid out plans for an "Events and Publicity Committee", headed by an Executive-level position appointed by the SGA President, meant to be focused entirely on planning and executing SGA-hosted events such as Town Halls and the President and Provost Forum. In presenting the concept, Sukkar argued that expecting each existing SGA committee to individually curate events related to their scope had led to confusion over planning in the past, and that the strategy of appointing a single Events Chair to manage such actions last year was not enough to do the job properly. After questions, clarifications, and open discussions among Senators, it was agreed upon that the words "and Publicity" would be struck from the proposed committee's name in order to avoid a conflict of expectations with the organization's Communications Committee, which carries out SGA's promotional campaigns and external relations work. More importantly, the Senators reached a consensus requiring the position of Events Chair to undergo a confirmation vote after nomination from the President, rather than the direct appointment presented in the amendment's original language.

Though the pre-meeting email sent to Senators on Monday implied that a vote would take place on the constitutional amendments presented that Wednesday, such an action would have violated Article 11 of the constitution, which requires amendments to be reviewed at one regular Senate meeting and voted on at the next. Given the time elapsed during the night's discussions, though, it's unlikely that the tweaks agreed upon by the Senate would have been made in time for a vote that night anyways, so those changes will be considered once again on the 7th. With the clock ticking toward 11:30, Senate adjourned without discussing a final agenda item: a proposal to introduce a two-tier student organization system that had been formulated and discussed last semester and over the Summer in the group's Slack team.

SGA Senate meetings happen every other Wednesday at 9:15 p.m. in Stuart Building 112, and are open to all students of the Illinois Institute of Technology, VanderCook College of Music, and Shimer College. Its committee meeting happen on alternate Wednesdays at the same time, in MTCC's colored conference rooms. SGA's members are reachable on Slack at iitsga.slack.com.

Why you should not run for student government senator in the upcoming SGA election

San Dinh
TECHNEWS WRITER

Nominations for Student Government Senate are open, and your Facebook notifications are flooded with invitations from either the Student Government Association (SGA), who tell you to nominate yourself because they don't know who you really are but at the same time have faith in your power to make a difference within one year, or from that one friend who is running and is asking for your endorsement.

As a member of the senate election committee this fall, I wanted to write an inspiring and motivational article that as soon as you finish reading, you would believe that

you want to do this "SGA thing" even though you are taking 18 credit hours, have a part time job, and regularly procrastinate on your homework. However, I soon realized that I am not that talented, so instead, I made it easier for myself by telling you why you should NOT run for SGA's upcoming election.

First of all, the pain might not outweigh the prizes. Senators are not the "cool" guys like the Greek people, nor are they the outgoing ones like people on Union Board. They are the ones that the student body blames for not working hard enough to improve their lives at Illinois Tech, and they are also the ones that some staff members feel annoyed by because they try too hard to deliver the requests from the students. At the end of your

senatorial term, you walk away with only a line in your resume saying you were trusted by the students, and if you actually invest at least 5 hours per week doing SGA work, you might have a 2 minute pitch to convince the recruiters in your job interview that you have leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Secondly, you are only here at Illinois Tech shortly, so why try making it a better place? Similarly, you don't necessarily have to make the world a better place, since you only temporarily live here. Additionally, you don't need to be very successful or happy because you can only live for a few more decades. After all, the good news is "everything is temporary", but the bad news is "everything is temporary".

Last, but not least, if elected, you will most likely give up your senatorial duties half way through. There is no consequence at all for not fulfilling your SGA work, or not showing up at the mandatory meeting. Worst-case scenario, you are bored and resign, or you are removed from your seat, but since you only work half-heartedly, that doesn't bother you at all. In the past 2 years, the first Senate meetings of the Fall semester barely had quorum. I assume you are just like most of the past senators, irresponsible and perfunctory, but I really want to see you prove me wrong.

If I failed to convince you to not run for Senate, submit your nominations to sga@iit.edu or <http://tinyurl.com/iitfall2016election>

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