

SGA discusses potential Athletics Senator, Stuart Building renovations, more at latest meeting

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Though much of the day-to-day business of Illinois Tech's Student Government Association (SGA) Senate involves working on self-formulated projects and deciding the status of prospective student organizations, its reach is much broader than the group's most visible facets. Senators are put in a special position of trust by both their constituents and their college, standing as representatives of student opinion in conversations with administrators. Additionally, senators set the tone for the organization's actions during each academic year, and have the power to bring about changes which drastically impact how student advocacy and activity take place on campus. During SGA's most recent Senate meeting on Wednesday, October 19, that side of the organization became the focus of conversation more than once, marking the gathering as the most wide-ranging such meeting of the semester so far.

At the beginning of this most recent gathering, two newly-formulated student orgs presented their pitches for acceptance as officially-recognized bodies on campus. The first, Chainless Challenge, was actually a group that had existed prior, but had never needed money from the Student Activities Fund in past years. Because of this, they had never sought official status as a student organization. The group was formed exclusively to compete with other universities at an annual event focused on the design and construction of a chainless bicycle, and the presenter from the organization brought last year's prototype to show to the Senate. While some senators expressed concerns about Chainless Challenge's financial planning and expectations (the presenter was unable to provide many logistical details

when questioned, but expressed eagerness to learn the ropes of student org financing and travel), the concept of the organization was unique and had a history of success. The group was approved by Senate after practically zero private discussion, by a margin of 15 yes votes, 2 no votes, and 1 abstention.

The second organization on the schedule, Handball, was a proposed intermural sport for Illinois Tech. Though intermural teams largely function under the funding of Keating's sports administration once established, they are still considered student organizations and must pass a Senate vote to become active. The presenter for the group interested in establishing a team explained some of the sport's origins, and pointed out that a basketball court could be used in place of a regulation handball court for play. After limited private discussion, the sport was passed by a margin of 16 yes votes and 2 no votes among the present senators.

Moving on to updates from SGA's Executive Board, student body president Leo Sukkar spoke about a recent meeting that he and multiple senators had held with staff members from the Office of Technology Services (OTS), setting priorities for improvements over the next year. The top three focus projects established at that meeting were improvement of campus Wi-Fi, changes to the recently-established Hawki mobile app (including added functionality for directly making reports to Illinois Tech Public Safety), and potential transformations of the often-aligned MyIIT website. He also spoke of this year's Students Speak survey, which went live on October 24 and will measure student opinion of the performance of 12 different departments on campus.

Student Life Committee Chair Qianran He explained that her committee was

prioritizing projects as well, with a focus this year on revitalizing the Student Discount Card program (which offers savings at many local businesses, mostly restaurants), establishing an SGA presence on MyIIT, improving options in on-campus vending machines, and exploring the possibility of reducing automobile speed through campus on State Street. That list of four 4 points came from a brainstormed list of 12 different action items, ranked in importance by members of her committee.

A procedural vote was then held to open up nominations for 5 vacant Senate seats: 2 in the College of Science, 2 in the College of Architecture, and 1 in the School of Applied Technology. SGA will be publicizing those seats in the coming weeks, and nominees will be elected by a simple majority vote of the Senate once the nomination process has ended.

The final portion of the meeting was reserved for an open floor, in which SGA members and others in the room could bring forward topics to discuss. 2 official topics were on the agenda, submitted by senators prior to the meeting. Nathan Jones, a senator from the College of Science, had spoken recently with Dean R. Russel Betts about plans being formulated for the renovation of Stuart Building. Those plans were based on donations being courted from corporate leadership of Cleversafe, the Illinois Tech-founded data storage company that was acquired by IBM last year for more than a billion dollars, and were specifically earmarked for the benefit of the Department of Computer Science. Jones said that upcoming renovations were supposed to create an environment in Stuart Building that would be "like a mini-Rettaliata" (referring to the recently-renovated engineering center on campus), and that Dean Betts wished to seek input from students about what to focus on

when designing the renovated space. Senators discussed whether work should extend to the building's basement or upper floor (something that hasn't happened in the Rettaliata Engineering Center or Pritzker Science Center), the possibility of creating outdoor study spaces, and implementing a crosswalk connecting Footlik to Stuart Building, which has traditionally been the most isolated academic structure at Illinois Tech.

After discussion about the future of Stuart Building had concluded, senators heard a proposal to add a new seat to their ranks, representing student athletes. The debate over the issue became the most extended topic of the night, with no clear consensus formed. Many pointed to the existence of Senate seats for the Residence Hall Association, Greek Council, and other special interests as justifying the creation of an athletics senator, but there was plenty of contention over whether the challenges faced by athletes were unique enough to merit specific representation. Some current senators were concerned about over-representing athletes who were already represented through Senators from their college and their housing situation, while others argued that the presence of a large number of student athletes in the sitting Senate already ensured their concerns were heard. The issue will be voted on at the next Senate meeting on November 2, and senators were encouraged by President Sukkar and Vice President Sonia Kamdar to seek opinions from their constituents to inform their votes.

SGA's Senate meets once every two weeks at 9:15 p.m. in Stuart Building room 113, and its committees meet on alternating weeks in the colored rooms of the MTCC.

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