Student Government Association extends reach into local volunteering

Ethan Castro COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEMBER

You would be forgiven for believing that the Illinois Tech Student Government Association (SGA) only concerns itself with projects centered on this campus and its student organizations. In fact, it is true that the recently revived coverage of SGA in TechNews thus far has only covered SGA developments that are immediately relevant to Illinois Tech students, such as creating a universal course syllabus library or the expanding role of Judicial Board in student organization affairs. However, the Communications Committee, under Vice President Jelani Canty, is looking to take SGA into the next level of involvement—

volunteering with the local community.

As Canty himself summarizes, "this semester SGA's Communications Committee will be conducting a community service outreach project. This project is centered on the Valentine Boys & Girls Club." Located at 3400 S. Emerald Ave., this local branch of the larger Boys & Girls Club organization is just a short ten-minute bus ride away from campus. Canty himself has already been making weekly trips to the organization to volunteer his time helping local elementary school children. With members ranging between 5 and 18 years of age, the Valentine Boys & Girls Club offers a multitude of programs, including an art club, poetry club, homework help, money management, and even Mandarin Chinese of "positively influencing the lives of today's

opportunity for increasing Illinois Tech involvement in the surrounding community through a partnership with this organization.

Just as there is a perceived lack of communication between SGA and the greater Illinois Tech student body that the Communications Committee is looking to address, there is also the broader issue of increasing Illinois Tech presence in the immediate surrounding communities. Thus, Canty believes the best way of dealing with these communications gaps is through the existing opportunities provided by organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club. He believes that many Illinois Tech students can find easy resonance with the club's goal language lessons. Thus, Canty sees a prime youth." Volunteer opportunities already exist

in scattered pockets around campus, especially with the connections offered by the Office of Campus Life, like the annual Big Event. It is only logical that SGA, as one of the largest and most encompassing groups on campus, takes up its own volunteering initiatives.

Those who are interested in forming a connection with the Boys & Girls Club of Chicago are highly encouraged to reach out directly to SGA's Vice President of Communications, Jelani Canty, at jcanty@ hawk.iit.edu.

SGA begins the new year with a new Events Chair, new office, more

Soren Spicknall COPY EDITOR

Two days after the start of the new semester, the Senate of Illinois Tech's Student Government Association (SGA) gathered in Stuart Building for their first meeting of 2017. With a month and a half gone since the body's most recent prior gathering, there was plenty of business to attend to during the allotted time. The organization worked through its usual gamut of necessary business, hearing approval requests from prospective student organizations and reporting on project progress within each of its committees, but Senators and Executive Board members also discussed a number of new business items, some of which stands to have as much an impact on the student body as its committees' various projects.

The meeting began as most Senate meetings do, with presentations from student groups that had submitted paperwork to become officially recognized on-campus organizations under the Office of Campus Life (OCL). The first such group to present was the proposed Polish Student Society, a social organization based on Polish heritage and interest in Polish culture. The group claimed 15 current members, more than the 10 required for student organization status, but wasn't able to elaborate on any specific structure already established within those members when prompted. The presenters from the Society projected a semester budget of 1,500 dollars, intending to use those funds to host a Polish cultural festival, food-related events, and other highly visible events. In addition, they expressed intent to attend some events off campus at a Polish cultural center in the city. However, their plans were somewhat light on details, and that combined with worries over their perceived lack of structure to result in a rejection by the Senate by a margin of seven in favor of approval, twelve against, and one abstaining. Senators largely agreed that the Polish Student Society's concept had merit, and that they were welcome to present again at another meeting, but that they were not organized enough yet to thrive as a student organization and have access to the university's Student Activities Fund.

By contrast, the next potential organization to present was quite polished. Students putting together a chapter of Upsilon Pi Epsilon, an honor society for computer science majors, spoke for just a few seconds under the maximum allowed time of five minutes, expanding on slides that described a full executive board structure, elaborated on the group's relationship with the computer science department, and presented a number of concrete event concepts for existing members and those new to Illinois Tech. The organization representatives, who had been working with faculty member Matthew Bauer over the last semester to begin shaping their proposal, came across as well-rehearsed and ambitious, with plans to use Upsilon Pi Epsilon to advise their academic department, provide resources for the group's members, and work in concert with Illinois Tech's chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the professional organization for new expectations for academic advisers. The room to get the ball rolling on strategies for

came time for the student Senate to discuss the group's application privately, a motion was sustained to skip debate altogether and move straight to voting, with 22 in favor, 0 against, and 1 abstaining.

new student organization presentations had finished, the meeting moved on to its next section: new business. To begin, SGA President Hamze "Leo" Sukkar brought forward the Executive Board's chosen candidate for the open position of Events Chair, an executive-level position that was created in the Fall semester through an amendment to the SGA constitution (it had existed informally for a year prior, but was not codified). The candidate, Adeena Ahmed, had been actively attending meetings in the past as a volunteer, including the smaller bi-weekly gatherings of SGA's Communications Committee. When asked about challenges facing SGA in its past execution of events, Ahmed spoke with energy about the organization's failure to dedicate itself to significant advance planning, setting out a goal of four weeks prior commitment and two weeks prior advertising for future activities. She also implored SGA members to attend the body's own events, something that was also claimed as a significant past failing. On a broader scale, Ahmed asserted that SGA "can be very vague about what it wishes to accomplish," and that she hoped to work to clarify the organization's actions and battle student apathy toward participation in traditional structures of leadership on campus. Following her answers to audience questions, the present senators moved to skip debate (as they had with Upsilon Pi Epsilon) and held a vote whose results indicated 22 in favor of her nomination, 0 against, and 1 abstaining, well above the two-thirds threshold needed to fill the open Events Chair position.

Next on the agenda, each member of the Executive Board (with the exception of the newly-inaugurated Ahmed, Executive Vice President Sonia Kamdar, and Judicial Board Chief Justice San Dinh) presented a brief report on their most recent activities within SGA. Sukkar announced that the organization's office had officially moved to MTCC 109, a former conference room next to the One Stop near the Commons, expressing hope that the location would be more visible than their previous office within a space shared with the OCL, Office of Student Affairs, Union Board, and TechNews. On the subject of visibility, he also stated that two new banners had been designed for display at SGA functions, one of which was specifically intended for use at each semester's President and Provost Forum.

After Sukkar's updates, Academic Affairs VP Akash Raina spoke about an upcoming effort organized by his committee, in which senators will be introducing themselves in Introduction to the Profession (ITP) courses and making themselves visible as faces of SGA. He also provided news on a few of his committee's other projects, stating that an effort to ensure syllabi were provided for every possible class was moving forward, establishing that a campus-wide curriculum amendment from the previous semester had been sent to Dr. Joseph Orgel to present at the University Faculty Council, and asking Senators to begin providing input for an upcoming push to set workers in computing-related fields. When it latter project is open to unstructured feedback, the spring's upcoming SGA Executive Board

and those who have encountered difficulty with advising or who have ideas about how it takes places can contact Raina directly to provide that information.

Communications Committee VP Jelani Canty spoke about his time volunteering at the nearest Boys & Girls Club charity, part of a focus on service within his committee that is intended to extend to all of SGA. He also discussed a final push to update information on the SGA website, which still contains some out-of-date information and currently suffers from a limited level of access within SGA, an issue that is being worked through with the Office of Technology Services (OTS). Finally, Canty proposed a concept for collaboration with businesses along the #31 bus line, a trial route launched last year that bisects campus on its way through the Bridgeport and Bronzeville neighborhoods. He admitted that he hadn't yet discussed such plans with his committee, but wanted to encourage students to use the #31 bus somehow so that ridership numbers would be high enough to warrant the CTA making it permanent when the trial ends this Spring.

In a brief report, Student Life VP Qianran He mentioned that the newly-formed Technology Advisory Board, which works with OTS to forward projects of student interest, had begun to see the fruits of its labor. OTS is in the process of formulating an "Athletics" tab in MyIIT, she explained, which will eventually contain information about past and future games and other events from Illinois Tech's sports teams, including scores, schedules, and other news. More information is expected to be forthcoming in the near future.

The final Executive Board member to give their report to the Senate was Sung Min Choi Hong, the student body's Finance Board Chair. Rather than a traditional report, however, he presented three new candidates for open Finance Board advising positions: Vishnav Ashok, Shruti Khetan, and Muneeb Yawari. Choi Hong explained that the field had been narrowed down from an array of applicants that was originally much larger, and that he had full personal confidence in each nominee. Each candidate was then asked about their motivations and qualifications for the position. Ashok spoke of his experience managing finances for the Residence Hall Association (RHA) and his belief that finance was a topic of utmost importance to student life at the university; Khetan pointed to internships in budgeting and resource allocation, and stated she felt becoming a Finance Board adviser was "a great way to be more involved at Illinois Tech"; Yawari's stated background was similar, with experience managing startup budgets and summer work at a finance firm, and he stated similarly that filling one of the open positions was "a good way to give back to the school, since I haven't been as active as I'd like to be." The three nominees were voted on as a slate (as required by SGA's governing documents), and all three passed with 20 votes in favor, 2 against, and 0 abstaining.

With all the structured business of the night done, it was time for Open Floor, the final segment of each Senate meeting during which any person may bring forward announcements or topics for discussion. Sukkar once again returned to the front of the

elections, which resulted in some of the most lively discussion of the meeting. Last year's Executive Board elections were the most effective of any in recent years, with nearly twice as many votes cast as in the previous year, but the current Executive Board hopes to spur an even greater number of students to vote this year. Sukkar asked senators and others present to come up with creative ways to get the word out and highlight the importance of SGA's elections, and much of the responses to his question came in the form of input over how to improve the debates held last year in Center Court. A number of alternate locations were discussed, as well as improvements to audio and the format of the event itself. There was no consensus on the perfect debate format, but those present agreed that balance had to be found between the visibility of the setting and its ability to host an event of that nature. Beyond debates, it was mentioned that publicly highlighting the importance of SGA's work and putting a focus on its successes throughout the coming semester could help passively spur Illinois Tech's students to take a more active role in choosing those who represent them to the university's administration at the highest

Before the meeting was set to close, one more item was brought forward. Food Advisory Board, a student input body which had traditionally been overseen by SGA's Student Life committee and included representatives from Illinois Tech Dining, the RHA, OCL, and Residence & Greek Life (RGL), had only met sporadically over the past year following the departure of former chair Ricky Stevenson, who reduced student leadership responsibilities after accepting a professional opportunity in his field. The SGA senator representing RHA at the time, Jermiron "Jay" Morris, was supposed to take over the group, but his death early in 2016 led to a period of uncertainty until John Munoz, then a senator serving on the Student Life Committee, put together a few meetings of the board prior to the academic year's end. In the Fall 2016 semester, however, Munoz departed his Senate seat and Food Advisory Board only met a single time, and both SGA and RHA sought a more stable arrangement. At the end of the meeting, RHA presented the concept of an amendment to the SGA constitution which would permanently place chairpersonship of Food Advisory Board within duties of the SGA Senator representing RHA, an arrangement that would ideally designate specific responsibility, keep the function of the Board accountable to two different student advocacy organizations, and resolve occasional backand-forth about whose auspices the Board falls under. RHA will present official wording of such an amendment at the next Senate meeting, and at that wording will be voted on during the following such meeting. It is possible, though, that Food Advisory Board will start up once again in the meantime, providing a direct forum for students interested in improving oncampus dining. SGA's Senate meets in its entirety on

every other Wednesday night at 9:15 p.m. in Stuart Building room 113, and its individual committees meeting on the alternating Wednesdays in the MTCC colored rooms.