

April 25, 2018

Press Release Statement

Dear SIUC Community,

I am truly honored by and thank my colleagues on Graduate and Professional Student Council for entrusting me with GPSC's presidency. I look forward to serving the council, our graduate and professional students, and SIUC in what I aim to be a transformational year: a year of direct and aggressive investment developing, expanding, and improving academic opportunity, substantive and effective support of graduate and professional students, and excellence in our professional development.

I am proud to also announce the elections of Dianah McGreehan as our Vice-President of Administrative Affairs, Luran Schaefer as our Vice-President of Graduate School Affairs, and Jordan Maddox, Derrick McDowell, Emilia Russo, and Rachel Steiger as GPSC representatives to SIUC's Graduate Council.

For those interested, please find attached a copy of my prepared speech to our council.

Warm regards,



Clay Michael Awsumb
Graduate and Professional Student Council, President-elect

Two years ago: I stood before this council, just as I am tonight, and made my case in a bid for a seat in Graduate Council. I remember that moment vividly.

It was over there in the student services building. I was nervous as hell. Hands shaky; my voice probably shakier. With notes I had scribbled on a piece of paper, I looked out, best as I could, to the room of faces: leaders among our graduate and professional students.

I finished my remarks, much to my own relief, and returned to my seat. The votes were collected, out to the hall went the election commissioner, and then returning after not too long. The winners were announced: I lost.

Now, I actually don't look back on that night because I lost. Despite losing, in the following year's council, while continuing as the representative from sociology, I was invited to serve on the executive board, advising and guiding GPSC's efforts: our strategies, priorities, and service to this university and its graduate and professional students.

Ultimately, this led to me taking the lead on a tense issue, the GPSC investigation into alleged misconduct of the then USG president. Undergraduate students called for and successfully petitioned GPSC to consider the constitutionality for some of USG's actions and investigate USG's executive for abuses of power.

The committee didn't start with much, only a rough set of guidelines on process. The exact procedures, standard of proof, and criteria for recommendations were left up to the committee: Dianah and myself. We got it figured out; convened hearings, received testimony and supporting evidence, completed the analysis, developed recommendations, and submitted the report.

What struck me the most in that process: it was the hearings held with the undergraduate students. In those hearings, I witnessed first hand and face-to-face the significance, the value, the impact leadership within student government can and does have on the experiences of students: the good and the bad.

One year ago and in the last election, in an unopposed campaign I was honored by our council to serve as the Vice-President of Graduate School Affairs this year. This of course came with quite the swank office, wonderful name-tag, and even a position in Graduate Council. It's been a responsibility, obligation, and opportunity I enjoy very much.

In the course of serving as your Vice-President, in what I think can be reasonably described as a wild year: I witnessed again, in this case within the administration of our university, the significance, value, and impact leadership has on students: again, the good and the bad.

Much of what the executive officers' jobs require, my current position included, goes unseen: various meetings across campus administration, reaching out to and meeting with representatives in our council, and keeping abreast with the constantly changing terrain of academic and administrative affairs.

Some has been more public: chairing the diversity and inclusivity policy committee, my reports on the graduate school and service in graduate council, and of course, my baby: the graduate and professional student survey.

Others have been less public: scheduling meetings to lay the groundwork for programing in the next year, building relationships with administrators to ensure those programs coordination and success, and the development of a workflow for my office, like keeping records of and documenting the discussions in meetings or producing memos for stakeholders.

So going back to that night two years ago, to tell you why I remember that night: it's because, granted, probably said then a little rushed, anxious, and mumbled, I articulated what has been and continues to be my guiding philosophy within this body and on behalf of graduate and professional students:

that graduate and professional students require above all from this university the academic opportunities and fair treatment, necessary continuing support and mentorship, and effective professional development while in our studies here, so as to matriculate as highly competent, accomplished, and competitive graduates of our respective disciplines and professions.

And that purpose, that philosophy has remained at the core, guiding my actions and efforts as a member of GPSC and SIU generally. As your president, I guarantee you it will continue to be.

Next year needs to be a transformational year. A year of building. For GPSC, the students we represent, and the university generally.

In effect: leadership, our leadership included, must take direct and aggressive action to invest in and build this institution's capacity: to develop, expand and improve those core areas of academic opportunity, substantive and effective support of graduate and professional students, and reach excellence in our professional development.

This will require our council's continued and unyielding advocacy. Certainly. However, it will also require keen and capable leadership, particularly in the abilities of defining goals, managing the organization, building and leveraging our relationships across the campus and community, and proven skills at project management.

My tenure in this council has demonstrated these abilities.

And trust me, I've had some practice: whether you want to start as far back as when I was 12, cutting lawns for a realtor, billing home owners living in different states or my teenage years operating a music venue and recording studio out of a basement.

But, more seriously, I have a history of experience, demonstrated leadership in project management, and goal-driven results. When I was 21 I operated my own small business as a photographer in Chicago. In my mid-twenties I ran operations in a department of a small business, managing deliveries, repairs, warranties, invoicing, and accounts receivable. I also founded and chaired a little known political action committee for the 13th congressional district of Illinois and did work coordinating organizations, networks, and collaborations. I have completed 3 degrees, currently working on my PhD in sociology. And, of course, I have the work I have done in service to this council.

In short: I have the experience, I have the abilities, and I have the knowledge to manage the affairs of this council and see to it that the needs and desires of it and our constituency are met.

Now in close: I've had the pleasure of being a part of three great years of efforts in GPSC. I participated and contributed to three administrations of GPSC as we've developed our standing, developed our strength, and developed appreciation and recognition for our organization's rightful place in the affairs of graduate and professional education, the university's governance as a whole.

In the next year, as your president, I will continue this development with tireless execution for the obligation of the office, for and on behalf of all graduate and professional students.

I will bring my understanding of the university, my care and consideration for my colleagues, my skills and knowledge of project management, and my resolve to improve graduate and professional programs here at SIU to bear as I have for these three years: with my focus fixed on the opportunities, the treatment and support, and professional development that graduate and professional student not only require, but deserve.

Truly, thank you all and I hope you will honor me with your vote. I'll take questions for those who have them with my remaining time.