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Motion for a Joint Resolution on Admissions and Protest

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Approved by the Senate: 3/6/2018

Not Approved by the President: 5/3/2018

Motion for a Joint-Resolution on Admissions and Protest

Submitted by: Michelle Haberland

2/28/2018

Motion:

Whereas we, the faculty senates at Georgia Southern University, support student engagement in the social and political issues of our times, including the right to engage in peaceful protest, we resolve that such protest action will not negatively affect any future admission decisions made for students involved in such actions. We support the right of students to protest peacefully and encourage civic engagement in our future Georgia Southern Eagles.

Rationale:

Colleges and universities across the country are reassuring students that exercising their First Amendment right to peaceably assemble and petition our government for a redress of their grievances will not affect their college applications. Talented and accomplished high school students are worried that receiving disciplinary action will negatively impact their college applications. Students at Savannah Arts Academy, one of the best public high schools in the state, have expressed these very concerns. As a university dedicated to providing a “student-centered culture of engagement designed to prepare students for lifelong service as scholars, leaders, and responsible stewards of their communities,” we need to let those prospective Eagles know that we’ve got their backs. (See Georgia Southern University’s mission statement at <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/mission/>)

- MIT: <http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/policies-principles-and-protests>
- Emory: <https://emorywheel.com/emory-applicants-can-protest-gun-control-without-worry/>
- AJC on Emory & Agnes Scott:
<https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/metro-atlanta-campus-will-not-withhold-admission-students-gun-protests/MMysdQKXj5cPE9NoKQBpPI/>
- North Carolina State:
<https://admissions.ncsu.edu/2018/02/26/a-message-from-the-admissions-office/>

- University of South Carolina:
<https://twitter.com/UofSCAdmissions/status/967907983026982913>
- The Washington Examiner reports that 117 universities and colleges across the country have issued similar statements.
<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/college-admissions-suspension-for-walkout-gun-protests-wont-hurt-admissions-chances/article/2650116>

Respectfully submitted, Michelle Haberland, Senator, Georgia Southern-Statesboro Faculty Senate
Kevin Jennings, Senator, Georgia Southern-Armstrong Faculty Senate

Response:

5/3/2018 from Dr. Hebert:

Following receipt of the Faculty Senate's recommendation at the March 6, 2018 Faculty Senate meeting, I must respectfully decline to support the Motion on a Joint Resolution on Admissions and Protest, as Georgia Southern University already has a process in place that is followed whenever we receive information that an applicant has pending disciplinary or academic misconduct charges, or has been disciplined, suspended, or expelled for conduct code violations from a high school.

Minutes April 4, 2018

President's Report: Jaimie Hebert

Of the motions that came forward at the last meeting, he had Approved all but one. He did not Approve the motion regarding students exercising their right to protest because he felt it was unnecessary for two reasons: One, we have a process in place which allows us, on a case-by-case basis, to examine a student's disciplinary record and make a subjective decision here on our campus. He believed this was more equitable than having a blanket statement that may lead to difficulties in interpretation down the road. Two, we are prohibited from denying access to the University when a person is exercising constitutional rights. He was grateful to the Senate for bringing this up, however, because it caused the University to consider what this process is all about, that it is about protecting the security and safety of our campus, and that we should never utilize that process to invoke our political views.

Minutes, March 6, 2018

a. Motion on a Joint Resolution on Admissions and Protest

Michelle Haberland (CAH) noted that, nationwide, many high school student “march for their lives” walkouts were planned [to seek laws to help prevent school shootings]. There were school districts across the country that had issued policies that students will receive disciplinary action if they leave the classroom or leave the campus. So high school students want reassurances from colleges and universities that these kinds of penalties that they might suffer in high school and that will be noted on their transcripts as disciplinary infractions will not negatively affect their college applications. She noted that many universities were giving such reassurances and getting good press for doing so, and she named several in Georgia, but none are public universities. She noted she and an Armstrong colleague were working to make this a joint resolution. She also noted that many public universities in the south outside of Georgia had come forward with statements of support for the students, and read a long list. She added that we were talking about supporting students’ First Amendment rights.

The motion was moved and seconded.

Marc Cyr (CAH) noted that the motion was generally written so if somebody was concerned that it only applied to leftist liberal gun policy, it did not. It would apply equally to a student who wanted to attend a pro-gun rally. He said maybe we don’t need the resolution, “but all you have to do is to have one person in any high school who is in charge of putting together disciplinary reports that go out there, who gets a black mark, who doesn’t. All you have to do is have one person enter the Admissions office who decides that they don’t like what was done by that student and they are looking at the disciplinary report. This motion . . . lets people know that Georgia Southern won’t tolerate that.” He was very much in favor of the motion.

Moderator Pirro asked if President Hebert wanted to speak since if it passed the motion would land in his lap to approve or disapprove. President Hebert did not speak.

Marshall Ransom (COSM) said that students who are minors don’t have the right to leave class under compulsory education laws. This was a question for the transcript people in the Admissions Office: If it comes across as a disciplinary item, does it come across in detail showing what the students were protesting, or does it merely say

something along the lines of absent without leave, or left class without permission, which are standard things that administrators discipline in high schools. He was not against what the students were doing, was excited to see some energy among these students, but they can't leave school without permission. As Cyr had noted, this was a general motion, and it could open us up to ignoring every disciplinary remark on a transcript.

Haberland agreed that minor students sometimes have their civil liberties restricted, but thought that was beside the point. The big issue was perception. She had called our Admissions office and asked if disciplinary matters were actually considered, and her sense from the answer was it's nowhere on the application; it just asks applicants if they have been guilty of a felony or something like that. That may lead some to think that we don't need a motion like this since obviously Georgia Southern doesn't penalize students who come in with disciplinary things on their record, but this is about the perception by students of us having their backs.

Finbarr Curtis (CAH) said what we'd be doing is reassuring students so that they don't self-censor. It was about student perceptions. Also, the motion was actually consistent with what we were already doing. He supported the motion.

President Hebert invited Maura Copeland (Office of Legal Affairs) to comment: "I will actually say that students will call our Admissions Office and ask this question as I've spent today responding to one such student. So we do have long-standing policies in place. It really isn't anything new for students to engage in behavior that gets dealt with in a high school level often in ways that we may not agree with . . . and so we have had a policy for quite a long time about what happens when we do somehow discover information that a student has been disciplined. . . . when we do have information and there's a whole process for how that information is treated, depending on what the level of the punishment was at the high school level. Our Admissions Office is able then to either clear the applicant or pass it up for further review. . . . so it's really a case-by-case decision at that point as to whether the behavior at the high school level affects admission and if you heard me speak on any issue from a legal standpoint, case-by-case is always the safest way to treat those."

Cyr thought the motion dealt with that case-by-case principle: "You can have a disciplinary report for any number of reasons. This sets up that if in this case, it has to do with exercising a constitutional right to peaceful protest, then we won't count that against them."

The motion was Approved.