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SGSU Update: A Look at What's to Come

Matt Parks, Staff Reporter

It's a hectic time for the Student Government of Seattle University (SGSU), which is currently preparing for the next elections while working to improve campus life.

Several projects aimed at serving the Seattle U community are in the works. The main goals include sustainability on campus, better access to public transportation, more accessible dining hours and improvements in mental health awareness.

First-year Representative at SGSU Sophia Cofinas, a public affairs major, shared details about Mental Health Spirit Week, one of SGSU's biggest mental health advocacy efforts, which is expected to take place in May.

The week will feature various events related to mental health. For instance, a Seattle-based speaker from the National Alliance on Mental Illness will be delivering a speech. SGSU also is planning themed meals from the dining hall, a collaboration with University Recreation (UREC) and a panel conversation on the effects of fitness and social media.

"This is a way to show students that we as an institution truly care about their mental wellness, and to make the subject of mental health as approachable, normalized and inclusive as possible," Cofinas wrote to The Spectator. "This is a huge event [and] I am thrilled to be leading [it] and hope that it will become an SU tradition."

Cofinas added that there are other projects in the works, including a newsletter subscription, a KXSU segment, improved counseling services and a possible peer-to-peer counseling system. These projects are currently in preliminary phases and updates will be released as progress is made.

SGSU's Vice President for University Affairs, Sarah Trapizona, a fourth-year political science major, is spearheading another mental health project that aims to alleviate anxiety and stress caused by classes.

"[I'm] trying to implement a mental health pass," Trapizona said. "For classes, you could turn [the pass] into professors and not get penalized for attendance, but it would not count for midterms, finals, projects or homework. It would be for a day that you don't show up to class and do not have to worry about any consequences."

Trapizona has spoken with several students about this project, noting that many professors have already implemented something similar. She has worked with Disabilities Services as well as administrators Natasha Martin, vice president for diversity and inclusion, and Provost Shane Martin about how to get all professors on board.



Headshot of representative Frederick von Brandenfels

Adeline Ong

“My goal is to get it added to syllabuses and have all professors accept it and speak about it so students are aware of it when it’s syllabus week,” Trapizona said.

First-year Representative Isabelle Alamilla, a first year business major, is working with Cofinas on mental health projects. In addition, she is looking to enhance the dining experience at Seattle U.

“I am working on building a relationship with Chartwells [the company who manages on-campus dining] so we can adjust the food/operations to improve the student dining hall,” Alamilla wrote to The Spectator. “I think that students would be very excited and interested in Chartwell’s project because it affects most underclassmen. The dining experience is something that can make college more enjoyable. Hopefully we can take the feedback from students to implement change.”

Transportation accessibility is another SGSU goal. SGSU tests the various transportation programs at Seattle U to see how long a process takes or if it’s accessible.

Looking specifically at ORCA, the Seattle area’s transportation card, SGSU is looking to improve the current system. In order to get an ORCA card, students have to go to locations that sell ORCA cards or Transportation and Parking Services in 1313 Columbia Building (CLMB) room 002. Seattle U currently subsidizes two kinds of ORCA cards by 50%. The ORCA Lift card is cheaper than the non-Lift card, and it is available to people whose household income is below 200% of the federal poverty level.

At-Large Representative at SGSU, Frederick Von Brandenfels, a first-year business management major, said that the current ORCA card process is odd and gave insight into what he’s been doing to better student access.

“It’s about finding a way that the school can either better advertise their programs for ORCA cards [or] subsidize more of them so we can have access to them,” Von Brandenfels said. “So part A is awareness and part B is the access to ORCA cards—having a general understanding of how much that system would cost and how that might be reflected on the students. Then we’re working in [coordination] with other people at Public Safety, who share information about how students commute to school based on surveys they conduct every other winter quarter.”

SGSU and Public Safety are working with the City of Seattle to find out the cost of a subsidized program, especially with Seattle U’s student population in mind. The possibility of having ORCA cards linked to student’s dining dollars is also being explored.

Student engagement is a core part of current SGSU representatives’ jobs. Von Brandenfels urges students to speak to him or others in SGSU about what support they need or something within the Seattle U community that should be addressed.

“If you really want to see big change, it needs to come from all of you,” Von Brandenfels said. “There’s always another voice out there that we haven’t listened to yet. There’s always another avenue that we haven’t thought of. There’s always another path to the way that we want to live life. At the end of the day, we are your representatives. If we forget what we actually are elected to do, then there are consequences for us as well as for you because the whole school does not win when we don’t do our jobs.”

While projects are underway, SGSU emphasized that it’s not too late to get involved. Attending the weekly Wednesday meetings from 6-8 p.m. is highly encouraged. SGSU can be contacted through their Instagram page and their member pages. SGSU will be unveiling new projects later this year, and their elections are coming up.