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SGA attempts to close disconnect with student body

Hannah Echols @echols_hannah Updated Mar 16, 2016



Casey Sykes

Johnelle Simpson, a senior risk management and insurance and political science major from Donalsonville, Georgia, addresses the UC Georgia, on Tuesday, October 6, 2015. Simpson is currently serving as the President of the UGA Student Government Association. (Fcsykes95@uga.edu) Johnelle Simpson: simpsoj@uga.edu

At the University of Georgia, the Student Government Association is responsible for representing the student body.

To accurately represent the student population, senatorial seats are broken down by college and student life seats senators. One senator represents every 1,000 students, according to the SGA Constitution. For highly populated colleges like the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, there are almost a dozen senators.

Katherine Twomey, one of 11 Franklin College representatives, said despite the large number of students she represents, she believes she is doing her best to reach out to the general student population.

"This year I think we have done a really good job of not just being internal and really conversing with the student body," she said.

But some students do not feel represented. Students Emma Epps and Allison Williams did not even know what SGA was.

"If you are our representative, it's literally your job to make sure you are keeping up pace with what we want," Epps said.

Jacob Fucetola, president pro-tempore of the SGA Senate, is aware some students like Epps and Williams do not know who he is.

"Of course there's going to be students who don't know who their college representative is," he said. "You can go out right now and ask who the governor is and plenty of people won't know who he is. I don't think that takes away from the good we have done."

Debbie Reid knows about SGA but was still unsure what the organization was doing on her behalf.

"I feel it's a little disconnected, like there isn't enough word out there about SGA," she said. "I don't know what their ideas are or what they are doing."



Photo by Casey Sykes

Emily Clark is a freshman and a member of SGA's Freshman Forum. Executive members inform the members of the Freshman Forum about what is going on within SGA so they can relay information to the student body.

Clark, a psychology and Spanish major, does not know who her college life senator is, but in her opinion, that does not undermine the work SGA does.

"Changes are happening, people just might not know it's coming from SGA," she said. Students have relayed concerns to her in the past, and she was able to help them by then contacting the executive board.

Family and consumer science major Jarrett Martin said SGA can represent students without having direct contact with them.

"I know a lot of my professors really well, and they know I am the representative for my college," he said. "So at least if I'm not reaching the 1,100 students in the college, I am reaching people who can refer students to me to try to address something."

Among many students, it was a common consensus that it is the student's job, not the senator's, to reach out.

"I think it should be the student's obligation if they want something done," said junior Aaron Niemann.

Vice President Houston Gaines disagreed.

"It is largely up to the senators to make their presence known to constituents," he said.

Gaines thinks senators could do a better job.

"Frankly, I think it's one of our biggest weaknesses right now," he said.

However, senators are actively trying to become more in touch with students. This year SGA altered a rule changing the mandatory numbers of hours senators must table to meet with students.



Photo by Timothy DeWitt

Fucetola said it is fairly common that a student will come up to the table and present an idea or ask what they are doing about a specific issue on campus.

“This initiative helps us stay in touch with our constituents and not just represent our own interests,” he said.

SGA also has an online suggestion option called the BarkBox where students can submit concerns, questions and ideas. Dylan Jolley, SGA director of communications, said the BarkBox is set to email him if anyone submits a concern. He then forwards it to the person that can best answer it. However, Jolley said, the BarkBox has not been used very often. He estimated he has received between 10 and 12 submissions since he began his role in May.

Recently, SGA has been partnering with other on-campus organizations, such as with the End It Movement at UGA on Feb. 25. They also hosted the “Did You Know Doughnuts” forum which provided helpful hints about the resources UGA has to offer.

Twomey said initiatives like this indicate how SGA is getting involved in other areas of campus.

“SGA has become not just a tool for the individual student, but for organizations as well,” she said.



SGA prepares for Senate, executive elections



End It Movement, other campus groups team up to shine a light on slavery