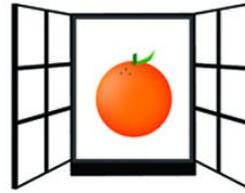


THE GENERAL BODY

A united front of student organizations at
Syracuse University



THE General Body
A united front of student organizations
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Locked in to Crouse-Hinds Hall, THE General Body Pushes for Policies Protecting Students

“When we think about it deeply, safety is ultimately one of the major reasons we are doing this sit-in,” says Hasmik Djoulakian, SU sophomore, who has been sitting in at Crouse-Hinds Hall since Monday night. “No one wants to be here with lights on all the time, our movement monitored at all times. But we are here because many of these issues are truly life or death,” she said. “The General Body believes in safety first.”

Students delineate these safety concerns in a [40+-page document](#). They include the need for adequate mental health services, services for students with disabilities, services for victims of sexual assault, and safety and support for students of color and marginalized students on this campus.

Students Lead Effort to Keep Crouse-Hinds Hall Safe, but Face Challenges from Administration

Students sitting in have led the effort to comply with the university’s rules for their safety. In a walk through Crouse-Hinds Hall with Syracuse University fire inspectors, students were directed to potential fire hazards to make sure to keep themselves, the staff, and the campus safe.

However, regard for safety from the part of the administration remains a huge concern. After a week that saw huge campus and community support for THE General Body, students were locked in Crouse-Hinds Hall for the weekend, allowing little outside communication. Last night, for example, students had to negotiate for almost an hour to allow an outside supporter to drop off food for dinner.

The students have also been given varying rules of safety and despite asking repeatedly, they have not been presented with actual written codes. This has made it difficult for students to learn the safety parameters. For example, students were told they could have signs on 50 percent of the walls. Then, in the middle of the night, officers came by to tell them they needed to tear the signs down. "They change the rules constantly," said MFA student Becca Glaser. "This puts us in an uncomfortable situation, where we wish to cooperate as best we can to respect fire codes while still maintaining our presence here," said Glaser.

Students also face challenges from the active presence of DPS officers in Crouse-Hinds. The upper level administration insists that the reason there are seven security guards is for "student safety." Yet, it is clear that DPS is also engaged in techniques which decrease safety. Students have repeatedly requested that the fire coordinator should survey the building and make sure that being locked in over the weekend does not compromise anyone's safety. Instead, DPS and fire safety did a walk through during the early hours of the morning, taking pictures of students sleeping without communicating the purpose of the pictures or any further actions that needed to take place on the students' part to keep safe.

For a good part of the morning, students requesting to meet with the coordinator were told that the coordinator is busy at the Dome with today's football game. The fire inspector finally stopped by in the early afternoon and told the students they are in compliance.

Students also requested opening a room for study hours which was initially denied. We were told that we would have access to the room today from Dean Bea Gonzalez, the university's negotiator, but as of 2 p.m. that has not happened. "We are put in a compromising position, between having spaces in order to focus on our school work and making the changes that this campus needs" said Syracuse University junior Kevin Sampaio.

This arbitrary communication along with random check-ins while students are busy doing school work has been extremely taxing on students trying to concentrate on their work. In recognition that this is a sit-in and not an easy process the students have made every attempt to comply, while trying to remain focused on the goals to bring about significant changes.

The Sit-In is a Last Resort

The students who make up THE General Body are some of the most involved students at SU, and have been trying for months--in some cases years--to work with the upper level administration through existing channels. They participate on Express Yourself workgroups,

made attempts to get on Fast Forward committees, and serve as a direct line to the larger student body's needs and concerns. Realizing the dire nature of the student concerns and the limitations of these existing institutional channels, these students made countless attempts to communicate with the upper level administration to no avail.

"It is important to note that it is only from doing the tactic of the sit-in that we have been able to get the ear of the upper level administration and trustees," said senior Kimberly E. Powell. "The sit-in is a last recourse." As the students' negotiation team works diligently at responding to the administration, the constant distractions and changing rules have made it not only difficult to get results, but made things physically taxing on the students.

"No one likes to sleep on brick floors, but we believe students should be safe on this campus," said PhD student Yanira Rodríguez. "We believe these are our rights as students and educators, we believe funding should be redirected to uphold these rights, that they are fundamental to a good education and the health of our campus community," said Rodríguez.

In an email this morning sent to the campus wide community titled "University Conversations Continue with Student Group," Gonzalez writes that negotiations have been taking place over the past four days. Conversations continued on Wednesday evening when the Chancellor came to speak to students but actual negotiations did not start until Thursday. However, the administration still has not agreed in writing to address all student concerns. The upper level administration's first responses were vague and led to only one or two actions and just mostly "considerations."

In the preliminary negotiations Dean Gonzalez came back with proposals that by Friday had already been overridden. According to the Student Association President Boris Gresely the Board of Trustees voted Friday on what they are now calling a "draft" of the mission and vision statement. They also refused to meet with students.

Incoming demands continue to demonstrate the many unaddressed needs and concerns faced by students, faculty and staff on this campus. This serves as evidence for both the faith the campus community is placing on THE General Body negotiations with administration, and the need for an open channel of communication and flexible negotiation process that can accommodate incoming demands.

The General Body Waits for an Administrative Commitment to Addressing Student Concerns

Dean Gonzalez also cited the administration's willingness to meet and have dialogue as a concession. However, THE General Body staged the sit-in and has been working diligently specifically *to move toward a commitment to action*. For example, the campus community cannot wait for students to have access to adequate mental health services. During the student demonstration in front of the board of trustees meeting, a reporter discussed his prior

coverage of the incidents at Virginia Tech and mentioned how Syracuse University expressed pride for having adequate services in place. Yet, currently there is only one psychiatrist on staff to service 25,000 students, including students at ESF.

The upper level administration has made the same degrees of commitment and effort to address these concerns as those that led to the sit-in. They publicly and verbally say they support the students efforts, set up listening meetings and workgroups but do not take actions toward actual change. Today students have so far met for almost three hours with Dean Gonzalez only to hear that she cannot make any decisions about the issues. This is an indication that there are no “negotiations” taking place as of yet, just merely listening.

Students cannot afford to wait for a huge tragedy to be what leads upper level administration to take these issues seriously. THE General Body understands there have been many incidents already at this level of concern. Some students already feel unsafe and unsupported on this campus. “I support THE General Body’s efforts to get this administration to understand the real discrimination that students of color, especially women, LGBT and the working class, face on this campus and hold administrators accountable to have plans, including faculty and administration training, to truly address these issues so these students can thrive as scholars here,” said Sherri Williams, a PhD candidate at SU.

Unfortunately, communication from the upper level administration subtly mirrors the kind of unsafe categorization of students that THE General body is mobilizing against. This morning, an email from Dean Bea Gonzalez went out over the University’s news service, which on the one hand praises students efforts and states respect for what they are doing yet suggests students are uncooperative about negotiations. The email also attempts to suggest there is not wide support for THE General Body’s efforts. However, the halls of the administration building have been continuously visited by supporters from throughout the campus and Syracuse community, dropping off food and joining the sit-in during the day. Faculty have also circulated petitions in support of students and conducted teach-ins attended by several hundred students throughout the past five days to help educate the broader community on the significance of these issues. The sit-in is widely supported, as evidenced by national and local [coverage](#) from *Democracy Now!*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Syracuse.com*, *TWC News*, and *the Daily Orange*, and support petitions circulated by students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members.

“THE general body is here because we have identified numerous problems at SU and are attempting to address them,” said freshman Kristen Koniuch. “We have exhausted all options, and hope that the sit-in, though not the ideal way for anyone, will lead to good outcomes for all,” said Koniuch.