



*Graduate Student Organization*

**Spring 2010**

**Resolution on the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act  
(PHEEIA)**

**Whereas** the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act (henceforth referred to as PHEEIA) has been proposed by New York State Governor Paterson as part of the 2010-2011 budget proposal, assisted by SUNY Chancellor Zimpher; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA was created as a direct response to the substantial budgetary cuts handed to SUNY from New York State in the wake of the economic recession, and it is unlikely that New York State will reinstate these budget cuts given the currently poor economic climate; and

**Whereas** in an optimal environment, the GSO would prefer for New York State to fully fund SUNY to ensure top-quality educational standards, thus making tuition hikes unnecessary, which would eliminate the need for PHEEIA; and

**Whereas** the budgetary cuts handed down would result in the (a) elimination of approximately 500 faculty/staff positions from Stony Brook University, (b) reduction in hundreds of course offerings, (c) closure of entire academic programs of study, (d) reduction in a variety of campus services, and (e) reduction in funding support for graduate students, all of which would create a tremendous hardship for Stony Brook graduate students and diminish the quality of Stony Brook University; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would change the structure of public higher education in New York State, such that most of the control/authority over SUNY schools will be transferred from the State Legislature to the SUNY Board of Trustees; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would make public higher education in New York State operate in a much similar fashion as most other American states (e.g. Michigan), which allow their public universities to operate under the jurisdiction of the Boards of Trustees, who are appointed and accountable to the state government; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would allow the SUNY Board of Trustees to regulate tuition costs in a predictable, incremental manner (rather than the abrupt, sparse, and large tuition increases under the status quo); and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would allow for “differential tuition” across different schools and academic programs, which would allow: (a) the 4 largest SUNY Universities (including

Stony Brook University) to have higher tuition rates than the smaller community colleges (e.g. SUNY Suffolk), given the relative costs required to run and maintain universities, and (b) more expensive academic programs within Stony Brook University to have higher tuition rates than less expensive academic programs; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would hold low-income students “harmless” to the tuition increases, through an expansion of need-based financial aid; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would allow the SUNY Board of Trustees to fully manage the budget allocation and allows each SUNY campus to retain all revenue brought in through the campus itself (including tuition and other forms of revenue); and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would grant more autonomy and efficiency to the SUNY campuses by removing many of the bureaucratic encumbrances (e.g. “pre-audit”) to campus operations (e.g. purchasing research equipment); and

**Whereas** PHEEIA would allow SUNY campuses to enter partnerships and land-leases with public institutions and private businesses that are in keeping with the educational mission of the campus, and which would likely generate revenue to the campuses; and

**Whereas** PHEEIA has received strong support from the SUNY Faculty Assembly, the SUNY Student Assembly, SUNY Chancellor Zimpher, Stony Brook University President Stanley, the Stony Brook University Senate, and the Stony Brook University Undergraduate Student Government; and

**Whereas** graduate students have expressed concerns about certain implications of PHEEIA that should be clarified in the final legislation, including but not limited to the following: (a) all rights and benefits of collective bargaining held for the current labor contracts should be extended/preserved to all future negotiated labor contracts, (b) oversight of public-private partnerships on the campus should require that these arrangements conform to all relevant environmental laws and to “best environmental practices,” and (c) the State of New York will not use the revenue stream generated by PHEEIA as justification to reduce the State’s funding of SUNY schools by a comparable amount, and

**Whereas** graduate students have expressed other concerns about many implications of PHEEIA, which must be addressed by the Stony Brook University Administration, including but not limited to the following: (a) tuition “waivers” for PhD and eligible Masters students should be maintained, regardless of the increases in tuition costs, and (b) funds generated through graduate student tuition must be used to assist graduate student education and quality of life (e.g. significantly raising stipends and building affordable/quality housing); therefore be it

**Resolved** that the Stony Brook University Graduate Student Organization (GSO) strongly condemns any further budget cuts to SUNY from New York State Government; and be it further

**Resolved** that the GSO agrees with the SUNY Student Assembly that the cap/maximum on tuition increases be 1.5x the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI), rather than 2.5x HEPI; and be it further

**Resolved** that the GSO currently views PHEEIA to be the most viable solution to effectively handle the substantial budgetary cuts to SUNY; and be it further

**Resolved** that Graduate Student Organization Executive Committee advocate to the Stony Brook University administration that (a) tuition “waivers” for PhD and eligible Masters students should be maintained, regardless of the increases in tuition costs, and (b) funds generated through graduate student tuition must be used to assist graduate student education and quality of life (e.g. significantly raising stipends and building affordable/quality housing); and be it further

**Resolved** that in light of the negative consequences for lack of action, the GSO endorses PHEEIA and will advocate strongly for the support and passage of PHEEIA (with our proposed revisions/clarifications) going forward.