Item 2 on today’s Agenda is the Chair’s report.

I’d like to begin by reporting on the continuing dialog with graduate students with respect to fees.

As shown in the minutes of our December 10 meeting, which we just approved, we had received our first submission of information and proposed agenda item for Consideration by the SUNY ESF Board of Trustees from Shelby Zangari, who is both an ESF graduate student and a representative of the Graduate Student Employees Union. You’ll recall Shelby’s description of the fees that graduate students are required to pay in August and January, which occurs before graduate workers receive their first SUNY ESF paycheck. Shelby also shared testimonials from graduate students on the financial burden that fees place on our graduate students.

Shelby’s presentation followed remarks made by Patrick Wickersham, who prior to this semester was the Graduate Student Association representative on this Board. Patrick described the importance of assuring continuity of Graduate Assistant funding, the need for multi-year funding packages, the desire to see administrative processes for students streamlined. He also described what seemed to be a disconnect between various databases and difficulties that continue to arise from the transition to the Banner software application.

In January, Shelby Zangari – who is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Chemistry, by the way – and several other graduate students, met with President Mahoney and other members of the College Administration during the week of January 17th. Among the topics discussed in that meeting was GSEU’s lobbying efforts with New York State legislators, who are continuing to review the Governor’s proposed budget for the State’s 2022-23 Fiscal Year, including the appropriations made to SUNY campuses including SUNY-ESF. Ms. Zangari followed up this meeting with a email requesting that the College Administration release a statement supporting GSEU’s lobbying efforts to secure fees scholarships to each graduate student worker at ESF. Ms. Zangari also wrote to me asking if the Board of Trustees would be willing to issue a statement by the end of February to support GSEU’s lobbying timeline.

Two weeks ago, the Board of Trustees received its second submittal of Information and Agenda Items for Consideration, which our Board Secretary, Ragan Squier, forwarded to me. This submission came from Graham Perner, who is an ESF Graduate Student. He suggested that our Board of Trustees work with GSEU to lobby the New York State legislature.

I spoke with Graham yesterday and described the regulations governing lobbying the New York State legislature, with which I am very familiar as this is my fourth year serving as a Commissioner on the Joint Commission on Public Ethics, or JCOPE. As I told Graham yesterday, it would not appear that our ByLaws give us the power to lobby the New York State legislature. We are not an independent legal entity. Rather, we are part of a College created by New York State statute that does in fact engage in lobbying efforts on a regular basis. As I reminded Graham yesterday, President Mahoney herself has been leading our lobbying efforts in Albany since the retirement of Dr. Maureen Fellows from her role as the Vice President for Government and External Relations at ESF.

In my judgment, it would not be wise to include a presentation suggesting that we get involved in lobbying the New York State legislature in cooperation with the GSEU. Both the College and the GSEU have every right to lobby the New York State legislature and I believe that their success is very important to the success of this institution.

Graham’s submission also said that he would like to reiterate how some of the processes surrounding billing deadlines create additional problems and suggest ways to help alleviate these concerns. I invited Graham to join the next meeting of the Sustainable Finance committee, which will provide an excellent forum for further consideration of the many details of graduate student fee billing and payments that we are all familiar with at a higher level.