

Candidate's Statement: James McLean

Just last week, I wrote in an email (regarding a campus issue), “Leadership means guiding the body, not controlling it.” As a governance leader, it is my highest goal that every voice can be heard, while the decision of the majority, so informed, moves forward. For the UFS, this means more than voices being heard within the body. Our power comes primarily through influence on those who make the decisions, based on their respect both for our wisdom and, just a little, for our potential to cause disruption. Between plenary meetings, officers need to represent the UFS in all its diversity and unity. I certainly bring my own opinions to the table; but as President I will leave the table forcefully advocating for the will of the body.

My favorite plants are trees.

Those who know me, especially on my campus, would surely attest that I am a parliamentary wonk. Many folks seem to think of Robert’s Rules as limiting, but to me they are the opposite: instructions on how to reach nearly any goal, while maintaining legitimacy and protecting the rights of minority views. In four years leading the Geneseo College Senate, there were several opportunities to put this to the test. The most significant was presiding over the 50% reduction of a general education requirement which had stood for decades as Geneseo’s signature core curriculum. The Senate meetings were standing-room-only, and debate was heated. But the change passed, the minority could accept defeat gracefully, and I was humbled to receive a standing ovation.

I like to “dress the part.” I own a kilt. In the proper tartan, of course.

I generally support gradualism. Even while in the small subcommittee to completely rewrite the UFS Bylaws, our main goal was to systematize existing practice. But within that, I aimed to support the agency of those who write the resolutions, the committees and sectors and individuals, while maintaining the strong oversight role of the Executive Committee.

I like that my house is 170 years old. With wifi.

If recent history tells us anything, it’s that many of the largest issues that the UFS will face cannot be anticipated. And I don’t just mean the pandemic. Who could have predicted the active learning mandate, sanctuary needs for DACA students, handing leadership of a campus to a friend of the governor, etc.? Flexibility and responsiveness are key. When we can control the narrative, as President I would look to senators, individually and collectively, to set the priorities.

Dogs are great. Cats are slightly better.

However, issues are already clamoring for our attention: perfection of the new SUNY Gen Ed and its rollout on a manageable timetable; system-level enrollment management, to support financially embattled campuses; keeping remote learning modes under control, to preserve intellectual property, student satisfaction, and educational quality; the failed promise of state budget “maintenance of effort;” continuous improvement of UFS internal and external communications; the ever-present need to diversify the faculty and support our URM students; the list goes on. The UFS needs to be a juggling team, not a juggernaut.

Computer programming and web design are entertainment.

My candidate materials are reaching you late, and you deserve to know why. I had not even considered throwing my hat into the ring this time around, until I was very recently encouraged to do so. I presume this was partly motivated by the race being uncontested at the time. I hate when candidates say they are running “to give voters a choice”—that’s no reason to vote for someone. But that is one reason that I felt emboldened to declare my candidacy after the published deadline had passed. In any case, after doing the considering, I believe that I would be a first-rate UFS President.