

Link, students clash in highest-attended General Assembly in ASG history

Sami Mirza, Features Editor | November 22, 2020



During the highest-attended General Assembly in Allegheny Student Government history, President Hillary Link faced questions from students on topics from racial justice at Allegheny College to the amount of time allotted for students to move out at the end of in-person instruction. The assembly was held virtually via Zoom at 7:30 pm on Tuesday, Nov. 17.

After introducing herself, Link began taking questions posed by students through the Instagram accounts of ASG and its partners, read by Bree Gray, '23, director of communications and press for ASG. Students attending live were asked to indicate in the chat with an asterisk if they wanted to speak. However, after a student spoke without being recognized by Gray and follow-up questions were typed into the chat, ASG decided to change chat functions so that messages were only visible to Gray, who would then read comments or call on constituents. This sparked some backlash within the meeting, as one student noted that a question about the lack of mental health support for students of color appeared to have been overlooked.

“Is the chat function changed because that question about students of color getting more counselors didn’t get addressed?” Amya Ruiz, '20, said. “(Because) that’s low-key a foul move.”

An unidentified student then interjected, saying, “I don’t understand why you’re doing that, because I thought this was meant to be a chat for all of the students to be in open discussion.”

Gena Pena, '22, director of student affairs, responded that change was made to keep the meeting on track and that students were not being prevented from speaking. Another unidentified student then spoke up and said, “Seems like another form of silencing to me.”

During the constituent comment section later in the meeting, Gray clarified why the system



was changed.

“Anytime that we have a meeting, there are a set of guidelines that we have to follow with the way that we interact with our guest speakers, the way we carry any type of discussion between our Senate members, whether it be between Cabinet (members) and (senators), between (senators), or between constituents and any member representing ASG,” Gray said. “While President Link isn’t a member of ASG, she is a separate body of the college, she was here as an ‘honorary guest,’ so any time that we have interactions with her, we have a set of rules guiding how we have to interact with her (and) the way we speak to her.”

Gray also noted that because meetings are currently virtual and not in person, it is harder for people to see who they’re addressing and who’s addressing them.

“Any time someone wants to make a remark (or) they want to be publicly noted, they have to do it face to face, which we can’t do,” Gray said. “They have to turn their cameras on, unmute themselves, and then say, ‘Hey, here’s my concern.’”

When asked about the nutritional value of the meals provided to students in quarantine, Link provided images that she received from Parkhurst Dining that showed samples of the meals she said were being delivered to students in quarantine. One such image showed a meal that included three pieces of fruit, mac and cheese, a steak dinner, a salad, a dinner roll, two bags of chips, three granola bars, three dessert items, butter, salad dressing and utensils.

As a follow-up, an unidentified student requested that the assembly note “that a healthy diet generally entails that half of your food should be fruits and vegetables, and in these particular quarantine meal images, more than half of the food tended to be processed or desserts,” before going on to ask if there were options available for students to have fresh fruits if requested. Link replied by stating that fresh fruits were sometimes hand-delivered by members of the senior administration and that students in quarantine should reach out to the Dean of Students Office.

The next line of questioning came from Ruiz.

“Considering not much of anything has changed at all, and more students that I can count on my own hands are facing homelessness on top of the pandemic, on top of living with immunocompromised people, on top of unemployment, poverty, trauma, racial trauma, was it an intentional decision to not make (credit/no credit) an option this semester, and if so what was the logic behind that?” Ruiz asked. “Because nothing about many students’ situations when this thing started has changed in less than a year.”

Link replied by saying, “It was an extraordinary decision to provide (CR/NCR) last spring, and that was mainly due to the very rapid shift to sudden, complete remote for absolutely everybody. This is a very different academic delivery of courses. In terms of things not having changed, that’s definitely not what we’ve heard from students. Actually, many many students have told me how much better even the remote or the hybrid experience is for them.”

Ruiz then asked if the administration had spoken to poorer students of color, to which Link replied that they had, and directed Ruiz to Provost and Dean of the College Ron Cole, ’87, if

Ruiz had problems with specific faculty. Ruiz pointed out that the conversation was one not just of faculty, but of the campus environment, asking, “Where have you been, and where will you be next semester? The whole school had addressed your use of the term “Blacks” and we got an apology from (Dean of Institutional Diversity) Kristin Dukes with your name signed on it.”

At this point, Link attempted to break in, before Ruiz cut her off by saying, “I’m speaking.” Ruiz then said, “I feel like more than any other ASG meeting I’ve been to, there’s been a lot of policing of language, a lot of ‘be respectful’, ‘be professional,’ ‘law and order,’ ‘use asterisk,’ ‘we’re changing the chat,’ whatever. It feels like you (Link) are very scared of us, to be honest.”

Ruiz went on to ask why it seemed that, “all we’ve seen from (Dukes) is a lot of cleaning up of your (Link’s) personal messes,” and that “you (Link) have really been in hiding.”

Ruiz then asked what Link is going to do to change that over the next semester without going through Dukes, to which Link replied, “Kristen and I write everything together. We have apologized together, and we have already apologized for the use of the word ‘Blacks.’”

Ruiz interjected again, asking, “Why did Kristen Dukes apologize for that? Because she didn’t use it.” Link responded by referring to her earlier answer.

“(Dukes) wrote the original statement with me,” Link said. “We wrote everything together and we apologized together. So don’t try to divide us up there. You need to understand we’re a unified team here.”

Link continued by referring to three open sessions held by the administration to address racial justice on campus, observing, “I sat there with all my senior colleagues and a total of nine people showed. I’ve actually been present waiting for you all to come and see me. We’ve reached out on multiple occasions to ask you to come meet, and we’ve been told, ‘absolutely not.’ I think you need to know that when someone reaches out and wants to dialogue with you, you need to be willing to have that dialogue with you.”

Ruiz fired back by saying that she has been showing up to have that dialogue for four years. She also cited a personal story, stating that Dean of Students April Thompson offered Ruiz a position at Allegheny College after graduation when Ruiz was a first-year student. However, when Ruiz, who is graduating this December, inquired about the position earlier this year, she said she was turned away.

“I hit (Thompson) up about that position, and she said no, because, ‘You are not a good fit for Allegheny College’ because, ‘our values do not align with yours,’” Ruiz said. “Now I don’t know what ‘values’ Allegheny has, but mine are anti-racist, blatantly and explicitly ... When students of color want to do the work and get paid for it, then you have to back up that request for us to show up.”

Link replied by saying, “Thank you for sharing,” and the questions continued.

Haley Lex, ’22, asked about the decision to move out while the semester was still in session. Link stated this decision was made several months prior to allow students to spend

Link stated this decision was made several months prior to allow students to spend Thanksgiving with their families. Lex followed up by commenting that students who didn't have WiFi back home were, "screwed," and that some professors, "have not been willing to be flexible with what (Lex has) been telling them (about move-out)." Before Lex was able to ask a question, Lola Asnin, '21, cut her off, saying, "Sorry, I'm confused. You (Lex) just said, 'I don't want to be rude,' but you're speaking to the president. No one would have spoken to (former president of Allegheny College James) Mullen this way."

At this point, Ruiz interjected again, commenting, "I spoke to Mullen this way." When Asnin retorted that she wasn't speaking to Ruiz, Ruiz began talking about tone policing. Asnin responded to this by saying, "You (Ruiz) told President Link you were speaking, I'm speaking."

Ruiz continued to speak about tone policing, while Asnin said, "This isn't about you (Ruiz)." Gray made a point of order and requested that participants be civil and Lex finished her line of questioning in a monotone voice.

After responding to Lex's questions, Link posed one of her own.

"I understand this is a horrible time we are all living through," Link said. "It is incredibly anxiety-producing, and I get it. But I'm really taken by the negativity of all of the questions. I just would love to know where that's all coming from."

Lex replied by noting that, as Ruiz had said, the administration was not addressing student concerns.

"We've been reaching out to you this entire semester, and there's a lot of events and things that have happened throughout the semester where I feel like the students aren't being heard," Lex said. "You answer certain things and not others ... I feel like there's very selective hearing going on, personally, and I feel like that's why students are getting frustrated."

Ruiz said that Link's question was not appropriate.

"I need you to know, if you don't know already, that tone policing is extremely discriminatory, classist, gaslighting and racist," Ruiz said. "I encourage you not to do it moving forward, because we have every reason in the world, beyond Allegheny, and beyond you (Link), to be mad. Life is freaking very hard right now, and if we have feelings to share to a person in power, who's dedicated to making our lives easier and who's been in hiding, and we haven't been feeling heard, we have the right to say it and we have the right to say it however we want to."

Link replied by saying, "I wasn't saying you shouldn't (share your feelings), I was honestly just asking a question."

Gray then followed up on a point Link had previously stated about boxes being provided to students well in advance to move-out, noting that many people had said in the chat that their residence halls did not have boxes. Some resident advisors who were in the meeting also said that they ultimately went to Walmart to purchase boxes for their residents.

The next question was on the accessibility of drinking water, and came from Jennifer Peralta, '22. who lives in Brooks Hall.

“All our water fountains are out,” Peralta said. “When I go down to the (Pine) Market, there’s no water, and when I go down to Brooks, there’s water with fruit in it that tastes like dirty water. So my question is, how can you provide better access to water next semester?”

Link replied that the college hopes to have sustainable water-bottle refill stations installed by January.

An RA identified only as “Nya” then spoke, stating that they had not received any boxes for their residents in Walker Hall. They also asked how RA staff and residents alike were going to be protected if a student in their community tests positive. Link referred them to the Residential Life office about what to do if a student tests positive, but on the topic of the boxes, Link was less sure.

“I will say, I’m really confused, because Dean Thompson just sent me an email several hours ago saying boxes were all delivered to all of the dorms last week (the week of 11/9),” Link said. “I’m sensing that’s not true.”

When Nicholas Wronchuck, ’21, asked where the boxes had been delivered and if they had gone directly to the RA staff, Link said that she knew as much as the students did.

“(Thompson) says, ‘Boxes were delivered to residence halls last week.’,” Link said. “That is all the information that I know.”

Another administrator on the call then messaged Link to inform her that, “boxes were seen being delivered to Brooks (Hall).”

Gray then read several questions relating to the Gator Pledge, and why it appeared that there were different standards for students and staff.

“Faculty and staff have very clear masking (and) physically distancing requirements, safety requirements, but we all go home and live with our families,” Link said. “We have to be out off-campus whereas students — in the first four weeks of the semester, remember this is what we’re getting back to — we had a campus quarantine that was very clearly announced from when students were coming back, where we asked students not to go off campus.”

Link also reminded students that the college was, for the most part, successful in protecting students.

“We actually managed to control the virus and to have a full, open semester where most schools have had to close down,” Link said.

At 8:46 p.m., Senator Lucas Biniewski, ’23, moved to end the guest speaker portion of the General Assembly. His motion was seconded by Senator Kristen Cadham, ’24, and passed. In the succeeding period for constituent comments, Vice President Patricia Gaxiola, ’21, encouraged students to speak to other administrators about issues that they were dealing with, not just Link.

“There (are) a lot of committees on campus, and in my personal opinion if you guys actually want action on something, try to figure out who heads those committees rather than going

straight to President Link,” Gaxiola said. “Because to be honest with you guys, it’s not helpful. It’s better to reach out to committees that are actually working on issues. That’s when action can actually be taken. For instance, with the whole box issue, Dean Thompson is the one that oversees the committee that’s handling all of that ... As you guys saw, (Link) didn’t even know what was going on.”

At the close of the meeting, ASG President Abdikadir Lugundi, '21, echoed the sentiment.

“If students aren’t reaching out to those committees, telling them what’s going on or what they need, then (those committees) will really be inactive,” Lugundi said. “ASG can’t work without student participation ... We need student participation to know what’s going on, to evaluate how we can make the school better.”

In a statement after the meeting, Lugundi and Gaxiola said, “(We) would like to clarify that we neither tolerate nor condone any form of disrespect to any guest at our General Assembly, especially an honorary speaker,” the statement read. “President Link attended as a guest to our General Assembly of her own free will and deserved to be acknowledged with respect and dignity regardless of the issues we have seen within her administration. We support our students, however, the manner in which these concerns were brought up at the General Assembly does not accurately reflect the good nature of our organization.”

A full, unedited recording of the General Assembly can be found on the ASG YouTube channel, and can be accessed by clicking here.

Disclosure: Bree Gray, '23, is identified in this story as the ASG Director of Communications and Press. Gray is separately a News Editor for the Campus. Gray was not involved in the writing or the publication of this story.

About the Writer



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Sami Mirza is a freshman from South Bend, IN. He intends to major in Communication Arts and double minor in Spanish and Arabic. Though this is his first...

1 Comment

One Response to “Link, students clash in highest-attended General Assembly in ASG history”

- Alum on November 23rd, 2020 1:04 pm



Yikes. The administration is definitely in the wrong on many things here. But the sense

of entitlement and nastiness from the students is just as wrong. I can tell you right now if I spoke to a supervisor or the director of my workplace the way Ms. Ruiz spoke with President Link, I'd likely be fired for insubordination. Again, the Allegheny administration has made waaaay too many missteps in the last few years, dating back to President Mullen, Dean of Students Joe DiChristina, and other former administrative staff members. Things have not gotten any better, and in fact sound like they have gotten significantly worse. But if this is how the students are behaving and speaking with those in leadership, it's just bad news all around. Professionalism goes a long way. Ms. Ruiz likely was not offered a position she was "promised" her freshman year because 1) there is literally just not an open position right now 2) she was never actually promised a position, but rather told she would be a good fit/personality for the office someday and 3) her combativeness and unwillingness to compromise or speak professionally with school leaders has probably been exhausting for all involved and the last thing they want to do is continue to deal with that after Ms. Ruiz graduates. The entitlement is astounding. President Link has disappointed some and made some missteps in the start of her tenure for sure, but my gosh was the entitlement and bratty nature of some of the student body cringey to read here.

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