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AS Board Member Faces Complaints About Conduct



Genaro Meza-Roa, AS VP for business and operations, poses for a portrait in June. Meza-Roa has clashed with other board members recently. **Ella Banken**// **AS**

Review

By **Soleil de Zwart**

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Following a heated exchange at their Nov. 16 meeting, the Associated Students board went in to an executive session to discuss multiple unspecified complaints against Genaro Meza-Roa, VP for business and operations.

Meza-Roa initially opted to make the session public, until Millka Solomon, AS president, specified that they would be discussing complaints beyond the issues raised in the last two board meetings.

An executive session (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=42.30.110>) is a closed meeting of a legislative body to discuss personnel matters or information that is not available to the public.

While board members declined to comment on what was discussed in the executive session or the specific complaints, several issues involving Meza-Roa arose during AS Board meetings at the end of last quarter, including:

- Using a derogatory term for people with mental disabilities to describe a committee
- Being accused of misogyny by other board members (Meza-Roa denied the allegation)
- Disappearing from a meeting part of the way through

AS board members also declined to comment on any issues concerning Meza-Roa for this story.

“I think you have enough,” Meza-Roa said when asked to comment after the executive session.

Past concerns

This isn’t the first time complaints have risen about Meza-Roa.

When he ran unopposed for the board last spring, two anonymous students said they had to ask Meza-Roa to leave an AS event after he confronted them about the event’s content warning posters. One of the students voiced concern about Meza-Roa’s ability to work with people and identities that are not his own, according to a May AS Review article (<https://wp.wvu.edu/theasreview/2018/05/03/election-code-violation-questioned-qualifications-complicate-as-election/>).

Francesca Cruz, then AS elections coordinator, confirmed at the time that some students had been inquiring about the impeachment process.

“Intent versus impact”

More recently, discord between Meza-Roa and other board members became evident during a Nov. 9 meeting when Meza-Roa brought up a suggestion to dissolve the AS Budget Committee.

“The budget committee has been a historically very retarding process in the budget,” Meza-Roa said.

Board members, including Anne Lee, VP for student life, and Solomon asked Meza-Roa to refrain from using that word to describe the budgeting process and to use a different word in future

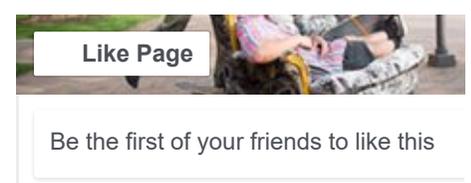
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McKenzie Bolar, AS Disability Outreach Center community engagement coordinator, said in a later interview that the R-slur is a derogatory term used to stigmatize and is no longer a medically accurate term.

It's in the general interest and comfort of students with disabilities on campus to use synonyms of the R-slur, instead, when describing a slow process, they said.

"The word in itself has always carried various meanings throughout time, but the important aspect to realize is that most people do know it as a slur today," Bolar said.

During the meeting Meza-Roa defended his word choice and said the word means to slow down, he meant no offense and did not see a problem with the use of the word.

Camilla Mejia, VP for diversity, replied that the board should be mindful of the language they use and consider intent versus impact.

Allegations of sexism

The strain between the board and Meza-Roa continued at the Nov. 16 board meeting, when the board voted on the appointment of Celia Major to the AS Activities Council.

Ama Monkah, VP for activities, was the only woman on the council, according to Monkah. This new appointment would change that.

When the board voted on the appointment, Meza-Roa was the only no vote.

Monkah responded to Meza-Roa's vote by asking him why he was being misogynistic.

Mejia agreed it was misogynistic and referred to an earlier comment by Meza-Roa when he said he couldn't get a woman legislator at Lobby Day 2018 to shut up.

In response, Meza-Roa defended his comments.

"It's only sexist because she happens to be a woman," Meza-Roa said.

This is what feeds male dominance and entitlement over women, Mejia said.

Meza-Roa said the board thinks the solution to this problem is placing women at an unmerited level. He isn't against equality, but thinks there's a problem with appointing someone to a committee solely because of their gender, he said.

Cora Cole, AS committee coordinator, clarified that Major is qualified for the position because they are a leader for an E-Sports club on campus and the council would benefit from more diversity in its student leadership.

While the board did not discuss Major's qualifications before the vote, not much is typically said on the qualifications of committee appointments prior to the board's vote.

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Solomon requested that, in the future, Meza-Roa bring up his concerns about a position before the vote occurs and before he votes no without explanation.

The board then went into executive session to discuss multiple complaints against Meza-Roa, according to Solomon.

A missing board member

While it occurred after the executive session, another issue involving Meza-Roa arose before the end of the quarter.

At the Dec. 7 board meeting, Meza-Roa disappeared from the meeting without explanation. Natasha Hessami, VP for governmental affairs, left to find him and returned saying Meza-Roa was at a College of Science and Engineering party in an adjacent conference room, drinking wine.

Moving forward

The board has been trying to set a norm of representing the entire student body and being respectful since the beginning of the year, said Mejia, according to the Nov. 16 meeting minutes.

The Disability Outreach Center is revising the inclusive language guide for AS employees, according to Bolar.

In response to a December inquiry, Sam Frost, AS communications director, said in a text that they had been considering conducting an inclusive language workshop at the AS winter training.

However, according to a schedule sent to AS employees, instead, Leti Romo, program advisor for the board of directors, led a training on sexism in the workplace.

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