The Daily Campus



THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE **UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT** SINCE 1896 • VOLUME CXXIX, NO. 96

Thursday, March 5, 2026

USG Chief Diversity Officer ticket profiles

by Samantha Brody
LIFE EDITOR
SHE/HER/HERS
sab23059@uconn.edu

Voting for candidates running for positions in the Undergraduate Student Government closes today on UConntact at noon. This year, two candidates are running for the position of Chief Diversity Officer. Below are their profiles.

Sadaf Zarei

Sadaf Zarei is a mathematics and economics major and a computer science minor in her sixth semester at the University of Connecticut. She is also an international student from Iran, which has helped form her platform and her ideas for UConn, she said.

"This role is essentially important because it is there to let students of every walk of life, every religion, every color, every sexual orientation, to know that no matter what, there is a place within the USG structure that cares for them," Zarei said.

Zarei noted that while she believes USG has a thriving internal culture that promotes international students, she hopes to improve the organization's outreach capabilities. The CDO is meant to advocate for the causes and cultures of the students on campus and help increase the mobility of students from underrepresented backgrounds, she said.

"It is really good that we care about diversity but also the missing element has been empowering people within different diverse backgrounds to increase their social mobilities," Zarei said. "If elected, that will be something that I am very keen on advocating."

Zarei specifically mentioned granting international students access to alumni counsel, legal advisory and work opportunities at UConn. International students can primarily only work on-campus student jobs, and Zarei hopes to help connect students with possible employers, Zarei said.

"There are not many resources available to students of different backgrounds," Zarei said. "If there were to be a change, the top priority should be perhaps giving people of different backgrounds connections to the alumni of their respective background."

Zarei said other universities have done this practice before, and she hopes to extend it to UConn. On the topic of legal advisory, while USG and the Office of the CDO have already begun the process of setting up a system for students, Zarei hopes to continue this initiative.

"If elected, I would definitely be doubling down on that and that initiative," Zarei said. "And I would work tirelessly to enhance it."

Syna Patel

Syna Patel is a fourth-semester political science student based on the Storrs campus. Patel was previously living and studying at the Waterbury campus last year and conducted a semester abroad in Florence, Italy before arriving at Storrs this spring.

I've met with so many people and while everyone is so different I've seen that they all have one unique thing in common, which is inclusivity and belonging. Everyone has a sense of that," Patel said. "With meeting all these different people and kinds of people, I've seen, what really stands out is the sense of belonging that people have."

Patel noted that she sees a CDO as someone who is meant to inspire a sense of belonging on campus. If a student were to experience harassment or encounter ICE on campus, she said she wants there to be availability for students to address these issues.

"I feel like I do a really good job in my personal life on making sure that people belong," Patel said. "Because I've felt that I haven't belonged for a very long time. I'm Indian, my background, I'm always like — I never feel like I am Indian enough, so I understand the inclusivity portion of it. I feel that I could do a really good job of bringing that to other people."

Patel noted that she's discussed with the Chief Diversity Officer of her mother's company to see what kind of events and duties the position holds.

"I've had meetings with her, I've talked to her about it," Patel said. "I've seen some of the events she's done and I've attended them. And I've seen how well they change people's perspectives, there's so many friendships that have been made throughout these events."

Friendship is an important part of her platform, Patel said. Finding community can be especially difficult when a student is new or has recently transferred, and even more so if a student is only enrolled in large classes, she said.

"I want everyone to have that one person," Patel said. "Whether that be me or be someone else, that they can go to and be like 'hey, I've had a really hard day, and I just need someone to talk to. I just need a friend right now.' And that's kind of my goal; I just want everyone to leave UConn knowing that they've felt like they belonged."



Syna Patel is a political science major from the Waterbury campus running for the Chief Diversity Officer position in USG. Patel wants to be someone that students can go and talk to should they ever need to. PHOTO BY SYNA PATEL ON LINKEDIN



Sadaf Zarei is running for USG Chief of Diversity Officer in this years USG election. She is also an international student from Iran and hopes to help others feel more included on campus no matter your background. PHOTO BY SADAF ZAREI ON LINKEDIN.

USG Comptroller profiles

by Ayyan Tamjeed
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
art24001@uconn.edu

Voting for the University of Connecticut Undergraduate Student Government Elections opened on March 3 and close today at noon. Here are the profiles for the two people running for comptroller for USG.

William "Billy" Lipinski

William "Billy" Lipinski, a sixth-semester political science and public administration student, is the current comptroller and seeking reelection for a second year. The year before, he was the inventory director under the previous comptroller.

Working with his inventory specialist last year, Lipinski "completely transformed the inventory reporting system ... and streamlined the audit system for RSOs (Registered Student Organizations)," Lipinski wrote in an email.

As comptroller this year, Lipinski says he is proud of the work his team has done funding Tier-II organizations with a reduced budget.

"We're working with a $133k budget cut for Tier II funding, and we're lasting just as long as last year, which signals a shift in policy application and implementation," Lipinski said.

Lipinski says he has "improved our fiscal transparency and advocacy." He cites the club sports funding town hall he and his team hosted earlier this semester and the weekly emails sent to RSO's regarding the status of the funding system as evidence.

If reelected, Lipinski hopes to make USG's two budgets — the programmatic and operating budget — more flexible so that committees can hit the ground running.

"Next year, knowing now what I know, I want to try to make our budget more flexible so that we have to make less amendments and can promote more flexible programming," said Lipinski.

Lipinski and his team have made several changes to keep finances transparent in USG this year. From conducting a mid-year budget review, updating the Tier-II funding website and conducting in-person funding training with select RSO's at their weekly meetings.

Next year, Lipinski hopes to overhaul the Tier-II funding training, film videos for funding updates and expand the in-person training.

One of Lipinski's favorite parts of working as comptroller has been meeting with committee directors and RSO's to deliver their event ideas.

"Working with the committee directors is one of the biggest parts of my job in USG ... we're constantly making changes to our budgeting to ensure that we can deliver on the ideas of our senators," Lipinski said. "I love meeting with RSOs. I've met with so many groups to discuss event ideas and how USG can support them. That's a culture I want to make sure extends into next year."

As for USG's interactions with Tier-II organizations, Lipinski is looking to streamline the funding process and be a representative for them to the UConn administration.

"What RSO leaders sometimes don't know right off the bat is that USG is also at the mercy of our advisors and the university's purchasing policies," Lipinski said. "[We want to] advocate on behalf of RSOs and be the liaison for them at the admin purchasing level so that they can get what they need."

When asked why he's running for a second term, Lipinski said "I feel as though I'm best prepared to execute. You can ask anyone in USG: this year, fiscally, has been one of the best years for USG. And while I didn't do it alone, I ask you to give me one more year of leadership so that I can continue fighting on behalf of you, the UConn undergraduate student body."

Andrea Perez-Meneses

Andrea Perez-Meneses, a fifth-semester economics major, currently serves as a multicultural and diversity senator and engagement coordinator, working to keep other senators accountable and honest.

One of Perez-Meneses' goals is to make USG finances more transparent by potentially implementing a live portal for students to see where their money is going or holding office hours for RSOs to come meet with funding staff and ask questions.

"There are different times throughout different days that these orgs can come down to the USG office and talk to us ... it's not fair if you need advice and you have no one to go to. I feel like that defeats the whole purpose of our work. We should be there to help you; we should be there to work with you," Perez-Meneses said.

Perez-Meneses believes that clearer funding checklists and access to financial resources could go a long way to improve the funding process for Tier-II organizations.

"These clearer checklists would improve how they get their money and help them understand what steps exactly they need to take in order to receive this funding," Perez-Meneses said. "I know we already have some, but I feel like they're not as clear as we would like for them to be," Perez-Meneses said.

Perez-Meneses also thinks that now is the time to bring in new leadership into USG to provide new perspectives on the current systems and policies.

"It's good to bring in fresh perspectives. It's the job of new leadership to evaluate all these current systems with the intention of improving them." Perez-Meneses said. "I feel like a fresh perspective would be a big benefit to the overall structure of USG. We're getting new presidents, a lot of our upperclassmen are leaving, this is also a perfect opportunity to make a transition."



William Lipinski is a reelection candidate for comptroller for the USG. He has already served as comptroller, looking to maintain his position. PHOTO BY WILLIAM LIPINSKI ON LINKEDIN



Andrea Perez-Meneses is one of the candidates running for the Comptroller position in this years USG election. She hopes to bring in new perspectives and fresh ideas to the council.. PHOTO BY ANDREA PEREZ-MENESE ON LINKEDIN. POSITION/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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