Christian Katumba and Rachel Rowley share their plans to unify the student body

The new SBP and SBVP consider new modes of online connection

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On March 28, third-year student Christian Katumba was elected University of New Hampshire (UNH) study body president (SBP) and second-year student Rachel Rowley was elected student body vice president (SBVP) for the 2024-2025 academic year. Throughout their campaign, Katumba and Rowley expressed how their international backgrounds and leadership roles in the student senate will influence their positions in office. The effects of recent budget cuts, parking issues, changes to the discovery program and questions surrounding honorarium are areas they will likely work on this upcoming year.

Though Rowley and Katumba are both involved in the student senate, they stated that their experiences in different areas of student life and organizations make their partnership unique. Rowley was previously involved in the Student Activity Fee Committee (SAFC), a branch of the UNH Memorial Union Board of Governors (MUBOG). Katumba is a member of the Diversity Support Coalition (DSC) and Black Student Union (BSU). Rowley stated that the work she has done is more policy-based, while Katumba has greater experience in student programming.

“Being part of different communities here at UNH and being in a position of power gives us a way to serve different communities on campus,” said Katumba.

During the student body president debate on March 26, Katumba and Rowley expressed their views on the referendum questions; required housing for the first two years on campus, regulations for e-scooters, free laundry versus streaming services and the protection of the UNH honorarium for students in leadership positions. The poll results of the referendum questions were released in a graphic on the UNH student senate's Instagram.

“Regardless of our personal opinions, we want what students want, which is very clear,” said Rowley. She said that she and Katumba discussed the poll results and will work to implement them whilst in office.
42.9% of UNH students voted for the ban of e-scooters on campus, while 46% voted against it. In response to the referendum results regarding the ban of e-scooters on campus, Katumba and Rowley have focused their game plan around road safety regulations. Katumba stated that, if enacted, the regulations would not completely ban scooters, but ban them off sidewalks as they are considered a motorized vehicle.

“People have mentioned that they have almost gotten hit...on those [UNH] pathways...personally, I think bike lanes could be used,” said Katumba.

However, Rowley expressed that the bike lanes are not as safe as her and Katumba would like them to be. She stated that there have been discussions on how to improve them but that she and Katumba will have to be financially conscious during the planning process in the wake of budget cuts.

“We don’t have a lot of money to spend,” she said.

Finding new routes to unify the UNH community through technology is a priority for Katumba and Rowley.

“How are we supposed to advocate for students if we don’t have a relationship with them?” said Rowley. She stated that she and Katumba are trying to find creative ways to connect with students that still coincide with the formalities of the senate such as social media and short videos.

Rowley stated that she and Katumba are currently in a transitional period as they learn more from current SBP Joseph Skehan and SBVP MJ Condon about their roles. Rowley noted that a major part of this transition has been to meet and build a relationship with different members of the administration.

UNH administration has faced criticism from the student body in the wake of budget cuts made across various departments, including the closure of the Museum of Art (MOA).

Katumba expressed that an information deficit within the UNH community may be responsible for issues not being addressed by the administration.

“A lot of students don’t know what student senate is, and that is a big issue because it is the biggest resource that the student body can have when it comes to reaching administration,” said Katumba.

He expressed that the creation of a website where the SBP and SBVP can gather feedback from the student body and inform specific cabinet members within the student senate might be helpful in enacting proper change. During the summer Katumba and Rowley will start discussions with the UNH Information Technology (IT) department for a timeline of when and how their site could be implemented to reach a student audience online.

UNH currently has one master calendar for each month detailing various events going on around campus listed on the university’s website. Katumba and Rowley mentioned that the UNH website can be inaccessible to students as various links are broken and some parts are outdated.

“There is no calendar that has everything and is readily available for students to have,” said Katumba. He stated that he and Rowley want to create a platform like a master calendar just for student organizations to promote outreach of information.

Katumba is an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rowley moved to the U.S. from Singapore.

“We both know through and through what it means to not feel at home, to feel outcast from our community...and how to search for a sense of belonging,” stated Rowley. “Our goal is really to try and help students find a sense of belonging here at UNH because...if I can find a sense of belonging here anyone can.”

The seven-person cabinet for the Katumba-Rowley presidency was announced on Instagram on May 1. After the end of the semester, the new SBP and SBVP will start summer work to plan for the new academic year. Katumba and Rowley stated that if any students have concerns about issues in the UNH community they should reach out on their Instagram via direct message.
Katumba and Rowley expressed the importance of improving UNH, not just for current students but for future classes.

“We want your [UNH student] future to be bright not only academically and professionally but also socially,” said Rowley. “We hope to make even the slightest difference for a single person,” she said.