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## Artificial Intelligence Community at Stony Brook University Hosts Its First Ever Datathon!

*Ruthwick Bandaru, Junior in Computer Engineering  
Vice President of the AI Community*

At the heart of innovation and collaboration on campus, the Artificial Intelligence Community at Stony Brook University (AI Community @ SBU) is proud to introduce its very first Datathon, bringing together students from diverse academic backgrounds to explore the power of data. This event is not just a competition—it's a celebration of curiosity, problem-solving, and the exciting potential of artificial intelligence and analytics.

### About the AI Community @ SBU

Founded with the goal of fostering a vibrant and inclusive AI ecosystem at Stony Brook, the AI Community provides a welcoming space for students interested in artificial intelligence, data science, and machine learning—no matter their level of expertise. Officially registered at Stony Brook University, our organization abides by all campus policies and laws, prioritizing safety, integrity, and community involvement.

The AI Community is a hub for collaborative learning, hosting workshops, paper reading sessions, guest speakers, Kaggle competitions, and project days that equip students with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools. Whether you're looking to dive into deep learning, explore ethical AI, or just learn how to visualize data, there's a space for you here.

### Announcing: The AI Community's First Datathon!

Date: Friday, April 4, 2025

Time: 10:30 AM – 5:00 PM

Location: Bauman Center

Register here:

<https://forms.gle/6XYMfmhyAByzFpxz5>

We're thrilled to host our first-ever Datathon, a full-day data analysis event open to all students—no prior experience required! This is your chance to work on real-world datasets, flex your analytical muscles, and collaborate with fellow students to craft innovative solutions to today's challenges.

Participants will choose from four impact-driven tracks:

- Student Life
- Environment & Sustainability
- Health & Wellness
- Finance & Economics

Each track presents a unique opportunity to uncover meaningful insights and tell compelling data stories. Whether it's improving campus experiences, addressing environmental concerns, enhancing healthcare systems, or exploring economic trends, your ideas can make a difference.

### Why You Should Join

This Datathon is designed for everyone—from seasoned data scientists to those just dipping their toes into the world of AI. It's a chance to:

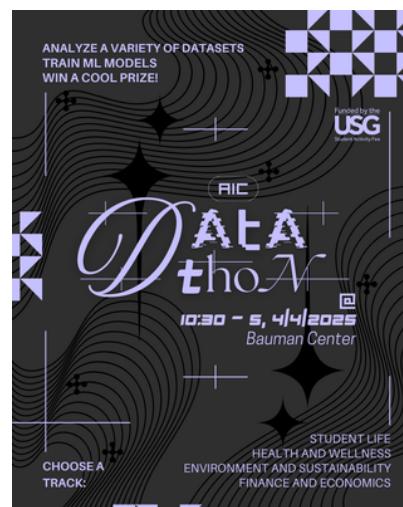
- Collaborate in teams and make new friends
- Learn by doing, with workshops and mentoring throughout the day
- Showcase your skills in front of professors and experienced judges
- Win exciting prizes for the most innovative and impactful ideas
- Enjoy free food, snacks, and games to keep your energy high and creativity flowing!

Beyond the competition, the Datathon is a great opportunity to build your resume, network with like-minded peers, and get noticed by faculty and industry professionals alike.

At the AI Community @ SBU, we believe data is more than just numbers—it's a tool for change. Through this Datathon, we're empowering students to use data to make the world a better place, one insight at a time.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab your laptop, your curiosity, and your team spirit—and join us for a day full of learning, laughter, and groundbreaking discovery. We can't wait to see what you'll uncover.

Let's turn data into action. See you at the Datathon!



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# New York State to Its Graduate Workers: Poverty is Your Choice

*Doğa Öner, 6th year PhD Candidate in Philosophy  
GSEU, Bargaining Team Member*

**This editorial was originally published with photographs provided by the author, which has since been removed at the request of the author. Views and opinions presented in this editorial are those of the author alone.**

In New York State's negotiations[i] with CWA 1104 Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU), SUNY's negotiation team headed by Michael Volforte insists on humiliating offers for the group of workers that make up the largest percentage of instructional labor in the SUNY system. In the February 12 negotiation session, SUNY offered a wage proposal that remained below NYS's own minimum wage, \$11,102 for a full academic-year appointment. After backlash, it merely increased its offer to \$15,778 during the following March 11<sup>th</sup> session. During the negotiations, Volforte claimed that it is the graduate workers' choice whether or not to take up poverty wages. The US' largest public university system's approach to graduate workers displays the latest example of academic administrators' disregard for their workers.

SUNY presented its February 12th proposal as a counter to GSEU's original wage proposal that was introduced two weeks prior. GSEU's current contract establishes a minimum yearly salary of \$10,779 for graduate workers at the four SUNY University Centers in Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, and Stony Brook. It does not establish a minimum for other campuses. This antiquated figure is so absurd that despite not being contractually obligated to, all four major university centers and several smaller campuses already offer salaries above \$20,000 across the state—largely as a result of GSEU Living Wage Campaigns over the last decade. However, other colleges across the SUNY system still pay teaching and graduate assistants the contractual minimum.

Based on the extensive research conducted by the bargaining committee members, GSEU presented a comprehensive wage proposal that illustrated SUNY's low compensation levels compared to the cost of living across New York State and SUNY's peer institutions. All calculations showed that the graduate educators and researchers of New York's higher-ed public institutions face impoverished conditions. When we look[ii] at the university centers, SUNY's compensation does not come anywhere close to the figures one finds in acclaimed cost of living calculation databases. In fact, in all but one university, the cost of living in the surrounding area is double the graduate stipend. The University at Buffalo is the only exception, exceeding half of the cost of living only by around \$1,500.

Take Stony Brook University as an example,

one of SUNY's flagship institutions, where conditions are harsher because of the increased downstate cost of living. Here,[i] the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment makes up 91% of the mean salary of a graduate worker. According to the Department of Housing poverty level guidelines,[ii] the "extremely low income" threshold for Suffolk County is \$32,800, while the current stipend for graduate workers at Stony Brook University is \$26,000. Graduate workers can't even get an affordable housing deal from the university itself. The monthly price for the university's own cheapest graduate housing, an "apartment-style double occupancy room" is \$1,161. This means that NYS' own public education system imposes a housing cost burden on its educators by its own standards; NYS defines[i] spending more than 30% of your income on rent as suffering a housing cost burden, and spending more than 50% of your income on rent as having a "severe cost burden." This burden is imposed frequently on international students who are legally limited in finding additional employment and who often prefer on-campus housing due to a lack of knowledge, connections, time, or other required materials (like US credit scores or guarantors etc.) to find off-campus housing when they arrive in the US.

It is not surprising when we look at these figures that graduate workers are frequently led to unsafe and illegal housing that violates local safety codes, and limits concerning the number of occupants, or are based on predatory and non-official agreements with landlords. It is also not surprising that according to a union poll[i] at Stony Brook University, virtually all graduate workers say that their stipend is not enough to "live comfortably, and to focus on [one's] research, without financial stress and worry," and 71% say that financial issues caused them mental health problems.

GSEU also presented comparisons[iii] between SUNY schools and other Association of American Universities (AAU), R1, and R2 universities. Comparing SUNY stipends to 71 comparable AAU institutions, every SUNY institution falls below the median. Buffalo ranks 45, Binghamton 57, Albany 61, and Stony Brook 70. Only three peer institutions treat and value their graduate workers more poorly than Stony Brook University. SUNY in this way significantly devalues its workers' labor compared to the market standards.

More than 4,000 teaching and graduate assistants work in the SUNY system, and according to an independent report[iv] at Stony Brook University, graduate workers make up the largest group of instructional employees at this campus. In the SUNY system that houses[v] more than 300,000 students, this means that every year hundreds

of thousands of students are taught by graduate workers. TAs and GAs teach their own courses and manage the majority of grading labor in many others, making them essential academic workers for the research and education that New York's public higher ed system offers. So, even though New York is the third wealthiest state in the US, hundreds of thousands of students are instructed by these TAs and GAs who are paid poverty wages. It is clear that this is shameful for not only SUNY leaders and administrators but all New York politicians who maintain silence on the impoverished conditions of the leading educators and researchers in the state's own public education system.

Instead of fixing this injustice, SUNY insists on offering poverty wages in the current contract negotiations. The union proposed a revised minimum stipend of \$40,059 for upstate SUNYs and \$44,731 for downstate schools, which would place the SUNY system within the top quarter of similar AAU schools in terms of the compensation offered to graduate workers in proportion to cost of living. With Rutgers University, another public university in our neighboring state, offering \$40,000 salaries to graduate workers, GSEU's wage proposal is completely plausible for one of the richest states in this country and for an education system that seeks to value the well-being, dignity, and living standards of educators. This wage proposal would represent an infinitesimal percent of NYS budget; more precisely, 0.03%, according to the 2024 numbers.

Thereby, Volforte's response in the February 12 session, the proposal to increase the \$10,779 minimum stipend level to \$11,300, was a slap in the face to graduate workers. Converted to an hourly rate, this figure is below the state minimum wage. Nevertheless, SUNY's negotiating team did not seem disturbed by the irony of a state offering to pay its essential higher ed workers below its own minimum wage. On the February 26 session, graduate workers traveled to Albany for a protest[i] to demand a fair contract. After this action in the New York State Capitol, on the March 11 negotiation session, SUNY merely offered an increase of around \$4,000, and proposed a \$15,778 minimum stipend.

UNY's attempts to justify its figures only illustrated its disregard for its educators further. When asked directly, SUNY's team confirmed that cost of living was not considered when coming up with the base pay number, a point repeated by SUNY on March 11 negotiations. Not acknowledging that this figure is below the state minimum wage, Volforte argued that he is merely offering the same deal he has done to other SUNY unions, that is, applying a 3% increase. This failed to acknowledge the fact that the

compensation levels for the members of other unions are well above the poverty wages. SUNY negotiation team also had no response to the GSEU's findings regarding the cost of living compared to peer institutions. Furthermore, Volforte failed to address what is already a serious problem for SUNY: attracting researchers. Eventually, failing to maintain a rational basis for their proposal, SUNY's stance was reduced to indifference and imposition of power; culminating in the statement that this is the offer, and graduate workers can choose to take the job or not, as with any other choice in life.

SUNY as such represents another chilling representation of laissez-faire logic in academia, the reduction of the academy to a bottom-line-focused market environment and a rejection of any ethical, humanitarian,

This is a moral rationalization employing the concept and language and freedom to maintain and perpetuate an exploitative status quo. As Volforte illustrates, the more such logic is asked to follow established standards of reason and ethics, the stronger its foundation resorts to the assertions of power and avoidance of justification. Hiding behind this façade of freedom cannot mystify the contradiction of offering poverty wages in one of the richest states of the richest countries in the world. It cannot explain why there has to be any choice where individuals would have to live in poverty in a state home to the world's top billionaires, and where giving a dignified life to workers would take up an infinitesimal part of the budget. Neither can it justify a world formed by the universalization of its rationality, which would imply the non-existence of any protections for workers, including a minimum wage. For, why should not all employers be justified in saying it is the workers' choice to take the employer's offer or not, leaving us with nothing more than a race to the bottom? SUNY's approach epitomizes one no different than any other corporate negotiator.

SUNY's lack of earnest engagement or attempt at justification, its inability to recognize the universal consequences of one's own reasoning, and resort to fallacious arguments that are not explanatory but merely assertive are all signs of a crumbling rationality. Like all ethics and rationalities of exploitation, it should be defeated and rendered powerless in practice and in public consciousness, left only as of interest as another example of individuals' shocking ability to rationalize their lack of empathy and disregard for the misery of their fellow human beings.

Figure provided by the author.

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