

GSA Council 20 April 2015
GSA Board 2014-2015 Strategic Work Plan: Update

Dear GSA Council,

As continuing members will recall, **the GSA Council received the GSA Board 2014-2015 Strategic Work Plan (SWP) at its meeting of June 16, 2014.** GSA Council then received **updates concerning the GSA's progress thus far in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the Board SWP in September and January. I now offer you a final update as we come to the end of our terms.** Your new team of Directly-Elected Officers has been hard at work (in collaboration with myself and the current team of Directly-Elected Officers) on developing the GSA Board 2015-2016 Strategic Work Plan and will bring it to Council in May.

As a reminder, the Board SWP is available online for your review at <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/03SWP.aspx>. It was prepared by me along with the GSA Vice-Presidents to direct our efforts and identify areas where we can work with others in the University community. The current Board SWP builds upon the 2013-2014 Board SWP, which ensures continuity in terms of strategic goals, planning, and advocacy.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As Councillors will recall, the Dean of FGSR presented on FGSR's plan for professional development at the March meeting of GSA Council. **A notice of motion to approve the addition of professional development requirements for graduate students to the U of A Calendar was made at FGSR Council on March 25, 2015;** we expect that the program will be passed by June. **The GSA has been active in the development of the plan,** with Vice-President Academic Colin More and Vice-President External Susan Cake leading the team on professional development issues. We look forward to seeing the final plan, and for the implementation of more professional development opportunities for graduate students to begin.

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The proposal for Permanent Residence (PR) application assistance at the U of A is still under review by the University legal team. Vice-President Student Services Megha Bajaj and Vice-President Labour Monty Bal continue to work on the issue, and **the new team of DEOs plans to continue this work.** As a reminder, the proposal for PR application assistance includes initial consultations regarding under which PR stream to apply, group sessions about PR application, and the ability to have an immigration consultant review a PR application before it is submitted. The application assistance services are proposed to be available at a subsidized, pay-per-use cost.

DEPARTMENT LIAISON INITIATIVE (DLI) AND DEPARTMENTAL GSAs

As we have reported in Council, we have created a draft constitution for Departmental GSAs to use when forming as a group under Student Group Services. Under the leadership of Vice-President Student Services Megha Bajaj, we have met several times with Student Group Services about registration issues for Departmental GSAs. Our discussions are still in the preliminary phases, but we are working towards being able to offer more supports for Departmental GSAs and other academically-related graduate student groups within the GSA office. **The new team will also be working hard this summer to move forward the Departmental Liaison Initiative,** with plans to meet with graduate students in departments across campus. **It is our goal to have meetings with every departmental GSA on campus, to hear directly from graduate students, and to strengthen the connection between graduate students and the GSA.**

GRADUATE STUDENT SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

This year, the GSA worked to increase the amount of social engagement opportunities offered for all graduate students. In the fall, we partnered with the Alumni Association to offer what we hope will be an annual Fall Mix and Mingle event. This event invited graduate students to mingle with each other, and with professionals from a variety of fields, over bowls of delicious chili. **In February, we also hosted the first Winter Career & Networking Mixer.** Again, professionals from a variety of disciplines were invited to attend. This event was more formalized, with the intention being that professionals share with graduate students their

experiences of moving from the academic to the industrial, non-profit, or government realm. **Both events were great successes, and we hope that the new team of DEOs will continue to offer these opportunities and others to graduate students.**

GSA INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ADVOCACY

As we reported in March, Vice-President External Susan Cake and I have worked with the three other Alberta CARI GSAs to **finalize the creation of the new Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC)**. The application to form as a society under the *Societies Act* has been submitted, and we are planning a transition meeting to train the new teams of DEOs from all four GSAs. **We also continue to work with the GU15 graduate student group**, which met recently in Calgary. Because the meeting was so close, we were able to send the current and incoming Presidents and Vice-President Externals. GU15 brings together GSAs from across Canada to discuss commonalities and differences in issues facing graduate students at different institutions. Topics discussed at this meeting included graduate student funding, professional development, and international student issues, among many others.

MENTAL HEALTH

Vice-President Labour Monty Bal continues to be an active participant in an array of discussions on mental health that are happening on campus and this is a priority for the GSA. As he reports to you regularly in Council, **the University is planning several major initiatives with respect to mental health**. At February Council, we also heard from the Interim Dean of Students with regards to the initiatives from her office, **including a suicide awareness campaign which should launch over the spring/summer**. In the meantime, Monty continues to ensure that the graduate student voice is present in mental health initiatives across campus.

SUSTAINED AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN PSE TUITION, FEES, AND FUNDING DISCUSSIONS

The GSA is committed to remaining active in discussions regarding PSE tuition, fees and funding discussions. The Government of Alberta had minimal consultation with graduate students leading up to the recent 2015 Alberta Budget, which saw another cut in funding to PSE. **Through ab-GPAC, we intend to make sure that graduate student voices are heard at the provincial level**. At the university level, we are an active participant in discussions with the Provost's Office and the Students' Union regarding **restructuring of Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees at the U of A**. Although there have been no decisions yet in this discussion, the entire group is keen to move forward and ensure that MNIFs are handled in a clear and transparent manner. We are sure that the new team will continue these considerations, and remain engaged in other discussions related to tuition, market modifiers, and mandatory non-instructional fees.

MULTI-FAITH PRAYER AND MEDITATION SPACE

In March, plans to renovate the designated HUB Mall space into a Multi-Faith Prayer and Meditation Space were approved by the General Faculties Council Facilities Development Committee. To move ahead with the renovation, \$200,000 needs to be raised, and a fundraising campaign will be initiated through the Office of Advancement. **An MOU to create the new space has been signed between the GSA, the SU, the Dean of Students, and Facilities and Operations**.

PAW CENTRE

The Grand Opening of the PAW Centre occurred in March, and Vice-President Student Services Megha Bajaj and I both spoke at events throughout the day. We are thrilled that the PAW Centre is open and that graduate students are actively using the space. **In March, Megha also led tours of the various spaces in PAW that are available for graduate student groups to book for their meetings and events at no cost**. Watch for the creation of patio space outside of the Graduate Student Lounge as summer progresses. Finally, the GSA is working on programming that will make use of the Graduate Student Lounge.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT GOVERNING THE ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

The 2015-2016 Salary Scale for the Collective Agreement governing the Academic Employment of Graduate Students has been released and is available here: <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/en/04CollectiveAgreement.aspx>. **Led by Vice-President Labour Monty Bal, we continue to work on compliance issues**. Recently, we have done a survey of information provided to graduate students on departmental websites; we also continue to work with Administration to accumulate copies of contracts. **We intend to use the**

mechanisms in the CA to address clear violations with Administration, and hope that these actions will lead to all graduate students being treated fairly under the terms of the CA.

LONG-TERM HEALTH OF THE ORGANIZATION

Council approved a balanced 2015-2016 GSA Budget at its February meeting, which reflects the overall health of the GSA. The Financial Team (ED Ellen Schoeck (team leader), Director of Operations Heather Hogg, Financial Manager Dorte Sheikh, and Accountant Shirley Ball) is now preparing for the 2015 Audit, which will come to Council in July. **Our previous photocopier lease expired at the end of March, which saw the removal of the photocopier available for graduate student use in Triffo Hall.** Although the machine saw some use, the use did not offset the cost. Our new photocopier lease is for two machines for GSA office use for three years, and **represents a significant decrease in costs overall compared to the previous lease.** Our lawyers reviewed the lease contract before it was signed, as per our practice before signing any lease, and we were able to decrease the GSA's risk on the lease through some amendments to the contract.

As the GSA continues to evolve, **Executive Director Ellen Schoeck and her management team have reassessed our staffing needs** to ensure optimal support for the initiatives outlined in the Board SWP. **I am happy to report that negotiations for the NASA Collective Agreement that covers our office staff should conclude in May.** Following on external consultations that occurred over the summer, we are working to revamp and improve the GSA website to enhance our external image. **We continue to work on the comprehensive review and restructuring of GSA Bylaw and Policy that began in 2010** (joining bylaw and policy together is a top priority). The major re-haul of bylaw and policy with respect to GSA elections remains ongoing.

On behalf of my entire team, I want to thank Council for their active and productive engagement on these and other initiatives over the last year. We have been proud to serve as your Directly-Elected Officers, and are confident that the incoming team will continue the work we started to ensure that graduate student concerns and issues are addressed across campus. Watch for the GSA Board 2015-2016 Strategic Work Plan from the new team in May.

Sincerely,



Nathan Andrews, GSA President 2014-2015