

GSA Council 22 September 2014
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.** The SWP is available online for your review at <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/03SWP.aspx>. The 2014-2015 SWP 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 SWP built upon the 2013-2014 SWP, which ensures continuity in terms of strategic goals, planning, and advocacy.

After releasing the SWP, the Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs) and I have met with various members of University administration to discuss common goals, and devise strategies to implement aspects of the plan that are of mutual interest. **At this point in our terms, I would like to offer you an update concerning the GSA's progress thus far in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the GSA Board 2014-2015 SWP.** Updates will also come to Council in January and April, but I encourage you to ask questions about the status of SWP goals at any time throughout the year.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The FGSR professional development working groups continue to meet, and the GSA continues to be active in those groups, with Vice-President Academic Colin More and Vice-President External Susan Cake leading the team on professional development issues. We are looking forward to the outcomes and new opportunities that will be available for graduate students. Over the summer we have had the opportunity to **discuss professional development for graduate students with both the Dean of FGSR and the Provost, and have received encouragement from both to push forward on this issue.**

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

Vice-President External Susan Cake has been representing graduate students across Alberta on a **number of committees organized by the Alberta Ministry of Innovation and Advance Education.** In these meetings, **discussion has ranged from the current state of post-secondary education funding and potential models for increasing the sustainability of funding, to working to define terms such as 'mandatory non-instructional fees' and 'tuition'.** As part of this work, Susan has reached out to the other Alberta CARI GSAs to receive input and examples to take back to the committees, and has met with representatives from the Council of Alberta Undergraduate Students (CAUS) and the Alberta Student Executive Council (ASEC) to **ensure that student voices are consistently represented at the table.**

GRADUATE STUDENT SUPERVISION

Vice-President Academic Colin More continues to **work on matters associated with supervision.** Additionally, the DEOs have had the opportunity to speak to Provost Carl Amrhein, Deputy Provost Olive Yonge, Vice-Provost Roger Epp, and the other Vice-Provosts about this important issue. The DEOs have also recently had the chance to discuss issues associated with graduate supervision with FGSR Dean Mazi Shirvani.

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The GSA also recently sent a letter to the provincial government, along with the Athabasca University GSA and the University of Lethbridge GSA Presidents, **asking that the QEII Graduate Scholarship applications be opened to international students.** We have yet to hear from the province in regards to that letter, but are hopeful that the response will be positive.

Vice-President Student Services Megha Bajaj and Vice-President Labour Monty Bal continue to work on the issue of **Permanent Residence (PR) application assistance at the U of A.** They met with Vice-President (International) Britta Baron in August to discuss the issue. From that meeting, we learned that **the proposal for PR application assistance includes initial consultations regarding which PR stream to apply under, 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.** The proposal is currently under review by the U of A legal counsel. We will continue to meet with University of Alberta International about PR as the proposal evolves.

DEPARTMENT LIAISON INITIATIVE (DLI)

In August, the GSA moved forward with the next stage of the Departmental Liaison Initiative (DLI). Vice-President Student Services Megha Bajaj and I sent letters to a number of departmental GSAs, **asking for the opportunity to come to their departments, and speak with graduate students about their concerns and priorities.** We have had the opportunity to meet with one department, and are working to contact and arrange meetings with more departments. **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. We copy the GSA Councillor on those letters, so watch your email if we haven't already met with your department!

CONNECTING WITH GRADUATE STUDENTS

Our Fall Orientation event on August 29 was a great success! Over 300 new graduate students came to learn about the GSA and visit the information booths set up by our service providers. We presented at 33 departmental orientations, and **want to thank all of the Councillors who joined us for the presentations in their departments!**

Our first ever Fall Mix and Mingle event will be held on September 24, 2014. Councillors will have received an invitation, and I look forward to seeing you there. The event is generously sponsored by the Alumni Association, and we are all very excited to 'mix and mingle' with fellow graduate students.

GSA INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ADVOCACY

As Council will be hearing the upcoming meeting of GSA Council, Vice-President External Susan Cake and myself have been hard at work since the start of our terms **finalizing the creation of the new provincial advocacy group with the three other Alberta CARI GSAs.** Should all four GSAs agree to join the new group, the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) will submit its application to register under the Alberta *Societies Act* in early October. **In the meantime, representatives from the four GSAs have already begun preparing other governing documents (eg, financial control policy) and identifying mutually agreeable advocacy points.**

Over the summer, Susan and I also had the opportunity to attend a **GU15** meeting in Montreal. As I reported to Council in August, in addition to sharing important information about issues that each GSA is facing individually, the group also discussed becoming more of an **advocacy organization at the federal level.** Although the group does not plan to formalize as a federal lobby group, it will be interesting to observe how the 15 GSAs who meet under this banner move towards coming together on common issues and concerns.

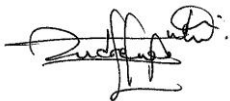
COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT UPDATE

As Councillors are aware, **we recently reached settlements with the U of A Board of Governors (BoG) regarding the AEGS Collective Agreement.** Council ratified this agreement in a Special Meeting on August 12, and ratification of the agreement by the BoG will follow. As this is a two-year agreement (ending in 2016) the team, led by Vice-President Labour Monty Bal, is looking forward to spending this year **focusing on issues of compliance and education alongside the Office of the Provost.** Please consult the GSA website for more information about the CA: <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/04CollectiveAgreement.aspx>.

PAW CENTRE

Finally, we would like to remind Councillors that the Physical Activity and Wellness (PAW) Centre will be opening this year - in fact, **Social Street and the Graduate Student Lounge are already open!** As Vice-President Student Services Megha Bajaj has reported to Council previously, the soft opening will happen over the fall semester, with the grand opening slated for March 2015. The GSA is excited about the Graduate Student Lounge that will be available in the PAW Centre for graduate student drop-in use, graduate student group bookings, and for social engagement events hosted by the GSA. Watch for more announcements about programming in the lounge over the next year. I also want to draw to Councillors' attention that graduate students will begin to see the PAW Centre fee on their tuition and fee assessments starting in January 2015. University Architect Ben Louie will be present at the September 22 meeting of GSA Council to provide an update on the PAW Centre and answer questions that Councillors may have.

Sincerely,



Nathan Andrews, GSA President 2014-2015