



Dear Councillors,

January 8, 2016

Those of you who have been on GSA Council since May will remember receiving the 2015-2016 Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP); others will recall that myself and the GSA Vice-Presidents offered an update on our progress with respect to the SWP at the September meeting of GSA Council. As you know, this Plan was prepared by the current team of Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs), the out-going team, and GSA Management to direct our efforts and identify areas where we can work with others in the University community. The complete SWP is available for your review on the GSA website at <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/O3SWP.aspx>.

As we near the end of our terms, I would like to offer you an update concerning the GSA's progress in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the SWP. A final update will also come to GSA Council in April, but I encourage you to ask questions about the status of SWP goals at any time throughout the year.

Highlights from our past eight months in office include:

- **Professional Development:** Vice-President Academic Harsh Thaker, Vice-President Labour Sarah Ficko, and I remain involved FGSR's ongoing work to develop innovative, meaningful professional development opportunities for graduate students, including the mentorship opportunities that now exist. All the DEOs worked together to host the Fall Mix and Mingle Professional Development event (generously sponsored by FGSR) and we are currently working on planning a similar event, generously sponsored by the Alumni Association, for February.
- **Mental Health Services and Residences:** In addition to her labour portfolio, Sarah continues her work on mental health services on campus – this is an important issue for graduate students and she meets regularly with an array of stakeholders and partners. Vice-President External Alphonse Ndem Ahola likewise remains closely involved in issues concerning graduate residences; I encourage you to speak to him if you hear of any problems concerning residences.
- **Winter Orientation and Awards:** Under the leadership of Alphonse and myself, the GSA hosted a Winter Orientation event in January. Alphonse, as Chair of the GSA Awards Selection Committee, was also engaged in the fall in the adjudication on behalf of the province of the Alberta Graduate Citizenship Award. Applications for this award were up this year (123 in 2015 compared to 87 in 2014). Alphonse will also be overseeing the adjudication of GSA Recognition Awards and the planning process for our annual Awards Night to honor recipients.
- **ab-GPAC:** After a lengthy building process, the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) is meeting regularly to discuss issues of importance to graduate students at Alberta's four CARI institutions and to advocate on their behalf. Our GSA is represented by Alphonse, Councillor-at-Large Monty Bal, and myself. We attended an AGM for the group in Lethbridge this past November and continue to meet via conference call. As a group we have had several important discussions with the provincial government and also submitted feedback to government as part of a consultative process on potential amendments to the *Post-Secondary Learning Act* and a position statement on the provincial budget.
- **PAW Centre:** Vice-President Student Services Ali Talaei remains engaged with discussions concerning the PAW Centre graduate student lounge. After resolving an issue in the fall with the room being overly hot, he is involved with the development of the outside patio space as well as some improvements to the lounge space itself. The GSA has also begun to collect revenue from Chopped Leaf and we are working on a sub-lease agreement with the SU in connection with this.



- **GSA Finances:** Sarah and I (as Vice-Chair and Chair, respectively, of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee) have been working closely with that committee on both the GSA's quarterly financial statements and the forthcoming 2016-2017 GSA budget, which will be presented to GSA Council shortly. The GSA is in excellent financial shape and together with the Financial Team we are also working with ATB Investment Management to ensure the prudent administration of our various funds.
- **U-Pass:** The current U-Pass agreement between the University and the City of Edmonton (the SU and GSA then negotiate a separate agreement with the University) expires in 2017. Ali has already begun to meet with stakeholders to discuss tactics for the upcoming negotiation and we are pleased to inform you that the University will continue to offer a subsidy for the service (the amount has yet to be determined).
- **GSA Events:** Throughout the fall all the DEOs hosted a series of GSA Coffee Breaks. These informal events were made possible through an Unwind Your Grant secured by the GSA and were hosted in Triffo Hall and the PAW lounge space and served to get students out of their labs and offices, and into a space where they can interact with other graduate students from across campus, enjoy refreshments, and learn more about the GSA. We also received a Gold Level Green Spaces Certification from the Office of Sustainability for these events and will make similar applications for all future GSA events.
- **Collective Agreement:** Under the leadership of Sarah as Vice-President Labour, the GSA's Opening Position for Collective Agreement negotiations was submitted to the Board of Governors in October and Sarah and I presented jointly to the Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee in November with respect to the Opening Position. Sarah will report regularly to GSA Council as the GSA Negotiating Committee negotiates the agreement. Compliance with the Collective Agreement likewise remains a priority for the GSA.
- **Strategic Institutional Plan:** The GSA DEOs played leading roles in the installation of President Turpin and are currently engaged in the consultative process surrounding the development of the next Strategic Institutional Plan. I also presented the SWP to General Faculties Council in November.
- **GSA Services:** Finally, under the leadership of Ali, we surveyed all graduate students throughout October and November regarding GSA services. We are currently working to analyze the results and will report on this further, but I am happy to say that levels of satisfaction are high (but we definitely need to be more pro-active in advertising our services and in educating the graduate student community about them).

As was the case with previous GSA Board SWPs, in implementing this Plan, we will strive for transparency, accountability, and reputation building through regular updates to GSA Council and other stakeholders. Through this process, we hope to gain valuable feedback on how we can best achieve what we have set out to accomplish. I look forward to our discussion on January 18.

Sincerely,

Colin More 2015-2016 GSA President