



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

April 6, 2018

As many of you may remember, my team and I began the development of the 2017-2018 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP) in May of 2017 and we presented the finalized plan to GSA Council in July. The complete SWP is available for your review on the GSA website at <https://www.ualberta.ca/graduate-students-association/about/board-strategic-work-plan>.

Below is the final update concerning the GSA's progress in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the 2017-2018 SWP. Updates were also provided to GSA Council in October and January; in preparing this final update, I asked my team to individually identify the key initiatives they have engaged with this year. I welcome the chance to discuss what follows with you on April 16.

- As you will recall, one of our main team goals was to advocate for the University to launch a review of the current state of graduate student funding on campus, and the potential to establish guaranteed minimum funding packages. After submitting a proposal to the Provost and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) concerning this, the Dean of FGSR created and circulated a survey to University departments to gather more information about their current graduate student funding practices. Dean Zwicker attended the February meeting of GSA Council to share her findings from this survey and to answer questions. In my recent meetings with Dr. Zwicker, I have continued to discuss her next steps for this project and recommend that the 2018-2019 GSA Directly-Elected Officers continue working on this important issue (guaranteed minimum funding), especially in light of the coming campus budget reductions.
- As outlined in the GSA's public response to the International Tuition Fee Increase, we, along with the University of Alberta Students' Union (SU), are disappointed that the 3.14% proposed tuition increase was approved, along with other increases that put cost pressures on students, such as a 4% increase to residence rates. Leading up to the final vote on March 16, Vice-President Academic, Firouz, Vice-President Labour, Sasha, and I met with as many Board of Governors members as possible to stress students' concerns regarding the proposal. I also delivered presentations in various governance venues to argue against the tuition increases and voted against these motions. The GSA will continue to advocate to both the University and the government that international graduate tuition should be predictable, regulated, and communicated in a manner that will allow graduate students to make informed decisions regarding which institution they choose to attend, and the associated costs they can expect to incur for the duration of their program.
- The Vice-President External, Masoud, and I have continued to actively participate in the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC). This year, they launched a [new website](#), which now includes the U of A GSA blog post that discusses the recent tuition increases and related advocacy work. Finally, the U of A GSA, through ab-GPAC, continues to pressure the government to release their long-awaited decision regarding tuition and funding models and to advocate that international student tuition should be regulated so that there is more stability and predictability for these students.
- Sasha has submitted a proposal to the Assistant Vice-President, Finance and Supply Management Services, requesting that the University of Alberta allow scholarship holders to pay their tuition in installments, without installment fees or interest fees for late payments. This proposal would parallel the long-standing and well-established program that the U of A currently provides for automatic tuition deductions from Graduate Assistantships.
- One of the priorities identified in the 2017-2018 SWP was for the GSA Vice-President External to "engage with Residence Associations and other stakeholders concerning the collection of Residence Association fees." As Masoud noted in his March report to GSA Council, the GSA Board developed a survey on this topic in order to get feedback directly from graduate students living in residences about this issue. Following review of this survey with Residence Associations during a Council of Residence Associations meeting, it was circulated to graduate students living in University residence. I look



forward to reviewing the data that this survey will provide and sharing the results with the incoming GSA Vice-President External, the 2018-2019 Directly-Elected Officer team, as well as with residence associations. Pending the results of this survey, internal discussion, and an analysis of some administrative issues, we are hopeful that this initiative can move forward.

- As discussed in earlier SWP updates to GSA Council, key goals from the Vice-President Labour's portfolio included negotiating for increased compensation for graduate student assistants in the Collective Agreement and ensuring the GSA's compliance with Bill 7. A Pre-Bargaining Town Hall was held in September 2017, and the GSA Negotiating Committee (GSA NC) and the GSA Labour Relations Committee (GSA LRC) reviewed the feedback and suggestions received during this session to develop a series of collective bargaining priorities and goals. Academically-employed graduate students were then asked to vote electronically on these priorities. The GSA NC included these approved priorities in the Opening Position that was sent to the University at the beginning of November. The GSA NC is still engaged in negotiations with the University and updates continue to be sent through the Labour Newsletter to current academically-employed graduate students as they become available. As Sasha presented during the March 2018 GSA Council meeting, draft changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy to ensure the GSA's compliance with Bill 7 are currently with the GSA lawyers for review and we will be engaging with their feedback shortly.
- In the interest of supporting a variety of high quality professional development opportunities for graduate students, the Vice-President Academic, Firouz, has been involved in a sub-group of the Professional Development Advisory Board to create an online graduate student community that would link graduate students with mentors in the industry and community. He also continued to be engaged in conversations regarding learning outcomes on campus and was involved throughout the year in academic governance reform initiatives through the General Faculties Council and its standing committees, which worked to implement the recommendations made in 2017 in the final report of the *ad hoc* Committee on Academic Governance and Delegated Authority.
- Firouz has also been engaged with emerging conversations on campus related to graduate students' academic requirements and experiences, including ongoing discussions about learning outcomes, discussing potential increases to the minimum Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research requirements for the International English Language Testing System scores, modifying the deadlines for part-time students for the completion of their Individual Development Plans, and the establishment of a Cotutelle Program at the U of A.
- Through Sasha's continued participation with the Student Homelessness Project, this team has established a project roadmap and established a series of subcommittees to explore topics such as food security, homeless de-stigmatization, and financial supports. The team will also work on developing medium-term housing and a social service program. It is anticipated that a pilot program will launch in September 2018. Additionally, progress continues with the Campus Parents Project, which has also finalized its project road map and is preparing to research short-term child care resources, lactation stations, breast feeding friendly spaces and physical space and design to accommodate students who parent.
- Masoud and the Vice-President Student Services, Royle, continue to consult with Nursing students completing their practicums at Michener Park on their work to develop a survey to learn about the transit usage of graduate students living in Michener Park and met with these Nursing students on March 27 to discuss their findings. As a next step, the data collected through this survey will be shared with the University, though there was a low participation rate for the survey.
- Sasha initiated and worked in collaboration with various stakeholders to provide the first Graduate Student Safety Session on March 13. This session included presentations and safety tips from University of Alberta Protective Services (UAPS),



Helping Individuals at Risk (HIAR), and Environment, Health, and Safety (EHS). On the topic of campus safety, the GSA has also been invited to participate in a new Campuses and Facilities Safety and Security Working Group, which has been established in response to an increasing number of reports and incidents associated with safety and security on campuses and within certain University buildings.

- Following pressure from the SU and the GSA, student representatives are now included in conversations regarding the development of University policies in response to the upcoming legalisation of cannabis. Royle has been participating in the Cannabis Community Consultation Working Group, and we anticipate that this project will generate a fair measure of work in the upcoming months as legalisation on July 1 fast approaches.
- Royle has also been involved in conversations regarding the future introduction of Smart Fare to the City of Edmonton Transit System (ETS), and the GSA, along with other stakeholders, will be advocating to ETS representatives that the new system should incorporate the U-Pass in a way that is beneficial and streamlined for student users.
- Sasha advocated for a University system of dealing with anonymous multiple complaints based on an actual case of bringing to the attention of the University concerns raised by a group of students without disclosing their identities.
- Finally, the GSA was pleased to host a series of events since our last SWP update to GSA Council in January, including monthly GSA Coffee Breaks, our winter social event in February which was very well attended, the annual GSA Awards Night on March 23, and a new Volunteer Appreciation Event in March to thank graduate student volunteers who serve on our committees for their dedication. Thank you to all who attended these events.

I would also like to express my gratitude and thank my team and the GSA office staff for all of their hard work and support this year. As always, I will be happy to answer your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Babak Soltannia, 2017-2018 GSA President