



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

5 April 2019

As many of you will remember, my team and I began the development of the 2018-2019 Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP) in May and we presented the finalized Plan to GSA Council in July. The complete SWP is available on the [GSA website](#).

Below is the final update concerning the GSA's progress in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the 2018-2019 SWP. Updates were also provided to GSA Council in October and January. Highlights from my portfolio include:

- I have continued advocating for the establishment of minimum funding packages at the U of A, which is a major component of our 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan, and a project that has been ongoing for a number of years. At the February 2019 GSA Council meeting, I was pleased that GSA Council was able to review and discuss background briefing note and draft proposal associated with this prepared by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR). While there are a number of details that need to be worked out and questions that remain, I am proud that this draft proposal now exists, following extensive advocacy efforts on this project this year. I'm also very grateful for past GSA teams who started the conversations.
- At the 15 March 2019 meeting of the Board of Governors (BoG), the proposal to increase international graduate tuition by 2.77% for 2019-2020, and which I voted against, was passed. As a reminder, for 2019-2020, the Government of Alberta had mandated that post-secondary institution freeze domestic tuition, and mandatory non-instructional fees for both domestic and international students. In 2019, important conversations will continue between the GSA, the Alberta government, and the University of Alberta regarding the implementation of the provisions of Bill 19, which requires post-secondary institutions in Alberta to communicate to international graduate students, at the outset of their program, the maximum amount of tuition they will pay each year, for the duration of the standard length of their graduate program. Specific issues to address will include: how the standard length of programs is defined and communicated to international graduate students, what will happen during the transition period, and whether current international graduate students will be grand-parented into the new model, as Bill 19 encourages predictability for current international graduate students as well.
- The BoG is currently revising its standing committee structure and membership, a project that started in 2017. It is anticipated that in the spring many of the recommendations, including revisions to the Terms of Reference of various BoG committees, will be implemented. I have been engaged in ongoing conversations with the current *ad hoc* BoG Governance Committee to advocate for graduate student representation on BoG committees, in order to ensure robust and effective GSA representation at the highest levels of University Governance.
- I continue to meet monthly with representatives from the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association (IGSA), and, in pursuit of supporting "initiatives and programs that specifically support Indigenous [...] graduate students" (2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan), I am proud to report that GSA Council approved the creation of a seat on GSA Council for an Indigenous graduate student, and that GSA Council was able to celebrate this new seat at GSA Council in February. I thank the members of the IGSA for all of their efforts in planning and implementing this celebratory event.
- In March, I developed a joint presentation for the 2019 Student Advisors' Conference at the University of Alberta with Kristine Wray, President of the IGSA. The theme of the conference was "Connecting Our Voices: Sharing and Understanding Our Stories," and our presentation focused on how the IGSA, as a newly established group, works to support, mentor, and increase the visibility of a growing group on campus, and how the GSA has worked to amplify their voice within the University structure this year.
- One of the three priorities for the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) for 2018-2019 was to look at the alleviation of barriers to post-secondary (graduate) education for Indigenous students. In furtherance of developing this priority, ab-GPAC continues to develop research procedures and to consult with the IGSA, along with other Indigenous student stakeholders.



- As outlined in the 2018-2019 SWP, the GSA would continue to evaluate possible memberships with national advocacy groups. In furtherance of this goal, I met with the Member Relations Officers for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) in early February, and also attended a CASA conference in March to learn more about this organization and how their advocacy efforts relate to graduate students.

Recent team goals that spanned across different Directly-Elected Officers' portfolios included:

- To align with our goal of maintaining the GSA's presence in Pride Week programming, my team and I were honoured to participate in the U of A Pride Week Parade on 13 March.
- In early March, the Directly-Elected Officers and GSA Board members participated in a focus group with an FGSR intern regarding their perspectives on graduate student mental health and wellness. The GSA looks forward to continuing exploring ways that the FGSR can support and collaborate with graduate students on this complex issue.
- Along with Masoud, I raised the issue of international graduate students not being able to complete co-op programs with the Interim Dean of the FGSR, and was happy to hear that the Interim Dean will be further exploring this issue, along with potential solutions. In the past few months, we have also been discussing with the Interim Dean the importance of ensuring that clear and transparent letters of offer associated with admissions are provided to incoming graduate students, and I anticipate these conversations will continue as Bill 19's requirement for communicating the total cost for the standard length of programs to international graduate students is implemented for 2020 onwards.
- In alignment with the broad goal of the 2018-2019 SWP to "foster a welcoming environment and an equitable, sustainable, safe, and healthy campus," Fahed and I attended the inaugural event of the Black Graduate Students' Association, on 28 February. At this event, we were also able to connect with current MLA, David Sheppard, and discuss graduate student experiences and issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sasha van der Klein'.

Sasha van der Klein, President



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

5 April 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in January, in addition to attending the regularly scheduled meetings of the many governance committees on which I represent the GSA.

- Following the receipt of a proposal from the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association (IGSA) to add a separate voting seat for an Indigenous graduate student on the Council on Student Affairs (COSA), I spoke in support of this proposal at several committee meetings, and I am happy to report that at the 25 February 2019 General Faculties Council (GFC) meeting, the addition of this voting seat to COSA was approved. As the IGSA's proposal outlined, while there was originally a dedicated seat on COSA for an Indigenous student, as appointed by the Aboriginal Students' Council (ASC), in the original draft terms of reference, Indigenous graduate students face different challenges compared to Indigenous undergraduate students.
- In response to graduate students bringing to my attention concerns about the procedural transparency around the adjudication process for scholarships and awards at the departmental and faculty levels, and the fact that appeal processes do not seem to exist for these decisions, Sasha and I met in March with the Interim Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) to discuss this matter in more detail. To move this project forward, we researched whether other Canadian post-secondary institutions have scholarship and award adjudication policies that allow for appeals. During my conversations with the Interim Vice-Dean, I continued to advocate for the establishment of enhanced transparency mechanisms, such as the creation of feedback rubrics that could be provided to students following the adjudication of an award or scholarship within their department, their home faculty, or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.
- As part of my ongoing efforts to encourage graduate student mentorship, I raised the idea of providing a modest supplementary stipend for graduate students involved as supervisors or co-supervisors in projects associated with the Undergraduate Research Initiative (URI), to ensure that they are recognized academically and financially. When I presented the idea of creating a modest stipend for graduate student participants to the URI Advisory Committee, committee members responded favorably, and as such, I worked to develop a formal proposal to bring forward to the URI Advisory Committee before the end of my term. This proposal stipend would also be provided to post-doctoral fellows serving as supervisors or co-supervisors for URI projects.
- Through my participation with the FGSR Policy Review Committee (FGSR PRC), we have been revisiting the current FGSR policy that graduate students are not permitted to take re-examinations, specifically for course-based graduate students. Members of this committee agreed to conduct more research to determine the frequency of re-examination cases. The FGSR PRC is also in the process of determining whether full-time graduate students should be able to shift to part-time status (with the exception of international graduate students, who must maintain full-time studies for the purposes of their study permits). When reviewing the proposal to allow full-time graduate students to shift to part-time status, and if such a policy is eventually implemented, I emphasized the importance of ensuring graduate students are well-informed about any implications that this shift could have on their ability to access funding opportunities (especially scholarships that are restricted to full-time students only).



# Graduate Students' Association

University of Alberta

- As I reported to GSA Council in October 2018, and in response to some graduate students bringing to my attention concerns about the scheduling of graduate courses during evenings and weekends or last-minute changes in scheduling, this past year, I raised this issue in three different committees (the General Faculties Council Academic Standards Committee (GFC ASC), the General Faculties Council Committee on the Learning Environment (GFC CLE), and the FGSR PRC). My goal was to see the introduction of a University policy concerning the scheduling (and any subsequent rescheduling) of University courses as none currently exists and I will continue to bring this matter forward throughout the duration of my term.
- Since January, I have been participating on the FGSR Learning Outcomes Framework Working Group, which is working to develop templates for graduate degree learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements that describe the essential knowledge and abilities that students are expected to possess once they have completed their graduate degree program. The pace of this project has been moving along quickly, and the working group will be presenting on this project to FGSR Council in April 2019 for pre-consultation. I also participated in two of the sub-groups (Scoping Exercise and Guide for Graduate Program Learning Objectives and Assessment) that worked on developing the details of the new framework.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Aliramezani'.

Masoud Aliramezani, Vice-President Academic



# Graduate Students' Association

University of Alberta

Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

5 April 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in January.

- Along with Sasha, and in keeping with the non-partisan nature of the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC), I have continued participating in ab-GPAC's ongoing meetings with representatives of Albertan political parties.
- During the fall semester, I participated in several meetings related to residence issues, and actively participated in the Housing for Students Who Parent Committee, to review all student feedback collected through the University's consultation process in order to determine what kind of supports the University should provide for families. The draft report on this topic was released in January, and I have been involved in ongoing conversations about its content and conclusions.
- In January, I also participated in a consultation with Residence Services regarding their Strategic Occupancy Management Plan. During this consultation, I emphasized a series of issues, including the fact that graduate students feel that residence rental rates are too high, that there are ongoing challenges associated with commuting between Michener Park and the main U of A campus, and that are challenges associated with accessing convenient and affordable grocery stores faced by graduate students living in University residences.
- As a member of the Residence Advisory Committee and the Joint Residence Oversight Committee, I continued discussing the University's residence budget, and the proposed increases to residence rates and meal plans that are anticipated for 2019-2020. GSA President, Sasha, along with the Students' Union representatives on the Board of Governors (BoG), voted against the proposed 5% increase to University residence rental rates at the 15 March 2019 BoG meeting. During this meeting, Sasha argued that residence rates should not increase for those living at Michener Park, given that this residence will close in 2020. The GSA will continue advocating to the University that variable supports be provided to the graduate student residents of Michener Park, and their families, while residents move out of the property.
- Finally, in my role as the Chair of the GSA Awards Selection Committee (GSA ASC), the GSA ASC will be having another in-person meeting before the end of my term to debrief on the 2019 GSA Recognition Awards adjudication process, and consider whether to propose changes to any of the eligibility criteria for the current GSA Recognition Awards. I was also honored to attend the 2019 GSA Awards Night in March, and appreciated the opportunity to congratulate all of the winners of the 2019 GSA Recognition Awards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zhihong Pan'.

Zhihong Pan, Vice-President External



# Graduate Students' Association

University of Alberta

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5 April 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in January.

- Negotiations for the next Graduate Assistantship Collective Agreement (CA) have been ongoing for several months and updates on negotiations have been shared with all current academically-employed graduate students. As per the regulations outlined in the *Labour Relations Code*, a final ratification vote was sent to all current academically-employed graduate students in January. As this ratification vote did not pass, collective bargaining continues. Over the past few months, I have been actively engaged in continued consultation with academically-employed graduate students (AEGSs) to inform these ongoing negotiations, which has included hosting two Labour Town Halls, and implementing standing office hours each week to meet with academically-employed graduate students. This work has also involved responding to approximately 5 – 8 emails per week from academically-employed graduate students with feedback or questions about the negotiations.
- I am pleased to report that at the 15 March 2019 meeting of the Board of Governors, and as a result of negotiations done concurrently but separately from those involving the Collective Agreement, an increase to the Graduate Student Support Fund (GSSF) was approved. The amount of the GSSF, which was previously \$814,000 is now 1,064,000 (please note that the actual amount of the GSSF for 2019-2020 is \$964,000 but \$100,000 was carried over from 2018-2019). This fund serves as a benefit to all graduate students, and is used to fund the GSA Academic Travel Grants, GSA Child Care Grants, GSA Emergency Bursaries, and GSA Recognition Awards and I am extremely happy that we were able to negotiate an increase in these funds.
- As reported previously, a large portion of my portfolio involves meeting with individual graduate students in person or over email regarding the interpretation of and compliance with the Collective Agreement. I have continued this work by responding to approximately 10 email conversations with graduate students per week, and meeting with approximately 4-5 graduate students per month, to assist with more complex issues.
- Along with Sasha, I met with Wade King, Director of the Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights, to discuss graduate student supervision and ongoing GSA work associated with the development of a document detailing graduate students' rights.
- In February, I attended the second meeting of the University's new Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee, which was established as part of the provincial government's new Occupational Health and Safety Legislation. This committee continues to work on establishing a process for graduate students to electronically report any perceived violations related to health and safety (including harassment).
- In addition to participating in the Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee, I have also met individually with representatives from the Post-Doctoral Fellows Association (PDFA), the Non-Academic Staff Association, and the Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta (AASUA), to strengthen connections with these labour unions.
- Through my participation this past year in the Campus and Facilities Safety and Security (CFSS) Working Group, its members have been discussing the feedback from various stakeholders, including GSA Council in January. The draft report was presented to the General Faculties Council (GFC) in February, and the final report, which was approved in March, was sent to the U of A Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) and Vice-President (Finance and Administration). The CFSS Working Group will now be transitioning to a standing committee to continue its work, and two subcommittees on communication and education will be established. The GSA and the Students' Union will have representatives serving on

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the new CFSS Committee, and these two subcommittees.

- I have also been working to expand the GSA's role as a union by developing strategies for outreach and engagement, in collaboration with GSA management. To build on the conversations and consultation with academically-employed graduate students that were carried out during the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement negotiations, these strategies will include regular email updates to the bargaining unit, bi-annual town halls, and frequent GSA Labour Relations Committee meetings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Beth Richardson'.

Beth Richardson, Vice-President Labour



# Graduate Students' Association

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5 April 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in January.

- In weighing opportunities to improve GSA services, and following GSA Council's approval of the GSA Health and Dental Plan Fee for 2019-2020 in March, for the April 2019 GSA Council meeting we have developed a proposal to increase dental coverage for the GSA Health and Dental Plan (without increasing the cost paid by graduate students).
- I have been participating since January in the newly formed Campus Clean Air Strategy Working Group, which is working to develop strategies to make the University of Alberta a smoke free campus. The group is focusing on cigarettes, vaping, shisha, and cannabis smoke, and contains representatives from various stakeholders, including student groups, faculties, Environment, Health & Safety (EHS), and Protective Services.
- These past months, I have continued collaborating with the Office of the Dean of Students, along with the Students' Union, regarding the consultation process that will take place for the development of mental health standards for our institution. These efforts are part of a larger project to develop a Post-Secondary Student Standard for Mental Health, as overseen by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. As reported to GSA Council previously, the consultation process is expected to conclude by May 2019. I also worked to connect the Dean of Students Office with the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association (IGSA), as another key stakeholder for this project.
- Following the 18 March 2018 meeting of GSA Council, I am pleased to report that GSA Council approved the recommended changes to GSA Policy on grants and bursaries. Some key changes included removing the provision that only dependent children up to age twelve (12) are eligible for the GSA Child Care Grant in favour of dependent children up to the age of eighteen (18) being eligible for this funding, and increasing the amount provided for GSA Emergency Bursaries from \$2,000 to \$4,000.
- Since January the U-Pass Advisory Committee and the U-Pass Administration Committee have been discussing at-length the anticipated 2020 integration of Smart Fare with the U-Pass program. As a reminder, the City of Edmonton is implementing a "tap and go" fare payment system that will be implemented for all users utilizing the Edmonton Transit System (ETS), as well as transit systems within St. Alberta and Strathcona County. The U-Pass Administration Committee struck a smaller work group to further discuss the details of implementing Smart Fare for the U-Pass program with various University of Alberta stakeholders. The GSA will remain engaged with these conversations.
- In consultation with the GSA office team, we developed a 101 session on the topic of GSA funding opportunities, and six graduate students attended the second session on 11 March 2019.
- Through my work with the Days of Action Committee, members of this committee coordinated a photo series on the topic of gender-based violence, and graduate students were encouraged to share their personal stories. This committee, along with University of Alberta International, also coordinated various programming to highlight the International Day of Happiness on 20 March.

Sincerely,

Fahed Elian, Vice-President Student Services

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