



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

4 October 2018

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](#).

As outlined at the July 2018 meeting of GSA Council when this plan was presented, we divided our SWP into two documents. The first is an outward facing document that is crisp and visually engaging. The main audiences for this document include University Administration, U of A Board of Governors, the Government of Alberta, and other graduate students. Following the July meeting of GSA Council, the SWP was circulated to these key stakeholders, and my team and I are now meeting with members of University Administration to discuss our priorities for the upcoming year.

The second document is an internal task list, which was shared in-person at the July meeting of GSA Council. This task list is a living document that will constantly evolve as my team strategizes issues and approaches. It is the document where we outline the specific actions we will be taking to work towards our goals and identify the Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs) responsible for each task. Content from this internal document has been used to develop the first update on our progress to GSA Council.

Highlights from my portfolio include:

- Along with the Vice-President Academic (Masoud), I am collaborating with the Post-Doctoral Fellows Association on jointly hosting their annual research day, which this year will include opportunities for graduate students to showcase their research. The event will take place on October 24 and I hope to see many of you there.
- While I was unable to participate in the most recent meeting of ThinkGrad (a national group of GSAs that meet twice a year to share information and discuss best practices), the Vice-President External (Zhihong) represented our GSA and had the opportunity to discuss communication and engagement strategies with other GSAs. We learned a lot about how other GSAs connect with their members. Additionally, I remain engaged in on-going conversations about communication platforms with my colleagues on the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC). Finally, with respect to communications, we recently added Instagram to our social media profiles and the Vice-President Student Services (Fahed) and I are happy to report that following work initiated during the 2017-2018 term, a redesign of the weekly GSA newsletter has been completed. We believe the newsletter will now be more reader friendly and engaging.
- In furtherance of sustainability initiatives, both within the GSA and the University, I have been participating in the Active Transportation Advisory Group to advocate for a campus that is inclusive of multiple modes of transportation and, in consultation with the Executive Director, we have worked on redesigning GSA Council election ballots to use 50% less paper.
- I have been working closely with ab-GPAC on spearheading the three main advocacy priorities identified by the work (tuition and fees, post-graduate employment, and the indigenization of graduate education), focusing particularly on developing ab-GPAC's stance on tuition and fees.
- Working with the GSA office, we redesigned the GSA Board Strategic Work Plan this year to make it more engaging (both for graduate students and stakeholders and partners) and to better align with best practices concerning work plan design/presentation. We have received very positive feedback from partners about the new format.
- I continue to meet with representatives from the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association, and, in pursuit of ab-GPAC's aforementioned priority to focus on Indigenous graduate students this year, I am emphasizing to government that Indigenous students need to be participating directly in conversations about post-secondary Indigenous initiatives.
- In a meeting with University of Alberta International (UAI) I brought forward a series of agenda items relating to improving the experiences of international graduate students and I will follow up on these items in the coming months.
- I have maintained my engagement with Residence Services regarding the upcoming closure of Michener Park and I strongly encourage anyone living there to participate in the University's consultation processes regarding both the closure and the future of family housing



on campus as it is critical that the University hear directly from graduate students regarding their housing needs.

- I will shortly be contacting the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (Finance and Administration) to further discuss funding allocation issues and the broader issue of the University's budget.
- Along with Masoud, I continue to meet regularly with the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) and bring forward a series of standing items of importance to graduate students. I will also be serving as a member of the decanal search committee for selecting the next Dean of the FGSR.
- I continue to build and cultivate relationships with the other associations on campus by collaborating via joint meetings with the Students' Union, Post-Doctoral Fellows Association, Association of Academic Staff: University of Alberta, and Non-Academic Staff Association, to discuss key issues.
- In advance of the upcoming 2019 provincial election, ab-GPAC is in the process of scheduling meetings with all political parties in the province to discuss graduate student issues. Ab-GPAC also continues to collaborate with the Council of Alberta University Students and the Alberta Students' Executive Council in these conversations.
- In addition to participating in ab-GPAC, our GSA maintains its involvement with ThinkGrad and monitor the potential for collaboration with other organizations, such as the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. Along with Masoud, I will also be attending the upcoming conference for the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies.
- At the end of October, we will be piloting a new Halloween themed social event to better connect with graduate students who parent. Both graduate student parents and their children will be invited to attend in costume.

There were also a series of team goals that span across different DEO portfolios:

- In furtherance of our support for the operations of the Campus Food Bank, their Board Chair and Executive Director attended the 3 October GSA Board meeting to discuss graduate student use of the Food Bank.
- We continue to support initiatives for the improvement of services for students who are new to Canada; recently my team met with representatives from UAI to discuss what they offer and we will be following up on some of these ideas when we meet with UAI in the fall.
- We're awaiting announcements from the University and government with respect to their plans for tuition and fees for the coming year and are strategically thinking about how to approach that issue.
- Finally, in pursuit of enhancing engagement with the GSA and fostering connections amongst graduate students, we collaborated with the FGSR to offer over 45 departmental and unit orientations this year.

Sincerely,

Sasha van der Klein
2018-2019 GSA President



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

4 October 2018

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 presentation of the SWP to GSA Council in July. In addition to the below, I have also been getting prepared for the beginning of the regularly scheduled meetings of the many governance committees on which I represent the GSA (learning relevant background, etc) and have worked individually over the summer with several graduate students who have brought forward academic issues to me.

- In efforts to collaborate with professional development providers, and to continue our support of the Graduate Student Internship Program (GSIP), I arranged for representatives from the GSIP to attend the September meeting of GSA Council. In the past few months, I also met with representatives from the Career Centre, and from the Undergraduate Research Initiative. During these meetings, I continued to discuss the possibility of expanding networking and mentorship opportunities for graduate students, in order to improve mentorship skills and to allow graduate students to develop broader networks within the University and with external partners (*in-progress*).
- I have been focused on communicating the importance of monitoring the frequency of supervisory committee meetings to ensure that graduate students benefit from the required amount of contact with their supervisory committees. I have discussed with the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) the idea of incorporating a way to record supervisory committee meetings as important milestones in the new online platform that the FGSR is working to create. This online platform will also be used to track awards, candidacy exam information, information from students' transcripts, etc. (*in-progress*).
- Following discussions with the Interim Dean of the FGSR, the topic of graduate student exam deferrals will be discussed this fall during upcoming FGSR Council Policy Review Committee meetings. While I have learned that graduate students are covered by the University's exam deferral policies and processes in cases of unexpected emergencies, I will be encouraging the FGSR to make it clear in their policies or communications that these regulations also apply to graduate students (*in-progress*).
- 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, I will be meeting with my delegate on the General Faculties Council Academic Standards Committee (GFC ASC) to discuss bringing these concerns forward to the University (*in-progress*).
- I have been attending University of Alberta International (UAI) workshops regarding permanent residency (PR) to continue to learn about recent changes, criteria, and pathways for graduate students applying for PR, and to bring forward questions or concerns from graduate students, including the potential impact of leaves on eligibility for Post-Graduate Work Permits, and how the length of programs can also impact eligibility for these permits (*in-progress*).

Additionally, in the upcoming months, I will be brainstorming ways to gather data on graduate students' experiences with supervisory committee meetings, and discussing with the Interim Dean of the FGSR the perceived lack of course offerings during the Spring/Summer, which was a concern I heard from some graduate students during the General Election.

Sincerely,

Masoud Aliramezani, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Academic



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

4 October 2018

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 presentation of the SWP to GSA Council in July.

- First, over the summer, I finalized discussions with the SU and Residence Associations concerning the collection of Residence Association fees and clarified that, following a survey that the GSA Board ran in 2017-2018 within graduate residences, the GSA will not collect these fees (*completed*).
- I attended the most recent ThinkGrad conference in Winnipeg, where I was able to connect with other student leaders from across Canada to discuss a range of issues, including non-mandatory student association membership, supports for student parents, online engagement, Indigenous graduate students, students' rights, and paid leaves (*completed*).
- 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 (*in-progress*).
- I have participated in initial conversations with Alberta Student Aid regarding potential upcoming changes to Alberta awards and scholarships (*completed*).
- In anticipation of working proactively to support graduate students living in residence, I have been working to establish relationships with Residence Services and members of residence-focused committees (*in-progress*).
- As Sasha reports, we have been working with ab-GPAC on developing its three priorities for 2018-2019. I am participating in developing ab-GPAC's tuition and fees policy (*in-progress*).

Additionally, in the upcoming months I will be focused on participating in consultations for housing for students who parent, as well as consultations with Michener Park residents concerning the structure's closure and the University's transition plan for residents, and whether campus family housing will be an institutional priority. In pursuit of campus safety initiatives, I will be meeting with the Safe Walk Director to learn more about how their service operates. Finally, in my role as the Chair of the GSA Awards Selection Committee, I am looking forward to overseeing the upcoming adjudication of the Alberta Graduate Citizenship Award and the GSA Recognition Awards.

Sincerely,

Zhihong Pan, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President External



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

4 October 2018

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 presentation of the SWP to GSA Council in July.

- Over the summer months, I have been working to improve transparency around graduate student pay issues and I will continue this work into the fall (*in-progress*).
- I have continued advocating for individual graduate students regarding interpretation of and compliance with the Collective Agreement. In addition to responding to approximately 15 email conversations with graduate students per week, since the beginning of my term I have met with approximately 5-6 graduate students per month, to assist with more complex issues (*in-progress*).
- In October, I will be hosting Collective Agreement 101 information sessions for academically-employed graduate students to help spread awareness about the provisions of the Collective Agreement (*in-progress*).
- Through my participation in the Campus and Facilities Safety and Security (CFSS) Working Group, we worked to solicit feedback from graduate students regarding campus safety issues and communicate these to University stakeholders through the circulation of a personal safety survey, and through arranging for the CFSS co-chairs to attend GSA Council in June. The final report from the CFSS Working Group was finalized in September and sent to the Vice-President (Finance and Administration), and Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) (*completed*).
- In conversations with the University concerning their work to develop a response to the new Tri-Council data research management proposals, I advocated for the protection of graduate students intellectual property rights in any new proposals (*completed*).
- I have continued consultations with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research regarding the supervisory training that is now required under the new Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, in order to ensure that it benefits graduate students and facilitates collegial working relationships with their supervisors (*in-progress*).

Additionally, in the upcoming months, I will be focused on collaborating with appropriate parties regarding hosting a spring safety event (which we may use to discuss the new Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, to parallel the work with the FGSR on supervisor training). I remain, with the support of the GSA Negotiating Team, actively involved in negotiations with the University for the new Collective Agreement; once negotiations have completed I will be following up with the University regarding their previous agreement to initiate paystub format education.

Sincerely,

Beth Richardson, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Labour



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

4 October 2018

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 presentation of the SWP to GSA Council in July.

- I have been taking all opportunities to discuss mental wellness with various stakeholders on campus, and participated in the Healthy Campus Alberta Summit over the summer at the University of Calgary. In addition, in October, I will be attending the Canadian Mental Health Association Conference, along with the Students' Union Vice-President Student Life, to learn more about post-secondary institutions' role in supporting mentally healthy campuses (*in-progress*).
- The University's policies on cannabis are currently being developed/implemented. As the Vice-President Student Services, I participated in the Cannabis Advisory Group's work to finalize a series of recommendations that were submitted to the University, and which will be used to shape the final policies (*completed*).
- In weighing opportunities to improve GSA services, and in response to a request for a GSA Council member, we explored the feasibility of adding Occupational Therapy services to the GSA Health and Dental Plan, and put forward a proposal to GSA Council in September (*completed*).
- I remain involved in continued work with the Days of Action Committee on developing their events to promote mental wellness. In September, for World Suicide Prevention Day, the GSA was lit up purple, and purple glow bands were distributed at the GSA office. This committee is also working on creating a communications plan to reach out to students across campus (*in-progress*).
- I met with representatives from the Academic Success Centre and determined that the GSA subsidy this year would be used to initiate a new workshop that will help graduate students learn how to structure their thesis, and about the corpus analysis method (*completed*).
- I continue to participate in working groups to discuss the creation of new all-gender and family washrooms, to ensure they are located in key areas across campus, including the renovations to the Van Vliet change rooms (*in-progress*).
- In working to ensure that students' culture and/or religious requirements are appropriately accommodated, and following conversations with the Dean of Students, Campus & Community Recreation circulated a survey to explore the possibility of offering gender-specific swim times. This survey was circulated through the GSA newsletter to all graduate students (*in-progress*).
- In consultation with the GSA office team, we strategized ways to enhance the promotion of the GSA's services through various communication platforms, and developed 101 sessions on topics such as GSA funding opportunities which we will be hosting throughout the year (*completed*). I also continue to be involved in ongoing efforts to ensure effective communication with our members (*in-progress*).
- Following a meeting in June with the Students' Union and the Alumni Association regarding their new Switchboard tool, which is a free online tool to connect students with fellow alumni, students, faculty, and staff, we advertised this resource in the GSA newsletter, and I also invited them to attend the October meeting of GSA Council to connect with graduate students (*completed*).

Additionally, in the upcoming months, I will be focused on advocating for the continuation and enhancement of dedicated funding from the University and the government to support mental health services on campus (with respect to government funding, I will work in consultation with Sasha and Zhihong as they serve on the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council) and communicating with partners across the University the impact that student/supervisor relationships can have on students' mental health, particularly through my participation with the Board Safety, Health, and Environment Committee.

Sincerely,

Fahed Elian, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Student Services