



The 2019-2020 team of GSA Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs) developed their Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP) from May – June 2019 and presented the finalized Plan to GSA Council in July 2019. The complete SWP is available on the [GSA website](#).

Below is the first update concerning the DEOs' progress in pursuing the goals outlined in the 2019-2020 SWP. Updates will also be provided to GSA Council in January and April. Key projects are as follows:

### Improving Student-Supervisor Relationships

- President, Fahed Elian, invited members of the Board of Governors (BoG) to attend the July 2019 meeting of GSA Council and the need to improve student-supervisor relationships was a consistent theme during the conversation;
- Following this, F Elian has continued meeting with members of the BoG to further discuss this matter. As a result, student-supervisory relationships will be a standing item on the agenda for the Board Learning, Research, and Student Experience Committee (BLRSEC), and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) will be attending the upcoming BLRSEC meeting in November to further discuss this issue;
- The GSA's current statistics for concerns brought forward by graduate students related to student-supervisor issues (five brought forward since June 2019) were reported to the BoG during their October 2019 meeting and the GSA will run a survey to collect additional anecdotal information directly from graduate students;
- Continued conversations with the University President, Provost, and FGSR Dean about concrete ways to improve these relationships are also underway. Specific points that have been raised include: the fact that there is currently a lack of training for professors related to their supervisory roles, there is a reputational risk for the University related to the persistence of poor supervisory relationships, and that, while the GSA has consistently brought forward these issues to the University and senior administration has commissioned extensive reports on the subject, there has been little done to-date to address the recommendations put forward in these reports;
- The GSA's current key recommendations include that the supervisors should complete mandatory training before gaining the privilege of supervising, and that the University should create a mechanism by which this privilege can be suspended or revoked if there are issues with supervision;
- Given that there is a new Chair and several new members on the Board of Governors, F Elian will continue to build relationships with new members and make sure this issue stays at the forefront during this transition; *and*
- D Ashley developed a presentation on the topic of improving the quality of graduate student supervision, which will be presented at the November Canadian Association for Graduate Studies Conference.

### Michener Park Closure

- F Elian and the Vice-President External, Marc Waddingham, have been working with members of the Michener Park Residence Association to learn about the supports that would benefit residents during the process of moving out of Michener Park;
- They have worked to establish a working/advisory group to bring together key stakeholders to continue conversations and establish partnerships to best support residents during the Michener Park closure next summer; *and*
- They started advocacy conversations with the City of Edmonton and Edmonton Student Alliance on the topic of low-income housing options for students. F Elian will also be meeting with Edmonton City Councillor Michael Walters and the U of A Vice-President (Facilities & Operations) to further explore low-income housing options for graduate students.

### Tuition and Funding

- Building on efforts in 2017 and 2018 to advocate for the establishment of minimum funding packages, F Elian is continuing conversations with the new Dean of FGSR about the PhD minimum funding package proposal that the FGSR developed last year, and which was discussed in various University committees in 2018-2019, to determine next steps;



- F Elian worked to find out, from the Minister of Advanced Education D Nicolaides, about the previous delays with provincial scholarships for graduate students, specifically the Queen Elizabeth II (QEII) Scholarship. The Minister confirmed that the funding would not be frozen or decreased, and the FGSR has now received this promised graduate scholarship funding. The GSA thanks the FGSR for its work to minimize the impacts of the delay by creating the University of Alberta Graduate Fellowship funding program to mitigate the delays in provincial funding.
- In May, as a result of Bill 19, the University of Alberta developed a new tuition model for incoming international students to make tuition costs more stable and predictable and, through F Elian and GSA Vice-President Dylan Ashley's advocacy work, the University extended the tuition guarantee for new PhD students starting their programs in fall 2020 to a six-year guarantee, and a four-year guarantee for new thesis-based Masters students starting their programs in fall 2020; *and*
- The University is still waiting for budget announcements from the provincial government, and once this information is known, the GSA will actively participate in conversations about tuition rates for current graduate students for fall 2020, and will continue to update its members on these conversations. Likewise, the GSA will closely monitor any potential issues related to the disbursement of provincial scholarship funding (such as that associated with the QEII's) and liaise with the government as necessary.

## Labour and Collective Agreement

- Vice-President Labour Shanawaz Mohammad sent out two updates over the summer and several updates in the fall to those who held an academic employment under the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement during the Spring/Summer and Fall terms (respectively), met with the GSA Labour Relations Committee in August, provided Labour 101 sessions in two departments upon request, and hosted two labour town halls meetings at the end of September to discuss the current collective bargaining process;
- He continued advocating for individual graduate students regarding interpretation of and compliance with the Collective Agreement. In addition to responding to approximately 10 email conversations with graduate students per week, since the beginning of his term he has met with approximately 7-8 graduate students per month to assist with more complex issues; *and*
- He attended the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions (CGEU) Summit in August to learn more about work done by other unions representing graduate students.

## Other Key Projects Since July

- F Elian has been working to develop relationships with City of Edmonton officials to discuss topics such as TEC Edmonton, eligibility for low-income housing for graduate students, mental health supports, and the development of Smart Fare for the Edmonton Transit System. In addition to planning to meet with Edmonton City Councillor Michael Walters, he has continued to meet with S Robertson, Senior External Relations Advisor with the City of Edmonton, and recently met with the Chair of the TEC Edmonton Board of Directors.
- M Waddingham and F Elian have had several meetings over the summer with the Minister of Advanced Education to discuss improving provincial express entry for international graduate students, professional development funding, the importance of QEII scholarships, mental health funding for institutions, and the creation of a Student Advisory Council.
- D Ashley has continued conversations about whether there are any mechanisms the University could implement to allow international students to participate in full-time off-campus internships, and about creating better predictability in course workloads.
- Vice-President Student Services Chantal Labonté developed an engagement strategy for graduate student groups and hosted a successful workshop in August to understand the needs and goals of graduate student groups,



brainstorm solutions to ongoing challenges, and strengthen relationships.

- M Waddingham has started work on an engagement plan to connect individually with GSA Councillors with the aim of improving communications and connections between GSA Council, GSA Councillors, and their constituents.
- The GSA sponsored and attended a new U of A Senate event, "Show and Tell: A Student Research Celebration," which provided networking opportunities and gave graduate students experience in the public dissemination of research.
- C Labonté continues to participate in conversations related to supporting students who parent on campus, and the Office of the Dean of Students will be working on creating a policy over the next year to clarify supports for students who parent.
- As the contract with the GSA's current Health and Dental Plan is expiring at the end of August 2020, C Labonté and F Elian have sent out a Request for Proposals to known providers of students' health and dental plans, with a submission deadline set for the end of October. Once proposals are received, they will interview selected companies prior to the GSA Board selecting a broker and service provider, and GSA Council will be updated throughout the process.
- At the September meeting of GSA Council, addition of coverage for the repatriation of bodies under the GSA Health and Dental Plan was approved. This new coverage will be in effect retroactively as of 1 September 2019, without any increases to the Plan fee for graduate students for 2019-2020.
- F Elian met with the new Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research), Dr Glanfield, to discuss previous conversations with the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association (IGSA) regarding the implementation of a SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) pod at the U of A. He will also continue conversations with the incoming President of the IGSA, who was elected in September 2019, about topics such as a previous request to advocate for the provision of space on campus for the IGSA.
- F Elian has been working alongside the GSA office team to develop a series of marketing videos to help graduate students learn about the services and benefits the GSA provides to its members.
- In the past few months, D Ashley has met with a number of graduate students encountering difficulties related to academic structures/processes.
- Though the compositions of the Board of Governors standing committees were modified prior to the start of the 2019-2020 term to no longer allow delegates, F Elian advocated that the Vice-President External be allowed to remain as the President's delegate on the Board Reputation and Public Affairs Committee until the end of the current DEOs' terms (30 April 2019).
- F Elian, along with the GSA office team, developed evaluations for the President and Vice-Presidents to help ensure accountability and transparency. These evaluations were circulated to all graduate student members of the GSA Board to complete in late October.