

GSA Council Meeting AMENDED MINUTES

Monday, June 20, 2016 at 6:00 pm
2-100 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex

IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah Ficko (President)	Robert Reklow (Councillor-at-Large)	Amanda Radil (Ed Psych)	Kelsey Peterson (Occupational Therapy)
Firouz Khodayari (VP Academic)	Dasha Smirnow (Councillor-at-Large)	Ryan Kisslinger (Electrical & Computer Engineering)	Sheldon Berke (Oncology)
Sasha van der Klein (VP Labour)	Sabrina Lopresti (AFNS)	Lorna Sutherland (Elementary Education)	Ashley Bahry (Paediatrics)
Masoud Khademi (VP External)	Swai Mon Khaing (Biochemistry)	Shaina Humble (English & Film Studies)	Will Giang (Physics)
Ali Talaei (VP Student Services)	Michele DuVal (Biological Sciences)	Neil Prather (History & Classics)	Brayden Whitlock (Physiology)
Sulya Fenichel (Speaker)	Trent Nabe (Business MBA)	Jocelyn Beyer; Evgeniya Kuznetsova (Humanities Computing)	Justin Leifso (Political Science)
Sean Rah (DRO)	Yi Fang (Business PhD)	Faisal Hirji (Lab Medicine & Pathology)	Karen Du (Psychology)
Jane Traynor (Senator)	Beth Richardson (Cell Bio)	Carla Lewis (Library & Information Studies)	Colin Reynolds (Public Health)
Michelle Campbell (Councillor-at-Large)	Sahar Saadat (Chemical & Materials Engineering)	Claudia Heinrich (Linguistics)	Maryse Ndilu Kiese (Religious Studies)
Alicia Cappello (Councillor-at-Large)	Anis Fahandeh-Sadi (Chemistry)	Michelle Michelle (Math & Statistical Sciences)	Rachel Hillabrand (Renewable Resources)
Colin More (Councillor-at-Large)	Darian Brennekamp (Communication Science & Disorders)	Amin Karkouti (Mech Eng)	Tasha Jayatunge; Kelsi Barkway (Sociology)
Nicole Noel (Councillor-at-Large)	Samira Diar-Bakirly (Dentistry)	Vanessa Carias; Fahed Elian (Medical Genetics)	Antonio Bruni (Surgery)
Phil Oel (Councillor-at-Large)	Nicole Meyer (Earth & Atmo Sciences)	Jay Friesen (MLCS)	
Ned Onwugbufor (Councillor-at-Large)	Atase Adjarho (Ed Policy Studies)	Mischa Bandet; Grant Norman (Neuroscience)	

GUESTS: Preshit Verma (GSA Deputy Speaker Candidate); Carolina Martinez Sanchez (GSA Chief Returning Officer Candidate); Darcy Bemister (Deputy Returning Officer Candidate)

Speaker Sulya Fenichel in the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm.

Roll Call

1. Roll Call of GSA Council Members in Attendance

Approval of Agenda

2. Approval of the 20 June 2016 Consolidated Agenda

Members had before them the 20 June 2016 Consolidated Agenda, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. S Fenichel **MOVED**; S Ficko **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

3. Minutes from the 16 May 2016 GSA Council Meeting

Members had before them the 16 May 2016 GSA Council Minutes, which had been previously distributed on 10 June 2016. S Fenichel **MOVED**; S van der Klein **SECONDED**.

S Ficko requested an amendment to the Minutes to reflect that she noted the \$25,000 increase to the Graduate Student Support Fund (GSSF) in 2017-2018 during her presentation on the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement.

Motion **PASSED**. A Talaei Abstained.

Changes in Council Membership

4. Changes in GSA Council Membership

i. Introduction of New Councillors

This was the first meeting for a number of Councillors: M Campbell (Councillor-at-Large); J Leifso (Political Science); J Beyer (Humanities Computing); M Bandet (Neuroscience); M Ndilu Kiese (Religious Studies).

ii. Farewell to Departing Councillors

This was the last meeting for a number of Councillors: G Norman (Neuroscience); S Rah (Deputy Returning Officer).

Councillor Announcements

5. Councillor Announcements

S Ficko invited GSA Council to attend the Roundtable Discussions organized by the GSA over the summer to gather information on topics including issues faced by graduate students, GSA services, and the GSA's engagement with graduate students. She encouraged members to invite graduate students in their departments to attend these discussions as well and noted that they would be held on Monday, July 11, 2016 from 1 PM to 3 PM in Triffo Hall and on Thursday, August 4, 2016 from 10 AM to 12 PM in MEC 2-3. She added that if any graduate students wanted to provide feedback but were unable to attend the roundtables, they were encouraged to email her at gsa.president@ualberta.ca.

S Fenichel announced that the new GSA Council Handbook was available in hardcopy at the meeting and at the GSA office and electronically on the GSA website. She added that any feedback on the Handbook from GSA Councillors would be welcomed.

Action Items, Elections, Appointments, Special Business, Updates

6. GSA Rolling Budget and Business Plan: Proposed Changes to GSA Bylaw (Part IX), GSA Policy (Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures), and GSA Policy (GSA Standing Committees, GSA Budget and Finance Committee).

Sarah Ficko (GSA President) presented the items.

MOTION BEFORE GSA COUNCIL: That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee and the GSA Board, **APPROVE** proposed changes to GSA Bylaw (Part IX), GSA Policy (Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures), and GSA Policy (GSA Standing Committees, GSA Budget and Finance Committee), as noted in the attached double column document and effective upon the second reading by GSA Council in the case of GSA Bylaw and the approval of GSA Council in the case of GSA Policy.

S Ficko explained that this item was initially brought forward to the GSA Budget and Finance Committee and to the GSA Board by the 2015-2016 GSA President, C More. She noted that the force of the Motion was to change from a five-year rolling budget and business plan to a three-year one and added that the change would allow for more accurate projections based on the Alberta Consumer Price Index moving forward.

MOTION: That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee and the GSA Board, **APPROVE** proposed changes to GSA Bylaw (Part IX), GSA Policy (Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures), and GSA Policy (GSA Standing Committees, GSA Budget and Finance Committee), as noted in the attached double column document and effective upon the second reading by GSA Council in the case of GSA Bylaw and the approval of GSA Council in the case of GSA Policy. S Ficko **MOVED**. M DuVal **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

7. GSA Council Elections

M DuVal (Administrative Chair of the GSA Nominating Committee) presented the items. S Fenichel, GSA Speaker, left the room as she was one of the candidates and M DuVal and S Ficko presided over the meeting for that item.

a) GSA Chief returning Officer (CRO), Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), Speaker, and Deputy Speaker

Nominee for GSA Chief Returning Officer (CRO):

Carolina Martinez Sanchez (Business)

Nominee for GSA Deputy Returning Officer (DRO):

Darcy Bemister (AFNS)

Nominee for GSA Speaker:

Clara Fallone (Oncology)

Sulya Fenichel (Elementary Education)

Nominee for GSA Deputy Speaker:

Preshit Verma (Construction Engineering & Management)

M DuVal asked Councillors to review the bios for the candidates for each election and noted that, as is the practice of GSA Council, each candidate was given the opportunity to address GSA Council. She specified that as one of the Speaker candidates was not able to attend GSA Council, in the interest of fairness GSA Council would not hear from either candidate for that position.

Candidates were asked one question and had 45 seconds to respond. Questions were provided in advance.

1. Taking 45 seconds, please introduce yourself and tell GSA Council what motivated you to run for this position.

P Verma (Candidate for Deputy Speaker) expressed his interest in the position in order to keep discussions and meetings objective-oriented and fair as they benefitted all graduate students at the U of A. P Verma also stated that he would like to assist the GSA moving forward.

C Martinez Sanchez (Candidate for CRO) stated that she was originally from Mexico and a current MBA student. She expressed that she was a true believer in fairness, equality, and good communication and noted that she believed in policy and in getting along with people. She further noted that she had participated in both local and federal election processes in her home country and that she believed she had the necessary skills to serve as CRO.

D Bemister (Candidate for DRO) stated that he was in his first year in AFNS and was motivated to get involved with the GSA because, while he was not interested in running as a GSA Councillor, he was interested in the processes of governance and would like to help.

D Smirnow inquired as to why the process was changing, as previously when there was only one nominee for a position, that nominee would be declared elected. M DuVal explained that was the process to fill vacancies on GSA Standing Committees rather than GSA Council-Elected positions.

b) GSA Governance Committee (2 vacancies)

MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL: That GSA Council, acting on the unanimous recommendation of the GSA Nominating Committee, **RECEIVE FOR INFORMATION** the newly-elected GSA Council members for the two positions on the GSA Governance Committee, as noted below.

Nominees for GSA Governance Committee:

Maryse Ndilu Kiese (GSA Councillor, Religious Studies)
Justin Leifson (GSA Councillor, Political Science)

M DuVal explained that there were two vacancies on the GSA Governance Committee. She noted that, after the standard two rounds of advertising, the GSA Nominating Committee received two nominations. She added that, as per GSA Policy, the two nominees for these positions were declared elected.

MOTION: That GSA Council, acting on the unanimous recommendation of the GSA Nominating Committee, **RECEIVE FOR INFORMATION** the newly-elected GSA Council members for the two positions on the GSA Governance Committee, as noted below. M DuVal **MOVED**. S Ficko **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

For Discussion:

8. GSA Board Strategic Work Plan 2016-2017: Discussion

S Ficko noted that this year the GSA Board wanted to explore new ways of developing its Strategic Work Plan by leading a facilitated workshop for the GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (GSA Board SWP). She noted that her goal, at this meeting, was to have a discussion on issues affecting graduate students and what they would like to see done by the GSA; this feedback would then be considered by the GSA Board in developing the GSA board SWP, prior to bringing it back to GSA Council for information. S Ficko then noted that she had been inspired to do this by the FGSR Council facilitated workshop on the Institutional Strategic Plan. She also mentioned that she had done a lot of reading on strategic work plans and their development. She noted that the GSA Board SWP shaped what the GSA does in the future because, while it was a yearly plan, some of the issues embedded within it would carry over into coming years.

S Ficko noted that a new format for the GSA Board SWP was being explored this year, structured around four themes: negotiate and advocate, support, engage, and sustain. She added that each had associated goals and each goal was divided into three columns: objectives, strategies, and 2016-2017 actions. She noted that this new format would help the GSA Directly-Elected Officers, as well as GSA Council, have a clear indication on what issues were worked on in a particular year and which actions needed to be taken moving forward.

S Ficko explained the four-part process for the facilitated workshop: focused conversation, brainstorming alone and in pairs, group clusters and naming, and sharing top ideas. She then pointed out four working assumptions: everyone has wisdom and everyone's wisdom is needed to achieve the wisest results, there are no wrong answers, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and everyone will be heard and will hear others. S Ficko then thanked GSA Council for their understanding, patience, and participation. She then introduced an icebreaker question to start with the first step of the process. The question was "briefly describe one recent issue you know that has affected grad students or that you have been really thinking about recently."

A number of GSA Councillors shared issues relating to this question. B Richardson noted that there had been no information or decisions communicated to graduate students on scholarships given by Alberta Innovates. J Leifso mentioned the Campus Alberta and Federal Government funding opportunities for capital projects. He added that capital projects were important but he would like the University to consider investing in maintaining current University buildings (for example the Tory Building). D Smirnow noted that she would like to see the coverage of the Health and Dental Plan increased. N Meyer stated that she would like to have travel insurance for international students traveling home. A Adjarho noted that she has heard about graduate students having to take ten to twelve courses during their graduate program and felt this was too many. L Sutherland raised the issue of disparity in salaries for TAs and RAs. G Norman noted that when some graduate students receive scholarships, they are only allowed to keep a portion of it as their departments place a cap on the level of funding (both departmental and from scholarships and other sources) that they can receive; he asked why graduate students would apply for these scholarships if they don't receive all the funding and mentioned that this might be more relevant for graduate students in health and science fields. N Prather noted that it was important to advocate for graduate students and engage with the University with respect to their rights. C Reynolds noted that most graduate students will not work in academia and that there should be better means to prepare graduate students for the non-academic workforce.

MOTION: That all current guests of GSA Council **BE GRANTED** speaking privileges for the purposes of this item. S Fenichel **MOVED**. S Ficko **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

S Ficko presented the question that she would like GSA Council to consider for the next steps: “what are specific actions that you want the GSA to take in the next 0-3 years that would result, either now or in the long run, in an important improvement to the graduate student experience at the U of A?” She reminded GSA Council to keep in mind that the GSA represents all graduate students. She instructed GSA Councillors to write one idea per sticky note (these had been distributed to GSA Councillors at the beginning of the meeting) and to use action wording in each idea. After some time elapsed, S Ficko invited GSA Councillors to partner with their neighbour to share and discuss their ideas with an eye to both sharing ideas and helping each other to enhance their clarity.

Again, after some time, S Ficko explained the next step of the workshop which was, in a group of four to six people, to cluster the ideas written on the sticky notes into groups based on the underlying links between them, and then when the ideas were clustered, to give each cluster a name. S Ficko suggested that the name could be a word/title but could also be a sentence. S Fenichel also encouraged each group to decide on a spokesperson, as the last step of the workshop would be group sharing.

After about fifteen minutes, S Ficko invited members to return to their seats and invited each group to share what they had discussed in their clusters.

A Cappello noted that her group had three clusters: anything to do with money (funding, awards, Collective Agreement), the quality of student life, and relationships.

A Radil noted that her group clusters were: promoting student wellness and advocating for fair, equitable, and clear funding.

N Meyer noted that her group discussed student supervision, student engagement, and finances (standardized pay).

R Reklow noted that his group discussed services (promoting existing GSA services, revamping the GSA Health and Dental Plan, increasing professional development opportunities, offering non-English counselling services) and funding (more transparency regarding salaries, more education about the Collective Agreement, higher stipends for graduate students, availability of scholarships and awards, equitable funds across departments, that funding to maintain existing infrastructure matched funding to build new infrastructure, and mindset changes to promote hiring new U of A graduates into academic positions to foster the careers of the people being trained at the U of A).

S Diar-Bakirly noted that her group discussed funding (minimum funding, transparency around scholarships, travel grants, variations in TA and RA stipends), the GSA Health and Dental Plan, and relationships (increasing interactions between graduate students and professors in the same department). She also noted that she liked this process and that she felt that she was participating and asked how this workshop would be included and translated into actions.

P Verma noted that his group discussed travel safety for students going to conferences, increased mental health resources available to students, and professional development (increasing collaboration for internships and allowing for a gap year).

T Nabe noted that his group discussed professional development, health and wellness, and quality of teaching. With respect to the last point, he commented that graduate level courses should be as good, if not better, than undergraduate courses suggested increasing the frequency of evaluations of professors and taking any corrective actions necessary to enhance the quality of teaching (for example requiring that professors take mandatory classes on teaching).

M DuVal noted that a number of points discussed by her group had already been covered. She then noted the major concerns discussed by her group included increasing students’ and professors’ awareness of the Collective Agreement, minimizing the discrepancy in compensation within the University for graduate students, negotiating healthier food options on campus and increasing options for students with dietary restrictions, increasing safe spaces on campus (gender-neutral bathrooms, safe and productive work environments (enough breaks, etc)), penalizing poor supervisors, and increasing affordable student housing. She added that a recurring theme in her group was the disparities in structures and operations in different faculties and departments.

D Brennekamp noted that her group discussed offering different levels of coverage for the GSA Health and Dental Plan and the lack of transparency in some departments.

D Bemister noted that his group discussed creating a searchable and sortable database for scholarships, increasing information on mental health resources, and the creation of networking and social opportunities. F Khodayari noted that there was a tool available on the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research website to search for scholarships by department.

J Friesen noted that his group discussed transparent communication, including within students' own departments (funding/decisions rubrics so that graduate students understand how decisions are made, education on the payment system to possibly understand disparities) and within the GSA (outreach to explain why the GSA is collectively important, better use of emails to communicate information that might be of interest for all graduate students, more updates on bargaining and negotiations, both related to the GSA Health and Dental Plan and to Collective Bargaining). He suggested modelling GSA negotiation practices on known best practices in other institutions.

S Ficko thanked GSA Council for participating and their valuable feedback. She noted that the GSA Board would take all ideas into consideration as they finalized the GSA Board SWP, and then the GSA Board would forward the GSA Board SWP to GSA Council for information. She added that she would be trying different things to engage GSA Councillors in the upcoming year. She mentioned that she might try a "silent discussion" at the next meeting of GSA Council. She finally asked GSA Council to keep the sticky notes as she would go around to collect them.

Reports

9. President

i. President's Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition, S Ficko noted that the two memoranda of settlement (one to increase funding to the Graduate Support Fund (GSSF) and one to increase compensation rates for graduate assistantships and make changes to the Collective Agreement) that GSA Council voted to ratify last month were ratified by the University's Board of Governors. She added that the new Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement would take effect on 1 September 2016 and that the GSA would distribute information about the new Collective Agreement in the upcoming weeks.

S Ficko also noted that after the presentation by Ian Reade (Director of Athletics) and Cheryl Harwardt (Director of Campus and Community Recreation) at the last meeting, a few questions regarding the Spring/Summer Athletics and Recreation Fee remained unanswered. She reported that the GSA was in contact with C Harwardt and additional information was received regarding these questions. S Ficko indicated that, with respect to graduate students who were assessed the Athletics and Recreation fee on their Spring/Summer fee assessments and who also paid it at the Facilities Services desk, they should visit the Facilities Services desk and they will be issued a refund. She added that the Athletics and Recreation fee was only assessed in the Spring and Summer terms if a graduate student was registered in courses (graduate students with thesis registrations were not assessed the fee) and that graduate students who want to have access to the facilities can opt in online through the Office of the Registrar. She stated that the graduate student fee for the Spring and Summer terms was \$82 (\$41 per term) compared to the community members' fee, which was \$85/month (\$211 per term).

S Ficko also reminded GSA Council members about the GSA Roundtable Discussions and encouraged Council members and other graduate students to attend.

ii. GSA Board Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted.

iii. GSA Budget and Finance Committee Report:

No meetings this reporting period.

iv. GSA Governance Committee Report:

No meetings this reporting period.

10. GSA Nominating Committee Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. Additionally, M DuVal thanked members for voting and exercising their democratic right in the earlier elections. S Fenichel stated that the results would be part of the GSA Council Summary. M DuVal noted that in the last month the GSA Nominating Committee filled positions on several prestigious awards selection committees. She also noted that there were no current vacancies.

11. Vice-President Academic

i. Vice-President Academic's Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. Additionally, F Khodayari highlighted two items from his report and invited input from GSA Councillors. First he noted that General Faculties Council had approved the creation of a sub-committee to review both teaching evaluation systems and processes and the Universal Student Rating of Instruction (USRI). He noted that, for graduate students, this issue was two-sided as they were often evaluated as teachers and also evaluating their teachers. He noted that issues that this sub-committee was interested in included the percentage of student participation, the methodology, the timing, the use of the outcomes, and the power of Departments Chairs to make changes based on the outcomes. He then reported on a PD4grad meeting at which FGSR asked for input to make professional development events more efficient, attractive, and useful for graduate students. D Smirnow asked how to share input and F Khodayari replied that it could be emailed to him at gsa.vpacademic@ualberta.ca.

12. Vice-President External

i. Vice-President External's Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. Additionally, M Khademi noted that last week he, along with the President and the Vice-President Labour, went to Government House to meet the Minister of Advanced Education, Marlin Schmidt. He noted that they also met other graduate and undergraduate student leaders. He added that it was really good to see that this government was open to hearing about students' issues. He noted that he was very optimistic.

ii. GSA Awards Selection Committee's Report:

No meetings this reporting period.

13. Vice-President Labour

i. Vice-President Labour's Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. Additionally, S van der Klein encouraged students to contact her if they had any problems with the Collective Agreement, as she was responsible for ensuring that the rights of graduate students were respected.

ii. GSA Negotiating Committee Report:

No meetings this reporting period.

iii. GSA Labour Relations Committee Report:

No meetings this reporting period.

14. Vice-President Student Services

i. Vice-President Student Services' Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. Additionally, A Talaei noted that he was currently working with the organizers of the Student Leaders Summit to increase the involvement of graduate students in this event by having more graduate-focused programming.

ii. GSA Student Affairs Advisory Committee Report:

No meetings this reporting period.

15. Senator

i. Senator's Report:

No written report at this time. J Traynor introduced herself and noted that she was settling into the position new job. She also noted that, on June 15, the University of Alberta's new Chancellor, Doug Stollery, was installed.

16. Speaker

i. Speaker's Report:

No written report at this time.

17. Chief Returning Officer

i. Chief Returning Officer's Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted.

18. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee

i. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted.

19. GSA Management

i. Executive Director's Report:

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 June 2016. The report stood as submitted. Additionally, E Schoeck noted that, as per the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, the GSA was subject to an external audit. She noted that the GSA's auditor was Tom Gee at Collins Barrow and that that GSA Council would hear more about the audit next month. She also noted that in the past week, there were two field auditors in the GSA office reading GSA Council and GSA Board minutes and reviewing human resources files. She stated that the auditors had access to any information they required. She also noted that in past years, auditors had questions for the GSA Executive Director; this year was different as they did not have any substantive questions but they had a good discussion about the GSA. E Schoeck thanked S Ball, GSA Accountant, and Dorte Sheikh, GSA Financial Manager, for preparing the audit and making the GSA look very professional.

Question Period

20. Written Questions

None at this time.

21. Oral Questions

None at this time.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm.