

**GSA Council Special Meeting AGENDA**  
Monday, December 12, 2016 at 6:00 pm  
2-100 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex

**The GSA acknowledges that the University of Alberta is situated on the Traditional Territory of Treaty Six.**

**Substantive material** is sent to all GSA Council members at least one week prior to the date of the meeting to give members abundant time to review (in accordance with the Standing Orders of Council). Any additional substantive material received after this mailing will be emailed as soon as possible.

**Reports** from committees, Directly-Elected Officers, and management are emailed the Friday before a Monday meeting so that the content is as current as possible.

**Speaker Sulya Fenichel in the Chair**

A pizza dinner will be served at 5:15 pm.

**OPEN SESSION**

**Attached Numbered  
Pages**

1. Roll Call
2. Approval of the 12 December 2016 Agenda
3. Approval of the Minutes from the 21 November 2016 GSA Council Meeting  
*Attachment:*
  - i. Minutes from the 21 November 2016 GSA Council Meeting

**3.0 - 3.9**

**Presentation**

4. 2017-2018 Graduate Tuition Fees  
**Sarah Ficko (GSA President) will present the item and introduce the guests**

**Guests:** Steven Dew (Provost and Vice-President (Academic)) and Gitta Kulczycki (Vice-President (Finance and Administration))

**Adjournment**

**GSA Council Special Meeting CONSOLIDATED AGENDA**

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2-100 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex

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**Adjournment**

**GSA Council Meeting MINUTES**  
Monday, November 21, 2016 at 6:00 pm  
2-100 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sarah Ficko (President)	Dasha Smirnow (Councillor-at-Large)	Amanda Radil (Ed Psych)	Kelsey Peterson (Occupational Therapy)
Firouz Khodayari (VP Academic)	Sabrina Lopresti (AFNS)	David Li (Electrical & Computer Engineering)	Daniel Kryz; Radim Barta (Oncology)
Sasha van der Klein (VP Labour)	Amy Reedman (Anthropology)	Lorna Sutherland (Elementary Education)	Ashley Bahry (Paediatrics)
Masoud Khademi (VP External)	Michael Woolley (Art & Design)	Kevin Kvas (English & Film Studies)	Hanin Aburasayn (Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences)
Ali Taleai (VP Student Services)	Francesca Jean (Biological Sciences)	Neil Prather (History & Classics)	Jay Worthy (Philosophy)
Sulya Fenichel (Speaker)	Graham Little (Biomedical Engineering)	Mohammed Abdul-Bari (Human Ecology)	Stephen Hunter (Phys Ed & Rec)
Preshit Verma (Deputy Speaker)	Trent Nabe (Business MBA)	Jocelyn Beyer; Evgeniya Kuznetzova (Humanities Computing)	Andrzej Pokraka (Physics)
Darcy Bemister (DRO)	Katie Lafreniere (Business PhD)	Shivam Srivastava (Internetworking)	Brayden Whitlock (Physiology)
Jane Traynor (Senator)	Karl Roesner (Cell Biology)	Faisal Hirji (Lab Medicine & Pathology)	Leigh Spanner (Political Science)
Michelle Campbell (Councillor-at-Large)	Umme Aulia Munira (Chemical & Materials Engineering)	Carla Lewis (Library & Info Studies)	Joshua Yong; Joanna Scanlon (Psychology)
Alicia Capello (Councillor-at-Large)	Anis Fahandej-Sadi (Chemistry)	Fae Karey-McKenna (Linguistics)	Colin Reynolds (Public Health)
Colin More (Councillor-at-Large)	Natalie Mahé (Communication Sciences & Disorders)	Michelle Michelle (Math & Statistical Sciences)	Bethany Hartman (Rehab Med)
Alphonse Ndem Ahola (Councillor-at-Large)	Roshan Shariff (Computing Science)	Masoud Aliramezani (Mech Eng)	Liam Lin (Resource Economics & Environmental Sociology)
Nicole Noel (Councillor-at-Large)	Dorian Lang (Drama)	Connie Le (Medical Microbiology & Immunology)	Christopher Charles; Remonia Stoddart-Morrison (Secondary Education)
Phil Oel (Councillor-at-Large)	Brette Harris (Earth & Atmo Sciences)	Jay Friesen (MLCS)	Antonio Bruni (Surgery)
Ned Onwugbufor (Councillor-at-Large)	Melody Li (East Asian Studies)	David Parent (Native Studies)	
Robert Reklow (Councillor-at-Large)	Benjamin Denga (Ed Policy Studies)	Upinder Singh (Nursing)	

Speaker Sulya Fenichel in the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

**Roll Call****1. Roll Call of Council Members in Attendance**

At Speaker's request, to maintain meeting timeline, attendances were noted by GSA Council Secretary prior to the beginning of the meeting.

## Approval of Agenda

### **2. Approval of the 21 November 2016 Consolidated Agenda**

Members had before them the 21 November 2016 Consolidated Agenda, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. S Ficko **MOVED**; N Prather **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

## Approval of Minutes

### **3. Minutes from the 24 October 2016 GSA Council meeting**

Members had before them the 24 October 2016 GSA Council Minutes, which had been previously distributed on 11 November 2016. S van der Klein **MOVED**; A Reedman **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED**. B Whitlock **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: U Munira (Chemical & Materials Engineering); N Mahé (Communication Science & Disorders); R Studdart-Morrison and C Charles (Educational Policy Studies); D Li (Electrical & Computer Engineering); B Hartman (Rehabilitation Medicine).

#### **ii. Farewell to Departing Councillors**

## Councillor Announcements

### **5. Councillor Announcements**

T Nabe introduced Hannah Madsen (former CAL) from his department (Business), who announced an upcoming competition put on by the MBA Women's Network. She noted that they are soliciting applications from all graduate students across all programs for innovative ideas (not related to their thesis work) that could be turned into an entrepreneurial pitch with assistance from members of the MBA program and which would then be entered into a competition. She added that selected applicants would be paired with a graduate student in the MBA program and then invited to deliver a pitch to a panel of judges, including local investors and representatives from entrepreneurial tech incubators. She asked interested graduate students to contact her at [hmadsen@ualberta.ca](mailto:hmadsen@ualberta.ca).

C Reynolds reminded GSA Council that the School of Public Health Students' Association was co-hosting a coffee break with the GSA on Thursday, November 24, at lunch time in 1-182 ECHA.

S Ficko thanked J Traynor and R Barta for picking up dishes from the SU's Reusable Dish Program for dinner tonight.

D Lang announced that the final project of the MFA Directing Candidate, Ashley Wright, is Shakespeare's Twelfth Night; showing at the Timms Centre from November 24 to December 3.

A Talaei reminded GSA Council that the GSA Child Care Grant would be re-opening on November 25, at 8:00 am.

N Prather announced the annual History and Classics Book Sale from Wednesday, November 23 to Friday, November 25, in the Humanities Fish Bowl. He noted that there would be a raffle for a Game Cube. He mentioned that they also have some historical items (swords) that interested parties could pose with for \$10.

N Prather also announced that History & Classics are celebrating Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> in January with undergraduate presentations in the Old Arts Building.

M Campbell announced the 2<sup>nd</sup> Research on Tap, a Nerd Nite Style event, at which some graduate student would present their research, on December 2, at 5:30 pm at the Faculty Club.

## Action Items, Elections, Appointments, Special Business, Updates

### **6. GSA 2016-2017 Budget and Expenditure (Quarterly) Report**

**MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL:** That the GSA Council **RECEIVE FOR INFORMATION** the GSA 2016-2017 Budget and Expenditure (Quarterly) Report.

S Ficko explained to GSA Council that this report was an overview of GSA financial situation for the past 3 months. She added that the 2017-2018 budget would come to GSA Council in February. She noted that the GSA financial situation was currently on target. She also noted that the GSA Board Finance Committee had reviewed the report.

C Thomas added that the major points to note are outlined in the cover letter and she thanked S Ball (GSA Accountant) and D Sheikh (GSA Financial Manager) for their work on the report and budget.

C More noted that in the Operating Narrative, the NASA staff's salaries and benefits accounted for \$225,000 and that the Management's salaries and benefits accounted over \$400,000 and asked why there was so much money allocated to Management's salaries and benefits. C Thomas responded that the Management line included some consultants' salaries and benefits such as the former Executive Director and included the salaries of the GSA Accountant and GSA Financial Manager. C More asked whether that line could be explained further to include some more details since the line covered more than strictly the Management salaries and benefits. S Ball noted that this was a feasible. S Ficko noted that his suggestion would be reviewed by GSA Board Finance Committee.

**MOTION:** That the GSA Council **RECEIVE FOR INFORMATION** the GSA 2016-2017 Budget and Expenditure (Quarterly) Report. S Ficko **MOVED**. T Nabe **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

#### 7. Proposed Changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on Elections and Referenda

Leigh Spanner (Chair of GSA Elections and Referenda Committee) will present the item.

**MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on Elections and Referenda, as shown in the attached double column documents 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.

L Spanner, Chair of the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee, noted that, among other changes, the proposal included recommended changes to enable Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs) not running in a GSA general election to endorse candidates (although not in their official capacity) and to distinguish between campaigning conducted using University physical or electronic resources and campaigning conducted using non-University physical or electronic resources.

A Fahandej-Sadi asked with regards to the translation of campaign materials whether candidates were responsible for the translation. L Spanner replied that effectively the candidates were responsible for providing the translation as it would be unreasonable to presume or expect that the Chief Returning Officer (CRO) have knowledge of many languages.

D Smirnow noted that there was a statement about the necessary neutrality of the CRO, Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), speaker, Deputy Speaker, members of the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee (GSA ERC), and members of the GSA Nominating Committee (GSA NoC), she enquired whether the GSA staff should be added to this list. L Spanner noted that the GSA office staff was under obligation to stay neutral in the GSA General Elections due to duties inherent the their jobs.

D Smirnow asked if the consultation with the GSA ERC (required in multiple sections) necessitated a certain number of consulted members for the requirement to be filled. L Spanner noted that it presumes that the GSA ERC quorum is reached.

C More asked about the necessity of registering a 'Yes' or 'No' campaign in a referendum as there was no real mechanism to stop a campaign that did not comply with the rules. L Spanner replied that this is part of the existing policies and she noted that it was not a bad idea to have a certain oversight of campaigns to ensure that no misinformation is communicated to students. C More reiterated the fact that there was no mechanism to enforce the compliance with the rules noting that in the GSA General Elections a candidate that did not comply with GSA Bylaw and Policy could be disqualified but for the referendum there was no punishment that could stop a student, or a group of students, from voicing their opinion. S Ficko noted that the GSA Board raised similar questions and she added that that GSA could disassociate itself with a campaign that was not registered and make it clear that this campaign was not following the GSA processes.

C More asked if the requirement for candidates to submit a written, informal plan for campaign expenditures belonged in GSA Policy. L Spanner acknowledged that it may seem paternalistic and that is something that the GSA ERC took into consideration. She emphasized that the turn around for appeals is short and the submission of an informal plan would allow the CRO to have some foresight, provide feedback, and possibly avoid breaches.

D Smirnow asked what happened if a moderated mailing list was administered by both the student groups and University employees. L Spanner answered that if the list was moderated by a GSA student group it should be fine but that was a question that the CRO would have to answer on a case-by-case basis. She also explained that the goal of this rule (candidates could only circulate campaign material on students group mailing list) was to avoid that University employees being pestered by candidates' requests and having to decide if they would, or would not, circulate their campaign materials. S Fenichel noted that a moderated mailing list by University employees were ones that the University employees could stop (or not) the circulation of a certain email.

D Smirnow asked why Campaign Representatives needed to collect the signature of five graduate students on the referenda registration form. L Spanner replied that it was to be consistent with the general election DEOs nomination form.

C More asked how the candidates were expected to be responsible for their volunteers. L Spanner noted that it was important for candidates to meet with their volunteers and to have a conversation about the rules outlined in GSA Bylaw and Policy.

C More asked about current DEOs running and the use of their GSA calendars for booking campaign events. L Spanner noted that it was ok for the DEOs to personally enter activities in their calendar but they couldn't ask the staff to schedule their campaign activities for them.

D Smirnow asked if the change to the design of the ballots from random order to reverse alphabetical order was due to a technical barrier. L Spanner replied that, yes, it was, and that now it would be consistent with the design of ballots in other GSA elections.

C More asked if the GSA ERC could discuss in the future the requirement of registering a 'Yes' or 'No' campaign. L Spanner noted that she would bring his concerns to the GSA ERC.

**MOTION:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on Elections and Referenda, as shown in the attached double column documents 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. L Spanner **MOVED**. A Talaei **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED**. J Worthy **ABSTAINED**.

### 8. Proposed Changes to GSA Policy on the Composition of the GSA Nominating Committee

Sarah Ficko (GSA President) will present the item.

**MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Governance Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Policy on the composition of the GSA Nominating Committee, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective immediately.

S Ficko noted that the GSA was less stable five or six years ago and that, at that time, when a graduate student was needed to serve on a committee the President Roy Coulthard and the Executive Director Ellen Schoeck would place students as quickly as they could. She also noted that the GSA Nominating Committee was now well established to fill this need and that the composition of the committee included the GSA President and Executive Director as voting members. She added that the involvement of the GSA President and the Executive Director changed over time to non-voting members and that this proposal would formalize the processes that are currently used.

S Ficko highlighted that this proposal would add two members of the GSA as voting members and change the GSA President and Executive Director to non-voting members and that the Administrative Chair will become the Chair, rather than the President who is Chair only in name. She added that this proposal was reviewed by the GSA NoC and discussed extensively by the GSA Governance Committee and GSA Board.

**MOTION:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Governance Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Policy on the composition of the GSA Nominating Committee, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective immediately. S Ficko **MOVED**. T Nabe **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

## **Elections**

### **9. GSA Council Elections**

Radim Barta (Administrative Chair of the GSA Nominating Committee) will present the item.

#### a. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee

R Barta noted that there were two vacancies on the GSA ERC and that the GSA NoC received, after the call for additional nominations, one nomination.

**MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL:** That GSA Council **DECLARE ELECTED** to the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee the graduate student below:

Nominees for GSA Elections and Referenda Committee:  
Runzhi Xu (Chemical and Materials Engineering)

**MOTION:** That GSA Council **DECLARE ELECTED** to the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee the graduate students below. R Barta **MOVED**. S Ficko **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

#### b. GSA Awards Selection Committee

R Barta noted that there were five vacancies on the GSA ASC and that the GSA NoC received, after the call for additional nominations, four nominations.

**MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL:** That GSA Council **DECLARE ELECTED** to the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee the graduate student below:

Nominees for GSA Awards Selection Committee:  
Honey Bhatia (Civil Engineering)  
Alix Clarke (Dental Hygiene)  
Bahador Rashidi (Electrical and Computer Engineering)  
Mostafa Tawfeek (Civil Engineering)

**MOTION:** That GSA Council **DECLARE ELECTED** to the GSA Awards Selection Committee the graduate students below. R Barta **MOVED**. L Spanner **SECONDED**.

Motion **PASSED** unanimously.

#### c. GSA Appeals and Complaints Board

##### i. Nominees for GSA Appeals and Complaints Board:

Radim Barta (Oncology)  
Antonio Bruni (Surgery)  
Justin Leifso (Political Science)  
Sarah Prendergast (MBA)  
Hajar Amidian (Political Science)  
Sarang Gumfekar (Chemical and Materials Engineering)  
Liam Heffernan (Renewable Resources)

##### ii. Nominees for GSA Appeals and Complaints Board Chair and Vice-Chair:

Antonio Bruni (Surgery) – Chair  
Justin Leifso (Political Science) – Vice-Chair

R Barta noted that the mandate of the GSA Appeals and Complaints Board (GSA ACB) is to adjudicate possible complaints of the DEOs and possible appeals of CRO decisions. He also noted that last time vacancies on the GSA ACB came forward it was a new committee and the ballot did not indicate if the candidates would be serving for a one-year term or a two-year terms, so it was assumed that it was for a one year term. R Barta noted that all members of the GSA ACB were contacted by the GSA NoC and asked whether they were interested in seeking an additional term. R Barta added that five members indicated an interest and were currently listed on the ballot in front of you. He also noted that following this the GSA NoC advertised for five vacant positions on the GSA ACB. Following the initial call, the GSA NoC interviewed the two nominees whose names are now before GSA Council.

R Barta explained that the interviews were conducted by himself, as Administrative Chair of the GSA NoC, and the recent former Administrative Chair of the NoC, Michele DuVal. He pointed out that Michele DuVal and he had both received training on procedural fairness from the GSA and were expected to demonstrate impartiality through their work on the GSA NoC. He further explained that, during the interview, nominees were asked a series of questions aimed at assessing their awareness of the basic tenets of procedural fairness and their ability to adjudicate potential cases in accord with those tenets. He added that following these interviews and ensuing discussion, the GSA NoC agreed to forward both nominees to GSA Council with the call for additional nominations and that the GSA NoC received no additional nominations

R Barta added that, given this, there were seven nominees for twelve positions. Hence, all positions were uncontested. He indicated that for each nominee the ballot listed whether they were standing for election or re-election, the desired length of the upcoming term, and that GSA Council member could check "Yes" or "No" box for each nominee.

R Barta noted that following this ballot. GSA Council could be presented with another ballot to elect the GSA ACB Chair and Vice-Chair. He added that this ballot would also indicate whether a candidate is running for an additional term. He specified that the results of this second vote would rely on the results of the GSA ACB membership vote; that is, if either the nominee for Chair or Vice-Chair was not voted to serve as a member of the GSA ACB, they would not be eligible to serve as Chair or Vice-Chair. He explained that as such the ballots for GSA ACB membership would be counted first and, in the event that the nominee for Chair and/or Vice-Chair were not elected to serve on the GSA ACB, their names would be automatically struck from the ballot for the positions of Chair and/or Vice-Chair. He mentioned that the GSA NoC would then seek new nominees from amongst the elected GSA ACB members to recommend to GSA Council for election as Chair and Vice-Chair. He explained that GSA Council members were invited to vote for the GSA ACB membership and the GSA Chair and Vice-Chair at the same meeting to allow for training sessions in January in advance of the GSA General Elections in February.

C More asked whether taking into account that the GSA ACB was the check for everything it could be a conflict of interest in having the Administrative Chair of the GSA NoC serving on the GSA ACB. R Barta specified that the GSA ACB was an accountability mechanism for the DEOs and so that appeals of the CRO decisions could be heard, and not GSA Standing Committees. He also noted that as per GSA Policy, the members of the GSA NoC were required to be impartial so there was a clear overlap in the requirements.

To a question from T Nabe about why we were not hearing the usual one question presentations from candidates, R Barta replied that, in accordance with GSA NoC procedures, the candidates were not addressing GSA Council as not all of them could attend the meeting.

D Smirnow noted that last year the Chair and Vice-Chair for these positions were recommended by the GSA ACB and she enquired as to why that recommendation was not there. R Barta explained that they were and that there was some continuation from the past year and there would be some additional training.

#### **For Discussion**

**None at this time**

S Fenichel noted that there would be a special meeting of GSA Council on December 12 at which the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (Finance and Administration) will discuss graduate tuition fees for 2017-2018. She also noted that guests were welcome. She added that she might seek a motion from the floor to give guests speaking privileges. She reminded GSA Councillors that GSA Council was a collegial environment and that listening to colleagues was important so that the conversation could move along. She noted that the information on the proposal for international graduate tuition fees was still coming in. Any questions about the proposal should be directed to the University of Alberta Administration. S Fenichel noted that the exact procedures for speaking rights would be set at the meeting depending on how long the presenters would be available and the number of guests. A Radil asked what was the timeline of that meeting. S Fenichel replied that the Provost



and Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (Finance and Administration) would do a short presentation and then there would be time for questions.

Following a question by T Nabe to this effect it was noted that the December meeting of GSA Council was cancelled.

## **Reports**

### **10. President**

#### **i. President's Report:**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition S Ficko stated, as many students were aware, there was a survey being run by the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) sent out today and in the GSA Newsletter on Friday about tuition in the province. S Ficko asked Council to fill out the survey and shared it with their peers. She noted that they had received about 500 responses thus far.

On the subject of the special meeting of GSA Council, S Ficko noted that the information regarding the proposal for international graduate student tuition increases was changing very rapidly and that even at the Board Finance and Property Committee (BFPC) meeting she had attended earlier that day, some changes were made. She also noted that the President's report and the VP Academic's report were largely about the international student tuition changes and she invited GSA Council to read them carefully. She specified that domestic tuition was frozen and that there was a calculation developed for Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees to show the actual costs for the University above the Alberta Consumer Price Index and that the University was considering applying the same calculation to international tuition for 2017-2018 called the Academic Price Index (API). She mentioned that this would mean a 3.02% increase to International Students tuition.

S Ficko noted that the University would also apply a \$4000 increase to international graduate student tuition but would then issue a rebate in the same amount. She also noted that the University stated that the rationale for this was because some international applications made an equation between high tuition costs and the quality of education offered. S Ficko added that she did not agree with this and felt that the University had not provided sufficient evidence in support of this. She indicated that the University also had not done much student consultation. She explained that the GSA first heard about this proposal on October 28, it was then changed and a new version presented on November 7, then it changed again when it was presented to the General Faculties Council Academic Planning Committee (GFC APC), and, finally, it was again modified earlier that day. She noted that the process felt rushed.

S Ficko reminded GSA Council that the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (Finance and Administration) would speak at FGSR Council on Wednesday, November 23, at 2:00 pm in Council Chambers. She noted that public could attend as observers. S Ficko added that she was happy to answer questions but noted that it might be easier if questions were emailed.

T Nabe asked if there was any opportunity to collaborate with the Students' Union (SU) to combine forces. S Ficko responded that the SU also had been vocal about their displeasure and would also like to at least see current students grandfathered in. She added that there would likely be articles in the Gateway and the Journal soon.

L Sutherland asked if the tuition increase was coming from the government. S Ficko explained that international tuition fees were not regulated by the government under the Post-Secondary Learning Act, as domestic tuition fees were. She noted that this was something the GSA would like to see changed. She explained further that these increases were internal to the University and that domestic tuition remained frozen.

S Fenichel urged Councillors to take this information back to their constituents and prepare for the December 12 meeting.

#### **ii. GSA Board**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted.

#### **iii. Budget and Finance Committee**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted.

#### **iv. GSA Governance Committee**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted.

#### **11. GSA Nominating Committee**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition R Barta stated the Early Call Talent and Training program was ongoing and that there were vacancies on the the GSA ACB, GSA ERC, and GSA ASC, these vacancies would be advertised in January.

#### **12. Vice-President Academic**

##### **i. Vice-President Academic's Report:**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition F Khodayari stated that, regarding the leave policy, FGSR Council had an extensive discussion last month with many remarks with respect to the medical leave policy. He added that FGSR would consider all the feedback received and reviewed the medical leave policy in details however FGSR Council at their next meeting would be asked to consider separately the Professional Development leave so it could be used by students.

F Khoadayari noted, in reference to the proposed increase to international graduate tuition, that the University is making the argument that international students, in deciding which school they will attend, equate costs with quality. He added that the GSA Board did some research to refute that argument. A Talaei added that in their research they didn't see a link between high cost of tuition and the perception of quality, they found however that other factors such as reputation mattered.

M Khademi noted that the proposal has, so far, been approved by the GFC APC and the BFPC and that in order to be implemented for the 2017-2018 academic year, the proposal must be approved by the University's Board of Governors at its December 16, 2016 meeting. He noted that students should convey their concern with the proposal to the University. He spoke of the need for more thorough consultation.

T Nabe noted his frustration regarding the lack of consultation and that increasing international tuition was an easy way for the University to keep its budget balanced. S Ficko noted that the government of Alberta had not confirmed it would backfill this cost like they did in the past and the University was doubtful they would. She added that there was a lack of \$4 M. She also indicated that it was an interesting time to start using the API because if the government chooses to not regulate international tuition, the University would most likely continue using the API in the future. N Prather noted that he was against the increase and that he didn't like the idea of dividing international and domestic graduate students. He suggested comparing statistics on tuition fees and ranking.

C Reynolds suggested that GSA Council participate in a straw poll as to whether higher price is associated with prestige. S Prescott noted that this was not a good statistical method. R Barta encouraged members to fill out the survey that would be shared with students by the GSA. S Ficko noted that the GSA would submit a written report which would include a summary of the survey responses. She also added that she would do a presentation at the December meeting of the Board of Governors.

D Smirnow asked why the timeline in this issue was so tight. S Ficko replied that the University's plan could not be formalized until the government announced their plans for domestic tuition in 2017-2018 which happened later in the year than is usual. She added that there is a pressure on the University to set tuition fees for 2017-2018 so that recruiters could circulate the correct information. She added that when the University met with both student associations it was more of an information session than a consultation session. She added that she had raised this issue when the proposal was considered by BFPC and that the Board of Governors Chair had asked University Administration to report further on consultation with students.

C Reynolds asked if the \$4000 would be used to inflate the 3.02%. S Ficko specified that it wouldn't as it was made clear that it would be a net zero cost to students.

C Charles asked what was the strategy moving forward. S Ficko replied that the GSA would be circulating a survey on Friday and she encouraged GSA Council members to fill it.

#### **13. Vice-President External**

##### **i. Vice-President External's Report**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition M Khademi stated: the GSA ASC finalized the list of nominees was sent to the Alberta government. He added that the GSA notified the applicants, via email, whether their applications had been selected.

**ii. GSA Awards Selection Committee's Report**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted.

**14. Vice-President Labour**

**i. Vice-President Labour's Report**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted.

**ii. GSA Negotiating Committee**

No meetings this reporting period.

**iii. GSA Labour Relations Committee**

No meetings this reporting period.

**15. Vice-President Student Services**

**i. Vice-President Student Services' Report**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition A Talaei stated that the GSA is working with the Michener Park Residence Association to advocate for a better transit to the University, some progress have been made and the University Administration and a city Councillor have been involved in the discussion.

**ii. GSA Student Affairs Advisory Committee**

No meetings this reporting period.

**16. Senator**

**i. Senator's Report**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition J Traynor noted that on December 1 and December 2 the Senate would have a discussion on racism. She invited Councillor to email her at [gsa.senator@ualberta.ca](mailto:gsa.senator@ualberta.ca). if they had any input they would like brought up.

**17. Speaker**

**i. Speaker's Report**

No written report at this time.

**18. Chief Returning Officer**

**i. Chief Returning Officer's Report**

No written report at this time.

**19. 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 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted.

**20. GSA Management**

**i. Executive Director's Report**

Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 18 November 2016. The report stood as submitted. In addition C Thomas stated that the Early Call Talent and Training Program was going well, they prepared students for the GSA General Election for DEOs positions plus 10 CAL positions.

**Question Period**

**21. Written Questions**

None at this time.

**22. Oral Questions**

A Radil reminded GSA Council of Helping Individuals at Risk (HlaR), a campus resource for communication and engagement when having concerns about a colleague or a student. She noted that this organization checked in with individuals brought to their attention. T Nabe added that he had worked with HlaR and the organization consolidated all the information from all available campus sources and acted as the main gatekeeper for students at risk on campus. T Nabe invited GSA Council to share this resource with their department. S Ficko also added that the new Dean of Students, André Costopoulos, was working on an email form that when filled out would go to him or HlaR.

B Whitlock expressed concerns about the GSA Bylaw and Policy on elections, particularly the section where it specified that candidates could not make any inappropriate, discriminatory, or ad hominem attacks as it was often important to address character in a campaign. He noted that this was needlessly restrictive and harmfully vague. He asked why the GSA did not want to allow people to be clear. S Prescott, in her capacity as Vice-Chair of GSA ERC, responded that she disagreed with his interpretation of an ad hominem attack and noted that the policy was intended to prevent “you’re ugly and you suck” and to avoid a campaign with a negative tone. This policy would allow the CRO a position when speaking to candidates. She added that the GSA ERC concern was religious or ethnic discrimination, not discriminating facts. B Whitlock agreed that this was reasonable but it was not clear in the policy and that he was concerned that as currently worded would allow for someone to be punished for healthy campaigning. S Prescott responded GSA Bylaw and Policy needed to avoid being too specific as to allow for some discretion if a situation is not covered. S Prescott noted that this attempted to discipline possible bad behaviour while leaving room for good faith behaviour. J Worthy clarified that the term “ad hominem” did not refer to anything you say about a person, it was the name for a logical fallacy – when someone used something about a person to make a point that had nothing to do with your point. B Whitlock agreed with that definition and requested more clarity on that section of the GSA Policy. S Prescott suggested sending his comments to GSA ERC for consideration.

B Whitlock expressed to GSA Council that he was in attendance at the GFC APC meeting and voted for the proposal on international graduate student tuition increase. He explained that the sticker price switch, since it was net neutral comes down to a marketing issue and S Ficko’s objections were reasonable but this was not a strong enough argument for him to vote the proposal down. As far as targeting international students, he noted that the University was mostly funded by the government so there was an argument to be made that international students had not contributed to Education in this province thus far. He added that if students opposed the fee increases then it was prudent to discuss where the cuts would alternately occur.

F Khodayari responded that since the University had not shown their reasoning for making this decision, the GSA cannot yet see if that change would help or not. He added that most international students were drawn to the University of Alberta for the program quality and the cheaper tuition. He specified that other programs might have been better based on their rankings so lower tuition does factor into students’ decisions. He agreed that international students might not yet have contributed to the Canadian/Alberta system but he noted that they brought skills that benefited the whole community and that many alumni stayed in Alberta and paid back their communities. He added that students who did return to their home countries further contributed to marketing the University with their fellow countrymen and women. S Ficko added that B Whitlock made a fair point about cuts and she agreed that was the reality. S Ficko noted that she challenged, at GFC APC and BFPC, the University to be more creative; their approach to marketing was only one strategy and we would like them to look at other options.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm.



## GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With respect to the University's proposal regarding increases to international graduate student tuition, the GSA presents the following concerns:

- The International Graduate Student Adjustment (IGA) fee is introduced as a 'sticker price' increase intended to present the U of A as a more valuable, and therefore more desirable destination, for international graduate students. In this proposal, graduate students will be reimbursed the full amount of the IGA for the 2017-2018 academic year. Currently the GSA is unaware of any quantitative or qualitative evidence suggesting a relationship between cost and the perception of quality with respect to graduate education. Similarly, the GSA seeks evidence that this method will be successful in better attracting future graduate students, rather than simply deterring non-affluent ones.
- The 'sticker price' raises the concern that—without a guarantee that financial support will continue beyond the 2017-2018 academic year—the reimbursement program will be discontinued. This would undoubtedly lead to serious implications on the affordability of graduate programs for international students, and have an adverse effect on current students. The GSA is particularly concerned about the vulnerability of this demographic as international graduate students face inherent obstacles in qualifying for government funding or securing employment to supplement their income, and as a result disproportionately rely on resources such as the Campus Food Bank and emergency funding.
- At the very least, the GSA objects to increases of this size without grandfathering current international graduate students, and is concerned about such increases adversely affecting the University's reputation. Given the significant financial stress many international graduate students already experience, we believe that increasing fees partway through their studies will be unnecessarily burdensome. The GSA suggests that current international graduate students receive a tuition increase in accordance with Alberta CPI rather than being charged significantly higher fees without commensurate and sustainable increases in financial support.

In advance of the December 16 meeting of the Board of Governors, the GSA reached out to graduate students to collect feedback from them regarding the University's proposal. The below tables present a summary of the data collected with respect to several key questions posed to respondents:

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
I support the proposal regarding increases to international graduate student tuition as outlined	72 %	17 %	5 %	2 %	3%	1 %
I believe that international graduate student tuition should be higher than that paid by domestic students and Permanent Residents	40 %	24 %	13 %	17 %	6 %	NA
I equate the cost of a graduate program with the quality of the education offered	36 %	21 %	14 %	23 %	5 %	1 %



### GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

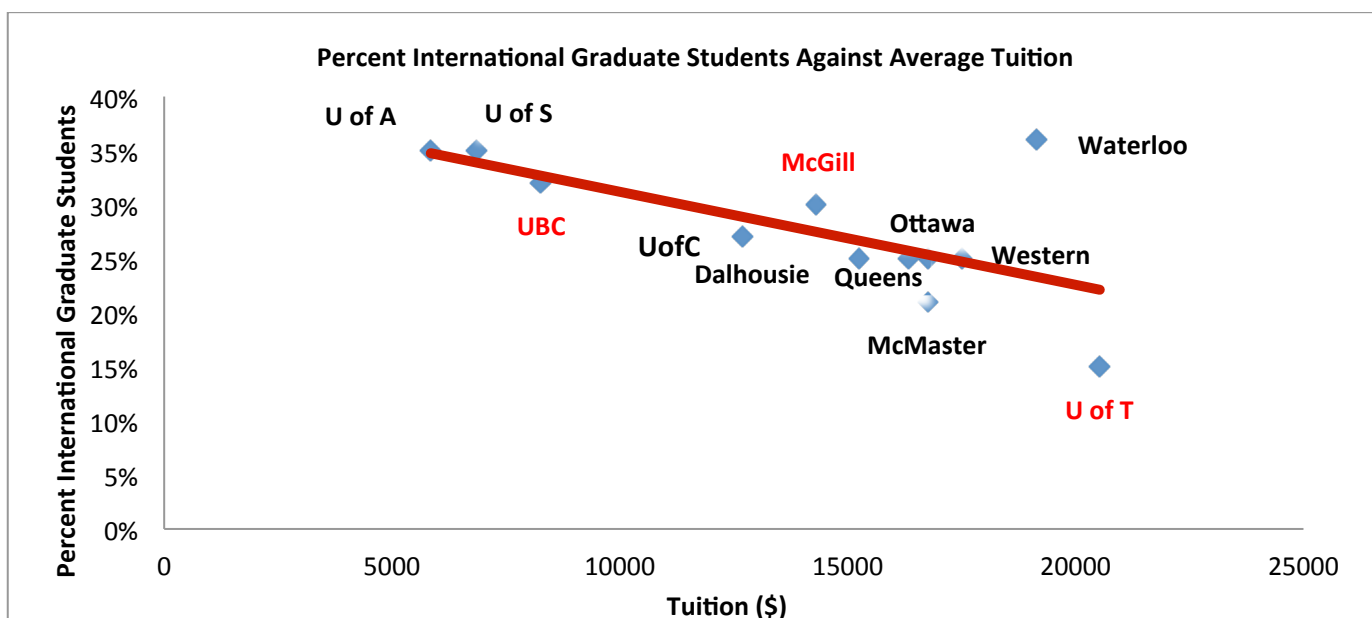
Question	Yes – many times	Yes – a few times	No
Has your financial situation caused you significant stress while you have been in graduate studies?	41%	49%	10%
Have you been concerned about your financial situation while you have been in graduate studies?	47%	47%	6%

Question	Yes	No
Was the affordability of tuition at UAlberta a major factor in your decision to pursue graduate studies here?	73%	27%

Based on the responses received, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Respondents strongly disagree with the proposal.
- The financial situation of many graduate students is precarious (some are below the poverty line) and any unpredictable or dramatic changes will make the situation worse and, as a result, decrease the quality of research at the University and its reputation.
- Affordability of tuition is one of the major factors for students to choose the U of A.
- In addition to sharing many of the GSA’s concerns with respect to the proposal, most respondents also felt, more generally that a lack of consistent, predictable, and sufficient funding was a serious issue affecting their health and wellness, their ability to conduct quality research, and their experience at the U of A.

With respect to the University’s suggestion that prospective students perceive a correlation between program cost and quality, the GSA engaged in a comparison of the percentage of international graduate students at the U of A relative to other Canadian institutions. This research suggested that there is a negative correlation between tuition fees and the percentage of international graduate students.



As the above chart indicates, universities with lower fees are more successful in attracting international students. The U of A has been one of the most successful and this is likely strongly tied to affordable tuition rates. The GSA believes that any large changes to this, especially



## **GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition**

those embarked upon without sufficient research and commensurate consultation, could result in declining enrollment levels – which will be damaging overall to the institution.

### **Proposed Next Steps (more detail on each suggestion is provided in the attached report):**

- Grandfather current international students.
- Delay elements of the current proposal until a literature review of the rationale underpinning this increase can be conducted to enable the Board to thoroughly review its potential affects to the University.
- Engage in a comprehensive review of graduate student funding.
- Develop a MoU to be signed by the University and the GSA to confirm that the rebate will continue to be offered for all students as long as the 'sticker price' inflation of \$4,000 (or more) is in place.



## **GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition**

### **FULL REPORT**

#### **Preamble**

In the University of Alberta's strategic plan, For the Public Good, the University makes a commitment to financial supports for students. For graduate students, financial stability is a function of costs (tuition, fees, living expenses, etc), and financial supports (scholarships, grants, bursaries, TA/RA funding, other work on/off campus, etc). In Alberta, there is currently no requirement for graduate students to receive any financial support during their degree, despite graduate students providing enormous benefits to the University and society through their research, teaching, and scholarly activities.

Over the last two years, the NDP government has shown a desire to ensure accessible and affordable education, with a focus on Alberta students. Since fall 2015, domestic tuition has been frozen at the 2014-2015 level. While international student tuition is currently unregulated by the province, the University chose to only increase it by CPI over the last two years, as the government provided backfill funding to help offset the loss of revenue from a lack of increases in domestic tuition each year. In fall 2016, the government extended the tuition freeze for a third year, but did not provide a guarantee of backfill funding. This placed the University in an uncertain financial position, with few opportunities to generate further revenue except by raising international student tuition.

In late October, a proposal for a tuition increase of 3.02% for all international students was presented to student leaders at a Tuition and Budget Advisory Committee meeting, along with a second proposal to apply an 'International Graduate Student Adjustment' fee, or sticker price increase, of \$4,000, to all international graduate students. At the same time, an 'award' (later amended to a 'rebate') of an equivalent amount would be given to each student, resulting in a cost-neutral plan. The purpose of this second proposal was to increase the 'perceived value' of a U of A degree, and attract 'better' students, though no justification beyond 'general marketing wisdom' has been offered, and there is currently no guarantee that the rebate will not be removed in future. While the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) recognizes that the University is facing financial constraints right now, we disagree with the method of implementation of the first proposal, and the rationale for the second proposal. Both matters are discussed below. As the GSA President, my objections have not only to do with the perceived negative effects on graduate students, but also with the reputation of the University and a desire to find a better solution to revenue shortfalls that will benefit the institution as a whole.

#### **Past Consultations and Graduate Student Financial Considerations**

Over the past nine months, the GSA has engaged in a broad consultative effort through a variety of meetings, workshops, roundtables, town halls, and surveys to hear directly from graduate students with respect to the issues they face and the actions they would like to see the GSA take on their behalf this year and over the next five years. In addition, we have worked with other campus resources including the Community Social Workers, Counselling and Clinical Services, the Campus Food Bank, Financial Services, FGSR, and the Dean of Students, to better understand how these groups interact with, and support graduate students on campus. After synthesizing all this information, the GSA Board's Strategic Work Plan outlines a vision of an equitable and welcoming campus community where all graduate students feel encouraged to actively learn and participate, and are provided reasonable accommodations and supports to ensure their success.

To predict expected costs during a graduate degree, many students use the FGSR website to help estimate their living expenses. However, the numbers listed tend to be on the extreme low end of an expected range for various expenses, and do not take into consideration other expenses that would disproportionately affect international students such as plane tickets to be able to travel home to see their families (as they may be living apart from their spouse and children). Furthermore, this number does not help indicate how the cost of living will increase over time. At the same time, tuition increases for students over the last five years have either been frozen, or increased by CPI, which is an indicator of how tuition will increase in future, and students have budgeted accordingly.

In terms of financial support in the form of funding packages, there is currently an incomplete understanding of how graduate students are funded across departments and campuses. For instance, some departments offer funding packages between \$17,500 and \$28,000, while others offer no funding. Some departments or supervisors pay the International Differential Fee, while many others do not, or only pay it





## GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

for a limited time. Some offer funding for one year, some offer it for up to four. Some departments ensure graduate students have teaching and research assistantship opportunities, others are unable to offer consistent support in this regard. Likewise, even if graduate students receive full assistantships (12 hours a week in each of the fall and winter semesters), the amount earned is typically insufficient to cover all their expenses. In addition, length of time to completion is an important consideration, with the average master's degree taking three years to complete, and the average PhD six years. Furthermore, many students are encouraged to apply for prestigious scholarships such as those from Tri-Council, but the value of the scholarships has not increased for close to a decade (though cost of living and tuition have continued to rise), and the number of awards has not kept up with the increasing number of students in graduate school, making it more challenging to receive an award that will provide less financial support than it did previously. Unclear communication from departments can further exacerbate the situation, with students who apply for major scholarships generally losing the remainder of their funding package, leaving them wondering why they are penalized for putting significant effort into applying for a scholarship when they could have focused on their research and studies.

During our discussions, many graduate students indicated that this lack of consistent, predictable, and sufficient funding is a serious issue affecting their health and wellness, their ability to conduct quality research, and their experience at the U of A. In addition, international students are a particularly vulnerable population with respect to financial matters. For example, we know that they disproportionately access both University and GSA sources of additional support (including GSA Emergency Bursaries and GSA Child Care Grants).

### Current Consultations

Most recently, we have released two surveys using Google Forms to graduate students (one through ab-GPAC, our graduate provincial lobby group, and the second developed by the GSA) to gain a better understanding of the thoughts current graduate students have on tuition and funding in general, and on the increases to international student tuition as proposed by the U of A. Graduate students have taken both surveys quite seriously, with over 1,200 (n = 1,227) graduate students of the approximate 17,500 in Alberta responding to date to the first survey (781 from the U of A) since November 18<sup>th</sup>, and over 250 (n = 251) responding between November 29<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup> to the second survey. While the sample may be biased based on students self-selecting to respond (survey fatigue was expressed by one student), demographic questions indicate diversity of samples between departments, gender, and degree programs. Survey questions collected both quantitative and qualitative data (results available upon request). Of the students who have replied to the U of A specific survey, 193 are international students (of 2,527; 7.6%), 10 are permanent residents (of 703; 1.4%), and 48 are domestic students (of 4,256; 1.1%).

Open-ended comments generally centered around ideas such as:

- a lack of sufficient funding for graduate students
- unexpected financial costs and/or increases can cause significant distress and hardship
- no provision in the current proposal for grandfathering current students
- consultation with students seems pointless as the University will do what it wants despite what students say
- the University does not seem to recognize that graduate students are the 'smallest fish' and a vulnerable population
- dramatically increasing international student tuition will impact student diversity, as the international student population will decrease or only wealthy students will be able to afford to come to the U of A
- rather than assessing itself solely in comparison to other institutions, the University has the opportunity and capacity to be a true leader in graduate education
- concerns about the impact of rising costs without equal ability to access financial supports

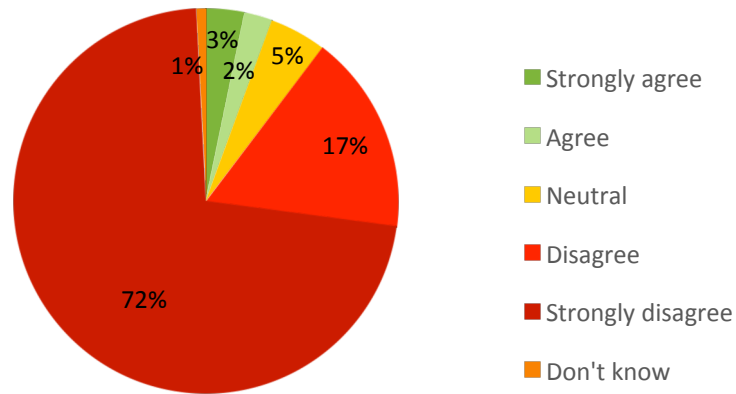


## GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

### U of A Survey Results

#### Part 1: Response to Proposed Increases in International Graduate Student Tuition

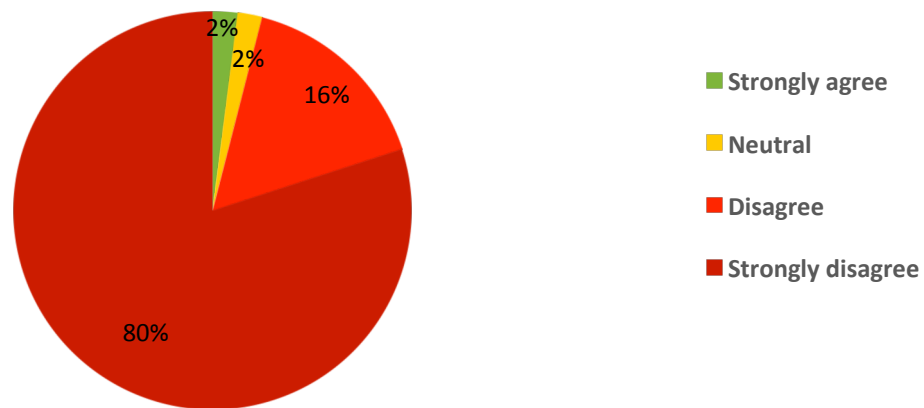
**Figure 1. I support the proposal regarding increases to international graduate student tuition as outlined (251 responses).**



Across all students who replied, only 5% agreed or strongly agreed with the international student tuition proposal, while 89% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of the 14 students that supported the proposal, 10 were domestic students or permanent residents, and 4 were international students.

Looking specifically at the 193 international students who responded to the first question (Figure 1.1), only 2% of students agreed with the proposal, while an overwhelming 96% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed. In general, international students who will be the most impacted by the changes were clearly not in favour of the proposal.

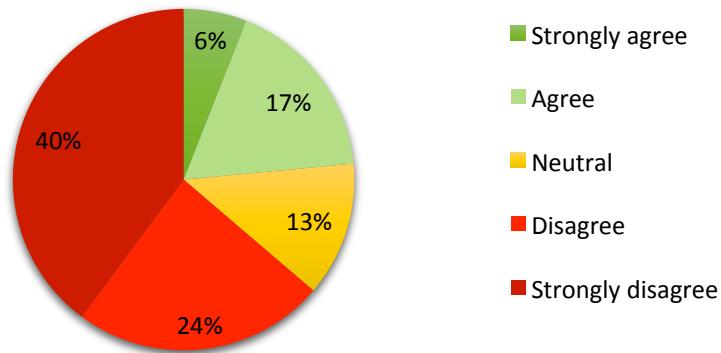
**Figure 1.1. I support the proposal regarding increases to international graduate student tuition as outlined (193 responses by international graduate students).**



### GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

When asked if international student tuition should be higher than domestic student tuition (Figure 2), 23% of respondents were in favour of this proposal, while the remaining 77% were neutral or disagreed. Of those that were in favour, 23 were domestic students, 2 were permanent residents, and 28 were international students. In those that were not in favour, 11 were domestic students, 4 were permanent residents, and 109 were international students.

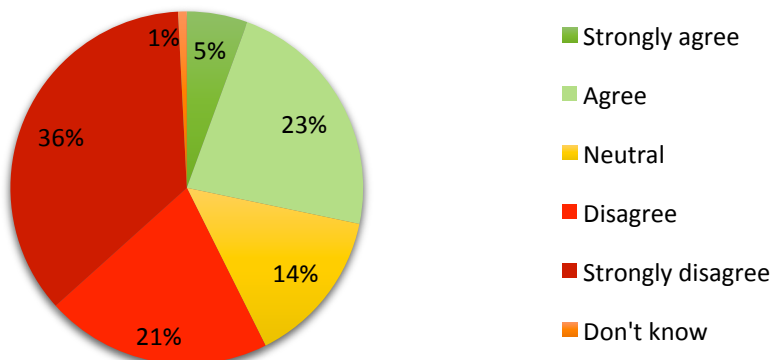
**Figure 2. I believe that international graduate student tuition should be higher than that paid by domestic students and Permanent Residents (251 responses).**



One respondent commented: “It would be fair if domestic people/family pay tax for a long time and take the lower tuition fee. However, it doesn’t mean the international student should be treated as ATM machine to balance the deficit of the university. And actually, our wage as TA/RA is not fairly increased as the increment of the Albertan minimum wage or the increase of tuition fee. And I think if the executives of the university cannot control their budget pretty well, they should feel ashamed and pay by themselves rather than just unfairly increase the tuition for the student. I understand the tuition will rise up over a period of time but how about our wage, which may not maintain a similar level of living cost, which is a big problem, and may damage the reputation of the school.”

With respect to a question asking if current graduate students equated the cost of a graduate program with the quality of the education offered, 28% agreed, 14% were neutral, and 57% disagreed (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. I equate the cost of a graduate program with the quality of the education offered (251 responses).**





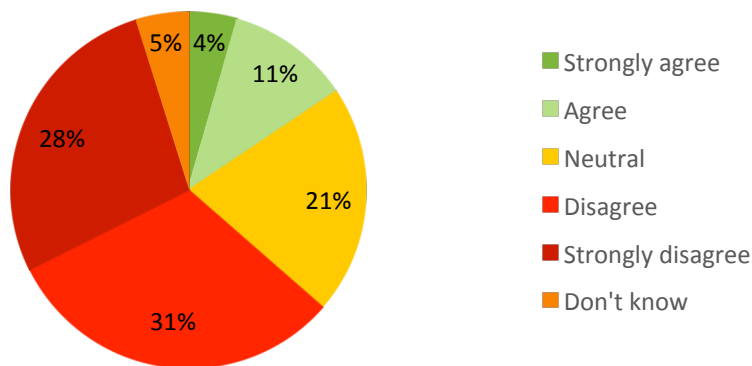
## GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

Graduate students' comments included thoughts similar to "I judge the quality of education based on: the University's position in worldwide rankings; the impact factor of journals in which my supervisor publishes papers; the facilities and equipment which my group has access to, including through collaborations; the number of collaborations in my department, and with whom these collaborations exist. When I applied to universities, I did not once look at the cost of the graduate program as an indication of the quality of education." Another commented: "The university should aim to attract high quality students rather than wealthy ones. The university should be an open institution with the goal of providing a high quality education as opposed to making money. Of course, money is required to provide services and pay salaries and wages. However, boosting the university's reputation by increasing tuition is not justifiable or supported by evidence. When considering which universities to apply to for my PhD, I saw a relatively low tuition cost as a positive rather than a warning signal of a poor quality institution."

Many students also made comparisons to the cost of tuition in other countries. For instance, "The cost of graduate program has nothing to do with the quality, in fact, the countries with the best education system around the world have entirely a tuition-free education for both international and domestic students. I see this sudden interest to raise the fees for international students as a means to deter less affluent families from enrolling at the University of Alberta. This proposal is a complete blow to the university and the entire country. International graduate students are already stressed with the fees they are paying at the moment, increasing the fees without proper measures to supplement what international students are making per year will not only affect the performance of students but also affect the standing of the university among its peers. I was fortunate to have a full packaged scholarship to study at Saudi Arabia during my MSc and I believe Canada is in better economic situation than most countries in the world. If Saudi Arabia were able to cover all international student expenses including airway tickets, subsidized meals, free accommodation, free textbooks and so many benefits, I see no reason why Canada can't afford that. The raise in this tuition will only benefit the management of the school not the students or the entire standing of the university."

For the fourth question, only 15% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement about the University clearly communication tuition changes to international students, with 59% of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

**Figure 4. I think that the University clearly communicates changes to international tuition fees to graduate students (250 responses).**



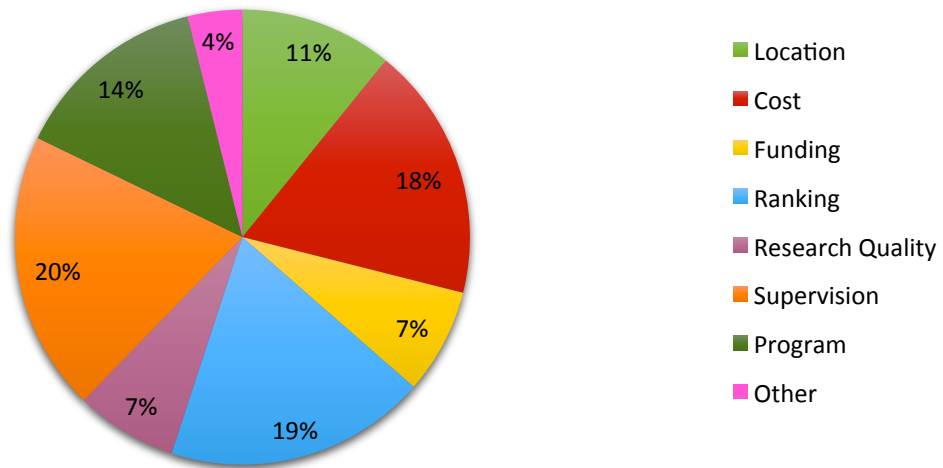
Several comments such as "I do not completely understand the international graduate adjustment proposal: are they suggesting an additional 4000\$ to be added to the international tuition? Would the Special Tuition Award [rebate] be granted to EVERY international graduate student in 2017-2018? What about afterwards?" highlights the confusion over the plan and lack of clarity for the proposal. Another student commented: "I am far more concerned about the \$4k payment than the 3%. One expects an increase in line with CPI, but the \$4k payment sounds a lot like the University is actually intending a 40-50% step change in fees to gouge international students to me. That is not consistent with the welcoming, multi-cultural environment that is the contemporary U of A. Worse - it sets a very uncomfortable precedent."

**GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition**

**Part 2: General Feedback**

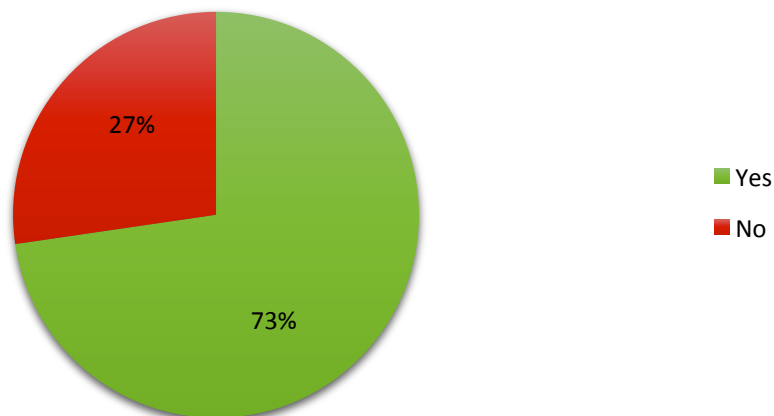
When asked about what factors contributed to their decision to attend the U of A (Figure 5), responses could be categorized into eight groupings, with the three highest percentages being supervision/supervisor (20%), ranking (19%), and cost (18%). Program and research quality were also separate, and when combined with supervisor, as some students mentioned, this would account for 41% of the responses. Location (11%) was another factor, as was funding (7%). In the 'other' category, students included family obligations, environment of the university, specific field of interest or the specializations/'avenues of study', links with industry and prospective job opportunities, and placement of alumni.

**Figure 5. What factors contributed to your decision to attend UAlberta (i.e. University ranking, cost, program quality, location, quality of supervision, etc.) (212 responders/387 responses)?**



When asked if affordability of tuition was a major factor in deciding to attend the U of A (Figure 6), 73% of respondents said yes.

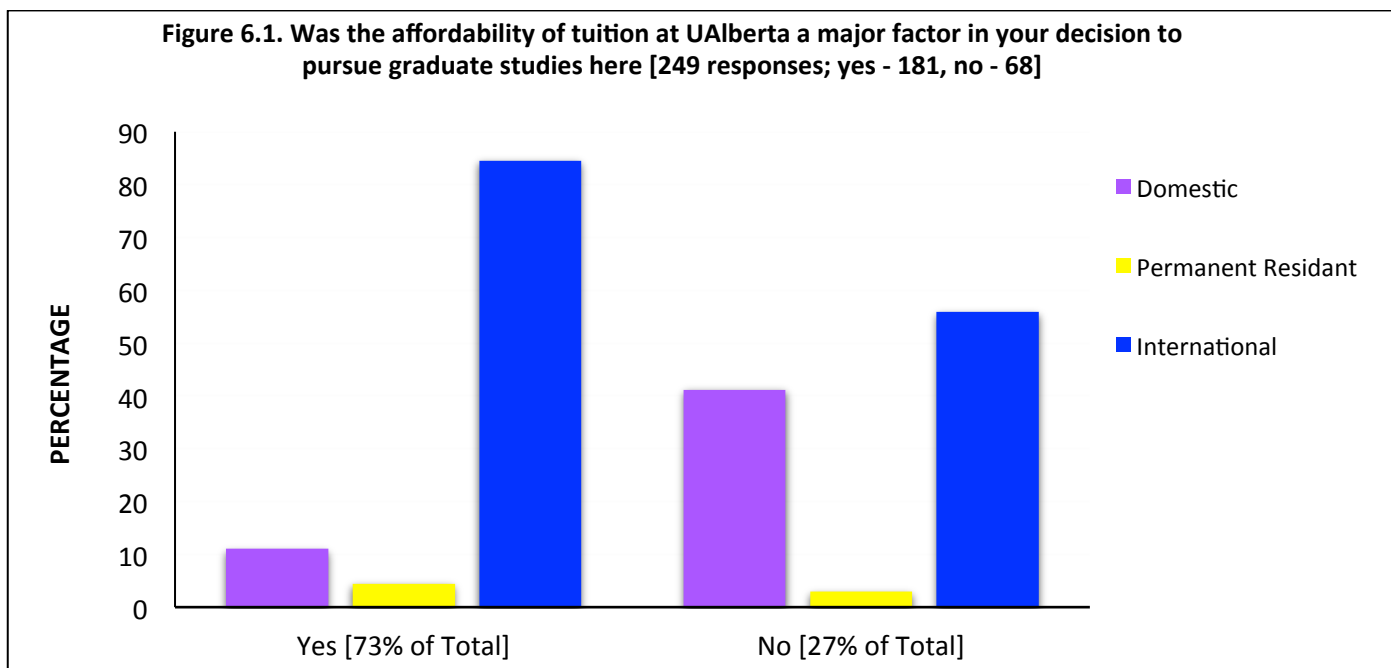
**Figure 6. Was the affordability of tuition at UAlberta a major factor in your decision to pursue graduate studies here (249 responses)?**



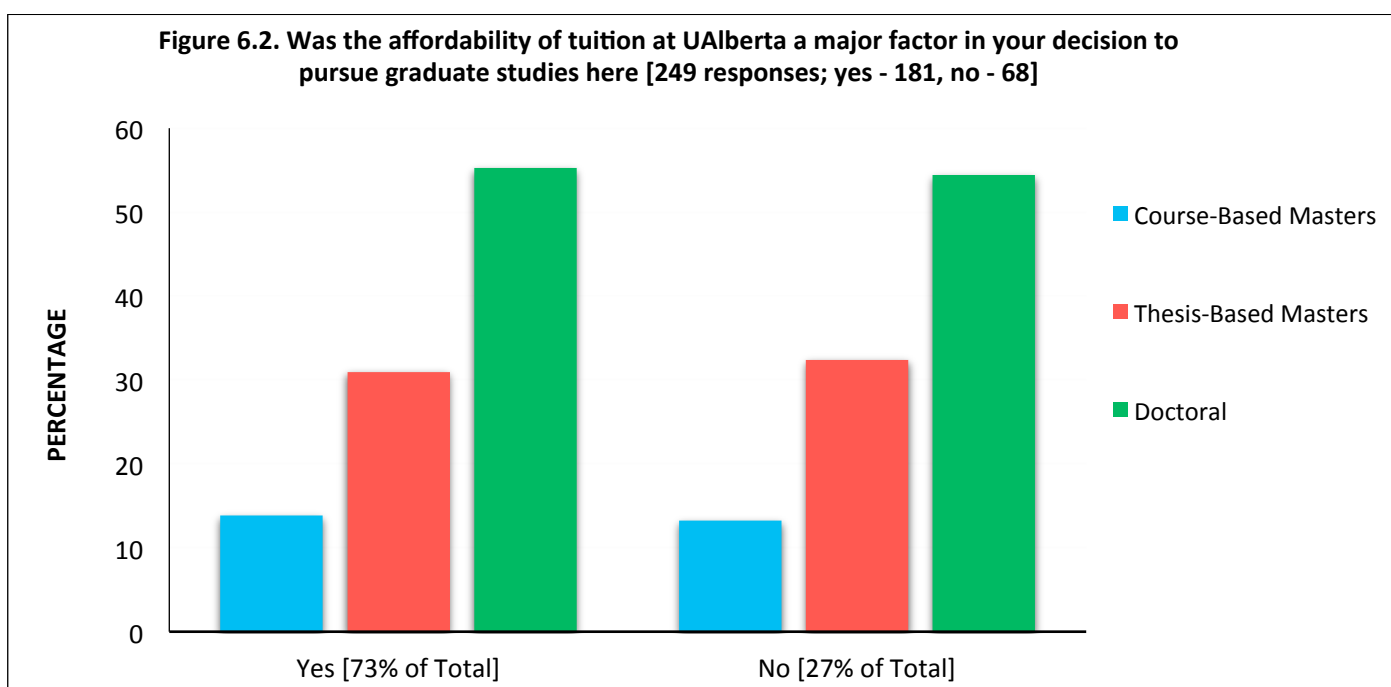


### GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

In Figure 6.1, yes and no responses were assessed by status – domestic student, permanent resident, and international student. Of those that responded 'yes' to the question above, international students were an overwhelming majority of the respondents (over 80%). In the 'no' group, 41% were domestic students and 55% were international students.



When breaking down affordability by degree (Figure 6.2), a similar trend was observed in both the yes and no groups, with course-based masters having the lowest percentage, followed by thesis-based masters, with PhD students having the highest percentage.





## GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition

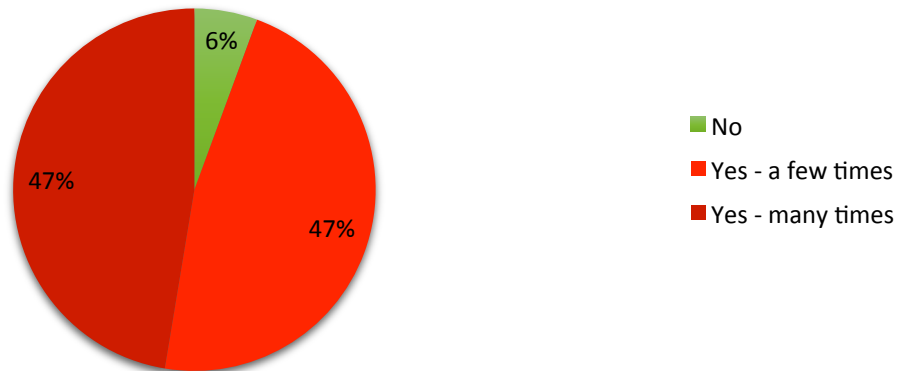
The trends between Figures 6, 6.1 and 6.2 indicate that for the students who were concerned about the affordability of their degree, many are thesis-based international students, while another group of thesis-based students split more evenly between domestic and international students do not have serious financial constraints. Students had a number of comments about affordability of graduate education including:

- “Neither my parents nor I are wealthy. Affordability of tuition was the entire reason I chose Canada over the US and the UK.”
- “When researching the University of Alberta, I found the cost to be similar to that of my previous university. It was affordable and acceptable to me. If the cost had been lower, I would have viewed it as a positive. I would not have been worried that the quality was poor. If the cost had been higher, it would have made me consider other universities more strongly. A very high cost would have deterred me from applying.”
- “I was accepted to 6 Canadian universities including UofT and UBC. I selected UofA because the tuition and cost of living were lower compared to others. Affordability is extremely important for international students as we have to carry extra costs many Canadians do not have to worry about, such as huge relocation expenses, high international tuition fees, rent.”
- “Yes, that was the number one reason especially I have family coming with me. If tuition is increased, that will definitely lower my interests in U of A. Most US schools offer full tuition coverage for graduate assistants whereas U of A doesn't. And now, U of A is telling us that it will increase burden on international students. Are you aware of how much percentage international students take in the whole school? If so, this is a huge mistake. My alma mater University of Minnesota reduced international student's tuition by 8,000 in 2008 which is the year I started to attend. This boosted international enrollment as well as it's fame for its program since students with strong academic abilities and financial issues found it very attractive compared to other schools. I think U of A is looking at wrong side of its financial problem.”
- “I don't believe a graduate student who is making good contributions to a university research group should have to spend very much money on tuition (if any at all). Too high tuition is a strong deterrent which prevents many students who are passionate about research from pursuing higher levels of education.”
- “As an international student affordability was extremely important as not only tuition had to be consider but living expenses, school related costs for three children, after school care, food, transportation etc.”
- “Humans have basic needs. If I have to worry about rent and food, I most certainly don't care about my research and work. It's that simple! We are not animals in a lab, we are humans who should live well to build the future.”
- “If [the] IGA is implemented without guaranteed financial support beyond 2017-2018, I may need to drop the program as my stipend is not sufficient even now. There is no means to pay the IGA fee of \$4000/year.”

**GSA Submission to the Board of Governors Regarding the Proposed Increases to International Graduate Student Tuition**

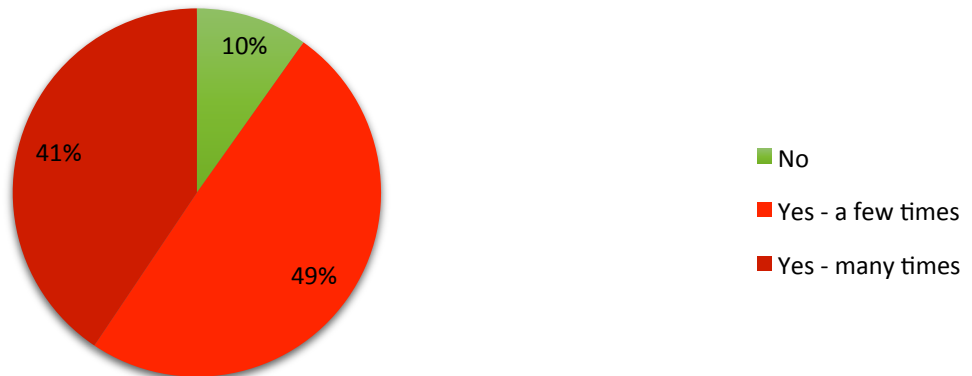
When asked if they had had financial concerns during their graduate studies, 94% of students responded yes (Figure 7). Only 14 students replied “no” to having financial concerns.

**Figure 7. Have you been concerned about your financial situation while you have been in graduate studies (249 responses)?**



Of the students who responded yes in Figure 7, 90% of them also reported that their financial situation had also caused them significant stress in their graduate studies (Figure 7.1).

**Figure 7.1. Has your financial situation caused you significant stress while you have been in graduate studies? [234 Students with Financial Concerns]**



Comments on the impact of financial stress on graduate students included:

- “One has to have money to go to school, getting money takes time away from studying in my degree field and working on my thesis, putting me behind and forcing me to need more money, which takes away from my schooling.... etc... As well “can I afford to eat this week?” is a stressful question for anyone.”
- “The cost of living in Edmonton can be expensive, especially when you factor in childcare so you always have to look for additional sources of revenue to make sure you can stay afloat.”





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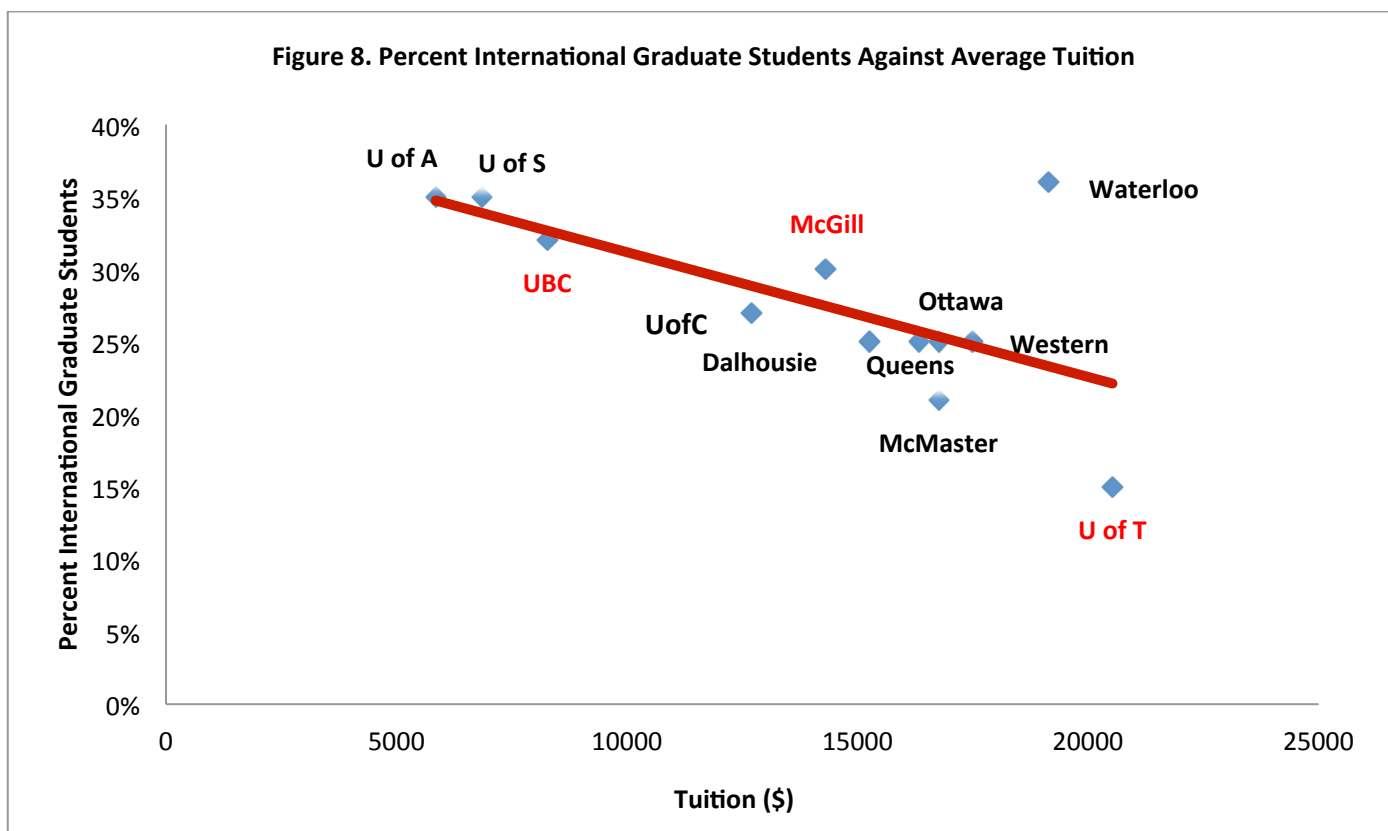
- “Returning to full-time graduate studies after a period in industry has been stressful. I have more sympathy for students’ financial situations now than I ever have. Planning for full-time studies requires careful budgeting, and unforeseen costs put studies at risk.”
- “Could not attend my dad’s funeral because I could not pay for an emergency flight, developed stress and anxiety disorders.”
- “Even as a funded student I struggle to pay my bills and not put myself further into debt. School and the cost of living here is so expensive/high.”
- “I am not from a rich family and the current tuition and expense of living are already high for me. Plus, my program provided little financial support. That is why I feel stressed all the time.”
- “Whenever I am in trouble with my salary, I have undergone in mental stress, I could not concentrate on my studies and research.”
- “A graduate teaching/research assistant salary (minus tuition) is below the poverty line in Alberta. If I hadn’t won a couple of scholarships my financial situation would still be precarious.”
- “International graduate students face greater difficulties in securing funding. It doesn’t make sense to make them the scapegoat of any financial shortfall the university is facing. This would result in only more affluent students considering graduate studies at the U of Alberta and deprive similarly or more talented but less affluent students from attending U of Alberta. In the end, it would also be a loss to the University.”
- “Grad studies are already stressing for international students that do not have a family to support them economically and mentally, neither a clear future in Canada after graduation. The fact that we have to pay more than a Canadian while we are working as much or even more than them is really discouraging; the University should try to stay in the top 100 Universities in the world just using Canadian students, let’s see how this works. I constantly saved money by eating low cost, unhealthy food to save enough to get back home once in a while.”
- “Once one of my contracts was not signed, so I did not receive a paycheck for one pay period. This prevented me from being able to pay my rent and I had to take out an emergency loan. It is stressful when my salary is only high enough to live pay check to pay check. Increasing tuition costs would greatly increase this pressure.”
- “Coming from Cuba (I started my program as international student and I am now permanent resident) I don’t have rich parents who could help me to afford education and/or the costs of living in Canada. I receive a salary support from my department and supervisor of 22 000 CAD a year. This means that every month I am paid 1800 CAD. However when tuition fees are deducted monthly this is reduced to almost half (1000 CAD in total). Considering that at least I need to pay rent and buy food every month, this amount is hardly just enough, sometimes not enough.”
- “There have been times when I couldn’t afford to eat.”
- “As an international student moving away from home is hard enough, and then the most important issue is financial support. When university decides to increase tuition, I’m almost certain everyone’s number one issue becomes budget, and focus is moved from research and study to figuring out how to survive and generate money.”



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### Issues with the International Student Tuition Proposal

Looking at some statistics, the U of A is the fourth ranked Canadian university in various Canadian and international rankings (behind McGill, U of T, and UBC). It also has the second highest percentage of international students at 34% (international graduate student percentages have ranged from 32-36% since 2011), and second lowest tuition for international graduate students of the U15 schools (U of S has both slightly lower tuition and slightly higher percentage of international graduate students, Figure 8).



While it is being argued that the 'low' cost of our tuition is negatively affecting the perception of the quality of a U of A grad degree in other countries (and therefore we are not attracting the 'best' students), we disagree. We believe we should be celebrating – not "correcting", our strengths, in that the U of A provides a quality education at an affordable rate, with a diverse population composed of students from both various nationalities and socioeconomic status. A visionary approach would be to use these strengths in more creative marketing strategies.

Given the statistics above, graduate students have serious reservations concerning the proposal for changes in international student tuition, and in particular the sticker price increase.

#### 1. Lack of Consultation

First, we believe that if a new way of calculating inflation (the 'Academic Price Index') is going to be used and applied within the University, the Board of Governors should have the opportunity to have a formal discussion on this topic to assess the benefits and repercussions of its use, before applying it to a very vulnerable group.

Second, while the GSA has been working diligently to consult with our constituents and provincial advocacy group on the key issues of tuition and funding for graduate students, the timelines at play have made it difficult to do this in a rigorous, appropriate way. At this point,



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one of our main concerns with this proposal is the lack of meaningful consultation with students, given we were first informed about the proposal on October 28 in a Tuition and Budget Advisory Committee (TBAC) meeting, and given a written document on November 7. The GSA and SU were not provided with sufficient time to review and consult before the proposal was shepherded through the governance processes (GFC APC and BFPC), where the proposal continued to evolve in each session.

During the BFPC meeting, the Board Chair asked what kind of consultation the GSA would like to see, and then at the end of the meeting requested the addition of a motion for further consultation with students. During the meeting, the hesitation over the question about what we wanted to see with respect to more consultation, was because, if Administration chooses to interpret 'consultation' as merely informing students of decisions already made, then we have already been consulted. However we take issue with the idea that this can truly be considered consultation in any meaningful sense. It is, rather, informing and enabling the University to cross off an item on a checklist without engaging in true dialogue and discussion.

On December 12, when the GSA Council will have a special meeting at which the Provost will be in attendance, there is no doubt that members will have a long list of challenging questions to ask. I am frustrated however, as the likely reality is that none of those questions or concerns are likely to spark serious consideration from Administration.

### **2. Lack of Rationale**

We at the GSA are frustrated that the Provost and President have failed to provide a clear rationale with any quantifiable research and associated documentation to support the argument of improved perceived quality with the sticker price inflation, or any assessment of how this sticker price inflation may have a detrimental effect on the diversity of our graduate student community. As was discussed in the BFPC meeting, if any student tried to hand in a paper with limited to no support for their argument other than 'general marketing wisdom,' they would receive a failing grade. That it should be used by senior administration as a rationale to support this proposal as it makes its way through the important channels of collegial governance is troubling.

The graph that Administration did show for the first time at the BFPC meeting of how tuition has increased at the U of A over the past ~15 years, while the number of international students has risen, is misleading and offers an example of flawed correlation. First, the numbers refer to undergraduate students, which are a very different demographic from graduate students, and use very different criteria in selecting an institution for their graduate degrees as shown in Figure 5, starting with supervisor/program, rankings of the institution (which are often linked to percentage of international faculty and students), costs and funding packages, and location. Second, there are numerous other factors at play in why the population of international undergraduate students has risen over the past fifteen years, and to say it is directly correlated with tuition increases is overly simplistic. Third, even if one were to suspend judgment and accept the argument that more students are applying to the U of A simply because of increases in tuition fees, the question remains as to whether these applicants are convinced that higher costs equals higher quality or if they are merely more affluent. While some student do equate cost with 'higher quality' programs as indicated by the survey results, the survey also demonstrates that the majority of current international graduate students did not pick the U of A based on cost, and many would not have come to the U of A if the cost of tuition were higher. Applying consumerist methods does not accord with the values of our institution (and, indeed, the values of higher education more broadly).

If we are calling ourselves an institution dedicated to the public good, we believe we should continue to offer education for the academically qualified, including those with financial and other barriers to accessing post-secondary. 'Public good' can mean solely Edmonton or solely Alberta but, using a more collective viewpoint, 'public good' can encompass the globe, indicating the vital role institutes of higher education play in changing the world. Until we take steps to offer a sustainable living funding package to graduate students to ensure they can live reasonably, inflated tuition fees may become a barrier for highly qualified potential graduate students who will not be able to even consider the U of A because (on the surface) it's just another institution they cannot afford to attend.

The GSA is not alone in having serious misgivings about this proposal. The Provost recently presented to the FGSR Council, and while he asked for input on how to roll out the plan, what he got back was a number of questions (which had to be cut off) from graduate student and faculty Council members who, like the GSA, failed to understand the value of the proposal, the rationale underpinning it, and are concerned about the long term implications of the proposal.



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### **3. Affordability of a Graduate Degree**

We believe that currently enrolled and future international graduate students will be very adversely affected by this proposal, as they can incur significant financial costs to afford a quality education, while leaving their families and social support systems behind. Lack of sufficient, stable and predictable funding can have major implications, from not being able to afford nutritious food, to constantly worrying about paying rent, to trying to find work off campus (which can extend the time to completion). As many students live pay cheques to pay cheques, they do not have resources for emergencies (eg a medical or dental emergency or the death of a family member at home that necessitates costly travel).

A disproportionate number of international graduate students already face financial challenges at the University, and have had to seek emergency funding and use resources such as the Campus Food Bank, where around 50% of the users are graduate students, despite being closer to 1/5 of the student population. Many came here with financial plans in place to get them through their degree programs and this sudden increase could be incredibly damaging to their quality of life and thereby to their ability to conduct productive and exemplary, no less groundbreaking, work in their programs. In particular, one must consider that they are constrained by limitations on applying for government funding and in seeking employment in order to earn extra funds (likewise, outside employment is often a less than ideal solution as it can extend program completion times). Some students also come from cultures that discourage asking for support, and, as such, financial constraints could create other sorts of untenable situations. We believe any large increases in tuition will be exceptionally burdensome, especially because there is no uniform and predictable funding across campus that ensures a reasonable standard of living.

In applying API to graduate student fees, this further selectively impacts international students who receive a stipend. During the last round of Collective Bargaining, both sides used CPI as a metric of inflation, and thus a 2% increase in salary for the second year was viewed as reasonable by both the University and the GSA. However, application of 3.02% to fees without a similar increase in salary disproportionately impacts international graduate students.

In addition, if this plan moves ahead, the GSA and many students and faculty are very concerned that there is no firm commitment to ensuring the rebate is guaranteed in the long run and throughout a student's program, especially given the comment that rebates may be re-examined for course-based graduate programs. Without guarantees that this is indeed solely a 'sticker price' increase, we are concerned that it may be discontinued in future years (first for course-based masters, and then for all international students if there is a particularly trying year). This proposal easily went through GFC APC despite student objections about lack of consultation or clear rationale, likely as students are minorities on many university committees. As such, this rebate could easily be removed for course-based students, again in spite of student objections.

### **4. Impact on University Reputation**

The University appears to have a decent understanding from the Registrar's research and reports on how to recruit undergrad students, but does not appear to have a strategy for recruitment of graduate students. Based on the results of both the U of A survey, and the one out to all graduate students in the province, factors which most influence decisions to attend the U of A include: the strength of its programs and quality of potential supervisors, the available funding opportunities (ones that both offset tuition and fees and provide a reasonable standard of living, especially for international students), the reputation of the University (both in terms of rankings and the quality of research), and location. Many graduate students, both domestic and international chose this institution after a thorough analysis comparing often between 3 and 10 though sometimes upwards of 25 or more institutions. For those we have spoken to, affordable tuition and ease of immigration are seen as assets, especially among Chinese and Iranian graduate students. Many also appreciate the cultural diversity of our campus and believe this is something that could be threatened by the implementation of an inflated tuition rate that assumes a direct link between cost and quality. As the number one point was often about program or supervisor of choice, highlighting our areas of research and infusing funding into those areas such as through the signature areas of research is actually likely to be an effective strategy to attract 'better' students.

However, prior to attempting to change anything in terms of recruitment, it would make a lot more sense to do a thorough review of graduate student funding to understand at a departmental level the kinds of supports available to students. This proposal uses the language about most thesis-based students are supported by their professors for the international differential fee, but we have no easy



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way to confirm or deny this statement due to the lack of data about grad students. It is true in certain departments or faculties, but, that may also only be offered for a limited time compared to the realistic time to completion for grad students, which is 3 years for a Masters student and about 6 years for a PhD. As grad students are clearly expressing a desire for sustainable living funding packages tied to the cost of living and tuition, being able to articulate the amount of support already offered would seem like a reasonable starting point before discussing sudden increases in program costs.

Furthermore, an artificial inflation of fees that will not even be marketed out to students seems like a very poor strategy to recruit 'better' students, which in itself is not clearly defined for grad students. According to a recent time to completion report by the Dean of FGSR, GPA is not clearly correlated with completion rates for grad students.

If we do want to attract a greater number of students here, there are various marketing strategies that a university can use to appeal to students; quality is one aspect, but so could guaranteed funding packages to all graduate students or, even highlighting that we don't inflate our fees like other universities do. There are lots of other clever and creative strategies the University could use to target international graduate students.

At this point, some international students feel angry and disrespected by the University; that they are being used as 'cash cows' to address the budget shortfalls. When this happens, the University has failed these students and itself, by creating a negative experience that may have long lasting repercussions. Students are only students for a short amount of time before they become alumni. A poor or negative experience is unlikely to create an engaged alumni, meaning future students will not benefit from their knowledge and skills, they are unlikely to donate to the university, and they could even damage the university's reputation abroad, by speaking against the U of A to friends, family, and other students in their home countries.

### **Proposed Solutions**

#### **1. Grandfathering Current Students**

To date, Administration has refused to consider grandfathering current students on the grounds that it would cost too much to change the fee assessment system. However, they are more than willing to implement a fee for the convoluted cost neutral sticker price increase, which may be more time intensive and problematic to institute from a fee assessment perspective (for example, if this system continues long-term, it would add yet another layer of having to remove the sticker price inflation, multiply the tuition by API, re-add the sticker price increase, and then re-apply the rebate). If they are willing to put resources into developing the infrastructure required for the latter scheme without clear benefits, it seems unreasonable to state that it would cost too much to grandfather current students, who are facing increases that could run as high as \$1,300/year.

As indicated by the responses from the survey, students are already significantly stressed by their financial situation, and increasing their fees part way through a degree program will further exacerbate this stress, and likely lead to further mental health issues (which will draw on university resources that are already going to be underfunded this year due to current lack of backfilling from MNIFs). Given most students are already living at or below the poverty line, this proposal does not seem in the best interests of students – and, in the context of our campus community, which values collegiality, it is troubling that the needs of a foundational segment of our population (students) are not receiving more consideration.

We believe current students should be grandfathered into the system at CPI rather than charged significantly higher fees without commensurate increases in financial support. In addition, given the government is currently reviewing tuition and funding in the province as we speak, it seems inappropriate to significantly changing the fee structure, when significant changes will happen in the next year.

#### **2) A Literature Review of the Rationale Underpinning This Increase (to enable the Board to thoroughly review potential affects to the University)**

- Provide literature on both sides of the argument, including an assessment based on socioeconomic status of potential applicants;
- Focus on the impacts of this kind or proposal on students in different types of graduate programs – thesis based, course based, and professional programs;



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- A review of the factors that graduate students use to choose their institution;
- A review of what a shift in demographic would mean in terms of supports and requirements for these students on our campus
- A review of effective marketing strategies to attract graduate students; and
- A review of graduate student tuition and funding across Canada and with any appropriate international comparators.

For each of these areas it would be important to report separately the literature for both domestic and international students. This document would need to be prepared by a neutral and independent third party.

### **3) A Review of Graduate Student Funding**

There is an overwhelming need for better funding packages. Why is it considered unacceptable, except at the University, to not provide financial support to highly qualified individuals for groundbreaking and novel research and related activities? While the argument that it is a 'privilege' to attend graduate school is often raised, there is also a huge opportunity cost for returning or remaining in school. Many students receive little to no funding, and worry constantly about finances. Another piece of paper does not truly justify the enormous pressure students face today, trying to balance their research/school expectations with staying afloat financially, and maintaining even a resemblance of work-life balance. Many of the graduate students we assist, and some of the students in the survey, have had mental health and mental illnesses brought on or exacerbated by their graduate studies. Based on the amount of stress, and the lack of acknowledgment or value that graduate degrees appear to receive both within the university and in society, it makes it challenging to recommend to students to do a graduate degree.

One way to begin to make graduate degrees more accessible is to ensure financial support for all students. As an initial step, this would require a review of current funding and financial support offered to graduate students, to determine how students are funded, how much, and for how long, and the extent of students not receiving sufficient support. Once that information is known, a conversation can then occur on how to ensure all graduate students can have a reasonable standard of living.

### **4) An MOU Signed Between the University and Graduate Students' Association That the Rebate Will Continue to be Offered For All Students as Long as the Sticker Price Inflation of \$4,000 (or more) Is In Place**

While there has been oral agreement that the sticker price will be cost neutral, and this was amended in the BFPC motion, there has been no official documentation ensuring the rebate will continue so long as the sticker price inflation is in place. Given that one of the earlier TBAC meetings mentioned the possibility of removing the rebate for course-based students, there is no guarantee that it wouldn't be removed first for course-based international graduate students, and then for all international students after three or more years Provost leaves, and students are 'normalized' to the inflated tuition costs. As demonstrated by the ease with which these proposals have passed through the governance structure, we would be very concerned about preventing further changes once a sticker price inflation is in place, given the 'rebate' removal would not go through the same governance route as tuition increases do.

### **Final Thoughts**

Ultimately, the GSA believes that the creation of minimum, sustainable living funding packages along with education and award opportunities that allow for stability and a reasonable quality of life during graduate studies will make us even more of a recognized leader in graduate education. In the short term, we believe that this proposal will be detrimental to current international graduate students. In the long term, it may result in serious unintended consequences that could damage the University and its reputation.

Placing the burden of increasing costs on the most financially constrained and vulnerable groups without corresponding financial support and calling it 'good governance' is questionable at best, and worrisome at an institution with a strategic plan called 'For the Public Good'. The GSA requests that our concerns be addressed prior to this proposal moving forward through the Board.