



Dear Councillors,

April 8, 2016

At its May 2015 meeting, GSA Council received the 2015-2016 Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The SWP is prepared annually by both the current and incoming teams of Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs), and GSA Management. It serves to direct the GSA's efforts over the course of the year, and identify areas where we can work with others in the University community. Reports on our team's efforts with respect to the SWP's goals occurred at the September 2015 and January 2016 GSA Council meetings. As this is the last GSA Council meeting for my team, I would like to give a final update on our progress. The complete SWP is available for your review on the GSA website at <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/03SWP.aspx>.

Highlights include:

- **Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs):** The GSA, SU, and Administration recently put forward a joint proposal to restructure how the University handles the collection and oversight of MNIFs. The proposal included the establishment of an oversight body of six students, seven administrators, and a Senator to track how MNIF money is being spent, and to recommend to the Board of Governors on how the fees should be adjusted each year. I'm just tickled to say that the proposal has now been approved by all the necessary governance committees, with the final stop being the Board of Governors on March 18.
- **Relationships with Administration and Government:** As you may have heard, Mr. Michael Phair was recently appointed as Chair of the University's Board of Governors, while Mr. Marlin Schmidt has been appointed as the provincial Minister of Advanced Education. I have talked to both on several occasions; incoming GSA President (and current VP Labour) Sarah Ficko has also had a chance to meet them, and the rest of this year's DEO's met Minister Schmidt on April 1st. During all of these meetings, we have educated the Minister and the Chair on the GSA and the issues faced by graduate students.
- **Residences:** Vice-President External Alphonse Ndem Ahola has been closely following issues concerning graduate residences, including matters related to the health of residence associations and the quality of accommodations in Michener Park. I encourage you to speak to the GSA if you hear of any problems concerning residences. In addition, Vice-President Student Services Ali Talaei has been a tireless advocate for direct transit access to the North Campus for residents of Michener Park (most of whom are graduate students). He has discussed this matter with stakeholders on campus as well as with the City, and is collaborating with the Michener Park Residents' Association in pursuit of this goal.
- **GSA Fall and Winter Orientations, Departmental Orientations, and GSA Coffee Breaks:** It is vital for the GSA to reach as many students as possible, introducing them to the organization and the various services and benefits we provide. All the current DEOs were very active in the planning and execution of the GSA's annual fall and winter orientations, as well as the 40 departmental orientations we gave this year. Additionally, thanks to a competitive grant secured by our staff from the Unwind Your Mind program, we hosted several coffee break-style events in Triffo Hall and the PAW Graduate Student Lounge. Building upon the success of the latter events, my team discussed a similar application for the 2016-17 funding year. Vice-President Academic Harsh Thaker raised the possibility of reaching out to and collaborating with departmental GSAs to host these events in more numerous locations. We received a Gold Level Green Spaces Certification for the Coffee Breaks from the Office of Sustainability, and will be applying for similar certification at future events.
- **ab-GPAC and GU15:** After a lengthy building process, the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) is now meeting regularly to discuss issues of importance to graduate students at Alberta's four CARI institutions (us, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University), and to advocate on their behalf. We attended an AGM for the group in Lethbridge this past November and continue to meet via conference call. As a group we have had meaningful conversations with the provincial government and have submitted feedback on the provincial budget. In addition, we have actively participated in a consultation process related to the right to strike and other possible amendments to the Post-Secondary Learning Act.



Our GSA also meets several times per year with peer organization at Canada's other major research and teaching institutions, in a group which informally refers to itself as GU15. The group met in Calgary last spring, Winnipeg last summer, and will be meeting April 12-15 in Vancouver. The UBC GSA is hosting; myself, Sarah, and the incoming Vice-President External will be representing the U of A.

- **Professional Development:** Harsh, Sarah, and I have been involved throughout the year in FGSR's ongoing work to develop comprehensive, meaningful professional development opportunities for graduate students, including the mentorship opportunities that now exist. The GSA also hosted the Fall Mix and Mingle Professional Development Event (generously sponsored by FGSR), and a similar event sponsored by the Alumni Association in the winter.
- **Negotiations:** A major part of Sarah's time this year has been spent leading the GSA's negotiations with the University for a new Collective Agreement. In preparation for these negotiations, she and I presented on graduate student working conditions and institutional impact to the Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee, which I understand caught the committee's attention. Meanwhile, while our Agreement has yet to be finalized and ratified, it is very close. I encourage you to watch for updates over the next few weeks.

Another set of negotiations involves the U-Pass. The current agreement between the University and the City of Edmonton expires in 2017, at the same time as a secondary agreement regarding the University's subsidization of the program expires with the SU and GSA. The GSA will obviously be heavily involved in renegotiating both agreements. To that end, Ali has been meeting with stakeholders at both levels to discuss tactics. The real outcomes of these meetings will be seen next fall and winter, but for now we are pleased to announce (along with the SU) that the University will continue to subsidize the service, though the amount has yet to be determined.

- **Mental Health Services:** In addition to her labour portfolio, Sarah has worked a great deal on issues related to the critical concern of on-campus mental health services. She has met with a wide array of stakeholders both on and off our campus, and has participated in numerous conferences and information sharing opportunities. This is another area where the real results will be seen in a year or two as new programs are formed and (hopefully) provincial funding is secured.

As always, we have striven throughout the year for transparency, accountability, and the building of the GSA's reputation in all of our dealings throughout the year. Regular reporting on our progress against the goals of the SWP to Council and other stakeholders is part of this process, which will continue when the new DEOs take office on May 1. Until then, I look forward to our discussion on April 18, and welcome any questions you may have beforehand.

Sincerely,

Colin More 2015-2016 GSA President