

September 11, 2015

Dear Councillors,

Those of you who have been on GSA Council since May will remember receiving the **2015-2016 Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP)**. The SWP is available for your review on the GSA website at <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/03SWP.aspx>. This Plan was prepared by me along with the GSA Vice-Presidents, the out-going team of Directly-Elected Officers, and GSA Management to direct our efforts and identify areas where we can work with others in the University community. The Board SWP both includes the platform and strategic goals of your new team of Directly-Elected Officers and was based upon the previous Board's SWP, which ensures continuity in terms of strategic goals, planning, and advocacy.

After releasing the SWP, the Directly-Elected Officers and I have met with various members of University administration to discuss common goals, and devise strategies to implement aspects of the plan that are of mutual interest. **At this point in our terms, I would like to offer you an update concerning the GSA's progress in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the GSA Board 2015-2016 SWP.** Updates will also come to Council in January and April, but I encourage you to ask questions about the status of SWP goals at any time throughout the year.

Highlights from our first four months in office include:


- FGSR's Professional Development requirements for graduate students are in place to begin with the September 2016 intake. Vice-President Academic Harsh Thaker, Vice-President Labour Sarah Ficko, and I are involved in a few different committees through FGSR that are still working to develop innovative, meaningful professional development opportunities for graduate students. In the meantime, all graduate students have access to ongoing professional development opportunities, including access to the online modules offered through mygradskills.ca. We are also working with FGSR, who are generously sponsoring the event, to hold the Fall Mix and Mingle Professional Development event on September 30. We hope that you have all RSVP'd to attend.
- The Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) is well underway. Our GSA is represented by Vice-President External Alphonse Ndem Ahola, Councillor-at-Large Monty Bal, and myself. The group is meeting regularly via teleconference, and we will have an in person meeting in Calgary in October, followed by the first AGM in Lethbridge near the end of November. Although we are still in the early days, ab-GPAC has been engaged with the new provincial government since May, and we look forward to advocating on many issues of importance to graduate students.
- After some initial frustration around the PAW Centre graduate student lounge being overly hot, this has been resolved. The outside patio is still in development (look for it next summer), but there is lots of room inside for graduate students to hang out and socialize, or get some work done away from their office/lab environment. We will be holding our grand opening of the space, hosted by Vice-President Student Services Ali Talaei, in conjunction with one of our Graduate Student Coffee Breaks (see below) on October 5, 2015. Check out the GSA Newsletter for more information on that! Also, if you haven't already had a chance to check out their (rather delicious) soups and salads, the Chopped Leaf location in PAW opened in July. The GSA and SU sub-lease the space, and the GSA will receive half the rental income.
- Under the leadership of GSA Vice-President Labour Sarah, the GSA's Opening Position for Collective Agreement negotiations has been drafted, and will be submitted to the University's negotiating team imminently. The Opening Position was drafted in consultation with the GSA Labour Relations Committee, and is approved by the GSA Negotiating Committee. Sarah will report regularly to GSA Council as negotiations proceed.
- In August, Vice-President External Alphonse and I attended the GU 15 meeting in Winnipeg. Here, we met with our counterparts from graduate student associations across Canada and discussed issues of importance to graduate students including graduate student funding issues and student-supervisor relationships. These meetings are informal opportunities for valuable information sharing. We have signed onto a letter developed at the previous GU 15 meeting urging the federal government to invest more money in Tri-Council research funding.

- Both the General Faculties Council and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research Council have resumed meeting this month. We are excited to be part of the evolution of these bodies under the new leadership of President David Turpin, Provost and Vice-President Academic Steven Dew, and Interim Dean of Graduate Studies Heather Zwicker. Vice-President Academic Harsh, Vice-President Labour Sarah, and I serve on these bodies, as well as several sub-committees. We will continue to represent the interests of graduate students, and bring issues back for GSA Council to discuss as the year progresses.
- Finally, under the leadership of Vice-President Student Services Ali, we will be hosting a series of "Graduate Student Coffee Breaks" over the fall term. These informal events are meant to get students out of their labs and offices, and into a space where they can interact with other graduate students from across campus, enjoy refreshments, and learn more about the GSA. Watch the GSA Newsletter or check out our website for a list of dates and locations.

As was the case with previous GSA Board SWPs, in implementing this Plan, we will strive for transparency, accountability, and reputation-building through regular updates to GSA Council and other stakeholders. Through this process, we hope to gain valuable feedback on how we can best achieve what we have set out to accomplish. We look forward to working with our many partners on the implementation of this Plan.

The GSA Board is interested in hearing your thoughts on the Strategic Work Plan progress to date. I look forward to our discussion on September 21.

Sincerely,



Colin More
2015-2016 GSA President