



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

18 January 2019

As many of you will remember, my team and I began the development of the 2018-2019 Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP) in May and we presented the finalized Plan to GSA Council in July. The complete SWP is available on the [GSA website](#).

As outlined at the July 2018 meeting of GSA Council when this plan was presented, we divided our SWP into two documents. The first is an outward facing document that is crisp and visually engaging. The main audiences for this document include University administration, the U of A Board of Governors, the Government of Alberta, other partners, and graduate students.

The second document is an internal task list, which was shared in-person at the July meeting of GSA Council. This task list is a living document that evolves as my team strategizes issues and approaches and it is the document where we outline the specific actions we will be taking to work towards our goals and identify those responsible for each task. Content from this internal document has been used to develop the second update on our progress to GSA Council. The first update was presented at the October 2018 meeting of GSA Council.

Highlights from my portfolio include:

- I have continued advocating for the establishment of minimum funding packages at the U of A, which is a major component of our 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan, and a project that has been ongoing for a number of years. While attending this year's Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) conference, I connected with individuals from universities that have already implemented minimum funding packages, to learn about any potential challenges. I have continued to discuss the importance of establishing minimum funding packages during various Board of Governors meetings, and individually with Board of Governors members. The Interim Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) and the Provost continue to examine the logistics of establishing minimum funding packages at our institution.
- I invited the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (Finance and Administration) to attend GSA Council on 19 November 2018 to discuss the important topics of the University budget and graduate student tuition, and to answer questions from GSA Council members. Before the end of the year, along with Masoud (Vice-President Academic), I also participated in meetings of the Tuition Budget Advisory Committee to review the University's preliminary proposal for international graduate tuition rates for 2019-2020. In early December, I also met individually with the University of Alberta Vice-President (Finance and Administration) to further discuss the University's budget with respect to how funds are allocated under the new budget model.
- Two years ago, the U of A GSA was an active participant in the Government of Alberta's review of tuition and funding. On 29 October, I was able to attend the introduction of Bill 19 to the Alberta Legislature. Following the announcement of this Bill, the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) issued a [statement](#). Bill 19 has now passed through all required readings in the Alberta Legislature, and it is anticipated that the Bill will receive Royal Assent in February 2019. Following the passing of Bill 19, I have had continued conversations with the Minister of Advanced Education, through my role as the Chair of ab-GPAC, as well as with various stakeholders, about what Bill 19's accompanying regulations will be. Specifically, we are discussing the issue of how to define the length of graduate students' programs, given that Bill 19 will require that international students are informed of the total cost of their program at its outset, starting in Fall 2020.
- I continue to work closely with ab-GPAC on spearheading the three main advocacy priorities identified at the beginning of our term (tuition and fees, post-graduate employment, and the indigenization of graduate education). Recently, ab-GPAC released a [policy statement on post-graduation employment](#), which supports the provision of funding for ongoing professional development opportunities for graduate students to increase their post-graduation employability, advocates for policies to increase the retention of highly-skilled workers in the province, and endorses the promotion of entrepreneurial mindsets and ecosystems.
- I continue to meet monthly with representatives from the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association, and, in pursuit of supporting "initiatives and programs that specifically support Indigenous [...] graduate students" (2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan), I am hopeful that GSA Council will approve the creation of a seat on GSA Council for an Indigenous graduate student. Along with the rest of my team, I will continue to emphasize the importance of establishing this seat at the January 2019 meeting of GSA Council.



Graduate Students' Association

University of Alberta

- With the support of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), Masoud and I were able to attend this year's Canadian Association for Graduate Studies conference in Winnipeg. I was able to present a poster at the conference on the topic of graduate student mental health and financial supports, and we're very pleased that the GSA was able to participate in conversations about several important topics, such as experiential learning and the future of the PhD dissertation.
- In advance of the upcoming 2019 provincial election, ab-GPAC continued to meet with MLAs from all political parties in the province to discuss graduate student issues.

Recent team goals that spanned across different Directly-Elected Officers' portfolios included:

- In furtherance of our work to advocate, on behalf of graduate students, for the prompt resolution of ongoing and systemic issues associated with the Collective Agreement, in November, Beth (Vice-President Labour) and I delivered a presentation to the Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee on the topics of minimum funding packages and graduate student supervision.
- In the fall, Masoud, Fahed (Vice-President Student Services), and I, along with representatives from the Students' Union, participated in a meeting of the Joint Oversight Committee on Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs), where we received a report on the University's use of revenue generated through MNIFs. Though the Government of Alberta has recently announced that they will be freezing MNIFs for all students for fall 2019 (both domestic and international students), we raised concerns about the student health and wellness fee, given that the government has now mandated that the funding the U of A receives through the mental health grant cannot be used for treatment, and is emphasising that students utilize Alberta Health Services' resources, which are located off-campus. Both student associations continue to raise issues with this shift, and the Dean of Students will be sharing these concerns with the government.
- In early 2019, along with Masoud, I will be scheduling a meeting with the FGSR to review and discuss the importance of clear and transparent letters of offer associated with admissions.
- At the beginning of November, we hosted a dedicated coffee break for graduate student group executives, in order to support and connect with departmental graduate student groups and networks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sasha'.

Sasha van der Klein
2018-2019 GSA President



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

18 January 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in October, in addition to attending the regularly scheduled meetings of the many governance committees on which I represent the GSA.

- I continue to raise the importance of monitoring the frequency of supervisory committee meetings to ensure that graduate students benefit from the required amount of contact with their supervisory committees. Following conversations with the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), I worked to help develop a survey that was circulated to graduate students through the GSA newsletter, asking about their experiences with the frequency of their supervisory committee meetings. Data from this survey has now been shared with the Interim Dean of the FGSR, and at the December meeting of the FGSR Policy Review Committee (FGSR PRC), these survey results, and next steps, were discussed. I also discussed this matter with Associate Dean Krogman, I continue to emphasize the importance of including annual supervisory committee meetings as one of the milestones that can be recorded in the online tracking platform that the FGSR will be implementing in the next few years.
- Other recent and important conversations within the FGSR PRC have included the creation of a support document for students pursuing research or courses at partner institutions, which do not have appropriate student support services. Additionally, the FGSR is currently reviewing its appeals policy, including how to best educate graduate students about the policy and discussing the creation of a supportive document to assist students in navigating it.
- Following discussions with the Interim Dean of the FGSR, the topic of graduate student exam deferrals was further discussed during recent FGSR Policy Review Committee meetings. During these discussions, I encouraged the FGSR to make it clear in their policies or communications that graduate students are covered by the University's exam deferral policies and processes in cases of unexpected emergencies for written exams, and the FGSR has agreed to incorporate language in the University calendar outlining that this is the case.
- In response to some graduate students bringing to my attention concerns about the scheduling of graduate courses during evenings and weekends or last-minute changes in scheduling, I met with my delegate on the General Faculties Council Academic Standards Committee (GFC ASC) to discuss bringing these concerns forward to the University. We then raised this issue to the General Faculties Council Committee on the Learning Environment and the matter has now been given to the FGSR PRC, who will be working on developing language to add to University policy.
- Finally, I have tackled a few individual issues, including working with a graduate student concerned about their ability to apply for various scholarships as a result of department specific regulations, and meeting with a representative of the Undergraduate Research Initiative to both learn more how their programming impacts graduate students and about how it intersects with a academic employment of graduate students under the GSA/Board of Governors Collective Agreement.

Sincerely,

Masoud Aliramezani, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Academic



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

18 January 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in October.

- Along with Sasha, and in keeping with the non-partisan nature of the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC), I have continued participating in ab-GPAC's ongoing meetings with representatives of Albertan political parties.
- During the fall semester, I continued to participate in several meetings related to residence issues, and actively participated in the Housing for Students Who Parent Committee, to review all student feedback collected through the University's consultation process in order to determine what kind of supports the University should provide for families. The consultation sessions have now wrapped up and the committee is now working on a final report.
- As a member of the Residence Advisory Committee and the Joint Residence Oversight Committee, I have also been discussing the University's residence budget, and the proposed increases to residence rates and meal plans that are anticipated for 2019-2020. I am happy to discuss this matter further with GSA Council.
- In support of student mental health, and as the GSA's representative on the Alumni Council, I am part of the new Volunteerism with Students Committee, which has been working to establish a program to recruit alumni as volunteers to support students and student mental health programming. The program is called ASSET, which stands for Alumni Student Support and Engagement team. I took an active role in the interview process for alumni wanting to participate in this program, and advised on the training they will receive to complete their roles.
- As Sasha reports, we have been working with ab-GPAC on implementing our three priorities for 2018-2019. As I reported in October, I participated in developing ab-GPAC's tuition and fees policy, which can be found [here](#).

Finally, in my role as the Chair of the GSA Awards Selection Committee, I am looking forward to overseeing the upcoming adjudication of the GSA Recognition Awards. I am also happy to report that in December, the GSA office team developed a 'GSA Awards 101' session, to provide information and assistance to graduate students interested in applying for these recognition awards. Five graduate students attended this session.

Sincerely,

Zhihong Pan, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President External



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

18 January 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in October.

- Negotiations for the next Graduate Assistantship Collective Agreement (CA) have been ongoing for several months and updates on negotiations have been shared with all current academically-employed graduate students. As per the regulations outlined in the *Labour Relations Code*, a final ratification vote will be sent to all current academically-employed graduate students.
- Over the fall I have continued working to improve transparency around graduate student pay issues and I will continue this work for the duration of my term of office.
- As reported previously, a large portion of my portfolio involves meeting with individual graduate students in person or over email regarding the interpretation of and compliance with the Collective Agreement. I have continued this work by responding to approximately 3-6 email conversations with graduate students per week, and meeting with approximately 3-8 graduate students per month, to assist with more complex issues.
- In October, I hosted a well-attended Collective Agreement 101 information session for academically-employed graduate students to help spread awareness about the provisions of the Collective Agreement. We are planning to host another session in the current term.
- In late November, I attended the University's new Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee, which was established as part of the provincial government's new Occupational Health and Safety Legislation. This committee will be examining third party oversight of health and safety violations on campus, and will work on establishing a process for graduate students to electronically report any perceived violations that they feel have not been addressed properly.
- Following the replenishment of the GSA Labour Relations Committee (GSA LRC) in the fall, this committee had its first meeting in November. Part of the mandate of the GSA LRC, as set out in GSA Bylaw and Policy, is to advise the Vice-President Labour with respect to educating academically-employed graduate students on the Collective Agreement.
- I have continued my participation in the Campus and Facilities Safety and Security (CFSS) Working Group, and we have been working on the final report that will be sent to the Vice-President (Finance and Administration) and Vice-President (Facilities and Operations). We have been utilizing the feedback received through GSA Council, and the personal safety survey, to develop the final recommendations that will be included in this report. Additionally, at their request, the co-chairs of the CFSS will be attending the January meeting of GSA Council to assist me in providing an update on these recommendations.
- Along with Sasha, I have continued consultations with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research regarding the supervisory training that is now required under the new Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, in order to ensure that this training benefits graduate students and facilitates collegial working relationships with their supervisors.

Sincerely,

Beth Richardson, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Labour



Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

18 January 2019

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in October.

- I have continued to take all opportunities to discuss mental wellness with various stakeholders on campus, and participated in the second Healthy Campus Alberta Summit in November, which was held at the University of Alberta. In addition, in October, I attended the Canadian Mental Health Association Conference, along with the Students' Union Vice-President Student Life, to learn more about post-secondary institutions' role in supporting mentally healthy campuses.
- Through my work with the Dean of Students' Advisory Council (DAC), I brought forward issues that my attention has been drawn to concerning mental health supports and Indigenous experiences on campus. Finally, in collaboration with the Students' Union Vice-President Student Life, we developed a mental health world café to assist DAC in collecting further feedback about student mental health, campus supports, and potential barriers.
- Along with a representative from the Students' Union, I met with the Assistant Dean of Students, Health and Wellness Services, to review the University's report to the Government of Alberta on the use of the mental health grant funding that they provide to the U of A, and providing feedback on the University's mental health strategy. I will continue to focus on advocating for the continuation and enhancement of dedicated funding from the University and the government to support mental health services on campus (with respect to government funding, I will work in consultation with Sasha and Zhihong as they serve on the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council). We also continue to raise concerns about the Government of Alberta's new mandate that the U of A use this funding to increase the awareness and prevention of mental health, rather than on-campus treatment.
- I attended the recent Studentcare Stakeholder Conference to learn more about the services provided through the current GSA Health and Dental Plan and have worked with several graduate students to resolve issues they experienced with the Plan.
- In furtherance of the goal of maintaining a strong advocacy presence within the U of A concerning the necessity of top tier health and wellness resources, I met with a representative from University Human Resources to evaluate the services provided through the Graduate Student Assistance Program, and to review the GSA's usage of this program.
- In working to ensure that students' culture and/or religious requirements are appropriately accommodated, and following conversations with the Dean of Students, Campus & Community Recreation circulated a survey to explore the possibility of offering gender-specific swim times. This survey was circulated through the GSA newsletter to all graduate students. Gender specific swim times are now available on an ad hoc basis, more information can be found [here](#).
- In consultation with the GSA office team, we developed a 101 session on the topic of GSA funding opportunities, and fifteen graduate students attended. Another GSA Funding 101 session will be scheduled prior to the opening of the April 1, 2019 granting period.

Sincerely,

Fahed Elian, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Student Services