



# Graduate Students' Association

University of Alberta

Dear President Flanagan,

10 December 2020

I write this letter to you on behalf of our graduate student members abroad who are faced with issues pertaining to the University of Alberta's online learning environment. The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) appreciates the efforts undertaken by our faculty and staff to transition our program offerings to the online environment back in March 2020, and to maintain those programs into the Fall 2020 term. We acknowledge that between historic budget reductions, the worsening pandemic, and the University of Alberta for Tomorrow initiative, our personnel and resources have been pushed to their absolute limits, and perhaps beyond. We maintain that this holds true for graduate students as well, and in this instance, our international members taking courses abroad who need our help.

The GSA is in support of the Students' Union and International Students' Association request to convene a special meeting of the General Faculties Council to discuss the necessity of asynchronous course materials for the Winter 2021 term, and we believe there are core considerations that need to be addressed in any forthcoming motion or resolution:

1. Asynchronous materials, e.g. lecture recordings, need to be mandatory for those courses with students in time zones that pose a conflict with their ability to participate fully in a synchronous manner. We agree that this constitutes an equity and health issue for these students.
2. Any resolution or motion carried requires supporting documentation describing the personnel, resources, and logistics to support the faculty needing to develop these materials.
3. The University of Alberta must develop ongoing review processes, aside from the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRIs), to monitor student satisfaction and engagement with the online learning environment, and publicly report the outcomes.

3.1 Additionally, a parallel process to gauge the online teaching experience of instructors (inclusive of Faculty, Sessional, and staff) and their Graduate Teaching Assistants, to collect data to help determine how we can better support our teaching personnel.

I understand this request comes at difficult time, however, I would note the GSA executive team members have exhausted our advocacy avenues, having raised the issue with the GFC Executive Committee, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) Council, and in conversations with the Dean of FGSR and the Dean of Students. These conversations have been ongoing since the summer of 2020, and it appears that we require direction from our highest collegial governance body to set a new direction for our campus community. Naturally, I am glad to hear alternative remedies, given that we are working against a narrow timeframe.

As always, I look forward to collaborating with you and your team on this and future projects.

With kind regards,

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

Marc Waddingham, GSA President 2020-2021

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