Graduate Students Association of McMaster University

Council Meeting

May 29th 2017
GSA Office, East Tower Refectory
6:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees: Tim Van Boxtel (GSA President), Robert Alex Ballagh (VP Services), Shawn Hercules (VP External), Curran Egan (FRC Humanities), Vi Dang (International Representative), Alexander Qian (FRC Health Science), Derek South (FRC Science), Jodie Lobano (FRC Business)

Regrets: Ashley Ravenscroft (DoO), Samira Farivar (FRC Business), Sara Oikawa (Incoming FRC Science), Kara Tsang (GSA CRO), Megan Murphy (VP Administration), Avijit Mallick (VP Internal)

Absent: Mariam Munawar (Senator Business), Sid Nath (Senator Health Science), Philip Tominac (Senator Engineering), Alexander Nielsen (Senator Science), Mohamed Zaher (FRC Engineering), Hanie Yousefi (FRC Engineering), Rodrigo Narro (BoG)

1.0 Call to Order

Motion to call the meeting to order at 6:19 p.m; first by Tim, seconded by Alex, all in favour, motion carried.

2.0 Acceptance of agenda

Motion to accept the Agenda for May 29th 2017; first by Tim, seconded by Alex, all in favour, motion carried.

3.0 New business

- Vi requested to add International committee discussion
- Tim requested to add Vp Internal nomination

Motion to add the new business items to the agenda; first by Tim, seconded by Curran, all in favour motion carried.

4.0 Ratification of previous Council Minutes

Motion to accept the previous Council minutes; first by Tim seconded by Curran, all in favour, motion carried.
5.0 Introduction

5.1 New Executives

- Tim introduced the current VPs and himself. He mentioned that the current VP Internal will step down by July 1st, and the position is currently open.

5.2 Council Members

- Tim highlighted the importance of Council members’ position, as they bring together graduate students voices, concerns and difficulties grad students face to the Council table for discussions and solutions.
- Tim explained that there will be new responsibility for FRCs as there is often lack of communication with grad students. For several faculties, students haven’t been in communication with their FRCs. He recommended that FRCs should get in contact and meet with grad students whenever their time permits.
- According to the new Bylaws each FRC should sit on at least 1 committee. List of the committees and standing resolutions are available on the GSA website. FRCs can send their request to join committees to Mona. There are 2 new committees that in need for members; Graduate clubs, and Executive review.
- Tim recommended to start an informal post Council social as there is a lot of topics can be solved outside the GSA doors, he recommended after the Council meeting members can meet at the Phoenix to socialize.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Roles of Council

- Alexander asked what is requested from him in his faculty report? Curran answered that the reports are sent 10 days prior to Council meeting reporting any updates within his faculty.
- Jodie asked what is the expectation from an FRC? Can FRC meet with the students’ association of their faculty and the Associate Dean to discuss grad students’ issues? Tim replied that all she mentioned shall be done, whatever help in communicating with grad students, and get the feedback to the Council table.
- Jodie mentioned in DeGroote School of Business, PhD Association have limited information, however, to get more information, she needs to meet with the Associate Dean of Research and Associate Dean of Academics.
- Alexander mentioned that he hasn’t been contacted by the previous FRCs of Health Science, he requested to have their contact information in order to get some information regarding the position. Tim mentioned that there is no official Health Science Association, however, there is a graduate group, he recommended to try and get in touch with them.
- Vi recommend to host a social event within the faculty using the budget line in social events, during the event he can introduce himself and communicate with grad students with in his faculty, she added SGS sometimes funds social events, he should get in touch with them in this regards.
Tim mentioned that FRCs need to get more engaged, be proactive and open the line of communication with the grad students, he added that Council needs to put some communication strategy in place to connect with grad students.

Jodie mentioned that regarding AGM attendance and since grad students aren’t always available on campus, she recommended to have a better technology in place to allow grad students to call in for general meetings, and avoid rescheduling and cancellation.

Jodie mentioned that she noticed that some Council members have been missing Council meetings, she recommended if members are absent for 2 or 3 Councils without sending regrets, they should be removed from Council. Tim mentioned that if members are absent from Council meetings, he will add this discussion to the agenda and the process of removal of a member will be according to the Bylaws.

Motion to discuss appointments of FRCs and CRO next; first by Tim, seconded by Curran, all in favour motion carried.

6...2 Expectations of Council Members

• Point discussed in previous point.

6...3 Standing Resolution of CRO Compensation

• The Council agreed to table item to next agenda to allow more input from Ashley.

7.0 Operational Updates

7...1 President’s Report

Tim send the following report:

IT Services

• He has identified key IT infrastructure and service deficiencies within the organization and has made initial steps to rectify them. IT requests were sent to the relevant university review committees for service and hardware infrastructure that is going to be essential to deliver effective services to the membership and maintain robust data security practices for all sensitive member information. These requests are to be reviewed at the next meeting; updates will be ongoing to the Membership at large. Furthermore, internal hardware was purchased to act as a central repository of data for the GSA which will greatly enhance data security and reliability of the organization.

• Tim added he is asking the university for some IT service development, for the use of verification of student registration, this will help to get an instant discount when swiping students card at the Phoenix.

Communications
Communication practices are being reviewed, specifically member email communications. A common criticism received about the GSA is in regards to the attrition of its email communications. Important information is not being effectively communicated separately from routine updates and overall fatigue has taken over leading to many missed communication opportunities and increased apathy of the membership. The VP External is currently tasked with exploring a finer grained user experience for members regarding what emails they receive. The idea is to have users opt in for non critical communications (i.e. events, administration, etc.) and even select categories of communications to receive. Mailer analytics will be used to improve engagement and communication metrics. A final test campaign is being conducted at present and roll out is expected later next month.

DBAC Fee Proposal

- A meeting was held between the AVP Students and the GSA regarding proposed fees surrounding the new David Braley Athletic Center expansion and the neighbouring Student Activity Building. The athletics facilities will be upgraded along with a sizeable expansion to the Pulse. The SAB will see multi-faith prayer rooms and other student oriented retail establishments. Construction is expected to complete by 2020.

- Currently, graduate students pay ~$35/yr. towards the DBAC capital build fee. The complete build loan of the original DBAC is expected to be paid off early and the university proposed that these fees were to remain and be applied to new build projects.

- It became clear in the meeting that absolutely no graduate student input was requested regarding any of the build / service improvements. This has unfortunately been a recurring theme from the administration and it was clearly communicated that this behaviour will not warrant graduate student support. It was communicated there cannot be any expectation of service or capital build funding by graduate students unless more direct input is achieved at much earlier stages. Furthermore, it is the feeling of the executives that the athletics facilities are not very heavily utilized by graduate students proportionally and therefore the average graduate student will have little appetite to fund this unless the university makes the case otherwise.

HSR Referendum

- The HSR referendum was held amongst the general membership via an email vote. The voting results were very strong with an overwhelming majority in favour of the fee increases. These increases are to be ratified at this month’s Council.

- There were complaints regarding the nature of the communications surrounding this referendum such as lack of direct information regarding how voting will take place was noted and will be applied to future referenda.
Phoenix

- A new General Manager, Conrad Smyte, has taken over the Phoenix this month. He has extensive experience managing successful restaurants and a great eye for detail. He has taken to the role very quickly and we have high hopes for him to help steward the Phoenix towards sustained profitability and serving graduate students’ needs. Be sure to say hi the next time you are in, he is very eager to meet and speak with graduate students. There are other big plans in the works that will be reported upon in the coming months.

Motion to accept president report; first by Tim, seconded by Alex, all in favour motion carried.

7...2 Executive Reports

VP External report:

- Shawn mentioned that the GSA has a consulting firm that gives advice on how to communicate through social media, GSA currently has Facebook page, Facebook Group, Website, and Weekly Email. His target now is to change the way the Weekly Email presented, especially there is a little number of students read it.
- Alexander mentioned that the email usually has the same contents and the logo takes a large space of the page. Tim mentioned that this is a good point and shall be considered.
- Jodie mentioned that the Weekly email could focus more on the main events instead of repetition of information. She recommended not to add too much information in the email and present it in the format of clickable items in case students are interested to read more they will click on the topic they are interested in reading.
- Tim mentioned that SGS email is shown in table content and bullet point, which is easy to read. Shawn mentioned that the GSA email used to be the same and students didn’t like it.
- Tim mentioned that the colours and formatting of the email is good but, the information is too much. However, creating an opt in system were students can indicate their interests and pick the categories they want to read about; will help increase the number of grad students reading GSA emails.
- Jodie recommended to add a clickable prize at the end of the email, in which students can click a link to answer a question and win a prize. She added regarding the Facebook page there is not many messages posted.
- Shawn mentioned that there was a BBQ at the Phoenix last Friday all tickets were sold in 1 day. He is planning to have another BBQ event in June, and Canada Wonderland in July.
- Vi suggested to have a trip to a beer brewery, as last year trip was very successful. Tim added that there is some beer brewery around this area he shall consider it, as there is no transportation required.
- Jodie mentioned that there is a festival at Niagara on Lake, she recommended that Shawn should consider it.
VP Services Report

Alex send the following report:

DBAC Fee Proposal

- AVP students and the GSA met to address proposed fees for the new David Braley Athletic Center expansion and the neighboring Student Activity Building. The proposed fees will go toward upgrading athletics facilities and expansion of the Pulse, as well as multi-faith prayer rooms and other student oriented retail establishments included in the Student Activity Building. Construction is expected to finish by 2020.
- Graduate students currently pay ~$35/yr. towards the DBAC capital build fee. The complete build loan of the original DBAC is to be paid off early and the university proposed that these fees were to remain and be applied to new build projects.
- No graduate student input was requested for any of the build/service improvements. This has unfortunately been a recurring theme from the administration and it was clearly communicated that this behavior will not warrant graduate student support. It was communicated there cannot be any expectation of service or capital build funding by graduate students unless more direct input is achieved at much earlier stages.
  Furthermore, it is the feeling of the executives that the athletics facilities are not very heavily utilized by graduate students proportionally and therefore the average graduate student will have little appetite to fund this unless the university makes the case otherwise.
- Tim commented that a lot of grad students don’t use the athletic center, and if they want service, they will pay themselves.
- Vi asked if grad students will still have access to the building? Alex mentioned that this point isn’t clear yet and there is still more discussion. He added if students vote No, then there is a risk of potentially losing access to the building, there is no solid agreement that grad students will retain access to the building, however, this is currently what the GSA is negotiating with the University.
- Tim mentioned that the University didn’t share information regarding the building, and they reached out to grad students at the last minute, and asks for the extra money. The university mentioned that grad students use the athletic center as much as undergrad students, however, their analytics couldn’t prove that.
- Vi mentioned that there is a point made before, that grad students didn’t pay to SWC, and lost access to it. She highlighted that this could be the same situation.

HSR Referendum

- The HSR referendum was held amongst the general membership via an email vote. The voting results were very strong with an overwhelming majority in favour of the fee increases. These increases are to be ratified at this month’s Council.
- It should be noted that there were complaints regarding the nature of the communications surrounding this referendum such as lack of direct information regarding how voting will take place. This will be addressed for future referenda.
GSA Clubs Committee

- The GSA Clubs Committee has been created. I will chair the committee and call meetings as needed to address issues related to recognized GSA clubs. The GSA Clubs administrator, Emanuele Blasioli will be responsible for more day-to-day concerns of the GSA Clubs.

Motion to accept the Executive report; first by Tim, seconded by Jodie, all in favour, motion carried.

8.0 Appointment of FRC’s

- Allison Leanage FRC Social Science
- Nitika Sanger FRC Health Science
- Tsz Wing Cheung FRC International
- Maryam Alizadeh FRC International

Motion to approve FRC nomination; first by Curran, seconded by Jodie, all in favour, motion carried.

9.0 Appointment of CRO

- Discussion in camera

Nominees are:
- Kara Tsang
- Efrah Yousuf
- Sudib Saha

- The Council agreed to appoint Kara Tsang as the incoming CRO.

Motion to vote for Kara Tsang to be the in coming CRO for 2017; first by Tim seconded by Shawn, all in favour, motion carried

10.0 Ratification of HSR referendum results

- Tim mentioned that the referendum results is Yes to HSR fee increase and the Council shall ratify this results.

Motion to accept all the referendum results first by Curran seconded by Shawn, all in favour motion carried.

- Jodie asked why students buy into that although there is an increase? Tim explained that if the vote was No, students would lose the bus pass, and the current fare now grad students will pay including the increase is still less much than the actual cost of the adult pass.
11.0 Council Feedback

- This point was discussed in reports

12.0 DBAC Fees

- This point was discussed in reports.

13.0 New Business

- **International committee**
  - Vi mentioned that there is no official head or any person in charge of international students, she recommended the creation of International Committee, consisting of FRC international, international officer from CUPE, and representatives from other faculties. She added there is a lot of work done by Mai and herself and there is no one to pass to the information they have, specially as they are graduating soon.
  - Through the past 3 years there have been many IFRCs come in and step down. That is why an International Committee is needed for the support of international students.
  - The next international FRC will be a member of this committee. This committee will be under CUPE and not GSA because, the International officer is a paid position, he will do the work, however, the International FRC is a volunteering position and if he/she isn’t active the International Committee will fade away.

- **VP Internal Position**
  - Tim mentioned that the current VP Internal Avijit Mallic will step down as of July 1st. There is an application received from Roqibul Hasan, he is a PhD student in Biomedical Engineering. He has a good communication skills and well spoken. He will shadow Avijit during the month of June and will start his position as of July 1st.
  - Jodie mentioned that she is interested to switch from the FRC Business position to the VP Internal position, she has a lot of recommendations and suggestions, she can talk to the Dean of DeGroote and Pete Self in regarding to academic relation and how to improve academics.
  - Jodie will submit her application for VP Internal position, and the Council will choose the candidate.

Motion to table the discussion of the VP Internal nomination to next Council; first by Tim, seconded by Alex, 7 in favour, 1 abstention, motion carried.

14.0 Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7: 27 p.m.; first by Tim, seconded by Alex, all in favour, motion carried.
Action Item:

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Action by</th>
<th>Due date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send Shawn an email presenting information in a sort of clickable items.</td>
<td>Jodie Lobano</td>
<td>By next Council (late June)</td>
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Shawn Hercules, VP External  

11/07/17  

[Signature]  

[Recorder's Name]  

11/07/17  

Date  

Recorder  

Date