Graduate Students Association of McMaster University
Council Meeting
Monday, May 30th, 2016
GSA Office, East Tower Refectory
6:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees: Natalie D’ Silva (President), Megan Murphy (VP Administration), Lucia Lee (VP External), Angela Orasch (VP Internal), Colette Nyirakamana (VP Services), Ashley Ravenscroft (DoO), Samira Farivar (FRC Business), David Bakhshinyan (FRC Health Science), Maleeha Qazi (FRC Health Science), Marguerite Marlin (FRC Social Science), Dan Irvine (FRC Social Science), Jonathan Tran (FRC Science), Emma Mckenna (FRC Humanities), Peter Gardhouse (Senator Humanities), Vi Dang (International representative).

Regrets: Jitka Bartosova (International Representative), Anna D’ Angela (BoG), Philip Tominac (Senator Engineering), Clorinde Petersew (FRC Humanities), Sara King Dowling (FRC Science).

Absent: Firat Sayin (FRC Business), Maryam Ghasemaghaei (Senator Business), Sid Nath (Senator Health Science), Azam Shamsi (CRO)

1.0 Call to Order 6:20 pm

2.0 Acceptance of the Agenda

- Marguerite requested adding CAFs discussion into new business.

Motion to add the discussion of CAFs into new business first by Angela, seconded by Emma, all in favor 12, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions, motion carried.

Motion to accept the amended agenda first by Peter, seconded by Angela all in favor, motion carried.

3.0 Approval of Minutes from the meeting of April 26th, 2016

Motion to accept the minutes of April 26th, 2016 first by Peter, seconded by Lucia, 5 in favor, 0 opposed, 9 abstentions, motion carried.

4.0 Approval of AGM minutes

Motion to approve the AGM minutes first by Megan, seconded by Peter, 9 in favor, 0 opposed 5 abstentions, motion carried.

5.0 Reports from the Board
5.1 President’s Report

- The board met the end of May. They discussed and passed the GSA’s employee meal and travel allowance policy, and will be reviewing our other policies going forward
GU15 meeting report

- The GSA is hosting the GU15 meeting in August. The GU15 is a meeting of the 15 research-intensive universities in Canada. The group discusses best practices amongst graduate student groups and issues pertaining to graduate students.

Meeting with SGS

- Ashley and Natalie will be meeting with Doug Welch (Dean of Graduate Studies), Brooke Gordon (Executive Director, Strategic Planning & Administration with SGS) and Lynne Bennett (Student Accounts and Cashiers) to discuss Mosaic and payment issues.

Student Legal Protection insurance plan

- Student Legal Protection is a new service developed by Studentcare to address the lack of access to justice in and around Canada today, especially among individuals who fall into the student demographic.
- Things like conflicts with a landlord, an employer, or a school’s administration can be stressful and costly to resolve which is why they have designed a legal protection package – the first of its kind in Canada – to ensure that students not only have the tools and financial means to defend their legal rights, but can also access free legal counsel via a helpline whenever they need it.
- What’s covered - Up to $500,000 per policy year and up to $100,000 per claim in three areas of law, 1) Housing rights or tenants disputes 2) Employment rights and 3) Academic rights, for the following expenses:
  o Lawyer fees
  o Disbursements, court fees and attendance, and witness expenses
  o Experts’ fees
  o Adverse costs award by a court to opponents (civil cases)
  o Student’s net salary and wages for missed work to attend court proceedings (up to $500 per day, to a maximum of $10,000)

- The service cost is set currently at $28/student per annum. Studentcare anticipates that this cost will reduce over time as usage patterns become clearer.
- The Health and Dental committee will discuss this and they will bring their recommendation to council.

5.2 Senate Report

Peter mentioned that,

- A number of Professors from the Engineering department requested to have the university reconsider the new budget models.
- There are a couple of certificate programs that the University is closing, due to insufficient number of student registration.

5.3 Board of Governor’s Report

- No Report
6.0 Committee Reports

6.1 Finance Committee (VP Administration)
Megan mentioned that,
- The committee had a meeting on May 24th with the GSA/Phoenix bookkeeper. They reviewed the current position of the GSA. They will be preparing over the next month for the audit. The financials are up-to-date, with only a few issues left to resolve. Next finance meeting will be at the end of June.

6.2 Phoenix Executive Committee (VP Administration)
Megan mentioned that,
- The financials of the Phoenix are up-to-date. Inventory has been scheduled for June 5th. After this they will be ready for the audit. The GM plans to revamp the menu before September in preparation for the new school year. There have been some staffing issues in the kitchen, which has put a few projects on hold, such as launching a new menu.
- The Phoenix is always looking for ideas or suggestions for events, entertainment, and advertising to reach students and encourage them to visit the establishment. Next PEC meeting will be towards the end of June.

6.3 Events and Trips Planning Committee (VP External)
Lucia mentioned that,
- Last Saturday there was a trip to Cameron’s Brewing Co, 36 students attended.
- She got in touch with McMaster out door club to arrange for a trip in June.
- New committee members have joined this committee; the first meeting will be during June.

6.4 Students Issues Action Committee (VP External)
- No new business.

6.5 Academic Affairs Committee (VP Internal)
Angela mentioned that,
- She attended the Indigenous Research Conference where discussions were had regarding how to better build bridges between members of McMaster’s indigenous student community and McMaster. A suggestion was made that we discuss a representative role in the GSA or some kind of outreach by the GSA to help bridge the current gaps.
- She attended the Student Accessibility workshop where many key leaders on campus debated and discussed the new policy on disability and accommodation. The take away was that there is a solid policy moving forward and that mental health is a key concern. She thinks there are allies to be had in this group regarding our mental health strategy.
- She had meetings with SGS regarding a strategy with them on the mental health services and they are moving forward with consulting with the SWC, to gain a better understanding of the usage in the center.
  - Discussions were also had regarding a potential conference or daylong workshop on mental health issues for grad students.

6.6 International Student Representative Report (International Reps)
Vi mentioned that,
• She is still working on a petition for bringing back the fast track PhD stream for immigration; however, as they now have a lawyer working with them, they have been advised to hold off on the petition as there should be some government movement in the next few months, that they should wait to hear about.
• Natalie added that this petition was sent out during the last GU15 in April as a McMaster initiative.

6.7 GSA Summer Leagues Committee (VP Services)
Colette mentioned that,
• Parking passes for the soccer and softball leagues have been ordered
• The Waiver system v (Right signature) has been put in place and all players, in both leagues, have to sign an electronic waiver via Right signature before they are able to play.

6.8 Bylaws Committee (President)
• Committee will meet in July.

6.9 Graduate Student Services Review Committee (VP Services/President)
• Following the cut of mental health services, the GSSRC held a meeting to discuss the short, medium, and long-term solutions in providing mental health services to students. The current position is to continue to work with the University until services are reinstated. Secondly, Colette and Natalie noted that we are currently seeking legal advice in regard to the 2004 CAFs agreement and to look into if services can be legally taken away.

Long and medium term strategies
• To work with the 20k of GSA/SGS money to offer counseling on and or off campus
• To work with SGS on some sort of minimum pay amount for students with the consideration of ancillary fee's –tying the payment to the supervisor’s research account rather than the student (or splitting the cost equally)
• To generate a centralized bursary for students who cannot pay fees and have them apply to have them covered
The long-term goal would be to Lobby the Government for reconsideration on the policy

6.10 Health & Dental Committee (VP Services)
• No new business, still waiting for members, Colette asked if anyone in council is interested to joining and Marguerite and Emma showed interest in joining the committee.

Clubs recognition project
• A job posting has been sent to SGS to hire a clubs' administrator and circulated to our members too.

7.0 Ratification of the appointment of BOD community member
• Natalie mentioned that the board of director appointed 3 community members, Gina Robinson, David Moore and Laura Whinton.
Motion to ratify the appointment of the 3 community members for the Board of Directors, first by Peter, second by Marguerite, 9 in favor, 0 apposed, 4 abstentions, motion carried.

8.0 New Business

Discussing CAFs
Marguerite mentioned that,

- The university (student affairs) has a $25800 discretionary fund in the 2014/2015 budget, that was not disclosed to the GSA, as to what it was used for. The GSA’s insurance already covers $50 of each mental wellness visit up to a maximum of $300 per year, so she suggested that the GSA request that discretionary budget to supplement the payout of mental health practitioners. She requested a motion that the GSA request from McMaster University to allocate the amount of $25800 of CAF revenue of this year towards a mental health reimbursement fund, to cover the remaining cost past $50 up to $100 for total reimbursement of $150 per visit.

- She recommended the funds be spent on a first come first served basis, until the funds run out up to a maximum of $600.00 per student. She noted that students can claim $50 from the insurance company, and $100 can be administered at the GSA, when students provide receipts, in the form of a cheques made out to them.

- Ashley added that at the GSSRC’s last meeting they discussed the $25800 fund and it was their understanding that those funds were put back into the student wellness center.

- Marguerite noted it would be helpful to bring that information to the group, so they can make their decision, knowing where this amount will be allocated, as currently the council doesn’t have the correct information about whether the discretionary amount went towards SWC or not.

- Marguerite added that, it’s an awkward situation from the university to allocate the money towards SWC, and not mental health services for graduate students, as this means giving SWC extra while reducing graduate student services.

- Ashley recommended another idea, whereas, the GSA who physically has $10,000, and can request SGS to match this amount, use the collective 20,000 towards short, medium and long-term solutions; however, she noted the 10k from SGS is not granted as it is tied to the lease, which we have not signed.

- Nonetheless, it was discussed that it would be beneficial to request this amount from the university to spend as per Marguerite’s suggestion, however, if they note it has been spent on SWC, we will request the comprehensive break down of that spending, and use the 20,000k from the GSA and SGS (should it be released) on this initiative.

- The $10,000 the GSA will request from SGS will be for this year, and the GSA council will formally ask the BOD to release the 10k from our house for the use as previously detailed.

- Natalie added that this item should be discussed at the GSSRC to know how the mentioned amount of money will be allocated, and whether this solution will work as a long or short-term solution, and what the action going forward will be.

- Colette recommended to request the YTD budget from the University, and also a detailed description of what the projected increase for the next 2 years are, as the council still doesn’t know if the university will agree to allocate the discretionary amount towards mental health, so we should plan based on the numbers that are actuals and projections.

- Emma asked how the GSA is dealing with the new CAFs agreement in terms of the legal side? Is everyone paying student fees up until the end of August, but still not allowed access, even though they paid? Are students going to be out of services in the summer?
• Natalie mentioned that Ashley spoke with a lawyer, and he will get back to us about his legal opinion by June 6. Ashley added that Marguerite has sent an excerpt from a lawyer she spoke with, which we passed to our lawyer to consider also.

• Emma asked what was the reason for not contacting a lawyer before having a referendum? Ashley mentioned that there were no legal reasons to do so, and during the GSSRC meetings the discussion was to either increase the fees to get these services or not, Natalie added that the focus of our legal efforts is centered around weather they can cut services before August 31st 2016.

• Natalie added that the VP Internal (Angela Orasch) needed to set up a president advisory committee (PAC), where student leaders get together to discuss issues such as these.

• The council agreed to motion for the discretionary fees from the university to be given to the GSA and to request the board’s approval for the release of $10,000 to be allocated to mental health services.

**Motion** to request the approval from the board of directors on the allocation of $10,000 to mental health initiative(s), and for the GSSRC to request an allocation from SGS of $10,000 for an interim mental health fund, which will be used within the fiscal year which ends May 31st, 2017, with a cap per person that the GSSRC will decided on. First by Colette, seconded by Dan, all in favor, motion carried.

**Motion** the GSA requests that McMaster University disclose the discretionary amount and to allocate the full amount to the GSA to supplement interim mental health initiatives, such as an interim mental health reimbursement fund for the 2015/2016 fiscal year. First by Marguerite, seconded by Jonathan all in favor, motion carried.

### 9.0 Adjournment

**Motion** to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m. First by Lucia, seconded by Colette, all in favor motion carried.

[Signatures and dates]