

## **The McMaster GSA Executive Review 2015-2016**

### *Working for Students*

Dear Graduate Students,

As another year comes to a close, we would like to review all the GSA has been up to this past year! The role of the GSA on campus is to support student life by providing services and recreation to students and to act as a representative and advocate for graduate students on campus and beyond.

The voice and needs of students have always guided the GSA's actions. In 2013, the GSA hired consultants to interview and survey McMaster Graduate Students to find out what graduate students wanted the GSA to do for them. From this – a Strategic Plan ([click here](#)) was developed to guide the GSA to better serve its members. The GSA has been following this plan, as well as requests from students we have received over the year, to guide our actions and determine where we allocate our time and efforts.

With the implementation of Mosaic and Compulsory Ancillary Fees discussions, it has been a challenging year. Through this, the GSA continues to provide essential services to students and has worked hard to advocate on students' behalf to the University Administration and beyond the University.

We have had many successes over the past years and have implemented new initiatives to better serve our members and as always, we hope to continue to move the GSA in a positive direction.

### **Some of what the GSA has been up to:**

#### **Core GSA Services Offered to Students:**

##### Travel Scholarships

- The GSA offers travel scholarship for students throughout the year. This year, the application process has been moved to an online system to make it easier for students to apply.

##### Health and Dental Plan

- The GSA offers all graduate students a health and dental plan. The plan was improved this year with additional paramedical and prescription coverage and the addition of vision coverage. There will be no increase to premiums paid by graduate students towards the GSA health and dental plan.

##### The Phoenix Bar and Grill

- The GSA owns and operates the Phoenix Bar and Grill. This year, through proper oversight we have seen a significant turnaround in the performance of the Phoenix restaurant. A lot of hard work and implementation of new policies and oversight amounted to a positive change in position of the Phoenix from a loss of \$189,909 to a profit of \$11,825 at the year-end of the restaurant (audited). We continue to see significant improvements this fiscal year!

### Social Events and Trips

- The GSA has run monthly trips bringing students from all departments and faculties together in a fun, social setting– these trips included going to Canada’s Wonderland, Niagara wine tours and much, much, more!
- A new "Coffee and Cookies with the GSA" event was held in January at the Phoenix. The event was well attended by students of various faculties. This gave students a chance to meet with the GSA representatives to share any concern they have or learn more about the GSA.

### Sports Leagues

- The GSA ran three leagues this year – softball, soccer and curling, all of which were well attended by the graduate student community. New Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the GSA Summer leagues have been developed, to ensure a smooth and easy transition and longevity of the leagues for years to come.

### **New in the GSA (Services/ Events):**

#### Academic Events

- An interactive talk on “Personal Branding, Networking and Social Media” by Bobby Umar was held in February. A total 75 students attended this professional development event hosted by the GSA. The event was a huge success with a lot of positive feedback from the students about the significance of these events and the style of the talk (i.e. interactive vs. lecture style).
- The next workshop held will be on “resolving conflict between supervisor and student expectations during the graduate program”. We will have speakers from OMBUDS office and the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services (HRES) to help students learn their rights on campus.

#### Club Recognition

- We have had numerous requests from students to have recognition of graduate student clubs on campus. The GSA has been working closely with SGS and the University to establish a process for graduate club recognition. We understand and know how important the establishment of clubs are to graduate students and we want to grant opportunities for diversity in the clubs. We are also committed to providing additional financial support to graduate student clubs. By the year’s end the recognition process should be in place.

#### Buddy System

- The GSA in partnership with SGS started an initiative for grad students called the McMaster Welcome Buddy Program in May 2015. This program pairs an incoming graduate student with a current grad student called a 'Welcome Buddy'. It is aimed at providing new students with a point of contact as they enter grad school. In addition, the volunteer ‘buddy,’ offers one-on-one support (through email and in person) to the incoming student, and is part of a larger community of peer-buddies who organize or attend events and workshops throughout the year.

#### Mac Bread Bin

- The GSA has worked with the director of the Mac Bread Bin to promote services dedicated to building stronger food systems for graduate students and the community at large! The GSA has also provided financial support to Mac Bread Bin this year.

## **GSA Student Advocacy on Campus and Beyond:**

### Mosaic and Payroll

- Students are well aware of the issues that have arisen with the implementation of Mosaic and the negative effect this has had on graduate students in regards to payroll. The GSA has had numerous meetings with SGS and the University Administration to voice how unacceptable this was and the impact on students. The GSA is solution oriented and advocated for better communication to students about payroll, workshops to help students understand the changes to payroll, faster response times for students who have questions related to payroll, all which have been implemented this year. The GSA is currently working with SGS to have a clear breakdown of what funding students will be receiving each pay period for the upcoming academic year – so students can plan and properly budget.

### Compulsory Ancillary Fees

- Conversations regarding the CAFs have been occurring between the GSA and the university for the past several years. The GSA (and graduate students interested in being involved with these conversations) have been meeting throughout the year to negotiate these fees and the services offered. Throughout this process no services were cut to students, and any impact will be delayed until a vote or online referendum can be held.

### Meeting with University Administration

- The GSA President and Executive meet regularly with the President, Provost, VP Administration, Student Affairs and School of Graduate Studies to bring forward concerns from the graduate student community.

### Ontario Council of Graduate Studies

- In October, the McMaster GSA met with other graduate student groups in Ontario to bring common concerns forward to the Graduate Deans in Ontario
- Items discussed were
  - Transparency in funding and scholarships
  - Internationalization
  - Accessibility

### Ontario Graduate Students Alliance (OGSA)

- The McMaster GSA is part of the OGSA, a group whose mandate is to bring the collective concerns of graduate students to the Ontario government. To find out more about what the OGSA has been up, [click here](#).
- In January, members of the GSA Executive attended a strategy meeting to select advocacy priorities moving forward. Among the top items selected were the implementation of Ontario wide post-residency fees and addressing the incongruence between the cost of graduate education and graduate student funding available.

### GU15

- The GU15 is a meeting of the graduate student representatives from the 15 research-intensive universities across Canada to share best practices and collaborate on nation wide initiatives to support graduate students. From the idea sharing at these meetings the McMaster GSA has recommended the implementation of a student supervisor checklist

here at McMaster– topics to be discussed at the beginning of a degree to ensure students know their rights and what is expected (coming soon in conjunction with SGS!). Additionally, the GSA hopes to implement a peer support system for students undergoing student-supervisory issues based on the model at Queens University.

The GSA has also been working on many other projects behinds the scenes to make sure the GSA is sustainable and can run efficiently to serve students better!

To find out more details about what the GSA Executive and Committees have been up to – come to the AGM on March 29<sup>th</sup> where a full update will be given.

Best wishes,

Talena Rambarran  
GSA President 2015-2016