



Executive Reports 2017-2018

Presented March 21st 2018

1) VP External Report, Shawn Hercules

Social Events and Trips

The GSA hosted monthly trips to bring students, and their friends/family members from all departments and faculties together in a fun social setting. These events included a trip to Canada's Wonderland, wineries in Niagara-on-the-lake, bowling and much more. Most of the events sold out in a matter of days after initial announcements were made. With the assistance of the social events and trips committee, these events were organized and coordinated well and executed smoothly. In addition to these events, graduate students were also given the opportunity to learn how to curl which was enjoyed by all who attended! Overall, it was a successful year of social events and trips.

Promotion of the GSA

Some aspects from a previous communication plan from a consultant hired last year were used for communication with graduate students. It was recommended to continue to use the Facebook group for in-house communications and the Facebook page, Twitter and website for broader community wide communications. Additionally, there were some changes made to the website—on of which was the addition of a “new students” tab to assist new and international incoming students to settling in with our academic and social community.

External Affairs

Ontario Graduate Students Association (OGSA)

This year, we sat on the board of the OGSA with observer status to ensure that the students would benefit from paying fees to be members. After our time sitting on as observers, we do not believe it will be beneficial to the graduate students. However, after last year's GU15 meeting, a new group was formed—ThinkGRAD which allows for graduate students across Canada to share best-practice and set lobbying priorities for federal governments.

Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS)

The VP External and the President of the GSA attended this year's CAGS conference in Quebec City. The main topics were graduate student funding, international graduate student issues, homelessness and mental health services. In addition to these issues discussed, we were given the opportunity to meet and network with deans across Canada as well as other graduate students in student government. This allowed us to interact with them at an informal level to discuss student issues faced and possible solutions to said issues.

2) VP Services Report, Alex Ballagh

GSA Clubs and Clubs Committee

This year has been an excellent inaugural run for the GSA clubs and GSA club's committee. We have recognized 10 clubs: The McMaster University Chapter of SIAM, the Life in Computer Sciences club, the Women in Engineering and Science Initiative, the Gilbrea Student Group, the Graduate Students Anti-Poverty Working Group, the Association of Iranian Muslims, Socialist Fightback Students, Research Methods Society, and the McMaster Bangladeshi Community. We have recognized a wide variety of clubs and stayed within budget. The club's committee has been successful in garnering student input and incorporating it into ongoing policy. We have been successful in communicating our overarching mission as the GSA in relation to the clubs and promoting an inclusive, non-violent, and community-oriented environment and working with clubs to ensure they incorporate these values.

Health and Dental

We have continued to utilize StudentCare as our insurance provider for the graduate student body. We have organized information sessions during welcome week and again in the fall and winter for international students, to better familiarize our student body with the services they have available to them. Student care has provided resources for students to learn more about their services, including a new mental health program, "Empower Me" to better reach the many graduate students who are more frequently off campus. This ensures that students who do not frequent the university campus still have access to the important support services that we as an association are able to provide.

Mental Health Referendum

The mental health referendum came out overwhelmingly in favour of reinstating mental health services for graduate students. In cooperation with StudentCare, we reinstated these services for the student body and implemented the "Empower Me" program for off-campus phone-line support. This has been a largely successful at reaching students who do not typically frequent the campus.

Compulsory Ancillary Fees Agreement (CAF)

We are in continued talks with the university to finalize this agreement. We have addressed the major issue of the identification of specific services made available to students and the priority of cuts for those services. This was especially important considering our previous year, where student access to mental health services was revoked. We have specified our access to career counseling and employment services, personal and academic skills counseling, ESL instruction and support services, basic athletics and recreation services, bookstore, off campus resource centre, and ombuds as services to be made available to students as per the agreement.

HSR

Following the HSR referendum, graduate students opted to continue to pay for bus passes for all students. In cooperation with the HSR and Presto, we have implemented Presto passes for all graduate students. This is a more reliable and faster method of validating student credentials and gathering data on student usage for further fee negotiations and potential discounts. We acted in

and promoted “Transit Week” to better raise awareness of these changes and help to ease registration, while minimizing technical problems. Reception of the passes has been positive and the data garnered from digital records should be excellent for learning more about student usage, reducing the abuse of these passes, and negotiating future deals with the HSR.

DBAC

We are in continued talks with the university regarding athletics and recreation fees following the decision of the graduate community not to mandate gym memberships for all students. Less than 800 graduate students currently have memberships at the Pulse, and less than 300 of those are for 8 months or more. It does not seem prudent to mandate memberships when interest appears to be so low. For the graduate student body this is understandable; many individuals are off campus or have other gyms closer to their homes or places of work. Where this leaves students with respect to DBAC use and the involvement in the new Student Activities Building is still being discussed. We have fought to be included in the DBAC and SAB planning committee and participate in discussions but our inclusion was minimal. We maintain that any project requesting the funding by the graduate student community must involve the graduate student community in the planning of said project.

GSA Summer Leagues and Leagues Committee

The Softball and Soccer Leagues run by the GSA were well attended by graduate students during the summer games season. Early concerns over players not signing waivers before playing were quickly addressed and signing the waivers became strictly enforced. The Phoenix Cup was successful, garnering approval by the leagues and ushering business and advertising for the Phoenix itself. We have addressed concerns students had regarding the limited availability of parking and worked to raise awareness of parking in the far lots specifically available for leagues members. We also finally implemented a policy regarding how conveners are chosen in the event that one retires. In this event, we will put out a call for applications and the leagues committee will review the applications and appoint the most qualified candidates.

Student Leave of Absence Policy

We have updated the student leave of absence policy. If students applied for LOA after September, they are charged the GSA supplementary fees (GSA membership, health and dental fees) and they are covered, however. If they applied before September, they aren’t charged any fees, and they aren’t covered under our plan. Students can request to opt out or in for each scenario respectively.

3) VP Administration, Jodie Labana

Finance Committee update

The major change this year has been the change of accounting firm responsible for preparing the financial statements of Phoenix and GSA. We changed the accounting firm for multiple reasons including to enhance cost efficiency, accuracy, and overall effectiveness of the accounting operations. We undertook a search for a new accounting firm that has experience in doing accounting for the restaurants. After contacting multiple firms, shortlisting and interviewing two firms, we decided to hire the accounting firm NTC under the accountant Nadeem Chaudhary.

The new accounting firm started work at the end of Oct 2017, and took a couple of months to learn the ways of GSA and Phoenix. Now, slowly the transition process is becoming smoother as the new accounting firm is becoming familiar with us.

NTC is responsible for complete bookkeeping and accounting of Phoenix. For GSA, we have brought the bookkeeping back to our staff, with NTC responsible for providing monthly guidance, and oversight over the preparation of financial statements.

- **2018-2019 Budget Review** – Separate budget document submitted
- **2017-2018 Actuals Review** – Separate financial statements submitted

Banking services review – Our President (Tim) has been reviewing the existing banking services, and determining whether we can obtain better services at a lower cost from an alternate provider. He will be providing more information about this in his report.

Insurance expense review – We have started the review of insurance expense to see whether it is feasible to reduce our overall insurance expense. We used to pay for the insurance cost for the sports leagues. However, we were able to get (thanks to President (Tim), and Director of Operations (Ashley) the leagues to start paying the insurance cost themselves, with significant savings for us.

Auditor expense review – We had considered getting new bids for external auditors to see whether it is feasible to reduce the overall auditor cost. However, since we had changed the bookkeeper this year, we determined that it is prudent to keep the same auditor as before to ensure that there is continuity at least on the audit side.

Strategic Planning for GSA – As a member of the Strategic planning committee of GSA, I participated in various key activities of the planning process including selection of a consulting firm to assist GSA in the planning process, interview of the President and Provost of McMaster to get their input for the strategic plan, and review of the questions used to survey the graduate students to obtain their input in determining the future plan for GSA.

HR Performance Evaluation process update – As part of the HR Committee led by the President (Tim), I assisted in the update of the performance evaluation process for GSA staff members.

Investment policy update – Met with the President (Tim), and other members of Investment Committee to determine ways and means to get the most out of the cash available with GSA. Also, we brainstormed on ideas to develop an Investment Policy for use by the future GSA executives.

GSA Promotion and Marketing – Reviewed the GSA Brochure drafted by VP-Internal (Roqibul), and submitted detailed comments to ensure accuracy and marketability of the brochure. Participated in the welcome week activities to both welcome graduate students, and help them get acquainted with the GSA activities.

Succession Planning – For GSA, the process is underway to put together a financial onboarding folder that can be given to the next VP of Administration as she starts her new position.