## GSA Council Meeting MINUTES

Monday, 19 June 2017 at 6:00 pm
2-100 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex

### IN ATTENDANCE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babak Soltannia (President)</td>
<td>Michael Woolley (Arts and Design)</td>
<td>Neil Prather (History &amp; Classics)</td>
<td>Andrew Woodman (Pharmacology)</td>
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<td>Firouz Khodayari (VP Academic)</td>
<td>Swai Mon Khaing (Biochemistry)</td>
<td>Kenzie Gordon (Humanities Computing)</td>
<td>Hamdah Al Nebaihi (Pharmacy &amp; Pharmaceutical Sciences)</td>
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<td>Masoud Khademi (VP External)</td>
<td>Francesca Jean (Biological Sciences)</td>
<td>Shivam Srivastava (Internetworking)</td>
<td>Stephen Hunter (Phys Ed &amp; Recreation)</td>
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<td>Royle Feng (VP Student Services)</td>
<td>Graham Little (Biomedical Engineering)</td>
<td>Evelyn Asiedu (Laboratory Medicine and Pathology)</td>
<td>Drew Shepherd (Physics)</td>
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<td>Preshit Verma (Deputy Speaker)</td>
<td>Rongrong Zhang (Business PhD)</td>
<td>Kris Joseph (Library &amp; Info Studies)</td>
<td>Megan Aiken (Political Science)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolina Martinez (Chief Returning Officer)</td>
<td>Beth Richardson (Cell Biology)</td>
<td>Michelle Michelle (Math &amp; Statistical Sciences)</td>
<td>Joanna Scanlon (Psychology)</td>
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<td>Darcy Bemister (Deputy Returning Officer)</td>
<td>Mengqi Fang (Chemical &amp; Materials Engineering)</td>
<td>Masoud Aliramezani (Mechanical Engineering)</td>
<td>Kevin Lien (Public Health)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trent Nabe (Senator; Business MBA)</td>
<td>Michael Armstrong (Chemistry)</td>
<td>Allison Lewis (Medical Genetics)</td>
<td>Alesha Reed (Rehabilitation Med)</td>
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<td>Maryse Kiese (Councillor-at-Large)</td>
<td>Natalie Mahé (Communication Sciences &amp; Disorders)</td>
<td>Melissa Silva (Medicine)</td>
<td>Owain Bamforth (Religious Studies)</td>
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<td>Kim Nguyen-Phuoc (Councillor-at-Large)</td>
<td>Melissa Woghiren (Computing Science)</td>
<td>Derya Cinar (MLCS)</td>
<td>Ryan Stanfield (Renewable Resources)</td>
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<td>Dasha Smirnow (Councillor-at-Large)</td>
<td>Brette Harris (Earth &amp; Atmospheric Sciences)</td>
<td>Cindy Wu (Nursing)</td>
<td>Yangzhe Cao (Resource Economics &amp; Environmental Sociology)</td>
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<td>Andrews Tawiah (Councillor-at-Large)</td>
<td>Benjamin Deng (Educational Policy Studies)</td>
<td>Kelsey Peterson (Occupational Therapy)</td>
<td>Robert Piazza (Secondary Education)</td>
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<td>Brayden Whitlock (Councillor-at-Large)</td>
<td>Chantal Labonté (Ed Psych)</td>
<td>Radim Barta (Oncology)</td>
<td>Wenlong Huang (Surgery)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin Laxamana (Anthropology)</td>
<td>David Li (Electrical &amp; Computer Engineering)</td>
<td>Prabhjot Bedi (Paediatrics)</td>
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Guests: Kerolous Messeha (Medicine; GSA Labour Relations Committee Nominee)

Deputy Speaker Preshit Verma in the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm. Speaker acknowledged the traditional territory of Treaty Six.

### Roll Call

1. Roll Call of GSA Council Members in Attendance

### Approval of Agenda

2. Approval of the 19 June 2017 Consolidated Agenda

Members had before them the 19 June 2017 Consolidated Agenda, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. M Khademi MOVED; F Khodayari SECONDED.

Motion PASSED unanimously.

### Approval of Minutes

3. Minutes from the 15 May 2017 GSA Council Meeting

Members had before them the 15 May 2017 GSA Council Meeting Minutes, which had been previously distributed on 9 June 2017. M Khademi MOVED; R Barta SECONDED.

Motion PASSED unanimously.

### Changes in GSA Council Membership

4. Changes in GSA Council Membership

 Prepared by L Hareuther and F Robertson for the GSA Council Meeting of 19 June 2017

None at this time.

**Councillor Announcements**

5. Councillor Announcements

None at this time.

**Action Items**

None at this time.

**Elections**

6. GSA Council Elections

Radim Barta (Chair of the GSA Nominating Committee) presented the item by explaining the election process and noting that members had four ballots to consider.

**GSA Council-Elected Officers Elections: GSA Chief Returning Officer (CRO), GSA Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), GSA Speaker, and GSA Deputy Speaker**

R Barta noted that no nominations were received for the positions of GSA DRO or GSA Deputy Speaker and that nominees for GSA CRO and GSA Speaker were given the opportunity to address GSA Council by responding to a question provided in advance. The GSA DRO nominee was present to answer the question and the nominee for the position of GSA Speaker had submitted a video.

The question for the nominees was as follows and the nominee had 45 seconds to respond: “please tell GSA Council what motivated you to run for this position.”

P Verma then invited GSA Council members to encourage their peers to nominate themselves for the position of GSA Deputy Speaker noting that the position was one in which nominees needed to be neutral and have a good understanding of GSA Council meeting procedures (as contained in the Standing Orders of GSA Council and in GSA Bylaw and Policy) and to move GSA Council meetings forward actively and with neutrality when presiding in the absence of the GSA Speaker.

T Nabe asked, as a point of clarification, what would happen if the GSA Speaker nominee was not elected and P Verma was away, in terms of who would chair the July meeting of GSA Council. J Tanguay clarified that the GSA would reach out to past Speakers, as recently happened at the April meeting of GSA Council.

- **Nominee for GSA CRO:**
  - Darcy Bemister (AFNS)

- **Nominee for GSA Speaker:**
  - Joshuha Connauton (Educational Policy Studies)

**GSA Standing Committees**

a. GSA Board and GSA Nominating Committee (1 vacancy)

Preshit Verma (Deputy Speaker) presented the item and introduced the nominee, who was given the opportunity to address GSA Council by responding to a question provided in advance.

The question for the nominee was as follows and the nominee had 45 second to respond: “please tell us why you’d like to serve in the joint position on the GSA Board and the GSA Nominating Committee.”

- **Nominees for GSA Board and GSA Nominating Committee:**
  - Kenzie Gordon (Humanities Computing)

b. GSA Labour Relations Committee (4-8 vacancies)

R Barta explained to GSA Council that there were 4-8 vacancies on the GSA Labour Relations Committee (GSA LRC) and that 3 nominations were received. All of the nominees were invited to attend and address GSA Council by responding to a question provided in advance.

All nominees were in attendance. The question for the nominees was as follows and the nominees had 45 second to respond: “please tell us why you would like to serve on the GSA LRC.”

- **Nominees for GSA Labour Relations Committee:**
  - Michael Armstrong (Chemistry)
  - Kerolous Messeha (Medicine)
For Discussion

7. GSA Board Strategic Work Plan – 2017-2018

Babak Soltannia (GSA President) presented the item and noted that the GSA Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs) held a day-long workshop to develop a first draft of the 2017-2018 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP) and then held a town hall to solicit feedback from graduate students. He specified that GSA Council was now asked to share its feedback on the attached High Level Summary of the 2017-2018 SWP prior to the Plan itself coming forward for information at the July meeting of GSA Council. B Soltannia summarised some of the highlights of the SWP including advocating for a review of graduate student funding and the creation of minimum funding packages, encouraging the use of a standardised contract for Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, and Graduate Research Assistant Fellowships, and residence issues.

P Verma asked for additional details with respect to minimum funding packages and B Soltannia responded that UBC and other universities offered minimum funding packages and while, at the U of A, most faculties offered some funding package to their incoming graduate students, the GSA would like to work with Administration to see institution-wide standardised offers of admission that included a guarantee of minimum funding. M Khademi added that the goal was to make the responsibilities and rights of graduate students more clear in both their contracts and admission offers, and that the GSA would like to see some security in terms of the funding received by graduate students.

With respect to residence issues, B Soltannia noted that many Michener Park residents were still concerned about delayed ETS from Michener Park to the Southgate LRT station.

B Soltannia then invited GSA Council members to discuss the SWP in small groups. D Smirnow asked if there was a specific question the groups should focus on during their discussion and B Soltannia stated that any feedback with respect to the High Level Summary of the 2017-2018 SWP was appreciated.

After the small group discussion, each group shared the highlights of their discussion.

Group 1: T Nabe as the group spokesperson noted that:
- The group liked that the GSA Board would continue advocating for tuition increases tied to CPI instead of API;
- UBC had a shuttle to transport students around campus late at night and the group suggested adding this idea to the SWP;
- It would be ideal to have professors being clear graduate students as to the exact amount of funding they could provide in offers of admission;
- The group discussed the possibility of having ranges of minimum funding to better suit graduate students with higher and lower funding needs; and
- Group members discussed minimum funding for course-based graduate students, as opposed to just thesis-based graduate students.

Group 2: D Shepherd as the group spokesperson noted that:
- The group liked the idea of ensuring all admission offers (including funding offers) were transparent;
- The group discussed whether graduate student enrolment would decrease if minimum funding packages were implemented; and
- The group discussed whether the GSA could support graduate student internship programs as an alternative for graduate students to secure funding.

Group 3: A Lewis as the group spokesperson noted that:
- The group discussed how “time to completion” could be best defined;
- They questioned how money would be secured to provide minimum funding packages;
- They discussed how to define sustainable housing and how standards of sustainable and/or affordable housing would be determined;
- In developing clear contracts to protect graduate students there was a need to ensure supervisors were also aware of these requirements;
- They asked how the GSA would improve transit for Michener Park residents; and
- They expressed the need to clearly define power imbalances with supervisors.

Group 4: N Prather as the group spokesperson noted that:
- Group members felt strongly about developing specific resources to facilitate supervisory relationships, such as developing a code of conduct for students and professors and they had a long discussion about minimum funding and how it related to the labour changes introduced by Bill 7.

Group 5: M Armstrong as the group spokesperson noted that:

Prepared by L Hareuther and F Robertson for the GSA Council Meeting of 19 June 2017
• Group members discussed how minimum funding packages could affect entrance averages and the number of graduate students admitted to each department and they suggested adding an item to the SWP to address the recently implemented ‘sticker price’ increase to international tuition and the need to ensure that the commensurate rebate of $2,000 for part-time international students and $4,000 for full-time international students remained in place in future years.

Group 6: D Bemister as the group spokesperson noted that:
• Group members were wondering how much of a priority graduate student residence issues were in terms of how many graduate students were actually affected by them;
• Minimum funding would be complex to implement given that departments differ significantly; and
• Group members agreed that promoting the need for clear and concise contract terms in letters of offer was important and establishing early expectations could help alleviate potential financial issues more than the push for minimum funding packages.

Group 7: D Li as the group spokesperson noted that:
• Group members indicated that none of the group members had faced issues with respect to unclear funding or expectations for work but noted that it would be good to have standardized admission offers; and
• They suggested focusing on graduate students in course-based programs, as they often have limited access to funding.

Group 8: B Richardson as the group spokesperson noted that:
• Group members broadly agreed with elements of the SWP;
• One idea brought forward was the need for horizontal support (peer-to-peer support) to facilitate addressing graduate students’ very specific needs;
• Current time to completion rates were very unrealistic and penalties for not completing on-time were imposed on graduate students rather than on their supervisors;
• Group members agreed on the need for a clear position on labour issues as a result of Bill 7;
• They wanted to see more specificity in the SWP in terms of the steps the GSA DEOs would take to achieve their goals; and
• They discussed feedback they heard from graduate students who felt it was important to have an explicit commitment to diversity included in the Collective Agreement.

Group 9: O Bamforth as the group spokesperson noted that:
• Group members discussed the minimum funding package proposal at length and thought it sounded good in theory but were concerned that it could discourage graduate students from applying for other external scholarships;
• Group members discussed whether a one-size-fits-all funding package would be the best way to go, and if it would be prudent to include an opt-out option if students did not want to receive a minimum funding package; and
• Group members discussed retaking courses and noted that while they were open to the suggestion they were concerned about its application and potential associated fairness issues.

F Khodayari responded to some of the questions raised by the various groups. He noted that, with respect to the difference in the individual and team goals, team goals were identified as those requiring all the GSA DEOs to work on the same issue through their differing committee appointments and meetings with different stakeholders. He then noted that, while it could be the case that by implementing minimum funding packages departments would admit fewer students, ensuring secure minimum funding packages and a great University of Alberta graduate student experience were equally important priorities. M Woghiren asked where the money for minimum funding packages would come from. She noted that, with respect to retaking courses, not all courses had exams and she suggested a broader discussion about deferral and extension policies. F Khodayari responded that the SWP emphasized the importance of first requesting the University to develop a solid set of data on current graduate student funding across campus and within faculties and departments. He also noted that they could explore the possibility of retaking project-based courses and that it would be important to balance fairness for all students in the process of retaking courses.

M Khademi thanked GSA Councillors for their input and noted that, on the topic of the minimum funding packages, the GSA DEOs had heard complaints from graduate students regarding funding, and that they did not yet know the extent of the problem or the level of complexity. He emphasized that this was the rationale behind the team’s desire to convince the University to conduct a graduate student funding review. With respect to residence issues, M Khademi reported that in 2016-2017 there was a Residence Life Task Force which included representatives from the SU, GSA, Ancillary Services, and the Office of the Dean of Students. He added that this group would be working in the upcoming years on implementing the recommendations developed in the Task Force’s report. M Khademi encouraged GSA Councillors to contact him with any additional feedback.

S Srivastava noted that graduate students in course-based programs were not provided with any funding and that his program was listed as a cost-recovery program. He suggested the GSA create a list of these departments.

B Soltannia thanked GSA Councillors for their feedback and indicated that the GSA Board would incorporate suggestions received prior to bringing the SWP forward to GSA Council for information at the July meeting.

3.4

Reports

8. President
   i. President’s Report:
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted.

   ii. GSA Board
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted.

   iii. GSA Budget and Finance Committee
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted.

   iv. GSA Governance Committee
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted.

9. Vice-President Academic
   i. Vice-President Academic’s Report:
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted. In addition, F Khodayari stated that two Motions recently passed at FGSR Council involving changes to the examination policy and the supervision policy and he added that these changes would now go through the University governance process with an implementation target of July 2018. He noted that he was happy with the changes, which increased transparency in the processes.

10. Vice-President External
    i. Vice-President External’s Report
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted. In addition M Khademi invited GSA Councillors to talk with the DEOs after the meeting if they had further questions/comments about the SWP.

    ii. GSA Awards Selection Committee
      No meetings this reporting period.

11. Vice-President Labour
    i. Vice-President Labour’s Report
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted. S van der Klein was not present as she was representing the GSA at a mental wellness summit in Calgary and GSA Councillors were invited to email her with any questions.

      M Woghiren noted that she recently met with S van der Klein and urged any GSA Councillors who had not met already done so to book a time with her. M Woghiren encouraged GSA Councillors to discuss with their departmental colleagues about their wishes for the next Collective Agreement including the right to strike and noted that one key thing to consider was that having the right to strike would also mean that the University would have the right to lock graduate students out.

    ii. GSA Negotiating Committee
      No meetings this reporting period.

    iii. GSA Labour Relations Committee
      No meetings this reporting period.

12. Vice-President Student Services
    i. Vice-President Student Services’ Report
      Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted. In addition R Feng stated that he recently attended the Studentcare conference in Montréal and was impressed with the level of student activism at McGill University and Université de Montréal. He also noted that the Campus Food Bank had seen a usage increase over the past few years and reminded GSA Council that many of those relying on their services were graduate students. R Feng further urged GSA Council to be active in their departments and faculties, and to encourage their peers to make their voices heard.

13. Senator
    i. Senator’s Report
      No written report at this time. T Nabe added that he would submit a report to GSA Council as soon as he was assigned duties by the Senate.
14. **Speaker**  
   i. **Speaker’s Report**  
   No written report at this time.

15. **Chief Returning Officer**  
   i. **Chief Returning Officer’s Report**  
   No written report at this time.

16. **GSA Nominating Committee**  
   i. **GSA Nominating Committee Report**  
   Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted. In addition, R Barta stated that there were two vacancies on the Green and Gold Adjudication Committee, and asked GSA Councillors to consider nominating themselves before the deadline of June 21; he then reminded GSA Council of the vacancies for the GSA DRO and Deputy Speaker positions. He added that if anyone wanted to be more involved or have an impact, this was a good place to do that. R Barta invited GSA Council members to email him with any questions about these opportunities.

17. **GSA Elections and Referenda Committee**  
   ii. **GSA Elections and Referenda Committee Report**  
   No meetings this reporting period.

18. **GSA Management**  
   i. **Executive Director’s Report**  
   Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 16 June 2017. The report stood as submitted. In addition C Thomas stated that the recent GSA audit went very well and she noted that the GSA Auditor, Tom Gee, would attend GSA Council in July to present the audited financial statements. She also noted that this would be her last GSA Council meeting until the fall as she would soon be going on maternity leave.

   A Tawieh asked for clarification on the recent GSA Board Policy changes noted in the GSA Board report to GSA Council. C Thomas responded that the change was to amend a previously unrealistic timeline for GSA Council remuneration to be completed in the Departmental Academically-Related Graduate Student Group Grant: Remuneration Based on Councillor Attendance at GSA Council section.

**Question Period**

19. **Written Questions**  
   None at this time.

20. **Oral Questions**  
   None at this time.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.