**GSA Council Meeting MINUTES**
Monday, November 23, 2017 at 6:00 pm
2-100 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex

### IN ATTENDANCE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Faculty/Program</th>
<th>Email/Contact Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Babak Soltannia</td>
<td>Biological Sciences</td>
<td>Adrian Christ (History &amp; Classics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic VP</td>
<td>Firouz Khodayari</td>
<td>Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td>Kenzie Gordon (Humanities Computing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External VP</td>
<td>Masoud Khademi</td>
<td>Business PhD</td>
<td>Ruqayyah Almizra (Lab Med &amp; Pathology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour VP</td>
<td>Sasha van der Klein</td>
<td>Cell Biology</td>
<td>Kris Joseph (Library &amp; Info Studies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services VP</td>
<td>Royle Feng</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Catherine Ford (Linguistics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Speaker</td>
<td>Teddy Carter</td>
<td>Civil &amp; Environmental Engineering</td>
<td>Michelle Michelle (Math &amp; Statistical Sciences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Returning Officer</td>
<td>Darcy Bemister</td>
<td>Communication Sciences &amp; Disorders</td>
<td>Milad Nazarahari (Mechanical Engineering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor-at-Large</td>
<td>Abdullah Alzubaidi</td>
<td>Computing Science</td>
<td>Fahed Elian (Medical Genetics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor-at-Large</td>
<td>Spencer Balay</td>
<td>Dentistry</td>
<td>Quinten Kieser (Med Microbiology &amp; Immunology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor-at-Large</td>
<td>Kim Nguyen-Phoc</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Derya Cinar (MLCS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor-at-Large</td>
<td>Dasha Smirnow</td>
<td>Earth &amp; Atmospheric Sciences</td>
<td>Yangzhe Cao (Resource Economics &amp; Environmental Sociology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor-at-Large</td>
<td>Andrews Tawiah</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Jaclyn Hutchinson (Occupational Therapy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural, Food &amp; Nutritional Science</td>
<td>Hongbing Fan</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Robert Piazza (Secondary Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Talisha Chaput</td>
<td>Electrical &amp; Computer Engineering</td>
<td>Brittany Matenchuk (Paediatrics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>Vicki Kwon</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Andrew Woodman (Pharmacology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>Ghazaleh Sedighi</td>
<td>English &amp; Film Studies</td>
<td>Hamdah Al Nebaihi (Pharmacy &amp; Pharm Sciences)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guests:** Dr. Steven Dew (U of A Provost and Vice-President (Academic)); Gitta Kulczycki (U of A Vice-President (Finance and Administration)); Marc Waddingham (Biological Sciences).

Deputy Speaker Teddy Carter in the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm. Speaker acknowledged the Traditional Territory of Treaty Six and Métis Homeland.
1. **Roll Call of Council Members in Attendance**

**Approval of Agenda**

2. **Approval of the 20 November 2017 Consolidated Agenda**

Members had before them the 20 November 2017 Consolidated Agenda, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. K Gordon MOVED; F Khodayari SECONDED.

Motion PASSED unanimously.

**Approval of Minutes**

3. **Minutes from the 23 October 2017 GSA Council meeting**

Members had before them the 23 October 2017 GSA Council Minutes, which had been previously distributed on 10 November 2017. F Khodayari MOVED; R Maran SECONDED.

Motion PASSED unanimously.

**Changes in Council Membership**

4. **Changes in GSA Council Membership**

   i. **Introduction of New Councillors; C St. Jean (Communication Sciences & Disorders); S Deschenes (Nursing); J Piche (Dentistry); B Matenchuk (Paediatrics); A De (Biomedical Engineering); GK Chowdhury (Electrical & Computer Engineering); G Sedighi (Biochemistry); N Zaamout (Poli Sci).**

   ii. **Farewell to Departing Councillors; None**

**Councillor Announcements**

5. **Councillor Announcements**

   B Soltannia noted that the Non-Academic Staff Association was looking for volunteers to participate in the December 6 event to mark the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. He invited anyone interested in volunteering to contact NASA at nasa@ualberta.ca.

   R Feng invited GSA Councillors to participate in the Campus Food Bank (CFB) 25th Anniversary Celebration during the week of November 27, 2017. More information about the Celebration can be found on the CFB website and Facebook.

   S van der Klein invited GSA Council members to attend the GSA Coffee Break on November 24 at 1 PM in partnership with Unitea (Community Social Work Team Initiative).

   F Khodayari invited GSA Councillors to share their research with high school and elementary students by volunteering for U School.

**Presentation**

6. **Financial Sustainability and the U of A Budget Model**

B Soltannia explained that toward the end of Fall term, the GSA invited the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), Steven Dew and the Vice-President (Finance and Administration), Gitta Kulczycki, to attend GSA Council to provide an update on tuition fees and Mandatory Non-Instructional fees. He added that, given the Government of Alberta has not yet released their updated tuition guidelines, S Dew and G Kulczyki offered to attend GSA Council to discuss the University’s financial sustainability and the new budget model and planning process.

S Dew explained that the University Administration was currently waiting on output from the Alberta Government around updated tuition regulation. He added that they would return to GSA Council to have a more specific discussion on fees when they received more information from the government. S Dew explained that, in the current funding model, most of the University’s operating dollars come from the Campus Alberta grant or from tuition (approximately 70%-30% split). This funding model was under review, in terms of how dollars would be distributed among the 26 institutions in the province.

S Dew noted that, with respect to the Institutional Strategic Work Plan, For the Public Good, which was approved about a year and a half ago, there were 23 objectives and that 15 of them were large in progress initiatives.

G Kulczycki introduced several pieces around the University’s financial future. She noted that the University has had a structural deficit for some time, the ongoing commitments being greater than the revenues received. She added that the University relied heavily on investment income and that that source of income needed to be relied on cautiously as investments were subject to
market volatility. She explained that the University wanted to address this deficit and to start having a longer horizon planning and that to reach this goal they were looking at a 4% reduction for 2018-2019 and a 2% cut the two following academic years. S Dew added that the University’s financial pressures come from the internal expenses and externally from the government.

She added that the University is moving to a multi-year planning and a new internal funding model and that Administration was meeting with all faculties and units to present these changes. She indicated that a new budget model would neither create nor solve the deficit. S Dew added that the three-year planning framework would create a budget model that helped the University better understand how funds were divided, rather than how much and outlined ways to be more efficient.

GSA Council members asked a series of questions concerning, among many issues, transparency of the process for finding a new framework (G Kulczycki explained that their consultations and reporting have been and will continue to be extensive; S Dew added that the new budget model will be a place to start from), the affect of new regulation on international tuition (the current framework is for domestic, not international. S Dew noted that he suspected that MNIFs and international tuition will fall under new regulations and that the Board of Governors would not revisit the international graduate differential), how cuts would be applied (across the board), the effect of cuts on the graduate student experience, funding of staff benefits, and curtailing the administrative budget. GSA Councillors further inquired about the graduate funding review currently underway and the issue of reduction of time to completion. S Dew closed with a reminder to graduate students that the vast majority of the University’s resources to support students came from research funding, not the operating budget.

Action Items

7. GSA 2017-2018 Budget and Expenditure Report
Babak Soltannia (GSA President) presented the item. Courtney Thomas (Financial Team Lead), Shirley Ball (Accountant), Dorte Sheikh (Financial Manager), Heather Hogg (Director of Operations), and Julie Tanguay (Acting Executive Director, Associate Director) were present to answer questions.

MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL: That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, APPROVE the proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures, and the Legal Defence Fund, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective immediately.

B Soltannia noted that the latest update on the 2017-2018 GSA’s fiscal year was presented to the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, GSA Board, and GSA Council in June and July 2017, and that this was the second update to GSA Council for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. He indicated that the GSA’s fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31 and that he was pleased to report that the GSA is on track and will likely have a surplus at the end of the year. B Soltannia noted that the cover letter also outlined major highlights. He indicated that, as previously discussed with the GSA BFC and GSA Council, the GSA was keeping a close eye on the implementation of Bill 7 and may consider spending part of the Operating/Contingency Fund as they get closer to negotiations and drafting revised bylaws. He summarized that the GSA continues to be in excellent shape financially and thanked the Financial Team and the members of the GSA BFC for their great work.

MOTION: That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, APPROVE the proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures, and the Legal Defence Fund, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective immediately. F Khodayari MOVED. M Khademi SECONDED.

Motion PASSED unanimously

Babak Soltannia (GSA President and GSA Budget and Finance Committee Chair) presented the item.

MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL: That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, APPROVE the proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures, and the Legal Defence Fund, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective immediately.

B Soltannia noted that GSA Council had before it proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on the Budget and Finance Committee, Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures, and the Legal Defence Fund. He indicated that this was the second reading of proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and the first reading of proposed changes to GSA Policy. He indicated that at the October 23 GSA Council meeting, a request was made for a friendly amendment by D Smirnow, GSA Councillor-at-Large and
GSA BFC Member, to the Legal Defence Fund policy to specify that any income earned by the fund would be returned to the fund and that the change was highlighted in yellow in the corresponding double column. B Soltannia reminded GSA Councillors that key proposed changes included removing reference to quarterly reports, removing a specific amount for the Financial Stabilization Fund to indicate that the GSA’s Auditor would make an annual recommendation on the amount that should be included in this fund, updating GSA Bylaw and Policy on the Legal Defence Fund to align with the structure of the GSA Health and Dental Plan Reserve Fund, and clarifying the circumstances in which this fund could be utilized and accessed.

A GSA Council member asked a question about the GSA Health and Dental Plan Reserve Fund (HDPRF) (in response, it was noted that if any adjustments to the fees were made resulting in a surplus, this money would go into the (HDPRF). It was also noted that the HDPRF may be used, with the agreement of GSA BFC, GSA Board, and GSA Council, to offset significant increases to the GSA Health and Dental Plan fee).

**MOTION:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, Budget Principles, Practices, and Procedures, and the Legal Defence Fund, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective immediately. B Soltannia **MOVED.** F Elian **SECONDED.**

**Motion PASSED unanimously**

9. **Proposed Changes to GSA Policy on GSA Recognition Awards**

Masoud Khademi (GSA Vice-President External and GSA Awards Selection Committee Chair) presented the item.

**MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Awards Selection Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Policy on the GSA Awards, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective upon approval by GSA Council.

M Khademi noted that following the adjudication of the GSA Recognition Awards in January and February 2017, the GSA Awards Selection Committee (GSA ASC) provided feedback and proposed changes to the criteria for the GSA Recognition Awards. He indicated that the GSA ASC developed the proposed changes and that they had been reviewed by the GSA Board as well.

GSA Council members posed a series of questions including, among others, questions concerning whether GSA ASC members were required to have adjudication experience in order to serve on the committee, and if nominees for this committee go through an evaluation process before their names were brought forward to GSA Council for election (K Gordon explained that the bios and resumes for all nominees for GSA Standing Committees were reviewed by the GSA Nominating Committee to ensure that they meet the eligibility criteria of the committee. It was also noted that there were no requirements for GSA ASC to have prior experience adjudicating awards and that all GSA ASC members receive training before adjudicating), the reason as to why the criteria for contributing to graduate student professional development had been removed from the Non-Academic Staff Award (this criteria was identified as being more challenging to adjudicate for those who work on the non-academic side of things, as opposed to the academic side), and whether the GSA keeps statistics for the number of applicants that were received and the distribution of departments that applied each year for GSA Awards (the GSA keep track of the number of applicants received and the applicants’ department, the GSA did not keep the adjudication information).

**MOTION:** That the GSA Council, on the recommendation of the GSA Awards Selection Committee, **APPROVE** the proposed changes to GSA Policy on the GSA Awards, as shown in the attached double column documents and effective upon approval by GSA Council. M Khademi **MOVED.** R Feng **SECONDED.**

**Motion PASSED unanimously**

**Elections**

10. **GSA Council Elections**

Kenzie Gordon (Vice-Chair of the GSA Nominating Committee) presented the items.

**GSA Standing Committees**

a. GSA Appeals and Complaints Board Vice-Chair (1 vacancy)

K Gordon presented the item and noted that the nominee was not able to attend GSA Council.

**Nominees for GSA Appeals and Complaints Board Vice-Chair:**
b. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee (1 vacancy)
K Gordon presented the item and introduced the nominee, who was given the opportunity to address GSA Council by responding to a question provided in advance. K Gordon asked the following question of the candidate and the candidate was given 45 seconds to respond: “Please tell us why you’d like to serve on the GSA Elections and Referenda Committee.”

Nominees for GSA Elections and Referenda Committee:
Yilun Wu (Physiology)

For Discussion
11. Graduate Students’ Mental health Power Point Presentation

S van der Klein indicated that part of her portfolio this year included mental health, and that in response to a suggestion from a former GSA Councillor, she undertook a review of the current literature on graduate student mental health and how it related to funding. She then went through the presentation she had developed in collaboration with F Khodayari, and encouraged GSA Council members to contact her if they would like to utilize this information within their own faculties and departments.

The following points, among others, were made during the presentation: the mental health continuum showed that the existence of an unsupportive environment could affect mental health and its symptoms; in the 2013 National College Health Assessment, statistics from the U of A regarding all students (not specifically graduate students) indicated that 36.6% felt so depressed it was difficult to function, and the 2016 National College Health Assessment indicated that in Canada 13% of students said they seriously considered suicide in the prior year; data from Belgium, Poland, and Canada illustrated various challenges graduate students face, including a team decision-making culture where graduate students were often part of a team but weren’t able to make decisions, supervisor leadership styles, lack of remuneration, and the use of PhD students as low paid workers at universities; the U of A funded around 83% of thesis-based students, there was a great variety across programs, departments, and terms and that funding often remained unpredictable; and 50% of graduate students were living with a partner/spouse and 25% of graduate students had at least one child. Finally, S van der Klein noted that this data indicated that there was a relationship between graduate student mental health and funding, and that improving funding for graduate students in an already stressful environment could assist with mental health issues.

GSA Council members asked a series of questions, including, among others, questions concerning the University’s response to student suicides on campus (S van der Klein noted that she served on a Suicide Prevention Implementation Committee which was examining the current Suicide Prevention framework which work among other things on raising awareness of resources available to graduate students including Clinical and Counselling Services, and the Graduate Student Assistant Program), minimum funding package (it was noted that the GSA was currently in conversations with the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-Provost and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) on this matter), mental health assessments for graduate students before they start graduate school or during their program (the ACCESS program was discussed and it was noted that FGSR has started doing exit interviews to find out why students may be leaving their program), the Student Mental Health Report, initiated in 2012 through the Office of the Dean of Students was discussed, and S van der Klein noted that the Board, Safety, and Environment Committee had placed student mental health as a standing item on their committee agendas.

Reports
12. President
i. President’s Report:
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted. In addition B Soltanni noted that he recently attended the CAGS (Canadian Association for Graduate Studies) Annual Conference and had great opportunities to speak with deans from different universities and Tri-Council representatives about diverse issues. He also invited GSA Councillor to attend the GSA Coffee Break this Friday.

ii. GSA Board
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

iii. **Budget and Finance Committee**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

iv. **GSA Governance Committee**
No meetings this reporting period.

13. **Vice-President Academic**
   i. **Vice-President Academic's Report:**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

14. **Vice-President External**
   i. **Vice-President External's Report**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

   ii. **GSA Awards Selection Committee's Report**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

15. **Vice-President Labour**
   i. **Vice-President Labour's Report**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

   ii. **GSA Negotiating Committee**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted. S van der Klein added that the GSA had sent out their Opening Position for collective bargaining.

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

16. **Vice-President Student Services**
   i. **Vice-President Student Services' Report**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November 2017. The report stood as submitted.

   ii. **GSA Student Affairs Advisory Committee**
No meetings this reporting period.

17. **Senator**
   i. **Senator's Report**
No written report at this time.

18. **Speaker**
   i. **Speaker's Report**
No written report at this time.

19. **Chief Returning Officer**
   i. **Chief Returning Officer's Report**
No written report at this time.

20. **GSA Nominating Committee**
   i. **GSA Nominating Committee Report**
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November. The report stood as submitted.

21. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee  
   ii. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee Report  
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November. The report stood as submitted.

22. GSA Management  
   i. Executive Director’s Report  
Members had before them a written report, which had been previously distributed on 17 November. The report stood as submitted. In addition J Tanguay noted that we were currently in the process of Early Call for Talent and Training; two sessions had been added for students interested in elected positions.

**Question Period**

23. Written Questions  
None at this time.

24. Oral Questions  
GSA Councillors raised the issue of security on campus, referencing specifically the recent incident in CCIS where an individual was suspected of having a firearm. It was noted that some graduate students were unhappy with how the incident was reported by the University. Several GSA Councillors also expressed concerns with security issues in their labs and offices and further reported a lack of actions and support from the University. GSA Councillors noted that certain buildings were more problematic than others. Some GSA Councillors expressed that these issues were not being properly addressed. S van der Klein explained that she served on the Board of Governors subcommittee that dealt specifically with health and safety and that she would bring these concerns forward. She also clarified that the acute messaging system was not used in the case of the CCIS incident as it was deemed a false alarm. S van der Klein asked to speak with GSA Councillors after the meeting about their experiences and concerns and encouraged others to bring their issues forward so the GSA can assist and support them. M Khademi also encouraged GSA Councillors to bring these issues to the GSA Directly-Elected officers for assistance.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.