



Dear GSA Council,

As you may recall, **the GSA Council received the GSA's 2012-2013 Strategic Work Plan at its October 15, 2012 meeting and then received an update on the SWP at the January 14, 2013 meeting.** The 2012-2013 Plan (which is available online for your review at <http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/~media/gsa/AboutTheGSA/GSAStrategicPlan201213ForCirculationOct2012.pdf>) was prepared by me along with my fellow elected officials and GSA Management to direct our efforts and identify areas where we can work with others in the University community.

I want to update you on the current 2012-2013 GSA SWP and the strategic goals that we have achieved this year. As you may remember from my report to you in January, since releasing the GSA SWP, the GSA elected officials have met with ten members of University Administration to discuss common goals, and devise strategies to implement aspects of the plan that are of mutual interest. That process has continued since January and I would like to offer you **a synthesis of the GSA's progress in pursuing the strategic goals outlined in the GSA 2012-2013 SWP.** This progress report will be the spring board for the new team's 2013-2014 SWP.

MARKET MODIFIERS

In the fall of 2012, **the potential introduction of another market modifier** caused us to temporarily redirect our strategic efforts to tackle this prospect. As I informed you in January, I am happy to report that **discussion of market modifiers for this year has ceased.** The recent release of the provincial budget will almost certainly mean that **the issues of market modifiers and potential tuition increases will play a central role in the GSA's activities in the coming year** and the incoming team of elected officials is ready and **fully prepared to engage with both the University and government and advocate to effectively on behalf of graduate students** about these issues. Over the past year **the GSA has built a reputation as a tough, constructive critic** on the issue of market modifiers and this is a role that will continue to be played by the incoming team.

THE GRADUATE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The graduate education initiative (which began as the possible abolition of FGSR) has kept the GSA elected officials extremely busy throughout their terms and this has been one of my top priorities as GSA President. **The GSA has worked very closely with FGSR and point person Catherine Swindlehurst on the graduate education initiative.** We have updated you regularly on this and created opportunities for you to express your suggestions and concerns to those involved by **inviting University stakeholders such as Dean Shirvani and Acting Provost and Vice-President Martin Ferguson-Pell to attend GSA Council on a regular basis (in November, January, March, and April).** The incoming team of elected officials will continue working with FGSR and the Provost's Office on the graduate education initiative and will **ensure the best interests of the graduate students of this University are the driving force behind this initiative.** The GSA will continue to offer both constructive criticism and its own positive proposals.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

A key strategic goal for the GSA in 2012-2013 was **the negotiation of "a fair collective agreement that supports graduate students who are employed by the University"** and I am happy to report that this has been accomplished. We also worked this year to **develop strategies concerning education and enforcement of the Agreement** and this is something that will continue to be pursued in the coming year. It is a great win for us that Administration is accepting responsibility for enforcement of the CA. Nonetheless, this remains very much a key goal for the GSA and Council will continue to receive progress reports. Thanks are due as



well to the VP Labour and the GSA Labour Relations Committee for all their hard work on the bargaining process this past year.

FUNDING

Another strategic goal was continued involvement in the Graduate Student Funding Task Force, which was struck in 2011. However, as I reported to you in January, the work of this Task Force stalled and so we have, in consultation with Phyllis Clark, VP Finance and Administration, struck terms of reference for a new committee, **the Graduate Student Tuition and Funding Data Committee, which will meet a few more times to gather information regarding graduate student support.** As GSA President, I have served as co-chair of this committee and am **pleased with the progress it has made.** The GSA has been **regarded as a partner in this initiative and that speaks volumes about our strong reputation within Administration.** Working collaboratively within this committee and sharing information, **the GSA and Administration have agreed on data sets related to issues of graduate student support across Canada.** The GSA was also able to contribute important sets of data to this body in the form of a comprehensive report on cost of living standards in a selection of Canadian cities. **Your elected officials will continue their work with this committee and see active participation as vital to engaging with both administration and government on budget and tuition debates.** We will also begin investigating how best to use the data generated.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The current team of elected officials has invested a great deal of time in research into various **professional development programs** which may benefit graduate students at the U of A (including **programs coordinated by Renee Polziehn, Professional Development and Outreach Director, FGSR, and the Skillsets program pioneered at McGill University**). We have had a researcher tackle this and will review her report shortly. Additionally, the VP Academic has worked throughout his term on the Attributes and Competencies subcommittee.

RECOGNITION AND RELIEF

We have worked closely with the University and FGSR to **develop policies surrounding the recognition and relief of GSA elected officials** to ensure that future involvement in graduate student government will be a viable and attractive option for students. **In January 2013 the GSA was successful in having a policy on the recognition and relief of GSA elected officials added the Graduate Program Manual** (the policy can be found here: <http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/gpm/Section7/ConsiderationOfReliefForTheGSAExecutive.aspx>). However, it remains a strategic goal for the incoming team of elected officials to negotiate a **no cost, special registration status** for elected officials (I recently met with the Registrar, Gerry Kendal, to discuss this issue and it is moving forward).

ON-CAMPUS HOUSING AND RENT INCREASES

The VP Student Life has worked diligently throughout the year on **a series of important issues related to graduate student housing.** While this, along with several issues, will remain an area of strategic focus in the coming year, **I am pleased with the progress we have made in this area.** At our retreat, March 22-23, the VPSL suggested a review of the residence contract in light of a number of disparate complaints we received this year.

MENTAL HEALTH

Our participation in the Administration's ongoing mental health review has resulted in an initiative on the part of Provost's Fellow Robin Everall to establish **a dedicated graduate student counseling space in Triffo**



Hall. Plans for this are moving forward and **the GSA will continue to participate vigorously in this important area.**

U-PASS

Negotiations for the **continuation of the U-Pass agreement** were completed this year and, by the time you read this, a referendum will have been held. U-Pass is one of the core, essential services that the GSA provides and the VP Student Services has worked with great skill on the re-negotiation of the agreement this year, leading a coalition of graduate students from other affected post secondary education institutions.

CHILD CARE

At the GSA, we continually see the childcare needs of graduate students who apply for Child Care Grants, and thus, increasing the available support for graduate students with families was an important part of the 2012-2013 GSA SWP. To that end, this year we lobbied for increased funding for graduate students with children in the form of GSA grants.

PAW

The GSA's involvement as financial partners (along with the SU and the University) in the Physical Activity and Wellness Centre (PAW) has, likewise, held the attention of your elected officials this year. **We are important financial partners in this project** and will continue to **maintain our involvement in infrastructure planning and financing discussions.**

MODERNIZING GSA INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE GSA'S LONG-TERM HEALTH

There have been a number of strategic goals identified by the GSA concerning infrastructure which I am proud to report we have met. **The implementation of online fillable forms and a modernized direct deposit system** are completed and constitute a huge step forward for the GSA. The ongoing hard work of the GSA staff, management, and financial team have, likewise, ensured **that the GSA is developing into an organization that will remain robust over time.** A comprehensive review of GSA bylaw and policy, as well as the development of a five-year budget (which was presented to Council in February), have been important components of this. **The GSA's Early Call for Talent and associated training program** has also been very successful this year. **Eighteen graduate students expressed interest in running for elected positions** this year and there was an **8.6% voter turnout in the 2012-13 general election** (up from **4.5% in 2011-2012**).

The Board and BFC have received a succession plan for management as Heather Hogg moves to three days a week on April 15, focusing more on her role as Labour Professional and less on her role as Director of Operations. Courtney Thomas will assume the role of Director of Operations on April 15, with continued mentoring from Heather and Ellen. In 2014-2015, Ellen will begin to work part-time and we will be hiring a "junior" manager (as provided for in the 2013-2014 budget) to begin learning the GSA's operations and services.

EXTERNAL ADVOCACY

I have also devoted attention this year to investigating and discussing the **GSA's external lobbying presence.** I **recently attended the CASA AGM as an observer** and the current team of elected officials have worked with AGC on the GSA's lobbying presence. The GSA also participated in the recent march on the legislature to protest the provincial's government's cuts to post-secondary funding and I spoke at the rally which preceded the march. Additionally, the GSA has begun to explore the possibility of a future **relationship with APIRG (as was discussed at Council).**



MOVING FORWARD

As myself and my fellow elected officials near the end of our terms, we have, in consultation with the incoming officials, drafted the 2013-2014 GSA SWP. Like the 2012-2013 SWP, this new version provides us at the GSA with **a planning document for this year and into the future in an effort to not only work towards achieving our vision but that of the University of Alberta as well**. It is meant to align with the University of Alberta's guiding documents - Dare to Discover, Dare to Deliver, and (when it is released by the University) the 2013 Comprehensive Institutional Plan, while at the same time pursuing the GSA's 'agenda'. In particular, the platform of the incoming team of elected officials has guided the development of the SWP. Additionally, **a great deal of strategic thought has gone into the 2013-2014 GSA SWP – to this end it has been greatly streamlined and more precisely focused** while also building in a focus on the recently released provincial budget and its effects of the University and the graduate student community. When the University's revised CIP is released, the new team will need to grapple with the effects of a reduced grant.

The infrastructure surrounding the Early Call, elections, and transition which has been built over the past year has allowed the GSA to greatly reduce the time needed for incoming elected officials to transition into their positions. This is an important achievement which means, to hearken back to an analogy used by the Executive Director in her last report to Council, **the GSA airplane will not be sitting on the tarmac for months as incoming officials prepare and orient themselves – it will take off on May 1.**

In the forthcoming 2013-2014 GSA SWP you will see a number of important strategic goals identified. In addition to the initiatives mentioned throughout my report, the following issues will occupy the efforts on the GSA in the coming year:

- Obtain counseling services and **support for international graduate students who are seeking Canadian Permanent Residence;**
- Advocate for a new **relocation bursary** for graduate students from developing countries to offset initial moving expenses;
- Evaluate the possibility of **waiving international differential fees** or offering new scholarships to cover the international differential fees for top-performing international students;
- Pilot a **Departmental Liaison Initiative** which will focus on:
 - Compliance with the PSLA (eg election of a Councillor)
 - Risk assessment and reduction related to graduate student groups affiliated with the GSA (especially regarding alcohol use)
 - Education about and compliance with the CA
 - Orientation needs of departments
 - Representation on Faculty Councils
 - Linking functional departmental GSAs with struggling ones
 - The “proactive search” for graduate student talent as per the Nominating Committee’s terms of reference
 - Advising departments on the process for nominating an individual for an Honorary Degree (at the request of the Chancellor)



- Work to make the U of A **campus free from discrimination and bullying**;
- **Maintain and expand external advocacy efforts** and continue to **be both an advocate and a constructive critic** in interactions with University Administration and government especially as the provincial budget news rolls out;
- Work closely with FGSR and the Alumni Association to develop **a new mentorship program and professional development program for graduate students**; *and*
- Continue to **advocate for accessible and well-maintained graduate student housing**.

Sincerely,

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