



**GSA COUNCIL**  
 Notice of Meeting  
 September 2, 2020  
 4:00PM – 7:30PM

Zoom Meeting (Details in Outlook Invitation)

**AGENDA**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>
4:00PM	<b>1. SPEAKER'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS</b>	-
4:05PM	<b>2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA</b>	For Approval
4:06PM	<b>3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS</b>	For Information
4:07PM	<b>4. ATTENDANCE</b>	For Information
4:08PM	<b>5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES</b> a. August 5, 2020	For Approval
4:10PM	<b>6. POLITICAL POSITION ADVOCACY</b> a. Mandatory Mental Wellness Training for TAs – Ryan (10 mins)	For Discussion
4:20PM	<b>7. BOARD DISCUSSIONS</b> a. Update from the Board – Mostafa (10 mins) b. Update on GP-10,GP-16 – Reid (15 mins) c. Role of Boards – Hanmer (15 mins)	For Discussion For Approval For Discussion
5:00PM	<b>8. EXECUTIVE-COUNCILLOR INTERACTION</b> a. Councillor Feedback – Robbins (45 mins)	For Discussion
5:45PM	<b>9. UNIONIZATION</b> a. Update on OrganizeUW (10 mins)	For Discussion
5:55PM	<b>10. BOARD DISCUSSIONS</b> a. Justification for GP-20 – Hampton (20 mins)	For Discussion
6:15PM	<b>11. NEW INITIATIVES</b> a. New GSA Initiatives – Billedeau (30 mins)	For Discussion
6:45PM	<b>12. SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION</b>	For Discussion

7:30PM	13. ADJOURNMENT	-
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## MINUTES:

**1. Speaker's Welcome and opening Remarks: 04:02pm**

*Robbins takes the Chair and calls the meeting to order at 4:02pm*

**2. Adoption of the Agenda: 4:04pm**

*Motion to approve the agenda. Approved unanimously.*

**3. Declaration of Interests:**

*Robbins declares a conflict of interest as he also serves as the Coordinator of GSEF. To mitigate the conflict of interest, the Deputy Speaker (Sgandurra) will chair the New Initiatives section of the meeting.*

**4. Attendance**

**5. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the August 2020 Council meeting were approved unanimously.

**6. Political Position Advocacy: 04:04pm**

*a) Mandatory Mental Wellness Training for TAs- Ryan*

*There was a presentation on an open letter requesting mandatory mental wellness training for all the TAs. This training will be an online module and would take about 1-2 hours to complete which would be marked as a milestone on the transcript of the graduate students. There was a discussion on whether this training would account for the TA hours of the graduate students which was further clarified by Senator Salman that the training would be paid as per the Ontario Employment Act and would be mandatory for the graduate students who would serve as TAs. There were some concerns raised regarding this training being a new approach to the graduate students. The main aim of this wellness training would be to create a harmonized system across campus where each student would have access to TA trainings as different departments have different or no trainings at all; this training would also encourage the undergraduate students to open up with graduate students. There was a discussion on how would this training would help graduate students (as it is not directly related to their academics); it was further clarified with this training being meant for both graduate and undergraduate students which would enable them to use the resources for tackling*

stress. There was a suggestion made that the reviewing for this training should be mandated and not to be kept as an opportunity.

There were questions on whether this training would be an external program or an in-house program and whether mental health training needed to be mandatory. IT was commented that that TAs need to be aware of the mental health crisis and help undergraduate students to make use of the available resources such as community health resources and also they should know that TAs aren't licensed to be therapist, psychologist, clinician etc. There were also some discussions on making the training paid.

**“BIRT the GSA-UW Council approves the open letter on mandatory mental wellness training for TAs provided that the open letter be revised to include language that the mandatory training be paid”. (Robbins/Salahub) (21-2-5)**

## **7. Board Discussions:**

### **a) Update from the board- Mostafa –**

**4:39pm**

The Board approved GP-10 for President, GP-16 for Vice-President and GP-20 for a conflict of interest policy. The budget has also been approved for the coming year. The Board has also laid out a strategic plan for the next three years (2020-2023). New directors were elected as a result of the AGM and they were being interviewed into the Board through setting up orientation and setting up the board meeting of this year.

### **c) Role of Boards- Hanmer-**

**4:43pm**

The Speaker invited Sandra Hanmer (Capacity Canada) to speak on the role of the Boards. GSA as a legal entity is a non-profit Corporation which is bound by Corporation Act of Ontario which sets up structure that an entity must have around its governance. The Board of GSA is responsible for everything that goes on within the organisation and it has the ultimate accountability for what goes on within the organisation. Responsibility for governance lies with the Board of Directors.

Hanmer discussed that Boards are constrained by laws and regulations, the letters/supplementary letters patent, organization bylaws, and Board policies. In general, Boards have fiduciary, strategic, and generative modes of governance and focus on collective governance, which is the sum of Culture of Inquiry, Board Management and Productive Board Engagement. Board of Inquiry involves asking questions and getting some insights that you need to know on the thing you are working upon. Productive Board Management relates the engagement with the committee which is more like Council's relation with the Board. There were some issues listed out which needed extra attention were: Conflict of Interest, Succession Planning and Managing Risk (including risks related to governance, reputation, finances, operation, and compliance). Some key roles of the

*Boards include supporting the President, setting up strategic priorities which comes because of inputs of the stakeholders, monitoring the performance of the organisation, overseeing the risk and helping the governance system. Hanmer mentioned that Boards will have a Nominating committee, Finance Function and Ad-Hoc/Advisory/ Task Force. These committees are used to fulfil the mandate of the Board as they have clearly defined terms of reference and make recommendations to the Board. Hanmer also mentioned that the governance committee is the key committee which is responsible for the recommendation of the tone and best practises for the governance of the organisation. On the other hand, the committee which is tasked to discuss the topics which are a responsibility of the President is the Advisory committee. Hanmer also mentioned various responsibilities of the Director which included that Director should have clear vision and purpose on what GSA was all about, governance policies, by laws, applicable legislation etc.*

*Some benefits of having GSA incorporated with legal overhead were given as that having an independent body was more beneficial to the graduate students back in the 70's, legal overhead expenses weren't that high as the Board members were voluntary, there was just training overhead rather than additional financial overhead; there was staff that was under supervision of GSA and not University of Waterloo and people that came on Board were trained. Also, members of the corporation weren't liable for their as they have liability coverage by being incorporated.*

*One of the Directors also mentioned that the Director's handbook outlines the History of the GSA and work was being done on the Councillor's handbook.*

**b) Update on GP-10 and GP-16 – Reid**

**5:02pm**

*The Board of the GSA has approved the second reading of GP-10 and GP-16 on the President and Vice-President nomination process in the Board meeting in August 2020. The Board adjusted the policy based on Councillor feedback. The Councillors suggested housekeeping but due to the time constraints, the focus was on high level policy and process.*

*Directors had a debate on the Council's role in the appointment process of President and Vice President. Directors agreed on involving and consulting Council in the appointment and the re-appointment process as the Board ultimately carries legal liability. The Board was decided that Council and Board both approve Board President and Vice-President nominations and Councillors be consulted during the re-nomination process, while the Board solely approve the President and Vice-President re-nomination. It was also mentioned that according to bylaw 6.1.2, by consulting the Council in the re-nomination process, the Board is giving powers to the Council required as per the laws. GP-10 and GP-16 were thus being modified so that they are in compliance with Bylaw 6.1.2.*

*There was also a discussion held by the directors on why the President required two months of pay notice when dismissed without a cause and Vice President required a two*

*week of pay notice under the same condition. In the past, the President was a full-time position and it required two months of pay notice whereas Vice President was a part-time position and hence only required two weeks pay notice. In the current year, the President is a part-time position.*

*As per current GP-10 and GP-16 policies and law 6.1.2, Board and the Council jointly determine the President and the Vice-President appointment process. The Board seeks Council's vote for approval of the final version of GP-10 and GP-16. As per the changes in the policy, Board may affect the appointment processes.*

***“Motion to approve the changes to GP-10 and GP-16” (Robbins/Reid) (18-3-7)***

## **8. Executive-Councillor Interaction**

### **a) Councillor Feedback Robbins**

**05:07pm**

*A concern was raised by the Councillor of Physics and Astronomy that the Department of Physics have been receiving recurring complaints regarding how the graduate students are being overseen by their supervisor committee and the feedback process is not usually beneficial if problems arise. Another issue raised by the Councillor of School of Planning was regarding degree extension. The Councillor of School of Planning discussed degree extensions in her program when were brought to the Director's notice, there was a lack of acknowledgment. So, students taking one or two terms extra to graduate and not providing enough support to them to graduate on time should inadvertently be considered as fine by the University. Another Councillor raised an issue regarding graduate students facing communication issues with the advisors due to remote learning and remote work. For example, when the TA list was sent out, students were supposed to contact the professor, but the professor did not contact many students in return, and this made it difficult for the students to find a direction.*

*The President addressed all the three issues listed above and said that University of Waterloo was working on allowing completion timelines to be extended and that this issue will further be discussed with GSPA. It was also mentioned, that as per the COVID-19 survey, which was sent out in April 2020, the main issue was the communication between the supervisors and the graduate students. There will be work done on this issue by jointly initiating a new COVID-19 administration survey with the administration, which will be released to students in mid-fall and address communication issues. Issues regarding oversight will be discussed privately as that involves some confidential information.*

*The Councillor of Pharmacy raised concerns regarding lack of oversight in supervisors' responsibility. A Director (speaking on behalf of computer science students) indicated that that some pandemic incurring costs were not being covered by the academic bursary. There were some cases where members in Computer Science were not eligible for CESB because of TA payments. There were lots of issues related to mental wellness. He also raised a concern that students find it difficult to access resources that*

*they would normally have but the addition remains the same attributed to these resources and echoed previous points about a lack of communication/transparency with respect to the pandemic. The Councillor of Psychology also asked when can students receive updates about the Winter 2020 term so that they can plan their semester accordingly.*

*The President commented that supervisors not accruing to the role was due to the pandemic. Regarding students' complaint on various issues, the President again indicated that the Fall COVID19 impact survey would address their concern and will be discussing with his administrative colleagues shortly.*

*The tuition fees for Winter 2020 term will be increasing for International students and Winter 2020 term would have more coherency than Fall 2020 term. The Council can be used to address the tuition fees issue. The University of Waterloo have been trying its best to make the experience smooth in these times for students. The Speaker of the Council briefly discussed a tuition freeze petition from the Spring 2020 semester and tuition changes over the past several semesters. A Director mentioned that their department shares a review on the minimum funding concept which they provide to Computer Science students. Both students and the faculty members will be affected by the increase in tuition fees and there lies an opportunity for the faculties to collaborate on this issue. The Councillor of Philosophy said that Council has already passed a mandate on tuition fees. Everything else would be realised as a lot of effort go into developing online instructions and it is nowhere close to in-person instruction as many students have lost access to offices for essential purposes.*

## **9. Unionization**

**05:28 pm**

### **a) Update on Organize UW**

*One of the Organizers gave an update on OrganizeUW and discussed that individuals volunteering with the group would be acting as students, rather than Councillors. The current and future needs and actions of the group was presented.*

## **10. Board Discussions**

### **a) Justification of GP-20 Hampton**

**05:36 pm**

*A Director mentioned that the Board has passed a new policy GP-20 (conflict of interest). The Board had considered this policy based on best governance practices. The new policy was made available for the Councillors and the members to be read on the website. A justification of passing GP-20 in an emergency session was provided to Council. A first reading of the policy occurred in early August 2020, which was written by the GSA's legal team. The policy was written so that it would fit within the framework of the GSA as it is not for profit organization. This policy was designed to apply to all members of the organization, including Directors, Volunteers, and Councillors.*

*The Director mentioned that an important part of the policy was disclosure of a conflict of interest. The policy outlined the process of disclosures such that the members of the organisation disclose the conflicts of interest to the Chair of the Board or their designee, as decided by the Chair of the Board.*

*The Director mentioned that as per the policy, it was up to the body of the question to determine whether a conflict of interest would arise or not. The body here might be the Board of Directors or meeting of the Council. The policy describes disclosure at the very beginning and the process on how GSA can best navigate when a conflict of interest arises.*

*There was a concern raised regarding the broad language of the conflict of interest and clarity on it was requested. It was also highlighted that there might be issues that might go against the interests of the GSA; The Councillor of SERS also requested some clarity on how this policy would affect the role of a Councillor.*

*A Director noted that transparency would be involved in the conflicts of interest, be it real or potential. The Board also recognized the fact that students were involved in GSA specially as Councillors as there are students who were Councillors and there are Directors who were Councillors before. The policy is not designed to discourage involvement in other organisations, but to declare the conflicts of interest and contribute to a conversation. A Director provided a couple of examples of how a conflict of interest can be handled based on previous Council conflict of interest declarations. Council should be aware that the decisions being made are a result of their own voices/opinions and they should not interfere with the ability to represent constituents.*

*The Councillor of Philosophy raised a concern over the definition of the clause in the policy discussing the interests of the constituents who are friends and colleagues.*

*A Director acknowledged that the language was confusing, and the policy doesn't discourage representing constituents. The Councillors should have loyalty to the objects of the corporation. The vision and the values should be fulfilled as Councillors and Directors.*

## **11. New Initiatives Billedeau New GSA Initiatives**

**05:56pm**

*The President mentioned that the surveys that were carried out in the past academic term indicated financial well being and academic requirements to be the major areas of concern. GSA had committed to \$10K per term to secure graduate student scholarships to provide financial aid. The scholarship would be available to the active*

*Masters and Ph.D. students and they can only apply for this scholarship once throughout their degree. The President proposal that the students could be awarded a \$500 bursary for presenting at a conference or by publishing in a peer reviewed journal. These awards would be issued on a first-come first-serve basis and the students can apply for it within one term of their accomplishment. The President noted that details still need to be worked out, including whether the reviewing would be done by GSA or GSEF and whether the equity would apply equally to all the departments.*

*A question was raised by a Councillor on the award being used to offload costs from supervisors/departments/professors onto the GSA award. The President clarified that an additional \$10K was added to the existing scholarships amount in the spring 2020 term, in order to provide students with financial aid in these pandemic times and the existing resources were to be maintained if not expanded. The President clarified that other financial resources would be left unaffected with the introduction of this award. There was some discussion on whether caps would be faculty-wise since different departments have different publishing rights. The President gave a clarity on it stating that if there were no caps, 60 awards would be given to first 60 qualified students and if the caps were installed faculty-wise, 10 awards would be the limit set for each faculty so as to promote fair distribution amongst faculties. Some fairness was set for the award as speed of publishing varies across disciplines and faculties. The Councillor of Philosophy suggested that a proportional cap should be based on number of graduate students in each department. It was also asked whether this award was contingent on the cost that was associated with publishing/conferences or not. The President replied that this award was based on academic accomplishments. Since the awards were based on faculties, the awards that were planned for one term would be carried over to the next term. One of the Directors also raised a concern mentioning that the word "equity" was meant for students and the award was potentially for those students who had the funding and time to attend the conference to get rewarded from the conference. This becomes an equity issue on who can succeed and get academic benefits. The Director had also raised the concern if GSA could leverage the money rather than push equality amongst black indigenous students at University of Waterloo. It was also mentioned that this award was more of a need-based award and less of an academic requirement. GSA doesn't support academic achievements as the University promotes academic achievements and GSA was responsible for solving the funding issues.*

*President also mentioned that there were two funding initiatives GSI (Graduate Student Initiatives) and GSEF (Graduate Students Endowment Fund). GSI is run by the GSA and has a budget of \$10k per term and provides funding of up to \$500 for any initiative be it social, academic or guest lectures whereas GSEF is run by GSEF board of Directors and the funding is based on \$20 contribution made by the registered students each term. These funds help fund projects which would impact graduate students like improving graduate spaces, research travel assistantships etc. The President also*



*mentioned that funding of up to \$600 was available for small projects and up to \$10K for large projects. The President proposed an idea of dismantling GSI as GSI was ultimately directing towards GSEF. He also mentioned that there was an overlap between GSI and GSEF mandates which caused confusion between sources of funding. President also said that it would be appropriate to have a single funding initiative as this would eliminate the administrative burden for the GSA. There was a concern raised whether DGSA would still be able to apply for awards to which the President clarified that the intent of the merger was not to eliminate any application criteria or any applicable projects between GSI and GSEF but to merge them under one banner. Any type of funding received from the sources would transfer during the merger.*

*The political positions of GSA are meant to support graduate student committee on campus and within GSA's wider community reach. GSA represents graduate students' interest to the university administration and at all levels of government. The GSA Board has committed \$1K per term to support local philanthropy efforts to improve off campus stakeholder reach, to advance GSA's political positions and to support political positions within the wider Region of Waterloo. The President also mentioned that there would be a dedicated community engagement co-ordinator position which would be a part of their mandates that would help to foster their relationships within the organizations. The voting on new philanthropic efforts by the Council would be done in second month of every term. The President raised a concern on whether to consider organisations in the Region of Waterloo as most of the graduate students live in region of Waterloo or the organisations to be considered in Canada/abroad.*

*One of the Directors recommended to have an additional justification for giving money to those charitable organisations as this would mitigate some risks that the members might face as the students tend to opt out of all the fees that could go out of the GSA. This additional justification would provide students with some clarity for giving out money which would advance towards GSA's organisational objectives. The President said that this would be approved by the Council and this money should be being used for advancing political positions within the GSA in the region of Waterloo both on and off campus. This would also enable the graduate students to engage with regional stakeholders as these organisations will be involved with the graduate through webinars and stating issues relating to their mandate. There will be case by case donations made to the organisations. One of the Directors also suggested to make this into an event and make it more engaging within the community which has more support from the GSA. A Councillor also recommended donating to the organizations which do not violate the charter rights.*

*The President also mentioned that there were some research projects that were under development.*

## 12. Small Group Discussions

06:27pm

*The Councillor of History raised a concern regarding the security and surveillance software that some departments required for certain exams and certain milestones. The comprehensive exams might not be using surveillance technology. This was something that the organisation should consider and to avoid invasion in the private space of the graduate students. She clarified that this was regarding cameras in houses and bedrooms of graduate students.*

*The Councillor of Master of Peace and Conflict Studies raised the concern regarding what sort of pushback the department would get if they exceed 12 hours limit of being on campus each week which was the maximum limit to be on campus but with the new rule that stated that the Wi-fi tracking the location, what would happen if the maximum limit was exceeded.*

*The Councillor of Philosophy raised a concern that she had been getting complaints regarding having a more streamlined way of entering campus from students safely. This could be done by logging onto a portal to check the occupancy level.*

*The Councillor of Physics and Astronomy raised a concern whether an additional app was needed by the University which had an additional Wi-Fi tracking system since the Canadian Government has already formed an app which very well preserved the anonymity and was an open source app. He also mentioned that there was no need to track the location of where students were but rather record the students' last location.*

*The President commented saying that the University had been working on promoting safety while in public spaces by getting the names and phone numbers of the people registered. Some comprehensive understanding on why this approach was being chosen and there will be discussion on it in the future.*

*The Councillor of School of Planning commented that her faculty focussed on many first-year students who were unable to achieve their internship milestone. The school has not focussed on second- and third-year students who have been defending their fees or PHD students. For example, there are no resources provided to committee members when it comes to timelines on submissions of final thesis especially for the first-year students who were new to the process.*

*The Councillor of SERS raised a concern about automatically waiving a time requirement for program extension at least for two to three semesters as timeline for milestones was to be extended anyway.*

*The Councillor of Fine Arts department mentioned that University had sent a memo which said that it was engaged in a company called Alibaba Cloud which is operated in China*

*within Chinese laws and surveillance and the University said that they were using to help ensure reliable and fast internet speed for the students. She also mentioned that 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the faculty would be teaching in Fall 2020 term. She raised a concern that only some students had access to LEARN and websites like Youtube, Twitter, Facebook and Google were not permitted in China. Their department also got everything signed off for the demonstration teaching by working with the Centre for Career Excellence for the Fall 2020 term, but everything was supposed to be made online without any financial aid from the University. Some students do not have access to these sites and their department was concerned about the privacy of the students as they will have to make some adjustments.*

*The Councillor of Physics and Astronomy raised a concern that his constituents might not have access to resources if there is ban on access to the resources from within China since there are a lot of Chinese students in the University. Approach must be followed, and it could be warning before opting the course or anything. A Director also clarified that the real problem is not Alibaba cloud but Chinese policies by the government and an alternative needs to be found out for the students that were being taught in China or the University to provide some backdoor access for the students to avoid government restrictions.*

*The President addressed this and said that the issue should be taken up by the University and if it requires to change the course content to be available to the members in China, it should be addressed by the University. Response from University of Waterloo indicated that hosting on the servers would require the professors to change the course content which relates to China. There were a lot of graduate students involved in creating course content. Content like Youtube links might not be available for access to all the students in China and professors must find an alternative to the same. Another way out was to change the course content. The Councillor of Physics and Astronomy suggested that there should be some kind of 'opt-out' from the sensitive material courses or URL should be based with website-based restrictions which would make it possible for some students to continue their studies for this year and some would put it to next year.*

***Motion to adjourn the meeting. (Robbins/Bell) (19-0-8)***

### **13.Adjournment**

**06:50 pm**

*Meeting adjourned at 06:50 pm.*