



GSA COUNCIL
Notice of Meeting
 December 2, 2020
 4:00PM – 7:00PM

Zoom Meeting (Details in Outlook Invitation)

AGENDA

Time	Item	Action
4:00PM	1. SPEAKER'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS	-
4:02PM	2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA	For Approval
4:03PM	3. ATTENDANCE	For Information
4:04PM	4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES a. November 4, 2020	For Approval
4:05PM	5. UPDATE FROM THE BOARD – Reid (5 mins)	For Information
4:10PM	6. MENTAL HEALTH UPDATE – Robbins/Salman (20 mins)	For Discussion
4:30PM	7. GSPA @ Council – Casello (25 mins)	For Information
4:55PM	8. COUNCILLOR FEEDBACK I – Robbins/Small Group Discussion (30 mins)	For Discussion
5:25PM	9. EXECUTIVE UPDATE – Yeung (10 mins)	For Information
5:35PM	10. STRATFORD CAMPUS (15 mins)	For Information
5:50PM	11. ORGANIZE UW UPDATE (5 mins)	For Information
5:55PM	12. UPDATE FROM THE EQUITY COORDINATOR – Francis (30 mins)	For Information
6:25PM	13. COUNCILLOR FEEDBACK II – Reid/Small Group Discussion (35 mins)	For Discussion
7:00PM	14. ADJOURNMENT	-

MINUTES

1. Speaker's Welcome and Opening Remarks **04:01pm**

Robbins takes the chair and calls the meeting to order at 04:01pm.

2. Adoption of the Agenda **04:03pm**

Motion to approve the agenda. Approved unanimously.

3. Attendance **04:03pm**

Chugh takes the attendance.

4. Approval of Minutes **04:04pm**

The minutes of the November 04, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously.

5. Update from the Board- Reid **04:04pm**

Reid mentioned that the Board held two meetings in the past month. It was decided that the GSA will not be collecting Graduate House fees for the Winter 2021 term. A motion was passed regarding SLC/PAC expansion to approve the spending of additional funding to outfit graduate common spaces. The Board also discussed and approved Council letter on Unionization without any modification. In a special meeting, the Board discussed increased support for the unionization drive and resolved a possible violation of GP-20.

6. Mental Health Update- Robbins/Salman **04:11pm**

Salman provided an update on the conversation between himself, Robbins, and the CTE regarding the mandatory mental health training module. He mentioned that according to the feedback provided by the Councillors, there was approximately a 50-50 split on whether the pilot testers were in favour of launching the module or not.

The Vice-President (Administration) suggested that the Management needed to look at the module. The information was complete and sufficient, but it took two to three hours to complete which seemed unfair.. She suggested on making the graphics more user friendly by giving an option of either text or videos. Salman replied that the bigger benefit of using text over video was compatibility. He mentioned that they would ensure that CTE provided more of resource heavy module and less of text heavy module which

would take no more than two hours to complete. He mentioned there was a need of centralized kind of module, where further discipline-specific training could be handled by the departments.

The Vice-President (Administration) replied by saying that there was a need of module which would have 1-2 hours to complete regardless of the medium and it should be consistent across departments as stated in the open letter.

Several Councillors raised similarly noted that the module was full of information, though slightly overwhelming, and also sought clarification on compensation to graduate students and the module appearing as a milestone on a transcript. It was decided to defer a motion providing support for the module until a later meeting of Council.

7. Philanthropy Fund-Khamisa

04:32pm

The Vice-President (Communication) gave an update on the philanthropy efforts conducted by the GSA. She mentioned that GSA had hired a community development Co-ordinator and that GSA was ready to launch community engagement initiatives, which would result onto cultivating strong and positive relationships with the community.

The GSA has committed to \$1K per term to support local philanthropy efforts which will help in improving off-campus stakeholder reach, political positions of GSA within Waterloo region and engagement with the community.

The Vice-President (Communication) mentioned that to enable graduate student engagement with regional stakeholders, the GSA would be co-hosting events and webinars where the community partners can discuss issues relating to their mandate. The Community Development Co-ordinator will be facilitating some of the events.

She said that the graduate students have been invited to participate by nominating local community-based organisation with a focus on environment sustainability, mental wellness, and accessibility to Graduate students. This was a clear reflection of the political positions of the GSA. She also encouraged the GSA Council to submit their suggestions.

8. Councillor Feedback I- Robbins

04:37pm

The President of the GSA mentioned that GSA worked with GSPA and GSEF to raise additional \$60K for Graduate Students financial support which was in addition to the \$100K that was jointly raised in the spring term. The GSA is working with on campus stakeholders to solve some of the pandemic related issues.

The President mentioned that he met the incoming President of University of Waterloo. He mentioned that the Senate has requested that the President (GSA) provides an update on GSA and the Graduate students in the meeting that is to be held in February.

The main issues raised by different departments were:

- *Working overtime without compensation*
- *High tuition fees for International students and being unable to access campus facilities and labs because of the pandemic*
- *The need for more funding as students were paying high bills and more accessible funding would help in emergency situations*
- *University needs to offer improved accessibility to services and infrastructure for the students*
- *Better communication from University with regards to Internal Administrative processes that have been impacted by Covid19; there were concerns that the staff were receiving more information than students*
- *International students were unable to apply for TAs as they do not hold a Canadian Bank Account because they were unable to get to Canada due to Covid19. Students also raised concerns on whether the students can enrol out of UHIP if they are not in Canada as the students were not using it*
- *Concerns regarding the TA selection process not being standardized across engineering departments; concerns regarding domestic students being prioritized over International students.*
- *TAs were facing harassment from students in an online environment*
- *In the Science department, there were lots of students involved in field and lab work. Due to the mode of delivery going online, there were some barriers that were obstructing the students to do the research in a complete manner. So, there should be a balance formed between the Federal Public Referral consultation and the students who were stuck in this situation*
- *Feeling that other faculties were valued more than Arts because Arts does not yield a direct financial gain (even though research shows that it does)*
- *Lack of transparency when receiving funding*

9. Executive update- Yeung

05:25pm

The Vice-President (Administration) gave an update on the pressing concerns of the GSA Executive:

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ISSUES:

The Spring 2020 research report that was tabled at the Council in August 2020 came out with some major areas of concern:

- *Accommodations and living costs*
- *Adequate housing*
- *Tuition costs in comparison to other sources of funding*

- *Discrimination*
- *Employment*
- *Need for an increased support system*

Secondly, the Covid19 Impact Survey Fall 2020 came out with major concerns:

- *Financial concerns*
- *Graduate student experience and support obstructed due to Covid19 hence students facing issues with networking, permanent residency and on having a future in Canada*
- *Academic plans and success*

She mentioned that Covid19 impact survey Fall 2020 survey helped to separate International students from Domestic students.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ISSUES:

The Vice-President (Administration) gave a brief description on a specific case issue. She shared an instance that at a recent Rogers hackathon, students were at first required to sign an agreement which did not seem to align with University's policy regarding intellectual property. Intellectual property issues for hackathons, ideation sessions, and student corporate events are concerning. In addition, there are some intellectual property concerns regarding technology developed during graduate studies and funded by industry.

The GSA will be collecting information on how graduate students have been affected by intellectual property rights and the Policy Coordinator will be producing a report on Policy 73 in the coming months.

10. MDEI Program Changes

05:34pm

Ross (Stratford campus Co-ordinator of GSA) raised some student concerns regarding program changes being made.

*She listed some changes made to the MDEI program with respect to the current program like reduction in the duration by 4 months from the Master's program by removal of the **Capstone project** and instead the addition of the **on-site intensive workshop** before and after the program. The workshop is a bootcamp style learning experience with the industry and students and will be synchronised with the whole program. She mentioned that the cost would be reduced by an amount of one term's tuition for both full time and part time for both domestic and International students.*

She mentioned that the changes have not yet formally been communicated to the students. Concerns were raised about the deterioration of the quality and reputation of the program by making changes in the duration and tuition. She said that these

concerns were brought up at the town hall and a follow-up was promised on it. They were still waiting for the response from the staff on the issues raised by the student with respect to the changes made in the program.

Jason (Graduate of the MDEI program) shared the future of the Stratford Campus. He mentioned that MDEI program would be going online starting from 2021 and this program would be targeted for a specific group of people who were in the late end of their early career. This would be more targeted towards domestic part-time students.

He mentioned that some additional programs would be added to the Stratford campus. He mentioned that there would be an expansion in the infrastructure to the Stratford campus after the pandemic. The need for increased resources in terms of mental health would be required as students would have a tough time working independently and would be more isolated.

The Council Speaker asked when the changes were expected to be announced formally. Ross replied that there was no formal communication with the staff yet. The Dean of the campus was unaware of the update as well.

The Vice-President (Administration) asked whether these unregulated program changes which lacked communication have been experienced in any of the departments before. She said that it would be of interest as there have been systems with audits where a third party can look at whether program changes are essentially of the same value.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies expressed his disappointment as the changes made in the program haven't been passed through students yet and suggested the program facilitator to talk to the students to discuss the changes.

11. Organize UW Update

05:45pm

An update on Organize UW was provided. She listed some upcoming events like Faculty Discussion with AHS, an energy democracy webinar with Fossil Fuel UW (FFUW) and an International Student Webinar with RAISE and MUS.

She also listed some ongoing activities like card signing events, contests etc. She gave an update about the Anti-Racism and Union webinar that was held.

The main areas of focus that were listed were health and safety, Anti-Racism and union movement, energy, democracy and Unions and International student issues. She also mentioned that some ongoing solidarity efforts on campus were going on.

12. Equity Strategy Phase I-Francis

05:51pm

The GSA Equity Co-ordinator gave an update on the GSA's equity strategy, activities, and initiatives.

He mentioned that the objective of the Research Report: State Equity that would be produced by the end of Winter 2021 was to allow the Council and the Executives to make a more informed decision as it concerns Equity. He mentioned that they were looking at the state of Equity and the Equity initiatives at University of Waterloo in terms of Administration including campus partners.

The GSA is compiling list of equity groups on campus that are either faculty or student led.

The GSA has been focussing much of their resources on the BIPOC community. The goal was to center around the academic and social experiences of BIPOC students and to foster intergenerational mentoring. The focus was to create pathways for peer-to-peer support to Graduate students, Undergraduate students and the faculty. The goal was to conduct two events per term.

They also conducted a review of the GSA Services and Student Support. The focus of Student Advising and Support Pathways was for students who experience discrimination. They were working with student engagement on recruitment. They partnered with Waterloo Indigenous Student Services, Indigenous Initiatives, and Human Rights Equity Inclusion Office.

The GSA Equity Co-ordinator mentioned that a policy review was in the process of being done. He said that the University's Equity Data Advisory Committee has been compiling data on students and that GSA was helping to form a strategy by being a member of this committee.

The Vice-President (Communication) mentioned that the updates were just for Phase I of Equity Strategy which focusses on building relationships with campus partners, making use of affiliated networks, and the graduate students who were already working on these issues. The Equity Co-ordinator has been tasked on dealing with University's Administration to ensure to have a continuous representation in the conversations that the GSA has advocated for.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy asked if there was anything that the departmental Councillors' part to be done. The Vice-President (Communication) replied that there were some attempts in departments to setup Anti-Racism Task Force. It would be of value if the Councillors would build relationships with the students in their departments who were facilitating these initiatives. This would provide them the support and help to create a pathway where the students who were working on these initiatives can come to the Councillors and they can provide feedback to these bigger Council

meetings. She also mentioned that through GSA, they will be collecting the feedback and stories anonymously of the students who have experienced discrimination.

The Councillor from Philosophy asked if the departments already had an Anti-racism Task Force and how many existed at the departmental and faculty level. The Vice-President (Communication) replied that students were already working before the formation of Equity Strategy and some of the departments forwarded their list of demands through their own run Anti-Racism Task Force. There have been efforts made to get these students and DGSA involved in this who already have been delivering it.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies expressed that their department had no people of colour and were all white. He asked what kind of role their department would have in term of Equity Strategy as they do not have any Anti-Racism Task Force and no representation of anyone. The Equity Co-ordinator replied that his role was to examine equity in all sorts be it gender equity or physical equity. The Vice-President (Communication) said that work was being done to codify the concept of Equity, which would be easier for the students to come up with any kind of discrimination that they have experienced.

The Councillor from Philosophy asked if the undergraduate students should be involved. The Vice-President (Communication) replied that the main agenda of the Equity Strategy was to prevent isolation and their aim was to create space to make it less fragmented. The main motive was to get rid of intergenerational component. Undergraduate students have been active and aggressive on addressing equity on campus. She mentioned that we could facilitate intergenerational mentoring. Undergraduate students who are considering graduate school can ask what it was like to be in graduate school from the perspective of senior students. We can work with Undergraduate students to create a legacy work and provide access transitions across generations.

The Councillor from RLS noted that her department was working on Anti-Racism Task Force with an external consultant hired with the department. She had asked if this organisation would only connect with student run groups or would help facilitate with groups who have external consultants. One of her concerns was that when the consultant left the role, the implementation of the suggestions might not be done in a way that would be valuable to the department. The Equity Co-ordinator answered that the GSA is trying to create a reference for Councillors and begin to codify within terms of GSA policies. He mentioned that once the work of the external consultant has completed, the goal would be to implement the policies and procedure, which could then be shared with the GSA.

The Vice-President (Communication) concluded by noting that this is an ongoing process and the GSA is developing deeper relationships with campus partners who already doing this work.

13. Councillor Feedback II- Reid

06:18pm

There have been some concerns regarding the role of Councillors and as there have been governance changes, there is a difficulty in defining how and where Council fits into the GSA. The Board wants to prioritise defining the roles and responsibilities of the different sections and committees in GSA. This will help improve overall satisfaction and productivity.

Within small group discussions, Councillors expressed motivation on their role as a Councillor. Below is a summary of the issues discussed during a debriefing session:

Engineering:

- 1. Most of the Councillors in this group had prior involvement in undergraduate student associations, which motivated their transition to the role of a Councillor of GSA.*
- 2. Councillors felt that they were more accountable as they were responsible for the concerns of the fellow students being raised and heard by the GSA .*
- 3. Councillors are looking for a positive change in the student's life in their department and on campus. The goal was to create a community of graduate students within their department and represent the concerns of their constituents and help them solve their problems*
- 4. They want the GSA to be more visible to the other student bodies in general because many people were unaware on the existence of the GSA.*
- 5. Councillors mentioned leadership , community outreach, public speaking, and building personal, academic, and professional connections, as skills developed through working as a Councillor.*
- 6. Councillors recommended that GSA can improve communications by being more direct and frequent with the Councillors and to the student body, which will help Councillors better engage with the campus community.*
- 7. Councillors suggested that GSA should have a database/repository of what the previous Councillors in each department did in their roles, as there is otherwise a loss of knowledge and institutional memory.*

Arts:

- 1. The motivation behind becoming a Councillor was the interest in Unionization Drive. In Arts, some department were very insular and do not interact with other departments due to several reasons like tight turnover rate etc. and by becoming a Councillor, one can become more involved with the larger Graduate community. Another reason for becoming a Councillor was the lack of student advocacy in the department. The Councillors' major motivation was to bring*

things to their departments which they would not have known otherwise and vice versa back to GSA.

- 2. The goal was to make students get more involved in the department and in the Graduate Student community and to foster cross-departmental collaborations*
- 3. Skills that the Councillors wanted to develop were articulating and acting on the concerns of constituents, conflict resolution, constructive disagreement, policy reading skills, and how to do strategic planning*
- 4. Issues raised by the Councillors was regarding the long three hours meeting held by the GSA which could sometimes be draining. Another suggestion made by the new Councillor was to conduct peer to peer mentoring by the GSA. Councillors suggested to consider advocacy training which would train how to bring an issue up to the GSA at Council meetings, how to effectively discuss it with departmental GSAs and their membership, and how to talk to the Administration in their departments essentially.*
- 5. The Councillors were appreciative of the top-down tone and they want the breakout discussion session to be continued as this makes everyone have an equal say*
- 6. The Councillors not only want to know their positions within the GSA but also want to know that their issues have been discussed and what action was going to be taken.*

AHS:

- 1. The main motivation was to be engaged, transparent and to communicate more with the constituents in their department. Some of the Councillors mentioned that there was a lack of communication before becoming a Councillor*
- 2. The Councillors were happy with the idea of Unionization with the Board approving the open letter*
- 3. More expansion should be done in other areas of mental health issues*
- 4. There are limited opportunities to get into activism on campus, motivating some to become a Councillor*
- 5. It is a good idea to have breakout room discussions as Councillors feel more comfortable in smaller groups and are able to contribute more*
- 6. Some Councillors wanted to engage more with their constituents, and they were facing difficulty due to the virtual world*

Environment:

- 1. The motivation for joining Council was interest in representing their constituents*
- 2. Due to lack of space in a survey on the role of Council that was sent out prior to the Council meeting, there was not enough to explain how the understanding of the role of the Councillor had changed*

3. *The presentations in the meetings in the Council made them aware of the Corporate structure of the GSA. They appreciated the way it was presented as they had some preconceived notions about regular student bodies*
4. *Some Councillors are concerned that the Board has the final say over the decisions of the GSA.*

A Director raised a concern that the Councillors had regarding the feedback asked through surveys. Councillors felt the mental health module was communicated in a very clear manner.

The Vice-President (Communication) mentioned that the Executives were working with the Professional Development office to create a training program for Council members.

Science:

1. *Some Councillors felt that their department had a tradition of saying that GSA actions were not directly coming to the students and their department. They had a tradition of checking with the Councillor on what was going on within GSA to keep them locked in with student advocacy*
2. *Councillors wanted to know their influence was on GSA mandate*

The President mentioned that GSA has some new processes for leveraging the feedback from Council and to action the feedback within the management. As the issues were dynamic and varied, they were sent through Council approved letters to the Graduate Students Relations Committee. He assured that the time of Councillors at the Council meetings was valued.

14. Adjournment

07:07pm

Motion to adjourn the meeting was passed at 07:07pm