



GSA COUNCIL
Notice of Meeting
February 24, 2021
11:00AM – 11:50AM
Zoom Meeting (Details in Outlook Invitation)

AGENDA

Time	Item	Action
11:00AM	1. SPEAKER'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS	-
11:02AM	2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA	For Approval
11:03AM	3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS	
11:03AM	4. ATTENDANCE	For Information
11:05AM	5. COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY (25 mins)	For Information
11:30AM	6. GSA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR UPDATE. – Mutumba (20 mins)	For Information
11:50AM	7. ADJOURNMENT	-
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MINUTES:

1. Speaker's Welcome and Opening Remarks **11:01am**

Robbins takes the chair and calls the meeting to order at 11:01am.

2. Adoption of the Agenda **11:03am**

Motion to approve the agenda. Approved unanimously.

3. Declaration of Interests **11:03am**

No conflicts of interest are declared.

4. Attendance **11:04am**

Chugh takes the attendance.

5. COVID-19 Impact Survey **11:04am**

The Vice-President (Administration) presented the results of COVID-19 Impact Survey-Fall 2020. The survey had five sections: demographic information, financial concerns, academic plans and success, TAs and supervisory relationships and graduate student experiences and supports.

*As per the **demographics**, the faculty of engineering responded the most. Mainly Canadian citizens responded but also permanent residents and international students. Mainly PhD students responded but research masters and professional based masters responded too. She mentioned that they asked two additional questions that were related to race and ethnicity and indigenous identity. They asked whether any discrimination due to Covid19 impacted the mental health of the students. Most of the people were white with respect to race and ethnicity. There were some indigenous students.*

Responses were clustered into four groups. Group 1 has International, Non-White, Upper-year PhD students in ENG and MATH. Group 2 has Domestic, Upper-Year PhD students not in ENG or MATH. Group 3 has Domestic, White, 1st year master's not in ENG or MATH. Group 4 has International 1st year master's in ENG and MATH.

*As per the **finances**, more students reported a decreased income since March 2020 during the pandemic. Group 4 were more likely to report a decreased income. The primary reason for decrease in income was a depletion of savings. Group 1 and Group 4 were more likely to report funding concerns.*

With respect to the **academia**, she mentioned that students were asked if they felt setback from completing their degree, with the majority of students responding that they were, especially in Groups 1 and 2 which were upper-year students. The reasons for students being dissatisfied with working from home was because of lack of daily structure and inappropriate workspaces. The students have also been facing difficulty in working in labs due to the reduction of hours to access the campus. Some students also mentioned that they had to change their thesis project. Students experienced changes and delays in reaching milestones. For those students taking courses, they were dissatisfied because international students experienced poor communication and online administration. 1st year students felt that feedback, support and discussion on online courses was poor.

With respect to **TAing**, students responded that TAing has been a challenge during the pandemic. It was noted that International 1st year students in ENG and MATH are much likely to receive a TAship than other groups. Most cited three reasons that were the sources of difficulty are: providing guidance to students, time spent answering to emails, and difficulty in communicating with students. International students were most likely to cite work converting course material to an online format as a challenge.

Most students reported no change in the **supervisory relationship**. Group 1 and Group 4 were more likely to cite poorly communicated expectations as a problem between them and their supervisor. Group 4 was more likely to cite personal priorities they placed above their supervisor relationship like caregiving duties at home, mental health concerns, etc. Group 2 was more likely to cite supervisor priorities being placed above the relationship between the students and the supervisor.

More students indicated a significantly worsened **well-being** since April. Lack of physical activity and social contact were the top contributors across all groups with respect to deteriorated mental health. Upper year students were more concerned with their progress than 1st year students while 1st year students were more concerned with course administration. Mental well-being for International and non-white students was affected due to the having cited income changes and discrimination. Domestic students were more concerned about networking and making friends during the pandemic. Also, very few people were aware of the supports. Financial supports are also less known and less used than other supports. OSAP financial support was the most dominantly used financial support by Group 2 and Group 3.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies asked for clarity about the grouping of students. He pointed out that no group covers the 1st year PhD students. The Vice-President (Administration) replied that they cannot generalise every single

group, but they do have information on other group of students and analysis can be done to extract information from the data. The Councillor from Statistics and Actuarial Sciences mentioned that there could be many different sub-groups, but they did not have enough responses for all other combinations of sub-groups to get an idea of what those sub-groups think. So, the groups were made in such a way that the responses of the sub-groups formed a cluster. He mentioned there were not many 1st year PhD respondents. The grouping was done based on the responses.

The Councillor from Global Governance comment that she was interested to know more about mental health amongst international students with regards to discrimination. She was interested to know if this area saw a difference in the two surveys and if this could be mapped onto the rise of racial awareness. The Vice-President (Administration) replied that they did not collect racial and ethnicity information in the first survey, and they would not be able to make a concrete comparison. A significant decline in the mental health of the students could be seen from both the surveys and a reason could be the discrimination amongst the students. Discrimination could be a problem in Group 1 and Group 4 as it represents non-white students.

The Councillor from School of Optometry and Vision Science asked if there was any statistically significant testing done between the groups as the sample sizes of the groups would have been different. The Councillor from Statistics and Actuarial Sciences mentioned that as shown in the presentation, the grid type representation is visually easy to interpret results. Within the grids, there are different bar heights and any test between those grids would come out significant for all the groups. He mentioned it was easy to provide p-values for the results in the presentation to check for significance.

The Council Speaker asked how the GSA would make use of the survey results and which piece of information should the Councillors disseminate back to their constituents. The Vice-President (Administration) replied that GSA has planned on putting a set of recommendations primarily to the GSPA and to some other stakeholders too. She mentioned it had already been presented to couple of groups on campus including GSPA, CTE (Centre for Teaching Excellence), library and CCA (Centre for Career Action). Lack of accessibility to resources and financial supports would need to be looked into. Some major takeaways from the survey would the decline of mental health since March and certain groups were more affected than others.

The Councillor from Global Governance mentioned that CTE would appreciate the student teaching part of the presentation.

The Councillor from Biology asked if there were any efforts being done by the Councillors on the term extensions and was there any appetite for extensions to

increase by two or more terms. He mentioned that his department was unaware of the one term extension and the degrees would be slowed down by these extensions.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies mentioned that his department was aware of the extension by one term but there would be an appetite for extensions for some students. He mentioned that the University will not be extending funding in case of an extension.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy mentioned that his department does not highlight the term 'extension' but the department is generally flexible about meeting the specific deadlines. He mentioned that the deadlines are not being communicated well.

The Councillor from ECE asked if the deadlines for the awards could be extended if the program extensions are imposed.

6. GSA Community Development Co-ordinator Update- Mutumba 11:32am

The GSA Community Development Co-ordinator gave an update on GSA Community Development. She mentioned the goal as a GSA Community Development Co-ordinator was to cultivate strong and positive relations with the broader community.

The GSA Community Development Co-ordinator mentioned that her team started a PoliticsToday series to promote graduate student engagement with current political themes in Waterloo region. This is an opportunity for the graduate students who are not from Canada to understand the Canadian Governance structure and the key issues being discussed. She mentioned that they would be discussing more about indigenous actions and journalism and critical engagement.

The GSA Community Development Co-ordinator mentioned that they have been compiling events in the Waterloo region each month to facilitate graduate student engagement in the community and these events are published in the monthly newsletter.

The GSA Community Development Co-ordinator mentioned that they looked at the community organizations which aligns with the political ends of GSA. This provided with a database and opportunity to think about how the GSA could engage with these organisations in the future .

The GSA Community Development Co-ordinator mentioned that they have been working on their LinkedIn account to showcase GSA as a "brand" and connect with key stakeholders. She mentioned a Philanthropy Fund Initiative has been initiated to identify local community-based organizations in Waterloo region meeting community needs in a way that aligns with GSA's political ends.

The GSA Community Development Co-ordinator gave a brief outline of the GSA's political positions and relation to possible organizations receiving the Philanthropy Fund. The first political position relates to Bridges to Belonging Waterloo Region, which supports unique abilities community members and allowing them to live a life without barriers. The second political position relates to Social Development centre for Waterloo region, with a goal to provide equitable access to everyone in the Waterloo region. The third political position relates to Wisahkotewinowak Gardens, with a goal to empower indigenous community amongst things with respect to food sustainability; Climate Action Waterloo Region, which supports climate change mitigation; Power Shift, which is improving and strengthening sustainability efforts in the region of Waterloo; Sustainable Waterloo Region, whose focus is on helping the local organisations to convert their sustainability interest into action. The fourth political position relates to Sanguen's Harm Reduction, with a focus on peer outreach opioid harm reduction; Spectrum is Waterloo's first LGBTQ community, which is providing a safe space and a sense of collective belonging to LGBTQ community; Sexual Assault Support Centre for Waterloo Region, working on transforming systems which promote gender-based violence; African Caribbean and Black (ACB) Network Waterloo Region, is working on strengthening the voices of ACB people in the community through criminal justice, economics, employment, health and wellness; The Working Centre supports employment and housing .CKMS radio is providing a diverse programming which is inclusive of all the cultures and backgrounds found in the greater-Waterloo community.

The Councillors were asked to nominate the organizations, with a link provided to do so.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy asked for clarification about the nomination form. He asked for clarity about whether the \$1000 funding service available for the organizations would apply to the most-nominated organisation or would be distributed between the organisations. GSA Community Development Co-ordinator clarified that the \$1000 funding amount would be given to one organization per term. The other nominated organizations would be getting this funding each term towards them.

The Council Speaker asked about where to access PoliticsToday. GSA Community Development Co-ordinator replied that there was a link to it on the GSA website.

7. Adjournment

11:57am

Motion to adjourn the meeting was passed at 11:57am.