



GSA COUNCIL
Notice of Meeting
March 30, 2021
4:30PM – 6:00PM

Zoom Meeting (Details in Outlook Invitation)

AGENDA

| Time | Item | Action |
|-------------|--|-----------------|
| 4:30PM | 1. SPEAKER'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS | - |
| 4:32PM | 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA | For Approval |
| 4:33PM | 3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS | |
| 4:33PM | 4. ATTENDANCE | For Information |
| 4:35PM | 5. INTRODUCTION OF SPEAKERS (15 mins) | For Information |
| 4:50PM | 6. BREAKOUT SESSIONS BY FACULTY (55 mins) | For Discussion |
| 5:45PM | 7. WRAP-UP (15 mins) | For Discussion |
| 6:00PM | 8. ADJOURNMENT | - |
| — | | |

MINUTES:

1. Speaker's Welcome and Opening Remarks **04:31pm**

Robbins takes the chair and calls the meeting to order at 04:31pm.

2. Adoption of the Agenda **04:33pm**

Motion to approve the agenda. Approved unanimously.

3. Declaration of Interests **04:33pm**

No interests are declared.

4. Attendance **04:34pm**

Chugh takes the attendance.

5. Introduction of Speakers **04:34pm**

All the deans from different faculties introduced themselves.

- **Jeff Casello**

- *Associate VP of GSPA; jointly appointed to the School of Planning in the Faculty of Environment and Civil and Environmental Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering.*
- *His research work revolves around how transportation system affects the social, economic, and environmental health of the cities.*

- **Liz Nilsen**

- *Assistant VP in GSPA; a Professor in Psychology and clinical psychologist by profession.*
- *Her role at GSPA involves supporting students who are stuck in situations navigating University's systems and what processes and resources should be used to provide the students with clarity. Secondly, her role supports the people who support graduate students, e.g. by improving the supervisor training.*

- **Shawn Wettig**

- *Assistant VP in GSPA.*
- *His role is to assist students so that they can navigate various aspects of the policies and procedures at the University of Waterloo. He works with faculty and associate deans to look at new program developments.*

- **Marianne Simm**
 - *Director of GSPA.*
 - *Her role involves working with the Associate Directors and the Managers and supporting students with recruitment related activities, awards, and records related to student experience.*

- **Anna Esselment**
 - *Associate Dean of Arts.*
 - *She has helped students in different capacities. She has served as an Associate Chair in the department of Political Science. She has also served as a Department Chair for a couple of years. Her most recent position was the Acting Director of the Master of Public Service program.*
 - *Her present role involves meeting students from different departments which excites her the most.*

- **Siva Sivoththaman**
 - *Associate Dean of Engineering.*
 - *He was a Graduate Associate Chair with Electrical and Computer Engineering department for four years back in 2008 and got familiar with the administration of the graduate studies. In his present role, he interacts with the eight units (6 departments and 2 schools). He interacts with students, supervisors, and graduate associates.*

- **Peter Deadman**
 - *Interim Associate Dean of the Graduate Studies in Environment.*
 - *He was a Chair of Geography for almost 8 years. He has worked with graduate students on projects in Canada and other parts of the world. His present role involves working with graduate students from master's and PhD programs.*

- **Brian Laird**
 - *Associate Dean of the Faculty of Health; Associate Professor at the School of Public Health and Health systems. His research is in toxicology and environmental health.*
 - *He interacts with the graduate students on the issues being faced by them like campus closures due to Covid19 and is looking forward on helping the students with these issues.*

- **Martin Ross**

- *Associate Dean of Science; Associate Professor at the department of Earth in Environmental Sciences.*
- *He mentioned that they have been reviewing more than 100 OGS students' applications for the week and it is fascinating to see the topics that the students want to research.*
- **Adam Kolkiewicz**
 - *Associate Dean in the Faculty of Math; Faculty member in the department of Statistics and Science.*
 - *He has worked for the graduate students at different capacities all his life. He started as a Department Chair in the department of Mathematics. In his present role, he supervises large number masters and PhD students and enjoys working with them.*

6. Breakout sessions by Faculty

04:49pm

Within small group discussions, the Councillors raised the issues being faced by the graduate students and the strengths of their programs.

7. Wrap-Up

05:47pm

A summary of the discussions and concerns raised is below:

- **ENG/MATH**
 - *Concerns regarding safety in the labs during the times of pandemic. The safety documents for the labs should be posted and it is the responsibility of the supervisor to enforce it.*
 - *The “quarantine package” is being implemented in the Math department. This would support the 3-day quarantine at the hotel, and it is left to the decision of the dean of a particular department to fund the expense or not.*
 - *Concerns regarding over-working of the TAs, the eligibility for being a TA and funding for the teaching assistantship.*
 - *There were considerations going on for both remote learning and in class learning for graduate students. There will be consultation with Public Health regarding whether the people will be required to have vaccines to attend classes in person.*
- **ARTS/ENV**
 - *Concerns regarding the transparency with respect to TA funding. This involved where the funding was coming from and how much money to expect.*

- *Clarity on the 10-hour cap should be provided to the students and the TAs should be compensated for the over time.*
- *Concerns regarding expansion in the funding due to limited resources in the Arts department. This is needed because there are students who are getting delayed in their research work due to the pandemic.*
- *Concerns regarding lack of diversity in the Faculty of Arts.*
- *Guidelines from Public Health should be provided so that the graduate students from Faculty of Environment can plan out projects and research work.*
- *The next steps would include meetings between Deans and the Councillors on a regular basis and not just getting information through GSA.*
- **AHS/SCI**
 - *Issues related to TAs, such as how TAs are assigned.*
 - *Issues related to the base funding levels as this is a major concern as it affects the living costs.*
 - *Supervisors can help the students to provide the necessary support.*
 - *Communication should be kept open within a department with the faculty level GSAs, Associate Chairs etc.*
 - *The next steps would include ways by which faculty-level GSA would follow up on the concerns as they arrive.*

Casello mentioned that the Policy 30 describes the governance of TAs. The new draft policy will address that there needs to be transparency around how TAs are selected, and it should be guided by the skillset of the students. The expectations from teaching assistantship will be covered by this policy and it will mandate that the instructors and the students have regular communication. This policy is a huge improvement in the relationship between instructors and the TA.

8. Adjournment

06:10pm

Motion to adjourn the meeting was raised at 06:10pm.

9. Appendix

Within the small group discussions, different departments and associate deans brought up some issues and suggestions.

AHS/SCI:

- *Suggestions on having regular administration meetings.*

- *Holding meetings with associate teams and graduate student representatives.*
- *Possibility of having a faculty wide GSA.*
- *Associate Dean of Science suggested that Physics department could contact him with respect to TA related issues as he could provide some accountability.*
- *Some departments were raising issues that all the graduate students cannot have TAs.*
- *RLS department is over-enrolled.*
- *With respect to the base funding level not being sufficient, the associate deans mentioned that negotiation is an important aspect, but the burden of negotiation should not be on the graduate students. They mentioned that the supervisors do have leeway to set the funding levels so that there is more funding for projects.*
- *Councillors suggested that the new governance policy for TAs should reform on how TAs are assigned and should base the selection on pedagogy and skillset to seek for improvement.*

ENG/MATH:

- *Councillors suggested that the department should offer more courses as some courses are offered every two years.*
- *Associate Dean of Engineering clarified that the resources are limited when it comes to offering more courses and enrolment numbers play a major role in this process. He suggested that the graduate students should not wait until last minute for the enrolment process.*
- *One of the Councillors pointed that there is a drop in TA funding as only 3/4 TA positions are made available per year. So, there is more responsibility and less funding for the TA.*
- *Associate Dean of Math clarified that some units have changed their funding models, and this could be related to professor's own funding.*
- *Jeff Casello mentioned that large undergraduate enrolment leads to the need for more TAs. International students cannot serve as TAs due to lack of Social Insurance Number.*
- *Councillors raised a concern on understaffing in department.*
- *TAs were overworking and not being compensated.*
- *Associate Dean of Engineering clarified that the TA hours will be monitored, and over working hours will be recorded.*
- *The return to the classes will require a lot of planning. Jeff Casello said if the vaccines are made available to the University, the University will offer vaccine in the public health office.*
- *Councillor raised concern with respect to safety in the lab. The students are not communicated properly as information goes to staff rather than graduate*

students. Associate Dean of Engineering mentioned that the safety document should be posted by the supervisor.

- *Jeff Casello mentioned that he will discuss with faculty deans if the faculties are able to support the quarantine package reimbursements.*
- *The difference between TA workload for different departments is because it depends on the professor and what he offers in terms of grants.*
- *Jeff Casello clarified that MSE has been extended by one term. IMA/IMSA has been less in number in 2021 because the total number of students reduced in the department of engineering. He mentioned that University had made available IMSA for half tuition for all international masters' students or years. The government of Ontario gives 0 IMA for PhD and master students, but University gives half tuition back for international masters' students.*

ARTS/ENV:

- *The Councillors mentioned that they were satisfied with how the professors were empathising and dealing with students of color.*
- *The communication with the department with respect to awards and deadlines has been good.*
- *The department tries to be intersectional in its pedagogy and research but there is no variety in the research methodology that is being taught.*
- *There were concerns with respect to grade weighing and expectations from the courses. There is no transparency on how funding works. Arts has lack of diversity in department and faculty.*
- *Associate Dean of Arts broke down the funding division for domestic PhD students. She said the departments should communicate to the students when they will be TAing well in advance. She mentioned that there will be discussions on clarifying the international student funding.*
- *Students are concerned about the impact due to Covid19 on the research work.*
- *Associate Dean of Environment suggested that the students can reach out to them regarding funding extensions. There are initiatives to decolonize environment and its courses.*
- *Assistant VP in GSPA mentioned that the goal of the process to apply for a program extension is for the graduate students to connect with supervisor and committee to determine what the student requires to be successful.*
- *Arts does grant an automatic three-term extension after 4th year (not funded) but Arts does not have enough funds to pay for the extra terms.*
- *The Councillors would want more BIPOC faculty and students.*

- *Concerns regarding forcing the students to deregister or move to part time studies if they were working off campus. Jeff Casello clarified that this is not a University policy.*
- *Students should be able to decide how many hours they can work and should be communicated with the supervisor.*
- *The University cannot regulate off-campus employment of the students.*