

Graduate Student Association UW

Council

Meeting Minutes

June 2, 2021

Primary Meeting

Date: June 2, 2021

Time: 4:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.

Place: Virtual

Council Speaker: Tyler B. Hampton

Minutes Taker: Niveta Chugh



MEETING ATTENDENCE

Name	Position/Faculty	Attendance*
Tyler Hampton	Council Speaker	P
MK Stinson	AHS - Rec & Leisure Studies	P
Kalsha Diaguarachchige De Silva	AHS - Kinesiology	P
Sue Sherifali	AHS - Public Health & Health Systems	P
Danielle LaBrash	Arts - Political Science	P
Elizabeth Scarlettte	Arts - MPS	R
Ethel Zlotnik	Arts - MDEI	P
Iman Sultana	Arts - Peace & Conflict Studies	P
Jessica Gill	Arts - Sociology	P
Kennedy Westlake	Arts - Psychology	P
Jillian Adams	Arts - Accounting & Finance	P
Khusro Mir	Arts - Economics	P
Lara El Mekkwawi	Arts - English Language & Literature	P
Lisa Duggan	Arts - Religious Studies	P
Lucy Hinton	Arts - Global Governance	P
Sam Schrim	Arts - Germanic & Slavic Studies	P
Sarah Galarneau	Arts - Fine Arts	P
Tasneem Alsayyed Ahmad	Arts - Philosophy	A
Teghan Barton	Arts - History	P
Akshat Atray	Eng - Management Sciences	A
Helene Chow	Eng - CEE	P
Jared Uramowski	Eng - MME	A
Meryem Chahbou	Eng - Architecture	R
Mozhgan Sadeghianlemraski	Eng - ECE	P
Nargess Heydari Beni	Eng - SDE	P
Wali ur Rehman Zia	Eng - MBET	P
Anju George	Enviro - Planning	P
Caitlin Laidlaw	Enviro - GEM	A
Kaylia Little	Enviro - SEED	P
Misty Matthews	Enviro - SERS	P
Jyler Menard	Math - Computational Math	P
Mojtaba Valipour	Math - Computer Science	P
William Bell	Math - Applied Mathematics	P
Adrian Van Dyk	Science - Biology	P
Jesse St Jean	Science - Pharmacy	P
Juliette Teodoro	Science - Optometry and Vision	P
Michael Chapman	Science - Physics and Astronomy	P
Joshua Woodcock	Theo - Theological Studies	A
Naima Samuel	UW Senate	R

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Onurcan Gokkaya	UW Senate	
Max Salman	UW Senate	
Cyrus Fiori	GSA Board	A
Nicholas Palaschuk	GSA Board	R
Elham Mohammadi	GSA Board	R
Samira Mehrabi	GSA Board	P
Yi Wang	GSA Board	P
Ruby Aigbotsua	GSA Board	P
Amir Hosein Sadeghi Isfahani	GSA Board	P
Twesh Upadhyaya	GSA Board	A
David Benjamin Billedeau	GSA President	P
Cindy Yeung	GSA VP Administration	P
Zabeen Khamisa	GSA VP Communication	P

*Attendance

P – Present , R – Regrets , A – Absent (no regrets)

AGENDA

Time	Item		Length (min)	Action
4:00 PM	1	SPEAKER'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS	5	
4:05 PM	2	ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA	1	For Approval
4:06 PM	3	DECLARATION OF INTERESTS	1	
4:07 PM	4	ATTENDANCE	1	
4:08 PM	5	APPROVAL OF MINUTES - May 5, 2021	2	For Approval
4:10 PM	6	ORGANIZE UW UPDATE	5	For Information
4:15 PM	7a	Presentation: Impact of External Funding - Jacqueline Harper (Data Analysis & Report Design Coordinator)	20	For Discussion
4:35 PM	7b	Introduction to GSPA Funding Principles - David	5	
4:40 PM	7c	Breakout discussion on Funding Themes	25	
5:05 PM	7d	Reporting from Breakout Rooms	20	
5:25 PM		5-minute break	5	
5:30 PM	8	UPDATE FROM THE BOARD	5	For Information
5:35 PM	9	GSEF-GSI Streamlined Program - VP Cindy	15	For Discussion
5:50 PM	10a	Breakout Discussions on Return to Campus, COVID Vaccination Access, International Students arriving in Canada	25	For Discussion
6:15 PM	10b	Reporting from Breakout Rooms	20	-
6:35 PM		Adjournment		

MINUTES

1. Speaker's Welcome and Opening Remarks 04:03pm

Hampton takes the chair and calls the meeting to order at 04:03pm.

2. Adoption of the Agenda 04:06pm

Agenda adopted by unanimous consent.

3. Declaration of Interests 04:07pm

No conflicts of interest were declared.

4. Attendance 04:07pm

Chugh takes the attendance.

5. Approval of minutes 04:08pm

The minutes of the May 5, 2021, meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

6. Organize UW Update 04:11pm

The Councillor from Recreation and Leisure Studies gave an update on Organize UW. She mentioned that a Return to Campus webinar was to be held on June 9th at 5pm. The ABCs of STEM and unions was to be held on June 24th at 5pm.

Organize UW published its Mental Health Article in the month of May. It was picked up by insideWaterloo which is a new local publication that focusses on amplifying the voices of Black, Indigenous, and racialized people of Kitchener and Waterloo region.

Organize UW wants to hear from graduate students about requests for new webinars and articles.

7. Funding 04:15pm

7a: Impact of External Awards on Graduate Student Funding: 04:15pm

Jacqueline Harper (GSA Data Analysis and Report Design Coordinator) presented to the Council. Graduate students are awarded internal funding to pay for their education which could be through scholarships, TA ship or RA ship. She said that the students who receive external funding such as OGS or the tri-agency award may be penalized for their external award success as they cannot opt-in for their internal funding along with it. This was a matter of concern as external award should be seen as an incentive to cover the tuition and living expenses beyond the current funding for the graduate students and any reduction to overall funding can be seen as a deterrent to the external funding.

Jacqueline mentioned that she is seeking feedback from each department on what happens within their departments with respect to external funding. The information will then be compared with

the U15 universities.

Jacqueline listed the four main questions that were supposed to be answered in the group discussions.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy asked what the method is of contacting the other U15 universities to know about their funding methodologies. Jacqueline clarified that they will be contacting their GSA's and will be getting information from them.

Jacqueline introduced the breakout room questions.

- 1. What is the procedure for your department when a student receives external funding (e.g. a Tri-Agency Award, MITACS, or OGS)?*
 - a. How did you come to learn this information? (e.g. academic advisor, supervisor, department's website).*
 - b. How transparent is this information?*
- 2. What happens to a student's internal funding from the department/faculty after an external funding source has been awarded?*
- 3. Have students from your department stated that they receive equivalent or less funding by accepting an external award than if they were to solely keep their internal funding package? What happened?*

7b: Discussion: Funding Principles

04:22pm

The President mentioned that the funding principles are designed to influence the process and outcome of funding discussions between the administration and the graduate students. He presented the funding principles that were proposed by GSPA and were rejected by the Council in February of 2021. The President asked the councilors to discuss which funding principles should guide the discussions on graduate student funding levels and how the Council would like to be engaged with the members of administration. He mentioned that the councillors should discuss what they would like to see because of discussions and negotiations.

7c: Faculty breakout rooms

25 minutes

7d: Funding Principles reporting from breakout rooms:

AHS

- There is no clear mechanism with regards having both external funding along with internal funding. Different departments have different methods for international students and other students. International students are essentially de-incentived for applying to funding like OGS and they lose their internal funding.*
- People who won external awards would have their awards topped up by the University up to a sum of \$10K or would lose their internal funding outright based on arbitrary needs.*
- Some students cannot apply for external funding at all and may not be internally funded.*
- Everyone wants to know the mechanism for the accountability of the funding principles in the*

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University.

- *University should pay attention to the wellness of the students and “safety nets” should be available for the students immediately and barrier free.*
- *Minimum funding needs to be adjusted keeping in mind that Waterloo is expensive.*

The Speaker Council said that the former GSA Director wrote about student rental market in Waterloo on the slack channel.

Arts I

- *The procedure for external funding differs from department to department.*
- *There were issues with respect to transparency on external funding and a lot of departments said that this information was not made available on websites. Lots of information was received through graduate coordinators over emails.*
- *Departments received the same amount of funding as promised.*
- *There is a lack of communication on where the funding was coming from. Students noticed that the funding was coming from the majority of TAships.*
- *Concerns about what “financially possible” meant in the proposed funding principles.*
- *Issues with BIPOC individuals having less social and financial support networks.*
- *Concerns on what the University considers to be an ideal graduate student and ideal researcher based on the funding principles.*

Arts II

- *Significant difference in the procedure for different departments when it comes to external funding.*
- *Offer letter advertises transparently the minimum funding amount and says that the graduate students can apply for OGS.*
- *There are cases where student meet graduate coordinators before accepting the offers. Even in verbal communication, they are not explaining any sort of callback which is a drawback when it comes to decision making purposes.*
- *There is vagueness in terms of procedure if students lose the internal funding and this would lead to them losing their ability to do a TAship. TAship for some students means gaining relevant experience.*
- *Many instances of students going to other departments and other universities to do a TAship to meet their budgetary needs.*
- *Students do not get to keep the entire amount after they accept OGS.*
- *In terms of funding principles, councillors are confused as they want to know what happened to their previous feedback as they do not notice any significant difference in the stated funding principles.*
- *Transparency is a major concern when it comes to funding principles. Principles should be more action oriented.*
- *There should be a faculty contact for concerns dealing with policy language, transparency etc.*
- *Arts is already at minimum funding and concerns regarding if they would see any change in scholarship in the arts department.*
- *Concerns on “safety nets”.*

The Council Speaker asked how this feedback session is different from the feedback session held earlier for funding principles. The President said that the Council feedback would be forwarded to Jeff Casello and GSRC. He wants to ensure that this discussion would provide with clarity on what the Councillors

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want to see in the process and as an outcome. He mentioned that this was talked in the past at a higher level in the initial draft posted by Jeff. After this discussion, the President will be drafting the principles and then forward to administration.

Eng+Math

- *It is up to the supervisor when one receives an external award and if you are going to replace it internal funding. The procedure is unclear and students get to know about this conflict once they accept the offer.*
- *Students do not know that OGS replaces only GRS before applying external scholarship.*
- *Students receive less money after external award. Students should go for an award only if the supervisor forces them or students want it on their resume.*
- *Funding principles are not clear.*
- *Lack of transparency on “safety nets”.*
- *Discussions about the way the University calculates the money that is needed to live in Waterloo.*
- *The amount of money received, and quality of life do not go hand in hand.*
- *Tuition fees are high whereas some universities do not charge any tuition to graduate students.*

Environ+Math

- *Lack of transparency with respect to the word “external”.*
- *The offer letter is being unfair by tuition fees being taken away.*
- *Concerns regarding international students being guaranteed only 3 years of PhD and not 4 years.*
- *Lack of clarity on how the external awards are given to students against tuition.*
- *In terms of funding principles, constituents are looking for wording that might support a living wage.*
- *Constituents want the graduate students to be taken as employees and not just students.*
- *Accountability from University with respect to following the funding principles.*
- *“Safety nets” idea needs to have some actual words.*

Science

- *All their departments should have grad coordinators that can provide a clear breakdown of what the funding would be. Physics has a set of slides posted on Learn for new students that makes it very clear.*
- *Some departments prevent students from TAing with awards, despite TA shortages.*
- *A feeling in many departments that applying for awards just is not worth the effort, especially since you lose your TA experience which is valuable for an academic career.*
- *Funding principles lack a real substance.*
- *Constituents want a commitment to transparency where there is a grad student involved at all steps, and/or all data and methods are published.*
- *International students do not know about the external funding prior to coming to the school, so many of them miss deadlines, or they lose the requirements for funding such as Vanier.*
- *Emailing/Communicating with incoming international students about how they can make covid appointments prior to coming to Canada, so when they arrived, they have COVID vaccination booked.*
- *The department would like the university (through Health Services) to provide vaccines to students who fell through the cracks once we return on-campus, and to let students know about this.*

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- *Students have experienced visa issues, delay their start to their degree here at UWaterloo, however, not sure if these delays are pandemic related or just general backlogs in getting visas approved.*

The Council Chair mentioned that the University has data on the estimated cost of living and the tuition rates. He said that this was done to convey to the students that they are doing degree for some reasoning and to get an increase in income and career benefit. If the University can understand the logic, they can negotiate better.

8. Update from the Board

05:30pm

GSA Director Amir Sadeghi gave an update from the Board. The Board chose the BD Officer and committee members. The Board corrected the By-Law 3.2.2 which is about the GSA fees. GSA-UW fees for the 2021-22 academic year have been approved. He mentioned that there are no planned changes in GSA Fees. The GRT UPass Fee would have gone up except that Waterloo Regional Council voted to freeze the GRT's contract with the GSA and move rate-changes back by one year.

Amir mentioned that in the future council meetings, the Board would hold small group discussions that will be focused on health and dental plans.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy asked for clarification if the GRT contract would be fixed with the current rate going forward and how long will it be frozen for. A Director replied that the GRT contract will be fixed, and it will be frozen for 1 year. The increase in the GRT fees has been shifted. The President clarified that GSA gets a five-year contract with GRT and each year, there is a certain percentage of increase in the fees. Fees have now locked in year 1 and year 2 is continuing with year 1's fee structure and the fifth year of the contract would have had the highest fee. With the shift, the fee structure for the fifth year has been knocked down.

The Council Chair mentioned that the Board did not approve a corporate secretary and he had been helping to recruit for this position. There will be more information on the Bylaw correction once the corporate secretary is instated.

9. GSEF-GSI Streamlined Program

05:35pm

The Vice-President Administration presented a proposed update to the GSI program. The proposal would streamline GSA's student led initiatives funding program (GSI) by pooling funding with the Graduate Students Endowment Fund (GSEF). This proposal was mentioned in the September 2020 Council meeting.

The VP-Admin mentioned that there is a significant overlap between two funding programs for graduate student led initiatives. Both initiatives fund academic and social projects to improve the graduate student experiences. Due to the significant overlap between both the initiatives, there is an administrative burden for both GSA and GSEF. So, it is better to streamline the two funding together as it will create less confusion for students in deciding which one to apply for. Also, there is a lot of saturation in the types of projects that people submit.

The pooled programs would have a budget of GSI's annual amount of \$30k (termly \$10k) plus GSEF's annual amount of \$20-30k, and would be disbursed through three streams: (1) small project department

initiatives, \$600, (2) large project department and cross department initiatives, >\$600, and (3) University-wide initiatives, \$600, \$1500, >\$1500. The third stream would prioritize initiatives that are dedicated to groups like equity, international students, environmental sustainability etc.

The VP-Admin proposed the topics for the planning committee to investigate and work on the implementation at a much deeper level. She explained the overall timeline for the next steps forward which involves gathering initial feedback, formation of planning committee which will have representations from both GSEF and GSA, voting from GSEF and GSA Board and finally adoption of the Streamline Program.

The VP-Admin proposed a recommended motion.

“The GSI funding (\$30K annually) is directed towards GSEF and subject to a five-year renewal, GSI is dismantled and the GSI-GSEF Streamline Planning Committee recommendations are adopted”.

A Director asked if the funding amounts for the three funding streams that were proposed were researched or the numbers were arbitrary. The Vice President (Admin) clarified that they reached onto an amount with the help of discussions with the GSEF coordinators which reflected on how much money GSI gives out and the kind of projects that are bucketed into the three areas. She said that they have prioritized initiatives which need more attention. The Director mentioned that in his own department, the department level workshops cost more than \$2000 depending on what sort of workshops you want to conduct. The Vice-President (Administration) said that such type of project would go under the second funding stream.

The Councillor from Biology asked if there is a discussion on whether the money needs to be spent and whether graduate students will benefit. The VP-Admin said that the current GSEF fee of \$20 is optional. GSA will still be paying for GSI as a baseline for streamline funding program. GSA is hoping that this merged GSI-GSEF program would encourage more people to apply and make use of the funding. Therefore, the idea of a five-year renewal is in process. The VP-Admin mentioned that on the GSEF's website, there is every single project that have been funded on an internal basis and on GSI's site, they have made a presentation of what projects have been funded in the past.

The Councillor from Political Science asked how much funding is unused every year. The VP-Admin replied that she knows more about GSEF from what the coordinators have told her. So far, no project has reached the \$10K limit and she does not have any exact numbers.

The Councillor from Sociology asked if when funds are unspent, whether they rollover to the next term or the next year. The Vice-President (Administration) said that this will be discussed with the planning committee. In terms of GSA, GSA has a budgeted \$10k per term and any funding leftover remains with GSA for other initiatives.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy asked about the process after the feedback from the Council is acquired, and a motion is raised for the Board to handle. The Council will be directly voting on a motion and providing the Board with some discussions that goes along. The VP-Admin acknowledged that it is the Board's plan as the Board did not hear much feedback on the proposal when it was brought forward in September 2020 Council meeting. She mentioned that she would open the feedback room from now until the vote takes place at the Board. The proposal also needs to be approved by both GSEF and the GSA.

10. Return to Campus Discussions

05:55pm

The Council Chair gave a brief overview on the concerns and challenges being faced by the students with respect to the return to campus. The safe return to campus was one of the biggest concerns. There were concerns with respect to campus safety. The Council Chair listed out some questions that are raised by students at the UW with respect to vaccinations, return to campus and international students. The Councilors were separated into separate breakout rooms.

Within small group discussions, the Councillors discussed issues being faced the students with respect to return to campus:

AHS

- *Large variation amongst people who have knowledge of the vaccine.*
- *Agreement with the UW Administration that the vaccination should not be mandated.*
- *Concerns regarding constituents getting vaccinated with the available vaccines in their respective countries and the vaccination not being recognized by the Health Canada.*
- *Students want an on-campus health vaccine clinic.*
- *Students who want to return to campus did not hear anything on yet and they want a firm date for it.*
- *Students do not have clarity on whether in person TAing will be mandatory as professors are given a choice to be on campus, but TAs are not given any option.*
- *International students who are out of country are concerned about getting a visa with their courses being fully online.*

Arts I

- *Constituents agreed that there should be a vaccine health clinic as some constituents have not had the opportunity to get the vaccine due to their region.*
- *Campus wellness should take part in student vaccinations.*
- *Concerns regarding management of second dose transfers if the first dose was in a different region other than Waterloo region.*
- *Less communication with students and the speculations are only with the faculty members.*
- *Accommodation should be made available for the international students to get to Waterloo safely and at the same time as other students.*
- *International students are frustrated due to the information not being able to reach them.*

Science

- *Most students were able to get a vaccine from different sources.*
- *Constituents agree with UW not mandating vaccination, but University should focus on providing timely information to the students who are in different places. They can do so by appointing a person to whom the students can contact particularly to know more about the information related to the international students who are arriving in Canada and have not been able to be back safely in their home countries.*
- *In the Fall 2021 term, a mass E-mail can be sent to students to access the information can be accessed related to vaccines.*
- *Vaccine clinics would take up a lot of space of the campus which the students would need to*

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access, so there is some difficulty around this.

- *Constituents are interested in having vaccine clinics to make the vaccine accessible for students.*
- *In terms of departmental communication, the constituents are not getting a full timeline of the reopening plan.*
- *International students are concerned about the vaccine timeline as they do not want to pay for quarantine when they arrive. There might be students who are unable to gain contact as they are new international students and are unable to have face to face meetings with graduate student community.*
- *Students are experiencing visa issues hence leading to delay in starting their degrees at UW.*

Enviro+Math

- *Students are finding it difficult to get vaccines in the Waterloo region.*
- *Concerns about the second dose for those who got first dose in other regions.*
- *There was some support with respect to the making the vaccination mandatory to be on campus but there are concerns regarding the protection of individuals who can not get the vaccine due to some reason.*
- *There is little information on how the classes will resume in September. For some departments, there will be a hybrid model by having the classes online, but the tutorials will be held in person. This would mean more workload for TAs.*
- *Concerns of the students arriving in Canada asking for how long the quarantine packages that the University is putting out would last.*

Arts II

- *Many students got access to the vaccination.*
- *Mandating the vaccination would act as a burden on people who might have been unable to access the vaccines due to various reasons.*
- *Constituents supported to have a centralized clinic on campus as this would lead to interactions with the Waterloo Public Health Unit.*
- *Students are in favor of educating about the vaccine than mandating as Waterloo region is lagging in number of people getting vaccinated.*
- *Department did not hear anything about return to campus. Different departments have different protocols and some departments have done an amazing job with calendar scheduling with regards to return to campus.*
- *International students who have not been able to enter Canada are concerned.*

Eng+Math

- *In terms of vaccination, most of the people in region of Waterloo have gotten their first dose.*
- *Situation can be made better if University provides campus vaccination.*
- *Constituents agreed that vaccine should not be mandated but people who cannot get vaccinated should follow some protocols to avoid risky situation for other students.*
- *Constituents suggested to have safety representatives in each department who would help to go through what the students need for on campus vaccination.*
- *In terms of return to work, Email from University were not very specific and there was lack of communication within some departments. However, some departments have clear communication regarding the timeline.*
- *Some courses would need an in-person TA and it will up to the instructors to decide whether they need the TA in person or not. Students who do not want to be on campus should not sign up for TAships.*

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- *International students who want to come to Canada should be informed well.*
- *Students are requesting to have more support from university with respect to coverage of the quarantine expense.*

11. Adjournment

06:47pm