

GSA- UW COUNCIL REPORT

Introduction.

This is the GSA- Council Report between April 2023 to March 2024. Over the past year, the Council has faced various challenges and celebrated numerous achievements. This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of our activities, accomplishments, and opportunities the GSA as a body can leverage.

Achievements

The Council has had numerous consultations with various departments within the UWaterloo ecosystem.

We have heard from Campus Housing on the new increase in campus housing fees and facility renewal service which focused on the criteria students chose.

We have also heard from GradWIL (Work Integrated Learning), The GradWIL program is meant for all grad students who are interested in developing industrial skills, collaboration and building professional networks before graduation. The consultation included sharing relevant information to grad students on the opportunities available in this program.

We have had from the GSEF Coordination on the funding opportunities that are available to individuals and student groups that have initiatives that require funding.

Councillors shared our thoughts on policy 70 which deals with student grievances and ethical behavior of University of Waterloo Students.

Centre for Career Development. They gathered feedback through on addressing services, communication preferences, career content needs, further education assistance, and challenges related to career identity.

In September, we heard from the GSA President on the new smoke-free policy that will be implemented in UW starting July 1st 2024.

The same month, the council offered feedback to the GSA-UW Wellness Advising Coordinator, on Policy 42, which addresses the prevention of and response to sexual violence. Council members provided input on principles they wanted to see in Policy 42, such as being survivor-centred, and rehabilitative, providing full choice for survivors in selecting responses, considering intersectionality, offering to counsel, and ensuring confidentiality.

UW TA & Ras have unionized, GSA especially the Council has housed the OUW Rep where the Council was one of the crucial platforms in disseminating updates and other relevant information to the students.

In November, after reviewing some Council policies, I proposed to the council for the review of Council policies especially GP-8 for clarity and transparency. The policy was last updated in 2021. The policy spells out the relationship between Council, Board and the Executive and the right each entity has within the Association. This idea was welcomed by the Councillor and a committee was formed for the review process which consisted of myself, Board Chair and Tia Driver.

In December, the UW Disability and Inclusion Coordinator informed the Council of The Accessibility initiatives at UW, which aimed to introduce Disability Affinity Networks and the goals of the Disability Inclusion Team.

In January, the Council voted on the recommended minimum funding fee that was brought to its attention. There were a series of debates on it but eventually, the council voted in favour of the 4% increase in 2024/2025 PhD funding.

In February, at the request of Kimberly Girec, we heard a presentation from Evelyn Morales from Renison University on the importance of having a structured and decentralized case

management system which will improve the mental health and well-being of UWaterloo students.

The same month, the Council was consulted by the Advocacy and President on the development of the new GSA Strategic Plan 2024-2027.

Council voted and accepted the proposed changes that were made on GP-8 and Policy was sent to JPRC for review and recommendation. In March, the Council accepted the recommendations made by the JPRC and was sent to the Board for review.

Currently, two indigenous students are sitting as guests Councillor in the Councillor. The council policy CP-2 dictates that Each of the following equity-seeking groups will be represented by a councillor with full privileges and rights of the role and title: Indigenous graduate students and Black graduate students.

Challenges

We couldn't get a meeting with Jeff Casello to arrange meetings with the Deans on the issues of remuneration. This was intended to engage and get more grad students to sit on the council. This was only to start the conversation at the department levels but unfortunately, it didn't materialise I never heard back from Jeff Casello.

Engagement has increased within the Council, there was a high turnout of councillors for Council meetings both in person and virtual, however, there was a constant low turnout for Council Social which takes place every Friday of the month.

There are still some council positions that are currently unfilled. The Elections Coordinator has done a tremendous job in filling so many positions, still, it will be great to have all positions filled especially recognizing the crucial role the council plays within the Graduate Student Association.

Opportunities

1. GSA/Departmental Updates

To increase engagement within the council and between councillors, Councillors shared departmental news, events and concerns and sought advice and insights from other councillors.

2. Get more diversity equity involved groups in the council.

Recognizing the diversity of the University I want to recommend the GSA to engage more equity diverse groups within the University, this will provide the opportunity and open doors to a wealth of knowledge, insights, and perspectives that can enrich our discussions and decision-making processes.

3. The Council as a political platform. we can leverage the open access of the council meeting to gauge the interest of grad students. Councillors should be encouraged to invite members of their constituents to council meetings.

4. Finally, the GSA should consider remunerations for Councillors. I believe this will not only enhance engagement of students but also accountability mechanism for the GSA.

Conclusion

In this report, we will highlight the significant achievements of the Council, including our engagements with campus stakeholders, policy deliberations, strategic planning efforts, and initiatives to promote mental health and well-being among our student body. Additionally, we will address the challenges faced by the Council, such as securing meetings with key stakeholders and addressing concerns regarding engagement and turnout.

As we look ahead to the AGM, we hope that this report will provide valuable insights into the activities and accomplishments of the Council, as well as serve as a catalyst for further discussions and collaborations to enhance the graduate student experience at Waterloo.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to the Graduate Student Association.

Together, we will continue to strive for excellence and advocate for the best interests of our diverse and vibrant graduate student community.