



GSA COUNCIL

Notice of Meeting

February 3, 2021

4:00PM – 7:10PM

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. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS | |
| 4:03PM | 4. ATTENDANCE | For Information |
| 4:04PM | 5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES a. January 13, 2021 | For Approval |
| 4:05PM | 6. UPDATE FROM THE BOARD – Reid (5 mins) | For Information |
| 4:10PM | 7. GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING UPDATE – Casello (30 mins) | For Information |
| 4:40PM | 8. GRADUATE SUPPORT DISCUSSION – small groups (80 mins) | For Discussion |
| 6:00PM | 9. BREAK (5 mins) | |
| 6:05PM | 10. PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING COMMITTEE – Reid (5 mins) | For Approval |
| 6:10PM | 11. ORGANIZE UW UPDATE (5 mins) | For Information |
| 6:15PM | 12. COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY (25 mins) | For Information |
| 6:40PM | 13. GSA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR UPDATE. – Mutumba (20 mins) | For Information |
| 7:00PM | 14. QUESTIONS ON PRESIDENTIAL REPORT (10 mins) | For Information |
| 7:10PM | 15. 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. Declaration of Interests **04:03pm**

No interests are declared.

4. Attendance **04:03pm**

Chugh takes the attendance.

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

The minutes of the Jan 13th, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.

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

The Board Chair gave an update from the Board. She mentioned that the Board appointed a Chief Returning Officer who will oversee the elections at the AGM. The Board also discussed the Council's role and next steps in terms of role clarification for the Council, which will be further considered by the Governance Oversight Committee, with a plan for further consultations with Council later in the month.

The Board also appointed three directors for the President Nominating Committee (PNC) who will oversee the hiring and re-appointment process of the President. As per policy GP-10, the PNC must have equal representation from the Board and the Council on the President Nominating Committee. The importance of this committee is to solicit feedback and make a recommendation on whether to re-appoint the same president. The President has a large role in the functioning of the GSA. Hence, this committee is a great way to participate in the oversight of management.

7. Graduate Student Funding Update- Casello **04:09pm**

Casello presented principles behind the Graduate Student Funding. He mentioned that the graduate students were critical to the University's missions of teaching and research. He mentioned that funding is provided to make the graduate studies financially possible for the students who could not pursue their research degree without the financial support as well as to provide "safety nets" for the students who experience extenuating circumstances. He pointed out that the University was committed to providing transparency in the supports it provides.

A Director raised a concern over the principles lacking specificity with respect to the funding levels. The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy mentioned that there was discrepancy in the principles behind the Graduate Student Funding. He asked for clarity on the principle that pointed towards making the funding financially possible for the students who could not pursue their research degree without the financial support.

Casello listed out different types of funding and the commonly used mechanisms for Graduate Student Funding, including the International Doctoral Student Award (IDSA), International Masters Award of Excellence (IMAE), UW Graduate Scholarship and President's Scholarship. Casello also mentioned various situations in which the University provided support to the students in the form of awards and bursaries (e.g. medical leave, parental leave). He said that in partnership with GSA and GSEF, University also provides a thesis completion award to help support students who are near to the completion of their program.

Casello mentioned that the funding was predominantly on the student-by-student basis but there were sources of funding for students who were in unique situations. The Councillor from English Language and Literature asked how the International Doctoral Student Award accounts for tuition increases. She asked for the algorithm that goes behind the calculation of Graduate Research tuition for International students. Casello replied that there is an annual increase for the value of IDSA so that the University can offset the complete tuition differential between the international and the domestic students. If the International tuition increases and domestic tuitions stays the same, then IDSA's value increases. Casello also mentioned that there is a process to determine tuition increases. International and domestic fees are approved by the Board of Governors. The Councillor from Master of Peace and Conflict Studies said that she was interested to know more about International student funding. Casello replied that he would establish a virtual session where he would invite all the Councillors and would answer to their questions on International tuition fees setting.

Casello explained the process on how University establishes the funding levels. He mentioned that the changes in student costs are quantified for domestic and international tuition fees, shelter and costs of living. These changes in supports are informed by the outcome of the change in cost analysis, changes in compensation for University faculty and staff and overall financial status of the University. The changes are communicated through GSA and feedback is received by the Graduate Student Relations Committee (GSRC). GSRC approves a recommended increase to the Provost and the Provost receives a recommendation and determine changes in support. The changes in the support are then brought back to GSA.

Casello mentioned that the University evaluates Funding levels by comparing Waterloo's support to peer institutions over a span of 3 years. He mentioned that outside of Faculty of Health at the University of Waterloo, all other faculties at the

University of Waterloo have higher average funding for PhD students than U15 (Research Intensive Universities across Canada) competitors. The comparison gives an idea that the starting point for University of Waterloo funding levels was correct.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies asked if the comparison was made on the funding levels or tuition fees. Casello replied that the comparison was only done on the basis on the funding levels and not tuition fees. The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic studies suggested that the funding level comparisons should be done after the tuition fees was deducted from the funding amount and the comparisons between the tuition fees should be done to make the comparisons clearer.

A Director raised a concern over the comparative groups that were taken into consideration while comparing the funding levels as for some regions where the Universities are located, the living expenses are lower than Waterloo. Casello replied by saying that some of the top Universities like University of Toronto have been taken into consideration for comparing the funding levels.

The Councillor from Electrical and Computer Engineering asked which years were taken into consideration in comparing the funding levels as the housing expenses have gone up while funding levels staying constant from the past three years. Casello clarified that the data presented was from the years 2017,2018 and 2019.

Casello mentioned that the University has been regularly investigating whether or not the University has kept up with the funding levels relative to the cost of living that students experience. He presented the change that has happened over the span of five years in terms of tuition, fees, shelter and other costs.

A Director pointed out that the cost of living in Kitchener-Waterloo region is greater than the minimum funding level by looking at the five-year change in tuition, fees, shelter and other costs. He said that most of the students are unable to live on the funding amounts. Casello said there was a fundamental difference between the ideal and the actual ratio of costs to support. He mentioned that the University is not in a situation to provide the funding levels which would lead to the numbers towards the ideal value. In several faculties, the costs of providing the funding to the graduate students exceed the revenue generated by the graduate students either through grants or tuition fees. So, the University would be redirecting the undergraduate tuition to provide funding to the graduate students which is not a viable option as per the operations of the University.

Casello mentioned that the number of graduate applications has increased over the years even if there was a significant difference between the ideal and actual ratio of costs to support. At present, the University is putting in efforts to increase the minimum funding for the PhD students and revised TA and RA rates.

Casello provided estimates on how the cost of living has changed since last year for both domestic and international students. There are about 40% domestic students and 60% international students. The Provincial Bill 124 has established a maximum increase in the compensation which says there should be a 1% increase for domestic students and 1.86% for the international students. By weighing these two things, GSRC could come out with a value. So, the proposal suggests a 1.34% increase in PhD minimum and GRA funding for the year 2021-22 for weighing that is based on both enrolment of international and domestic students.

Casello mentioned that there would be an increase in GTA rate from \$33.89 per hour to \$45 per hour. The Faculty Deans have committed on continuing the practice of assigning GTA positions based on pedagogical needs.

The Councillor from Accounting and Finance asked for clarification for the faculties that have TA pay built into minimum funding, if they would see a difference, or their scholarship would decrease by the amount in TA pay. She expressed that if they divide the shelter amount by the four months in a term, the expenses seem to be unmanageable. Casello replied that if the TA pay is built into minimum funding, then they would receive at a minimum increase in the minimum support and that will represent as a combination of TA package and the support. There would only be the change in the minimum support. He suggested he could provide documentation for the shelter support.

The Councillor from SEED asked for the relationship between minimum funding and external merit-based scholarships particularly in the events that the graduate students are fortunate enough to win any Tri-Council and then the minimum funding packages are then rescinded. Casello replied that about 40% of the operations budget comes from the Ontario government in terms of provincial grants to the institution and when one receives other government money like Tri-Agency funds, it is a replacement to the other government money received in the form of minimum funding.

The Councillor from Biology asked if the TAs will still be paid for the proctoring sessions which the students take up voluntarily once the TA rates are increased from \$33.89 per hour to \$45 per hour. Casello replied that the TAs will be paid \$45 per hour for the proctoring sessions.

A Director asked for a clearer picture of the financial situation of the University which is holding back the University from providing the funding greater than what is being offered. He asked for a detailed perspective of the graduate students' community. Casello mentioned that the University entered this year with about \$3 million of deficit. He mentioned that the undergraduate enrolments have increased which has led to the increase in the revenue. The reality was that the undergraduate enrolments have increased leading to the increase in the revenue. The costs have also gone up due to additional support for the students. Due to the fiscal carefulness, the University is

projecting about 0.2% surplus out of the operating budget by the end of 2021. GSPA began 2021 with 15% budget holdback from the Province Provost and out of which 9% was given back. He mentioned that their unit was operating at 94% of their budget and 6% was cut out of their operating budget, which was the equivalent of two contract positions. He pointed out that 91% of the budget of the University comes from tuition and grants hence leaving the University with very little amount of discretionary income. So, when the enrolment numbers meet the target values, the budget bounces greatly. He also mentioned that 90% of the operating expenses are fixed in terms of student support and salaries. Therefore, the operating budget is constructed with great reliance on the enrolment numbers.

The Councillor from Pharmacy asked for clarification on the increase in tuition fees. He mentioned that there was a 20% increase in fees and the domestic tuition fees was frozen. He pointed out that it seemed that it was a way of University getting the same amount of money by sidestepping the lack of tuition increases. Casello mentioned that there is a student fee committee which comprises of GSA President and undergraduate representatives, associate Provost students and Vice-President (Finance). The committee comes to consensus on what the changes in fees will be. Casello mentioned that these fee changes are guided by students for students.

The Councillor from Recreation and Leisure studies asked for clarity on shelter expectations for the year 2021-22. She asked where the graduate students can find detailed documentation on the shelter expectations and was that available to the students. Casello replied that he can provide with the details about the shelter cost analysis, but he is not involved in analysing the shelter costs.

The Councillor from Physics and Astronomy pointed out that the incoming students from his department demand some transparency on how the base funding is decided and the cost of living goes into that calculation. The international students do not have a good reference to the actual cost of living when they have an expectation that the actual ratio would be closer to 1. So, the international students would like to see an actual transparency and information towards an actual scenario. Casello replied that if the students are provided with information with what their financial situation would look like, their support levels and tuition fees, they can make good decisions and whether, they are able to come to graduate school. He mentioned there are different calculators that calculates and evaluates the financial situation of students using different parameters.

Casello mentioned that GSRC was hopeful to get a written response from GSA Council on the minimum funding and revised TA and RA rates' proposals. GSRC would work on reaching on a decision on a recommendation for the Provost. GSRC would then receive the Provost's decision on student funding changes.

8. Graduate Support Discussion

05:13pm

Within small group discussions, the Councillors expressed their supports/oppositions for the proposed changes in the principles of funding, 1.34% increase in minimum funding levels and \$45 per hour rate for the GTAs.

The Councillor from Accounting and Finance asked if the discussions would be made with caveat as Jeff Casello would get back with shelter numbers. The Council Speaker mentioned that Councillors could amend the motion so that they approve it with the caveat.

“BIRT the Council supports the Funding Principles as elaborated in the presentation by the Associate VP, GSPA and advises the GSA President and GSA Council Speaker to vote in favour of this proposal at the February 5,2021 meeting of the Graduate Student Relations Committee.” (Robbins/Perreault) (11-13-0)

*Different departments had different viewpoints on the **Funding Principles**.*

- *Science: The Councillors felt that the funding principles should be more transparent around cost estimates like shelter costs. They were disappointed with the ratio of costs. They reluctantly agreed with the funding principles.*
- *Engineering: The Councillors expected an in-depth explanation on the funding principles. There are lots of actions for transparency which are desired. The shelter costs are different than what has been perceived by the graduate students. They agreed with an overall view of the principles.*
- *AHS: The Councillors were looking for transparency even with the raw data being accessible and not just with the data at the Council’s level. They were disappointed in the principles’ accountability. They reluctantly agreed with the principles.*
- *Arts: They had concerns about transparency. The true housing costs were not reflected as some of the graduate students were living with their family and some were living on their own for health concerns. Concerns were raised about not having any housing supports by the University who live in Cambridge and Stratford. The acceptance letter for some programs mentions that the students cannot work outside the University and can only work for 10 hours/week, making it difficult for the students to make their ends meet. They disagreed with the principles due to the way they were formulated but they did not have any suggestions to reformulate them at this time. They raised a concern that the University sometimes treats TAs as students and sometimes as employees. They want the University to pick a path and treat the TAs as employees.*
- *Environment: They mentioned it was hard to not be in favour as they read well but some in-depth explanation was needed on how these principles were materialised in practice. The sentiments that graduate students are an investment rather than a cash cow for university popped up during the discussion. There was a minimum effort to engage in any sort of substantial or*

meaningful change, the idea that was supposed to accept the status quo. They wanted some clarity and transparency on how the GTA rates increased even after Jeff mentioning that the University was bootstrapped of cash.

- Math: Principles were too vague as there were no website links or sources of data that was presented and how they calculated the costs. The data was not listed transparently. They were not in favour of the principles.

A Director added that the graduate students' pay range varies from \$26K to \$40K faculty-wise. He mentioned that the mean funding level for each faculty level is different. Doing rough back of the envelope calculations, he pointed out that every student could in theory be paid \$35K whereas the proposed minimum funding amount is \$24K.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies pointed out that the funding levels were listed based on comparison with the U15 universities was problematic as it cannot be seen that the students at other universities are not making a living wage. He suggested that the data should have been compared to the people who are making a living wage in Waterloo rather than comparing on how the wages are distributed in Nova Scotia or Toronto.

The Councillor from Biology mentioned that he got the impression from the presentation that students are not profitable for the University as the costs being put into the graduate students does not help in getting the money back on campus. He mentioned that most of the degree in Sciences are in research. He has been researching things which the grant/funding agencies think are worth an answer. He feels that research in science would bring enough money and would be profitable.

A Director shared that at University of Western Ontario have much better funding principles. Their funding principles works in such a way that any increase in tuition results an increase in the minimum funding level. They also provide minimum funding level for masters. They do not have international tuition for PhD students. He mentioned that the principles that were listed does not provide anything new and there was no transparency. There were no cost-of-living estimates listed.

The Councillor from History stated that if Arts department does not generate any wealth to the campus, but they do generate and impart their knowledge to the campus by their research. This value might not be capitalised in the same way as it is done for Science.

Everyone agreed for the wording of the motion.

“BIRT that Council supports the 1.34% increase in PhD minimum and GRA funding levels and advises the GSA President and GSA Council Speaker to vote in favour of this proposal at the February 5, 2021 meeting at the Graduate Student Relations Committee.” (Robbins/Yeung) (9-16-0)

*Different departments had different viewpoints on **1.34% increase in funding**:*

- *Math: There were concerns that there seem to be different increase in the expected living costs for domestic and international students. They raised a concern that there was an arbitrary weighting to living costs to come up with 1.34% increase which seems to detriment international students. They were against how they calculated the 1.34% increase in funding.*
- *Engineering: Concerns were raised regarding significance of 1.34% increase in funding and why was it only for PhD students and not for research-based master's program as it is only a two-year program. They did not approve or disapprove but asked for some clarifications.*
- *Arts: There were concerns that if the TA rate were to increase, that could result in an overall loss of funding due to increased taxable income. Concerns were raised regarding the financial literacy for the students because of uncertainty if students can claim EI and pensions (which they pay into) after they graduate. Their concerns were like those raised above and they did not approve of the increase.*
- *AHS: There was no transparency in what all parameters were involved in coming up with the increase in funding. Councillors asked for the data to get an idea in the increased number of international financial funding. They also asked about how to deal with equity between domestic and international student funding. They asked for the 1.34% increase to be explained in more detail and how this number has changed over the years in the past. They were cautious to support it as they would like to see a more detailed information behind 1.34% increase in funding.*
- *Science: There were concerns regarding the increase being disadvantageous to the international students and it was not doing anything to improve the overall cost and support ratio for living expenses. They were reluctantly in favour of it.*
- *Environment: There were concerns about whether the tuition fees will be covered in the increased level of funding. In the times of Covid19, where the experiences and services are meant to justify the costs but are not accessible to the graduate students, why are the graduate students paying a third of their income back to the university. They neither approved nor disapprove of the proposal.*

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies asked for a clarification that if the Councillors vote against the motion, would they still see an increase or not. The President replied that this was the path for the University seeking buy and own. If the GSA Council and graduate students vote against it, then 1.34% gets advanced to the Head of Finance with the caveat that graduate students are against it.

A Director mentioned that the Council members are not the decision makers and budget was always a question of priority for the University. The Council should understand the consequences of it. For example, if the Council approves and you would have a constituent who vote against it, then the Council will have to defend that vote. This was a kind of test on whom to decide for vote for it.

There were no concerns about the wording of the motion.

A motion was raised.

“BIRT that Council supports the increase in the GTA rate to \$45 per hour and advises the GSA President and GSA Council Speaker to vote in favour of this proposal at the February 5, 2021 meeting of the Graduate Student Relations Committee.” (Robbins/Perreault) (26-1-0)

The Council Speaker mentioned that all other schools’ GTA rate was around mid \$40’s per hour.

Different viewpoints from different departments on increase in GTA rate to \$45 per hour:

- ***Arts:*** Concerns regarding the TA rate increase would lead to a higher income rate which would lead to high EI deductions and whether they can claim the amount after they leave the school. It makes more sense for Arts students to talk about TA rate and base funding separately. They recommended students also receive financial literacy training. Overall, they agreed with the increase in the GTA rate, though they had concerns about how this increase in GTA rate would affect the guaranteed funding.
- ***AHS:*** They asked for more information on how the University came up with \$45 per hour GTA rate. They were hesitant to disapprove as they want increase in GTA rate and want some information on how the University came up with \$45 per hour in the GTA rate.
- ***Math:*** They were reluctantly in favour of it. They had concerns about how this increase would change the TA hours and administrative factors like how many people are working and how that impacts the amount paid at the end of the year.
- ***Environment:*** There was a lack of transparency from where this money was coming from. For their faculty, the TA allocation is less than the number of students actively seeking for TA ships. They were neither in favour nor against the motion.
- ***Science:*** They reluctantly agreed for the increase in GTA rate. They had concerns about a move from grant amounts to TA as it affects the amount of taxable income. They had concerns on whether they would affect other TA opportunities like volunteering TA proctoring.
- ***Engineering:*** Engineering department felt it was overall in favour for them.

The Councillor from Biology raised a point that their department voted against the Unionization since the untaxable income being turned into a taxable income. He mentioned that in the past, the Council said it needs to unionize to get \$45/hour but now it does not mention anything regarding Unionization.

A Director mentioned that it was important to focus on Jeff Casello's ability to follow through his commitment. If in next three years, the faculty decides that they are unable to support the increased rate, this is where the difference in a unionized environment and not unionized environment could be seen. He mentioned that if you have a collective agreement, the document specifies far more than just the TA rate. It also includes the number of hours and there are many agreements for protection from claw backs. If there were such guarantees, then increased GTA rates would make more sense. At present, it would be better to understand the limited capacity of the University to enforce the present criteria. He made another point to take equity concerns into account. Students across the campus are paid differently. Currently, the University does not protect the minimum funding for master's at all, but Masters students who also work as TAs would enjoy a guaranteed increase in the GTA rate of \$45/hour.

The Vice-President (Administration) added that this \$45 per hour increase was a separation from unionization. She mentioned that is it just \$45 per hour working conditions and other aspects that were talked in the past with respect to the unionization.

The Councillor from Psychology asked what happens if the Councillors votes against the motion. The President replied that the conversations on this motion would continue in the next academic year.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies asked how quickly both the financial changes would come into effect. The President replied that this would start by Fall 2021.

The Councillor from Recreation and Leisure Studies asked for clarification that if the conversation continues in the next academic year if the Councillors vote against the motion, would that mean cessation of this conversation around pay raise or would it be a conversation on why the motion was voted against and this would amend to be at a higher rate? The President clarified for the Fall 2021 term, things must be set up by the Spring 2021 term and if the discussions on TA compensation rate goes beyond the cut-off that the University has for setting the TA compensation rate, then the existing structure would be carried over to the next academic year. The University is very reluctant to make material changes to pay structures during an academic year. So, every major change must take place in September.

The Councillor from Global Governance pointed that there was not enough time to talk with the constituents about the changes in the GTA rate. She felt that it was a big confusion on whether to vote for the motion or not.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies raised a concern on why the increase in GTA rate was not brought up in the earlier meetings. The President replied that the University's approach to Council's consultants with the student's groups is lackluster. Even a month of heads up prior to the GSRC vote would be valuable, however, the University of Waterloo does not operate with that kind of process in mind. He raised a point that the TA rate is a part of the larger picture of graduate student compensation and if it does not pass the votes, then it would be a continued discussion. He assured that the conversations would be continued if this motion does not pass.

There were no concerns regarding the wording of the motion.

9. Break

06:35pm

10. Organize UW Update

06:40pm

An Organizer gave an update on OrganizeUW. She mentioned that there will be an upcoming event on Climate Justice and Unions in partnership with fossilfreeUW on Feb 10, 2021. There will be a departmental discussion on Physics and Astronomy on Feb 11, 2021 and a Mental Health and Unions webinar on Feb 25, 2021.

She mentioned that the webinar on International Students and Unionization was out on YouTube.

Some helpful resources like webinars, Card Signing tutorials and Comprehensive FAQ page were accessible to the students.

The Councillor from Philosophy asked for some details on Climate Justice and Unions. The Organizer replied that the webinar will be about the parallels between the Union organising and Climate Justice. This webinar goes well beyond the wage debate and working conditions debate. The union can put language into the collective agreement about things like demanding the University take a position on fossil fuel divestment. The webinar would also enable speaking with the students from the University of Toronto on their experience with the unionized climate regarding some of the language they have put into their collective agreement on the same issue.

The Councillor from Psychology asked what happened about the status of the letter that was going to go to the DGSAs. The President replied that it was shared on the GSA website and Councillors are also welcome to share it.

11. Presidential Nominating Committee-Reid

06:47pm

The Board Chair requested two other Council members to join the President's Nomination Committee. There will be two other Board members who will be sitting on the committee with the Board Chair. This committee would be evaluating the President's performance in order to recommend whether to offer a second term to the current

President. She mentioned that the Board was trying to do this before the turnover as Board has turnover every year. She mentioned that Board would like to show the new directors on how this process works. April 2021 is the deadline for this recommendation.

She mentioned that the time commitment would be 5-10 hours for three months (until April).

The Council Speaker asked what if there were unequal number of councillors and directors in the PNC. The Board Chair replied that this would lead to violation of policy if the Councillors do not want to serve on this committee. GP-10 is a policy that must be amended by both Board and Council according to the current policy structure. This happens because the nomination and re-nomination of the President and the Vice-President was an important process and both Council and the Board wanted a say in this process. If the Councillors do not wish to be a part of this committee, then the Board will have to change the policy.

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies asked if the decision to join the PNC was supposed to be made in that very moment. The Board Chair replied that it was ideal to volunteer for it as soon as possible. She mentioned that her tenure as a Board Chair would be ending in April and after that a new Board Chair would overtake the responsibility of the President's Nomination process.

“BIRT Council appoints the following two members to PNC: Jessica Ross and Teghan Barton.” (Robbins/Schrim)

The Councillor from Germanic and Slavic Studies seconded the motion.

The motion was passed with unanimous consent.

12. Adjournment

06:56pm

Motion to adjourn the meeting was passed at 06:56pm.