November 14th Council Meeting Summary

In the November meeting, Associate Deans (ADs) of all faculties within UW and the interim co-associate vice-presidents (co-associate VPs) of the Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA) were invited to take part in Council meeting. Both the interim co-associate VPs of the GSPA attended alongside the ADs of Arts, Environment, and Math faculties. The main objective of the meeting was to bring issues facing graduate students and issues pertaining to the overall graduate student experience directly to ADs and VPs of the GSPA.

The first item of discussion involved graduate spaces. Council members brought up that in the past graduate students did not receive proper or frequent communication involving what spaces they were assigned to and would sometimes find their current offices being occupied by other students. ADs responded that this is likely stemming from a large overhaul of certain buildings and renovations that are occurring leading to a lack of spaces for graduate student use. Graduate spaces are scarce in some buildings and faculties just because of the nature of their work as well, with many students leaving for remote work/field work which could also exacerbate this issue. ADs and Council members agreed that better communication on which offices were available and which ones were under ‘review’ is probably warranted. The GM also reminded students that the graduate lounge (SLC) can be used by students 24/7 (and is bookable) but the issue around *specific graduate space for specific departments* was still raised as a concern.

Days prior to the meeting, UofT had announced that they were increasing the minimum funding for PhD Students across campus. This was brought up to the ADs and AVPs and have a discussion on what the main challenges were from the perspective of UW to push for similar changes or if there was any way for our campus to also increase its minimum funding to graduate students (not at the same scale/level as UofT). Main differences between UW and other universities regarding endowment fund size, course-based graduate courses offered were discussed as why UofT could make a change, but other universities may not be able to follow. A graduate student member brought up possibly reducing the size of the incoming graduate cohort as a mechanism for alleviation for not having enough funds for all students. ADs and AVPs responded that this would also cause concerns with reduced overall tuition amount, and decrease overall degrees awarded with trained students entering the workforce, which is a metric that the provincial government closely monitors and encourages. Further discussion on challenges with funding related to mismatch between crisis and action, political environment changes, provincial vs federal funding responsibility were also discussed.

Following a break, the GSA President provided an update on several topics including ombudsperson hiring, international student working group (collab with Laurier and Conestoga college), PhD minimum funding discussion and negotiation in GSRC, GSEF funding for research dissemination, and the start of the Indigenous Art Project in the Winter term. The president also gave on update on the program that the GSA had launched addressing food scarcity for graduate students. Each month, meals would be provided to graduate students who can show their WatCard and receive a package of food (please check out the GSA website, social media, or reach out to the GSA reps for more information).

The Board Chair then gave an update regarding the appointemnt of the Deputy Chair and a change in the investment policy for GSA.

The meeting concluded with council members and guests raising questions about how to get information regarding events (such as budget, vendors etc.) on events that a dGSA wants to run internally. Clarifications on the dGSA guidelines involving Councilor election was also discussed, which specified that Councilors had to be elected by the dGSA with a 2/3 approval of the members who vote rather than 2/3 of the entire membership of the dGSA.