



GSA ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

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WHERE WE'RE AT

PHYSICAL LOCATION

Brock University, and inherently the GSA, acknowledges the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Agreement.

Today this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and acknowledging reminds us that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people.

As the GSA begins its journey to not only decolonize and indigenize our organization we recognize that the process of understanding and reflecting on the land we occupy. We want to acknowledge that the statement made above reflects Brock University and its mission, vision and values. While we share similarities, noting both our location and our context, we have significant and intentional divergence as well, notably around our purpose and who we serve. As such we want to remark that the land acknowledgement of Brock University does not fully reflect the work that our association needs to undertake to respect the original custodians of this land.

Moving forward our commitment as an association is to develop a land acknowledgement that reflects the intentions of our strategic plan and our own mission, vision and values as we build toward our collective future. Once completed this statement will replace any existing land acknowledgements offered by the GSA. We believe this work is necessary for all our members and engaging reminds us of how far we must go to address issues of inequity at our institution. While this is one of the first steps to decolonizing and indigenizing our work, it is our sincere hope that all graduate students will join with us in this journey.

LOCATION OF OUR WORK

As the GSA enters its third decade of formal organization, having existed since 2001, we have embarked on a journey of renewal; of reflecting on our past to inform where we want to go. We have grown a lot over these years, as have our members, we have been well served by our students and staff in the past and this has positioned us for transformation.

The accomplishments that we have made this year, during perhaps the greatest external transformative event in a generation, are a remarkable testament to the enduring passion and dedication of our executive, our staff, our Board and our program assembly, as well as the faith and trust that the membership continues to place in us. We could not achieve what we set out

to do without the support of our members. If the GSA is a ship on the ocean, then our members are the wind in our sails.

This report details some of the high-level activities of the year; it is a culmination of efforts some years in the making. It is our first official Annual Report, and we intend to use it as a guide to frame future conversations with our membership. When we began this year, no one thought that the last twelve months would turn out like they did. Upon suspending our campus operations in March 2020, we had every intention of being back on campus within a few weeks, certainly by the time that the new year was to begin in Fall 2020. What transpired took us all by surprise and continues to shake the ground just as we think we have found our footing. Through all that, the GSA has continued to navigate the unknown waters and often been a leader within the post-secondary space while doing so.

It is our hope that documents like this will provide our members with a greater sense of the work we have done and serve as a jumping off point for deeper interest and discussion around the work the GSA does on the behalf of graduate students. We also intend to use this report to further the association's goals with various stakeholders and partners by providing a glance of the kind of challenges we have faced and the methods we have undertaken to overcome them.

WHO WE ARE

The following mission, vision, values and strategic priorities were created through months of consultation and envisioning discussions between the Board of Directors and the membership, amongst other internal and external community members. These elements currently preside in the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, but would be more widely shared, both in print and online, if approved. The Strategic Plan has been approved by the GSA Board of Directors on April 22, 2021 and will be presented at the GSA Annual General Meeting on April 29, 2021 for further approval.

We are an organization who is working to achieve a daily *mission* of...

ENHANCING THE GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE THROUGH HOLISTIC REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY.

We are an organization who holds the *vision* of creating...

AN EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE GRADUATE COMMUNITY WHERE ALL STUDENTS FEEL SUPPORTED, ENGAGED, AND EMPOWERED TO SUCCEED.

Every day, our work focuses on:

- EXPERIENCE
- SUPPORT
- ENGAGEMENT
- REPRESENTATION
- ADVOCACY

As we move forward, we strive towards:

- EQUITY
- COMMUNITY
- HOLISM
- EMPOWERMENT
- SUSTAINABLE

Over the next five years, we aspire to be an organization that strategically prioritizes:

- **COMMITMENT TO LEADERSHIP**
By example, providing leadership at all levels to build a better future for graduate students.
- **COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY**
Fostering and promoting an equitable and supportive graduate student community.
- **COMMITMENT TO SERVICE**
Championing solutions for service, addressing the needs of graduate students.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & BOARD CHAIR

On behalf of the Executive, Staff and Board of Directors of the Brock University Graduate Students' Association, we want to thank you for taking the time to read our Annual Plan for 2020-2021. While this report does not contain all of the work we undertook this year, it does provide a high-level overview of some of the major achievements we managed to accomplish. If you are interested in more detailed information of our 2020-21 year, check out our monthly executive reports.

As it has been said time and time again, this year has been unprecedented. Like many, when impacts of COVID-19 began to be felt in March 2020, we never did imagine that a year later, we would continue to be on high alert with the pandemic. In reflection of navigating uncharted territories and redefining many of our operations, we collectively stand proud of what the GSA has accomplished over the last twelve-months.

Despite challenges imposed by COVID-19, we found ways to win as an organization - we found ways to win for graduate students. We made major strides in our growth as an association and developed a clear pay forward for the next half decade. We advocated in countless committee meetings and we collaborated with multiple departments, services and on-campus partners to ensure that graduate students had opportunities to engage, find support, network with peers and grow professionally.

We are proud of our organization and along that, we are proud of the role that each of you played within our accomplishments. Our wins are your wins, and your wins ours. Together, we navigated 2020-2021 – let's do it all again next year.

Stay safe and stay healthy.

Prost,



CHRISTOPHER YENDT

(HE/HIM/THEM)

PRESIDENT AND CEO



HALEY MYATT

(SHE/HER)

CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

LEADERSHIP

COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION

While COVID-19 may have been a large hurdle for the team to navigate, and a hurdle that slowed many other aspects down in worlds around us all, we found ourselves continuing and intensifying our committee representations throughout the university. Many members of the executive team would have continuous days of back-to-back Zoom calls; there were Board and Executive members who even needed to plan around time zone differences. While meeting in diverse virtual environments, it was and continues to be evermore important to ensure the visibility of graduate student voices. Some of the committees that we've held representation during the 2020-2021 year include, but are not limited to:

- Board of Trustees
- Internationalization (University)
- Senate
- Academic Review (Senate)
- Research and Scholarship Policy (Senate)
- Planning Priorities and Budget Advisory (Senate)
- Student Appeals Board (Senate)
- President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights, Equity and Decolonization (PACHRED)
- Advisory Committees for the Chancellor, Vice-President Administration, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President Students, and President and Vice-Chancellor
- Mapping the New Knowledges Conference

STRATEGIC PLAN

During the 2019-2020 year, discussions began regarding the creation of the inaugural Strategic Plan for the GSA. While some work and consultations had been completed prior to the COVID-19 disruptions, much of this work was limited and served as background information to the processes ahead.

Once the Board of Directors for 2020-2021 resumed, the GSA undertook a series of breakout activities to engage members in fulsome discussions around who the GSA is and where we all want the GSA to go. These discussions were done in parallel to series of conversations in one-on-one spaces with relevant campus stakeholders to gather their perspectives on the future of the GSA, along with what expectations they have of our goals and priorities.

Taking this information and holding it in consideration with the organizational history, the Board considered the development of a new mission and vision for the GSA. After significant conversation, the Board arrived at a mutual understanding of who the GSA is, what the GSA should focus on, and where the GSA can idealistically be in five years. The renewed mission and

vision, along with our established values are shared at the beginning of this Report, while the complete Strategic Plan can be found on the GSA's website.

The GSA will continue to engage the Board, graduate students, and our community in the execution of this Strategic Plan. Long-term plans are only as effective as those that uphold them; their relevance is determined by the action of those that are ultimately responsible for the outcomes.

EXECUTIVE RESTRUCTURING

Prior to this year, the GSA's Executive structure had remained nearly unchanged over the course of almost two decades, with the exception of the addition of the Vice-President, International in 2012-2013. Over that same time period, our membership has quadrupled, our staff compliment has doubled, and the needs of our members have increased exponentially. Since 2015, the limitations of a decades-old structure have only continued to increase the pressures of work within the organization and our ability to achieve annual goals.

Not only were there internal pressures, but after review of the sector we operate in, there were external pressures to reevaluate our structure. Our sector review revealed that of the fifteen GSAs in Ontario, we were the only one with eight executives; the largest after Brock had six while the average was approximately four and a half. This was another key indicator that we should entertain a restructuring.

With an eye toward future growth, we also wanted to provide fair compensation for the executive team for the work they do, this has historically been a challenge and something the GSA has struggled with. We remained one of the few GSAs in the province without clear compensation for the work of our student leaders. Financially, with some reallocation, we identified that the GSA had capacity for additional roles if compensated at the current Teaching Assistant (TA) rate. This noted, capacity translated to an additional four contracts, each for five hours per week or the equivalent of one TA contract for four team members. All totaled, this would put the executive team compliment at five members, arriving close to the provincial average.

This began by assessing current workloads, and for roles that were already working five hours per week, very little was done in terms of adjustment, other than changing the name to better reflect the role. This was also true for the VP Communications position. The VP Finance position was more easily made redundant due to the nature of the work being rather episodic, those specific requirements were distributed throughout the other restructured roles.

This left four positions that would have to become two. Both Senator positions found homes in the VP's whose roles had additional capacity (based on a 5 hours per week workload) as well had logical harmony. For the VP External Affairs, it made sense, given their external advocacy with partners and with the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) at the provincial and federal level, that they be a member of the university senate, highest academic body at Brock. The same was true for the reconfigured VP International role, given the impacts that this body could have on the lives and experiences of students often marginalized of university campuses.

Collectively, we developed position bylaws for each of the five positions (President, Vice-President, Student Engagement, Vice-President, External Affairs, Vice-President, Communications & Advancement, and Vice-President, Equity & Inclusion), clear job descriptions which had never been articulated within the GSA.

NEW LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS CREATED

Throughout the last twelve months, a number of legislative documents have been created and revised. Not only does this improve our compliment of documents on hand, but these documents also reduce legislative gaps, propel the organization forward and aligns us under compliance of provincial legislation. At the end of the 2019-2020 year, the GSA had five Bylaws (Document 010, Document 011, Document 015, Document 021 and Document 040). Now, we have a more robust collection of documents. The following are documents that are new to the GSA as April 2021:

Bylaws:

- Document 012A – Honorary Membership Bylaw
- Document 013A – Honorary Membership List Bylaw
- Document 016A – Board Member Bylaw
- Document 017A – Board Leadership Bylaw
- Document 018A – Program Assembly Bylaw
- Document 020A – President’s Bylaw
- Document 022A – Past-President’s Bylaw
- Document 023A – VP Student Engagement Bylaw
- Document 024A – VP External Affairs Bylaw
- Document 025A – VP Communications and Advancement Bylaw
- Document 026A – VP Equity and Inclusion Bylaw
- Document 027A – Associate Vice-President’s Bylaw
- Document 029A – Executive Performance Appraisal Bylaw
- Document 030A – Executive Director’s Bylaw
- Document 041A – General Meetings Bylaw
- Document 050A – Committees Bylaw
- Document 051A – Executive Committee Bylaw

Policies:

- Documents 112A, 113A, 114A, 115A, 116A, 117A, 118A, and 119A
These are policies that govern the conduct of the Board, committees and the executive team. These Policies provide guidance that help ensure that we remain in compliance with relevant legislation. These documents also recognize the serious nature of the Board’s business.

- Document 125A – AVP Digital Communications Policy.

Legislative Documents Revised:

- Document 010B – Legislation of the GSA Bylaw
- Document 015B – Board of Directors Bylaw
- Document 021B – Deputy President’s Bylaw

SENATE

This year, the President and Deputy President, in their roles as graduate student senators, worked to revitalize the Student Caucus (SSC). This revitalization came after several years of inactivity and was a joint partnership with the undergraduate student senators. A total of nine students made up the SSC this year, out of approximately 72 members of Senate. The work of the caucus was primarily focused on ensuring student voice was effectively deployed in order to maximize the influence of our voting bloc. This was most apparent over the discussion around student’s paying for third-party fees, a topic which was only raised at Senate because of the insistence of the SSC. These conversations resulted in the establishment of a working group to revise and implement new guidelines around third-party fees, with the goal of further developing these into policies in the future.

The other major success for the GSA was the addition of a third Senate seat for graduate students. Previously, graduate students were only represented by two senators. This made committee assignments challenging and often meant there were not enough representatives to share the workload and additional responsibilities. The addition of a non-voting seat for the GSA President (or their designate) allows for a greater distribution of work, while also increasing the GSA’s voice within the Senate. This additional seat also creates a better line of communication between the GSA and Senate, which has been previously muddled. This is a major victory for the GSA and for graduate students. It caps years' worth of advocacy to increase our representation and comes at a time when many universities are reducing student representation on their governing bodies.

COMMUNITY

INCREASED COLLABORATION WITH UNIVERSITY GROUPS

Planning programming in virtual spaces can be difficult. As the year went on, the more time that all of us were spending in front of screen, be it for school, work, research, leisure and social time. Wanting to offer programming that was not only rich in content but rich in delivery, we felt that by partnering with university groups, we could offer collective, meaningful and engaging programming for graduate students. We are both proud and thankful for our increased collaborations with the following university groups:

- Student Wellness & Accessibility Center
- Human Rights and Equity
- Faculty of Graduate Studies
- Faith and Life
- Faculty of Education Writing Studio
- Career Zone
- Brock International

CULTURAL INTEGRATION EVENT WEEK

For the first time, the GSA hosted a Cultural Integration Event Week. This week was developed through inspiration to celebrate and highlight the diversity of the graduate student population; it was also a week to further connections and unification between domestic and international students. This week showcased graduate students on our social media channels singing, cooking, dancing and talking about their cultures. Cultural Integration Event Week also focused on education, featuring presentations from the Vice-Provost of Strategic Partnerships and International, Brock International and officers from the Human Rights and Equity Department.

GRAD-ITUDE WEEK

After the year that we – Board, executive, and the GSA membership alike – experienced, the GSA wanted to celebrate the achievements, success and growth of all in more ways than one. Building off of the concept of the GSA's annual Starlight Gala, Grad-itude Week was a week of celebrating graduate students and showing our gratitude for each other. The week featured five virtual events, four daily social media challenges, and a virtual peer-nominated awards night to honour graduate students. The GSA wanted to commemorate this important event and still provide graduate students with an opportunity to socialize, have fun, and celebrate the end of the semester.

GSA PODCAST

Seeing a space to have further conversations than what could be hosted in a social media post, but also in a desire to share information with students in a medium other than reading off a screen, the GSA hosted a podcast, The GSA Podcast, in the Winter term featured conversation with individuals from the Canadian Federation of Students. While small in episodes, the update on this new initiative was exciting and introduced conversations of how we ultimately communicate with graduate students.

EVENT TURNOUT

Due to the online nature of this past year, as mentioned, the events that the GSA ran were very different this year compared to prior years. Despite the new expectations and environments for events, we are proud of our efforts to reach graduate students. Throughout the Fall and Winter semesters, we hosted twenty virtual events and co-hosted an addition fourteen virtual events. As of mid-April 2021, 285 students attended our events between September 2020 and April 2021. This number does not include engagement from students on social media channels, events held throughout Spring 2020 or the Grad-itude events.

SERVICE

GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORTS

We are proud of the work that we have done for graduate students this year. Below are some highlights that particularly connect with supports for graduate students:

- Contributed \$15,000 to the COVID-19 Emergency Fund, established in May 2020, to provide graduate students with emergency one-time financial support.
- Advocated for the extension of funded terms (one term for research-based masters students; two terms for PhD students). To this day, we remain the only graduate student's association in Ontario to have achieved this extension for our students.
- Championed for and secured an additional final stage status, allowing students to receive an additional term as a substantially reduced cost as compared to full or part time tuition.
- Secured more flexible rules around inactive term status.
- Secured one-time funding for students out of their funded term and nearing completion (April 2021)

BUILDING REFERENDUM

Beginning in 2017 the GSA has sought additional space on campus to reflect the growing population of our membership and the various needs that accompany them. These efforts reached an increased pace throughout the 2019-2020 year, as the GSA began to intentionally explore opportunities for additional graduate student space, specifically dedicated for the GSA, on campus. Each time we arrived at the functional program phase, developing conceptual blueprints but never advancing forward. This limitation came largely because of two critical factors, a lack of funds and a lack of belief that any of these alternatives would meet the needs of the GSA, both today and in the future. Simply put the GSA did not want to commit to a project whereby the time it was completed it no longer met the needs of our association and membership.

Our previous efforts to covert level 200 C-Block in the Mackenzie Chown Complex were abandoned and instead the GSA charted a new course to develop new, dedicated graduate student space on campus. Recognizing the need for sustainability and future planning we crafted a functional program for over 8000 sq/ft, housing additional amenities such as collaborative and event space, a restaurant and a bar. We worked closely with university administration and engaged in months of consultation with various stakeholders before presenting our board with a request to engage an architect to develop a vision for what this space could look like.

What resulted was a campaign for 'A Home to Call Our Own', which was housed at our website, providing a detailed outline of the plans for the space, where it would be located, what may be offered within the space as well as our proposed agreement with our membership to fund the

project. That referendum, held in March 2021 passed with a record 70.5% in favour, the highest 'YES' vote for a referendum in GSA history. This endorsement articulates a clear commitment from our membership, that we want space for ourselves, we want to improve graduate culture. This is a generational milestone for the GSA and one that has been years in the making, it provides the foundation from which we can build a home for graduate students that will stand for decades to come.

MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

From the growing demands of the graduate student population, along with the increased pressures resulting from the pandemic, Brock has seen graduate students interacting with campus health services in record numbers. This year more than ever, the GSA worked closely with campus partners to identify opportunities for additional supports, such as increasing the Graduate Mental Health fee, but also advocating for additional supports from the University. We partnered with Student Accessibility Services to secure a dedicate app for our students. This app introduces help that is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week throughout the year. As we continue to see the growth in use of these services, we will continue to monitor these trends with members of the University and further look into opportunities for additional supports for graduate students.

STAFF EXPANSION

This year we implemented the first and second phases of our organizational restructuring plan. We created the role of the Executive Director, dividing the previous Office Coordinator position to better reflect the demands of the role, and hired a new Office and Health Plan Administrator. Following the success of the new employee we prepared for and are completing hiring for an additional employee as our current OHPA transitions into the role of Executive Director. By staging the succession in this way, we have ensured organization continuity and retained corporate memory while adjusting our course and preparing for the next decade of growth in the organization.

By growing our staff compliment to 2 FTEs we position ourselves for expansion and allow for better communication year over year, which will enable us to build on our success more effectively. In creating a tiered staff structure now, it will allow future growth to be easier and cleaner. To supplement this, we will be developing a clear organizational chart, outlining the staff and executive connections/intersections, while also creating a clear succession plan for senior staff and leadership positions.

FINANCIALS

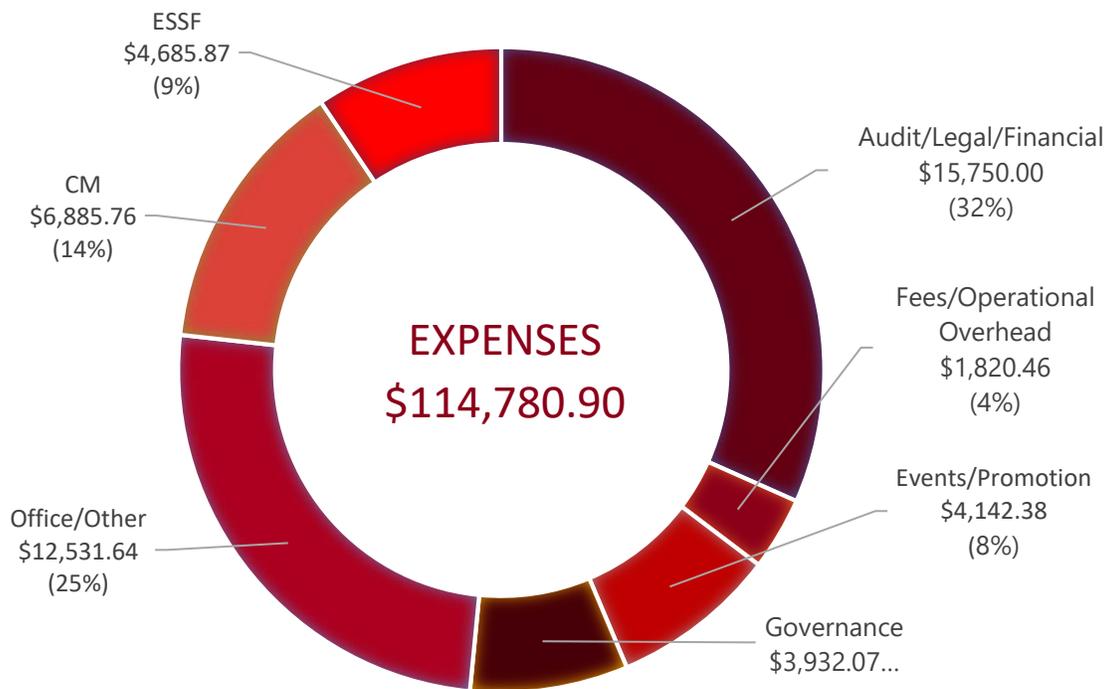
REVENUES AND EXPENSES

As in fiscal year 2019/20 the GSA developed a budget that was conservative in its projections for revenue, recognizing the potential for reduced enrollments, we wanted to ensure that we were not over-extending our reach when it came to annual commitments to our membership. Despite these challenges we are pleased to acknowledge the hard work of our executive and staff who have worked tirelessly to make sure that we tracked expenses closely against our revenues over the first eight months of the fiscal year. In addition to our strong performance provided by fiscal guidance we also benefitted from stronger enrollment performance than forecasted placing us in a good position to close out the year.

Our revenues and expenses reflect our fiscal performance over the last eight months and recognize there are still four months remaining in our fiscal year (till August 31st, 2021). While our excess of revenues over expenses may look high (\$10,000) at this time this reflects our fee schedule with the university, we are not expected to receive significant new revenue over the spring/summer semesters but will continue to see additional costs against the budget, most significantly from the staff and executive restructures. This means that we will balance much closer to zero by the end of the fiscal year.

Given the success of the new building referendum we will continue to explore opportunities for additional membership growth beyond our fees driven model. We hope to expand partnerships with existing campus stakeholders to provide graduate students with more opportunities and more services in anticipation of our return to campus.





AUDIT

To provide greater transparency and accountability to our members and following requests from our campus partners as we renegotiate our Omnibus agreement with the university, the GSA chose to proactively develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for audit services. This RFP was developed by the Audit Procurement Committee, who did an incredible job preparing this document. The team consisted of staff, executive and members of the Board.

We received responses of interest from approximately half a dozen firms, both local and provincial. Upon reviewing the submissions, the committee selected the successful firm, with an eye to both cost as well as presentation and commitment. This selection was presented to the Board, who has since approved this recommendation to be presented for confirmation at our Annual General Meeting. Our three-year engagement will see a review engagement completed in our first year as we work to achieve greater compliance. We will also work to achieve and meet relevant standards in our first year, with the expectation that we will move to a full audit for the following year and remain with that commitment for all subsequent years.

This is a major milestone for the GSA. Our projected future growth will place us in a strong position as we explore the opportunities for additional retail services afforded by additional space on campus.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Executive Officers

Christopher Yendt, President & CEO
Melanie Exance, Deputy President & Senate Representative
Hannah Young, Vice-President Internal
Daislyn Vidal, Vice-President International
Mohammad Moinul Hassan, Vice-President Equity & External Affairs

Associate Vice-President

Ahmadreza Rabbani Movarekh, Associate Vice-President Digital Communication

Board of Directors

Haley Myatt, Chair & Faculty of Social Sciences Representative
Felisia Milana, Vice-Chair & Faculty of Social Sciences Representative
Ash Grover, Faculty of Education
Nawal Syed, Goodman School of Business Representative
Linshan Hou, Goodman School of Business Representative
Amanda Williams, Faculty of Mathematics & Sciences
Jensen Murphy, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Melissa Van der Wal, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences

Program Assembly

Eric O'Neill, Applied Health Sciences (MA/MSc)
Phillip Wallace, Applied Health Sciences (PhD)
Nure Jannat, Education ISP (MEd ISP)
Niluja Muralitharan, Educational Students (Joint PhD Program)
Pragti Kapoor, Business Administration (MBA)
Prakhar Gupta, Business Administration (MBA ISP)
Mohammad Maruf Hasan, Management (MSc)
(Muhammad) Zain Abdeen, Professional Accounting ISP (MPAcc)
Mitch Goldsmith, Interdisciplinary Humanities (PhD)
Favour Nwogu, Business Economics (MBE)
Kelly McCowell, Child and Youth Studies (MA)
Kerendu Waboso, Child and Youth Studies (PhD)
Lina Adeetuk, Geography (MA)
Anita Twele, Psychology (MA)
Appiah Bonsu, Sociology (Critical) (MA)

Staff

Barb Daly, Executive Director
Mary Tibollo, Office & Health Plan Administrator