



## Graduate Students' Association Inc.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
December 3, 2020

OFFICER'S REPORTS– April 2020.

### **PRESIDENT - CHRISTOPHER YENDT**

#### **SEPTEMBER 2019**

**Contracts/Negotiations:** A major part of my work over the summer has been negotiating or renegotiating contracts with several campus partners. Because of the GSA's relative size, in comparison to other groups on campus, we are not often able to provide the services graduate students need internally and instead must look for partners in service provision. Last year this included successfully renegotiation of our transit contract with the Brock University Students' Union (BUSU). A part of this negotiated included a provision that will see the GSA transferred 1% of our U-Pass contribution back at the beginning of the spring/summer term to cover the costs of the summer subsidy program. This is a major win for the GSA as previously we covered these costs out of our operating budget. This contract is for five years and will see the GSA to the summer of 2023.

August 2019 saw the expiry of GSA contracts for access to the campus food bank as well as graduate student access to the campus ombudsperson. These contracts had previously been renewed for a period of one year with the hope of being able to renegotiate in that extension, however this did not happen. A large part of my time since transitioning into this role has been locking down these contracts. In the case of the Food Bank (named FoodFirst) I am delighted to say that the contract has been successfully signed, the service will now be accessible from the BUSU office and students in need will be able to access the service once per term. Usage will be re-evaluated over the coming term to see if this allotment can be adjusted but for now I am thrilled that students will not suffer a disruption to this service.

Similarly, for Ombuds access, negotiations have been ongoing and while details of contributions have not been finalized by any of the three parties I'm pleased that all partners have agreed in good faith to maintain access for graduate students until a new contract is finalized. This was something that I pushed for heavily during our conversations when it became clear that the expiration timelines would not be met.

As we wait for the results of the first opt-out period conversations have started with senior administration around reclassification of our fees. As I discuss later in my report there are two types of ancillary fees, those deemed mandatory and those deemed optional. While the GSA Operating Fund is currently considered entirely optional it is my intention, based on what has transpired at other universities to determine the mandatory components of this fee and have them protected accordingly. This is something we had wanted to do last term but owing to all of the other work underway was simply too much to tackle.

Part of these conversations will also include negotiations around audit requirements. Under provincial regulations all student associations will have to have an audit performed on their mandatory fees. As these costs are significant, and the GSA has never needed an audit before I will be negotiating with the university to try and find an acceptable balance for this requirement, hopefully utilizing finance department expertise for an internal audit.

Graduate students currently pay a mandatory ancillary fee to the university to support mental health services on campus. The agreement for that fee, a memorandum of understanding, expires next year. Negotiations have begun in order to inform what the next phase of this fee might look like, these are preliminary at best and no decisions have been made. I will be inviting the Director of Student Wellness and Accessibility Services to make a presentation to the Board later this term to discuss potential options and gain feedback for any new directions that the university wishes to take the fee.

In 2018 the Brock University Students' Union (BUSU) ran a referendum to increase the size of the Zone Fitness Centre on Campus. As graduate students have not run a corresponding referendum, we are not set to provide any contribution to the construction of the facility at this time, which means that any access to the future space is not guaranteed. Work is scheduled to be completed for the Fall of 2020 and recognizing those timelines I have begun having early conversations around ways to partner with the institution and BUSU so that graduate students will continue to have access to this facility.

**Updates to Student Choice Initiative (SCI):** Earlier this year the previous Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Merrilee Fullerton gave a press conference on January 17<sup>th</sup> regarding some major changes to OSAP, Tuition and related fees that formed the basis for a new tuition and funding framework that facilitated the biggest change in student government over the course of my involvement. For the GSA these changes came in the form of the Student Choice Initiative (SCI) a change that allows all students to determine which fees they wish to pay for and which they don't. Previously all graduate students were required to pay all three of the GSA fees, which included a GSA Fee, GSA Services Fee and a flow through fee we charge on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS).

Following the initial announcement, the GSA worked to develop new Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to propose to the members at our Annual General Meeting. These documents were then modified to reflect the specifics of the new government mandate as they were outlined in the new Tuition and Ancillary Fees Framework. This framework created two new classifications for ancillary fees, those that were deemed to be essential services and those that were not. Any fee determined to be essential would be protected, and students would not be allowed to opt-out of paying that fee. Any fee that was deemed to be non-essential would in turn be a choice for students, allowing them to decide whether they would like to opt-in or out of paying. In reviewing these parameters, the GSA created four new MOU's to reorganize our current fee structure. These fees were;

- 1) GSA Capital Fund – This fee covers the cost of infrastructure and capital items of the GSA, maintaining necessary equipment over the lifespan. This fee existed previously underneath the GSA Services Fee, but was not broken out as a separate charge to students. This fee is classified as essential under the new framework.

- 2) GSA Ombudsperson Fund – This fee covers the cost of access to the University Ombudsperson for all Graduate Students. This fee is classified as essential under the new framework.
- 3) GSA Operating Fund – This fee functions as our membership fee, with the choice to opt-in or out determining what level of membership a graduate student will hold in our organization. This fee covers all operational costs of the GSA, including advocacy efforts, social engagements and personnel costs. This fee is classified as non-essential under the new framework.
- 4) GSA Emergency Student Support Fund – This fee was proposed to cover the GSA’s costs for supporting students in need, typically done with campus partners. This fee was initially classified as essential under the new framework but upon review by the university, in their conversations with other institutions it was determined to be non-essential. Because of the difficulty in tracking multiple non-essential fees (given our size and resource limitations) it was determined it was more suitable to combine this fee back into the Operating Fund until such a time that conversations could begin again as to how best to classify the fee.

As no institution wants to ‘go it alone’ and risk being made an example of by the provincial government, the decision of how to classify an ancillary fee (essential versus non-essential) has proved to be a labor-intensive negotiation process on behalf of all parties involved. This restructuring of fees took effect for September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and were reflected in the fees charged to students and the choices presented to you. All fees charged by the university remain essential, so students will not be able to opt-out of them. The other two major fees that the GSA collects, the Universal Bus Pass and the Health and Dental Plan fee remain unchanged. For the former, it is now provincially mandated that this fee be charged to all eligible students, whereas before it was simply a contracted requirement from the providers of the service (local and regional transit authorities). For the latter, the Health and Dental Plan retains its original opt-in/out period (September 1<sup>st</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>), and students are only allowed to opt-out if they can provide proof of alternative coverage that is comparable to that provided by the plan the GSA offers.

**GSA Operating Budget:** The Financial Year of the GSA runs from September 1<sup>st</sup> until August 31<sup>st</sup> of the following year. This is misaligned from the executive year by four months. Over the spring/summer term the Executive continues to execute the last third of the budget approved during the previous year. In each of the last few years the Operating Budget typically comes forward to the Board for approval during the September or October meetings, but the approach this year is somewhat different given the changes made by the Student Choice Initiative. Opt-out periods were set independently by every institution across the province, and as such no two periods are the same. At Brock University the opt-out period was paired with the registration period, meaning students had the opportunity to opt-in or out of any non-essential fees from June 17<sup>th</sup> until September 17<sup>th</sup>.

As this year will be precedence setting, the Executive passed an interim budget over the summer to guide the organization’s spending and operation until we receive finalized enrollment numbers from the university and can use those to inform any necessary adjustments to the 2019-20 Operating budget, which will be presented for final approval at the October meeting of the Board of Directors. The interim budget has assumed a reduction of funding by 50% over the 2018-19 Fiscal Year. While the anticipated reduction seems steep, numbers that have been reported from student associations across the province indicate that no

two circumstances are comparable, and each experience is unique. Some organizations have seen modest reductions in funding (15-20%), others face bankruptcy where over 90% of students have opted out of paying related association fees. The interim budget was prepared last year and presented to the Board for input in winter 2019, and with a lot of hard work from the current as well as previous executive we were able to reach a budget that will ensure continued operation for the GSA even in the event that half of students choose to no longer support the organization.

Depending on the outcomes of our negotiations with the university around the Student Choice Initiative (SCI) we will likely need to seek outside counsel on the appropriate policies to have internally to restrict and monitor cash flows.

One of my additional goals this year had been to look at the realignment of the GSA's fiscal year to that of the university, which would make budgeting noticeably easier, as fee payment dates would more readily align with our operating budget. Doing so would also more appropriately align with the terms of our executives (May-April) so that incoming executives weren't forced to manage the final four months of the previous executive's budget. However, this project has been placed off my radar due to the more pressing changes of addressing the risks associated with the Student Choice Initiative (SCI).

Throughout this fiscal year, as in previous fiscal years, the GSA has generally tracked above our budgeted amounts through our Year-to-Date monitoring. While this is often due to the timing of payments from the university and the subsequent timing of our payments to other providers, it also has to do with our revenues versus expenses. As I had informed the board previously, the GSA is in a relatively strong position to be able to weather the immediate effects of the SCI, our cash position in the bank is healthy and we have had annual surpluses for several years. Now this has been primarily since the organization has been positioned (not by planning but by growth) for expansion in terms of the services we provide to graduate students.

Despite all the negativity surrounding the Student Choice Initiative, I refuse to give in to my blues. While I have rarely ever been the optimist, I will not accept the most negative outcome, that's not how it's going to be. There remain several alternatives and opportunities that could be explored to assist the survival and success of the GSA. As has been outlined in previous reports, the GSA has a heavy reliance on student fees for our operating budget and a lack of diversity when it comes to income sources. My recommendation would be for a greater focus to be placed on alternative revenue sources to decrease the organizational reliance on a single income source.

**Legislation/Governance:** The GSA has tried in previous years to have the full board of directors sit over the summer, beyond the monthly meetings held from September to April. No such meeting has managed to meet quorum, so the Board each April transfers its authority, under Article Fifteen, Section II of the GSA Constitution, which states: *The Directors of the Board may transfer their decision-making authority, and all the responsibilities therein, to the Executive Committee for the duration of the term of office from May 1st to August 31st. This transfer shall not limit the liabilities or rights of the board during that time.* Part of this responsibility is to pass legislation, where necessary, to support the organization and its growth and development. Over the summer the Executive Committee approved several legislative components, beyond the rollback of the Emergency Student Support Fund into the

general Operating Fund, the executive undertook other necessary changes over course of the spring/summer to move the GSA forward with an eye to greater compliance with provincial legislation. As a background, in 2017 the provincial government passed the Cutting Unnecessary Red Tape Act, this act approved several pending pieces of legislation but most notably for non-profits, passed the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA). While this law had long been in the works the GSA has remained relatively unfocused in its resolve to move forward with the required changes. In early 2016 I authored a report comparing the GSA to other student associations across the province, a copy of which can be found here: [https://www.academia.edu/31565105/Phase\\_One\\_Council\\_Refresh\\_Project\\_CRP\\_GSA\\_Report](https://www.academia.edu/31565105/Phase_One_Council_Refresh_Project_CRP_GSA_Report)

This report found several decisions with our Board of Directors (then referred to incorrectly as our Council) and provided a series of recommendations to move towards a model more reflective of our needs and the demands placed on us by ONCA (then still a proposed but anticipated bill). In the years since this report has formed the bedrock of discussion for improvements to our system of governance, with each successive iteration of various committees identifying that the current model (appointments based on program) was inadequate to our needs and did a disservice to our students. The greatest problem was two-fold, because representatives were selected by program it meant that the GSA failed the basic principle of representative democracy.

Some programs have hundreds of students while some have a dozen, this means that sometimes a representative would represent the needs of a few students, while others had the impossible task of representing a number unfeasible for a student volunteer. The second piece stems from a requirement that all directors of non-profit boards are required, by law, to put the interests of organization they serve (the GSA) above the interests of the organizations they represent (programs). The very nature of this structure created an impossible ask, one which a soon to be enforce ONCA would not tolerate. While ONCA will not be fully enforceable until 2023, this is less than three years away, and there are far more changes required for compliance than just this piece, so there remains an immediacy to these changes.

It is also important to note that the GSA constitution requires for Board Members to be elected, and while this provision was written prior to the details of SCI coming to fruition, which has dominated the organizations time and focus over the last two months, it also means that program representatives are no longer feasible because the GSA is unable, due to university restrictions, facilitate elections by program, the smallest denomination that can be accommodated is elections by Faculty. The executive followed closely the recommendations provided in the report and chose to implement a phased approach to the change. In order to achieve compliance, the changes required would be too substantial to implement over a single year and so instead they would be implemented in steps, beginning with a shift to a Faculty based representative model, including provisions for additional seats accommodating underrepresented voices on campus. This approach would represent the first step to modifying and codifying the GSA's structure.

It is important to recognize that prior to this change the GSA had no documentation outlining the structure of its Board of Directors, no legislation to enforce the way that it operated and simply acted on word of mouth, which again under provincial legislation is both dangerous and illegal. While these changes don't represent anything in finality, they are the next steps

needed to move the conversation forward and will exist in conjunction with a Board Governance Committee tasked with determining future directions to compliance.

The Executive Committee also approved documentation for the role of the Deputy President under Document 021A. While the constitution outlines certain duties of the role it is important that the GSA provide a fulsome list of responsibilities as they pertain to the job to ensure that all future office holders are aware of their responsibilities and so that should an incident arise that there is a logical procedure to follow to effectively manage the situation, as was the case over the summer. This document can be found on the GSA website

Finally, the executive approved the first set of Job Descriptions for each of the different roles. While these have always existed, they have never been approved or finalized. These will exist as policy for the coming year after which time the current office holders will be able to provide feedback and edit the documents to greater reflect the nature of their roles.

**Freedom of Expression on Campus:** The GSA was contacted by the university secretariat to provide feedback on the University's Freedom of Expression policy. The context for this was that about a year ago the Provincial government mandated that all Universities and Colleges in the province develop policies to outline how Freedom of Speech and Expression are protected on campuses. The directive cited the University of Chicago as a model to follow and required all institutions to have a policy in place by January 1, 2019. In the time since this deadline the provincial government has now tasked the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to evaluate every institution's policy and whether it has been upheld, looking at all potential violations. As part of this review, the GSA was asked to provide feedback on implementation as well issues that may have arisen over the period. In providing feedback the GSA noted that the wording of the policy continues to remain a concern, including the potential threats that face teaching assistants as a result. The GSA only reported a single issue arising that relates to the policy since it was implemented, though minor, as it relates to information distributed through our mailing list. This information was reported to the General Counsel of the University, no further follow up is expected at this time.

**Executive Transition:** For the 2019 Election cycle the GSA moved to a new provider, SimplyVoting from their previous provider BigPulse. This change was accompanied by the approval of Document 040A, which created a comprehensive list of rules and regulations for the GSA to operate its elections. This transition required a greater understanding of the role then it had in previous years, and so I offered to serve as the Chief Returning Officer for the election period. This appointment was supported by the executive committee and approved by the Board. It also meant that I was ineligible to run in the election.

The election solicited no applications for the role of Vice-President, Finance during the first nomination period, as well as no nominations during a second period opened after the closure of the first. As a result, the GSA utilized the provision of:

- 1) Article Ten, Section III, Subsection f of the GSA constitution which states: *"If two nomination periods fail to solicit a candidate for an Office, the responsibilities of that Office may be delegated by the Board of Directors of the GSA, through an appointment by them for the duration of the proposed term."*

Then President Guertin presented a motion for my appointment to the role at the final meeting of the Board of Directors in April 2019, which was approved with two abstentions. It is important to note that this same process was used for the VP Finance position in April 2016,

when two previous nomination periods had failed to attract a candidate to the role. In addition, under provincial law, an office holder continues to hold the role in the absence of a successor, so had no appointment been made I still would have been required to execute the duties of the role until such a time as a new individual was chosen.

In addition, the AGM of 2019 provided several critical edits to the GSA Constitution, one of which was to replace the Vice-President, Internal as the dedicated executive member responsible for standing in for the president with a Deputy President. This was done to alleviate the responsibility from a fixed person, and instead allow the executive to select the most interested and qualified person, on the recommendation of the President. Previous VP Internals' have remarked that it never made sense that their role, which is primarily focused on planning events, is also responsible for managing meetings and executing the duties of the President in their absence. The Constitution also states that specific meetings cannot take place unless the President or Deputy President is present to chair them, given certain health concerns the previous president faced over the spring/summer it was necessary that this role be filled to ensure business could continue to be conducted. Given my experience and long history with the GSA (nearly four years) the president nominated me, I accepted and the executive approved my appointment as Deputy President following the procedure outlined in the Deputy President's Bylaw.

During my involvement with the GSA each year typically sees the loss of executive over the spring/summer term. There are several reasons for this, but it speaks to the nature of demands placed on graduate students during their study, and the amount of time available to focus on roles outside of their specific program. In 2016 the VP Equity and External resigned during the fall term, in 2017 the VP Internal resigned shortly after the beginning of their term, and in 2018 resignations of both the VP Internal and the VP Communications took place over the course of the spring/summer term. In all cases the GSA managed these resignations in accordance with the Constitution, namely the following provisions:

- 1) Article Eighteen, Section I, Subsection b, *Provided that a vacancy occurs because of any provision outlined in Article Eighteen, Section I, Subsection a, the Board of Directors of the Corporation by majority vote, may, by appointment, fill the vacancy for the remainder of the vacant Officer or Director's term. And*
- 2) Article Nineteen, Section I, *Upon the recall or resignation of an Officer of the GSA, the duties of said office may be taken over by one of the Vice Presidents for the duration of the term. Should this occur, the said Vice President will be known as "Acting". Should the situation arise whereby a seat becomes vacant, one Officer may hold two offices, one as their primary responsibility and one as "Acting" Officer.*

In all cases, except for the most recent VP International vacancy, a member of the executive fulfilled the duties of the vacant executive until a new person could be appointed under the first provision.

**Vice-President, International Appointment:** At the beginning of May, the Vice-President, International resigned and President Guertin issued a call for applications to fill the position. The posting was, as has been the case in recent years, for an interim person to fill the role who then would get full confirmation from the Board in November. I participated in interviews of shortlisted candidates which succeeded in selecting a new individual, Aaron Nartley, for the

role. Aaron was approved by the executive during the summer, prior to the resignation of the President.

**President Appointment:** As a result of ongoing health concerns the President submitted their resignation on July 12<sup>th</sup>, which was subsequently accepted by the executive committee, and following the bylaw provisions outlined earlier, appointed the Deputy President into the role for an Acting period until a meeting could be convened to discuss the vacancy further. That meeting occurred at the end of July, where conversation could occur to determine the best path forward for the whole of the organization. Considerations were given to all of the provisions within the constitution available to the executive, which included the appointment authority provided in Article Eighteen as well as the Acting ability provided in Article Nineteen.

Unlike previous vacancies, where appointments were made for an interim period for full approval by the board later, this appointment was made for the duration of the term owing to a number of other factors that were not present for the Vice-President's or Senator vacancies.

These included issues such as:

- 1) The GSA does not do direct deposit payment, as a result all staff, contract, bursaries and other expenses are paid out by either credit card, or most frequently by cheque. All cheques require at two officers to sign (the President and the Vice-President, Finance) which is outlined in the constitution. With the resignation of the President, my appointment in an acting capacity would have meant that the organization still only had one signing authority, meaning cheques could not be written and most notably staff would not be paid for the work they were doing, which is unacceptable. Issues arising with an interim appointment were similarly problematic if not untenable.
- 2) Workload – In addition to the restriction above the workload between the two roles is beyond what can be effectively managed by a single person, considering the requirement to maintain my studies this would have been impossible and it necessitated that one person not hold joint positions.
- 3) Contract Negotiation – At the time the appointment was made the GSA had several contracts due to expire prior to the end of the summer. Negotiations for these services has not been easy, but most of those outstanding have been finalized. Having had the experience of trying to negotiate in an interim or acting capacity I can whole heartedly say that it is a difficult and frustrating process. Those you are working with become very hesitant to make any agreements for fear that your successor will take a different approach or have different demands, often negotiations are stopped altogether and simply put on hold. The issue in this case was that services for graduate students, such as access to the food bank or to the campus ombudsperson would have been suspended. Jeopardizing access to these services for graduate students was a risk that I was not willing to take, and something an Interim appointment would not have allowed for the effective management of.
- 4) Board of Trustees – Service on the Board of Trustees representing Graduate students comes with several restrictions, while many of them are on time others are led by the institution. There is a significant amount of training and onboarding required to serve on the board, and changes on and off cannot be done quickly. This meant that an interim appointment would leave the GSA in a place where it could go unrepresented at meetings, in between transition. This is

- a massive liability for the GSA, given the cuts that have been experienced across the institution a lack of student voice in a space dominated by financial pressures means graduate students would be at risk of losing what we have to say.
- 5) Executive Recruitment – I am fortunate to have a long history of experience in the not-for-profit sector, and with that I have been able to lend a lot of insight to the executive committee, and one of those is around recruitment. Any recruitment efforts are managed by the President and seek input from other executive or staff members. In this case it would have been highly illogical for a president to be in charge of calling, shortlisting and interviewing candidates for positions were they not to have an eye on the bigger picture. An interim appoint would have meant greater focus on managing a process of reappointment rather than an eye on developing culture and fit around an executive table in order to achieve the GSA's mission and vision.
  - 6) Student Choice Initiative – Since my appointment a large portion of my time has been negotiations around SCI, which at the time of my appointment was active and September was fast approaching. These negotiations required trust and relationship building with members of the university community which would not have been achieved in an interim capacity. Like the second bullet above, key stakeholders are often hesitant to invest the time and effort into building relationships if they know you are a placeholder in a role.
  - 7) Employment – Because of the 10-hour rule, a provincial mandate which limits graduate students to only 10 hours of on campus work a week, the GSA president must forgo teaching or research assistant roles for the duration of their appointment. At the time of my appointment applications were coming due for TA/RAships for the Fall/Winter term and I was required to decline any appointments I had then received. An interim appointment would have meant that I would have forgone employment on campus for the role, with the potential of only being employed for less than half of the year, which have jeopardized my income and my ability to maintain my studies at the campus. While certainly less GSA focused, it is important to consider the impact such an appoint can have on our personal lives both on and off campus. Finally, owing to those same restrictions an interim appointment would have come due in the middle of a term, where students have already accepted employment, meaning many other students would be ineligible to serve in the role.

Following my appointment as President, I immediately resigned my role as Vice-President, Finance and the executive appointed an Acting Vice-President, Finance (Reuben Plance) who could take on the additional signing authority role and ensure that the GSA could continue to meet its financial obligations, which I am happy to say we are doing and will continue to do. At the same time the GSA executive also received a resignation, effective for the end of the summer, from one of its senators who indicated that that would be taking the fall semester off from school and would therefore be ineligible to serve on the Senate going forward.

**VP Finance and GSA Senator Appointments:** A simultaneous call was put out for both a VP Finance and a GSA Senator. The GSA Senator process solicited interest within the initial application period, several candidates were shortlisted and interviewed with interviews conducted by both myself and the GSA Office Coordinator Barb Daly. The successful applicant was Melanie Extance, whose knowledge and depth of experience in the Post-

Secondary Education sector is incredibly impressive and will be of great benefit to the GSA this year.

The initial call for the VP Finance required an extension of one week to solicit additional interest for the position. This extension was successful and allowed for a shortlisting of candidates for the role, who were in turn interviewed by both myself and the GSA Office Coordinator. The successful applicant was Siddharth Pathak, whose skills and insight will be a valuable addition to the role and I am looking forward to the onboarding process and transition.

## **OCTOBER 2019**

### **Contracts/Negotiations:**

**FoodFirst:** The GSA signed a new contract with the Brock University Students' Union that will run until August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Two major changes have occurred with this contract, the first being that grocery store gift cards will now be circulated in place of a food package. These can be picked up by any graduate student in need from the BUSU office after filling out a form online. The GSA contract is for \$6500.00 in food cards over three terms (\$2500.00 in both the Fall and Winter semesters, with \$1500.00 being reserved for the spring summer). This marks the first time that BUSU has extended coverage for GSA members for the period of May-August. By limiting both the amount and frequency of cards available the GSA was optimistic this amount of money would be sufficient, however demand has far outstripped supply for this term with all passes being given out within the first month of school.

I will be working closely with BUSU to identify alternatives to the growing demand and the issue more broadly on campus for both next term, the remainder of the contract and beyond.

**Ombuds:** Services will transfer to the University beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The University has posted for a new ombudsperson and will likely be posting for an additional person to support this individual once the transfer is complete. This means that the existing relationship with BUSU to provide graduate student access for Ombuds will expire at the same time. This leaves two major hurdles to address before the end of the Fall term. 1) Determine the outstanding amount owed to BUSU for the period of the contract until the service transfer and 2) Negotiate a new contract with the university to ensure uninterrupted service provision. Given all parties tend to agree on the latter issue it will be about determining what the GSA should and can afford to contribute to the service. While we currently collect a fee for Ombuds this fee was established in relation to the previous cost of the service, which has increased substantially. I look forward to being able to provide more detail at our November Board Meeting.

**The Zone:** All parties have generally agreed to the desire to continue to provide graduate students access to the Zone, likely for a reduced rate to reflect our size and need. While a number has not yet been landed upon the proposal will follow the same formula as the undergraduate fee (a full amount for the renovations charged over 5 years once the building is open, followed but a reduction to a fee of a few dollars per year to cover equipment replacement and repair). Expect a Memorandum of Understanding to come to the Board before the end of the year for feedback and input.

Mental Health: The current fee graduate students pay to the university is due to expire in May 2020, and I am currently working with Student Health Services to determine a more appropriate amount of money to contribute as well as more suitable program provision for graduate students. In the past the money collected was not spent in accordance with the documentation students voted on and our goal moving forward is both that any new documentation is followed as well as enough money is collected to provide graduate students with the service they need.

**GSA Operating Budget:** In partnership with the GSA Office Coordinator and the Vice-President, Finance we have built a budget to help guide the GSA for the remainder of the year in the face of significant uncertainty. With the help of the rest of the Executive team the GSA will be putting together a promotional campaign for the upcoming registration/op-out period to highlight the great work we do and ensure that the number of students to continue to pay the GSA fee remains high and stable. After following along with all of the other changes that have happened at other student unions I can say that I gained only wisdom from so long in the game, I built such a wall believing that worst that I saw elsewhere but this planning for a more negative outcome has put the GSA in a position to continue to succeed in both the short and long terms.

**Legislation/Governance:** Under Document 010A and the GSA Constitution the GSA has two types of Bylaws, Regular and Issue. Issue Bylaws are different from the others as they are approved by the executive committee, they expire automatically after three years and need only to be voted on once before they are approved. Issue Bylaws can only be used for a specific purpose, namely allowing the GSA to take a stance on an issue. The GSA has two Issue Bylaws (Document 080 and 081) pertaining to Student Supervisor Relationships and Email Promotion and Distribution. Last week the GSA Executive approved two additional Issue Bylaws (Document 082 and 083) which focus on the issues of increasing faculty-student / student-supervisor ratios (an issue which recently contributed to Brock's downgrading in the MacLean's Rankings) as well as GSA neutrality as it relates to issues beyond Brock and our students (namely elections, political parties and foreign affairs)

**Senate Recruitment:** At our previous Board meeting in September I indicated that the GSA Executive had received a resignation from one of our Graduate Student Senators. As this was after the period in which the Executive Committee had received the authority to act on behalf of the Board, I brought this forward at the meeting and through subsequent email. The GSA only has two senators, which means there is a lot of demand on their time and involvement with various committees, making a prolonged vacancy untenable. As was the case with previous vacancies, the process to fill any such absence is outlined in the constitution.

- 1) Article Eighteen, Section I, Subsection b, *Provided that a vacancy occurs because of any provision outlined in Article Eighteen, Section I, Subsection a, the Board of Directors of the Corporation by majority vote, may, by appointment, fill the vacancy for the remainder of the vacant Officer or Director's term.*

I received an application from a member of the Board who met with both myself and our current Student Senator, Melanie Extance for an interview. This candidate impressed us both with their knowledge of the institution as well as passion for the role of advocacy. They indicated they would be a student at least until Spring Convocation 2020 (when the term of the senator expires) and confirmed their interest in being presented as the successful interview

candidate. Should the Board accept their application to fill the role for the remainder of the term this will return the GSA Executive Committee to its full complement after the transitions this summer and allow us to move forward with the task of governing the association.

**Committees:** A list of committees has been circulated to Board members and to graduate students, I'm hoping to see lots of involvement from members around the room and for these committees to greater inform the monthly board agenda and the direction that the GSA chooses to go to support its students. An active committee roster means less time listening to what the executive committee has to say and more time on informing us about the needs of graduate students and the steps we need to take to address those issues.

## **NOVEMBER 2019**

### **Contracts/Negotiations:**

**FoodFirst:** At my urging the GSA and BUSU have struck a working group with the university to address more holistically the issue of food access on campus. While our contract with BUSU runs until August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 we are looking to substantial changes as early as possible. These include working with the new contract provisions of the incoming campus food provider. As you were informed previously, demand exceeded supply for the GSA's fall commitment to the program, which will resent on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Given this, both BUSU and the GSA have chosen to reduce the amount of the gift card from \$25.00 to \$15.00. While this will not solve the issue in its entirety, we are hopeful that it will allow for a greater dispersion of cards to those in need.

**Ombuds:** Services will transfer to the University beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The University had posted for a new ombudsperson, applications have been received and will now proceed to shortlisting and interviews. I have been invited to take part in this process, along with the BUSU President and a couple of other stakeholders on campus who will make up the hiring panel. I expect these interviews to be conducted over the next couple of weeks with a successful candidate announced prior to the winter break. In addition to this transfer:

- The GSA and BUSU have agreed to an appropriate amount to address the GSA's outstanding contribution for the 2019 year. This amount will be consistent with previous contributions, prorated for the term in question.
- I am currently negotiating a new contract with the university to ensure uninterrupted service provision. Going forward the goal will be to determine what the GSA should and can afford to contribute to the service. While we currently collect a fee for Ombuds this fee was established in relation to the previous cost of the service, which has increased substantially. The expected outcome will be a commitment by the GSA to increase its fee gradually over a period of five years to reflect the new need.

**The Zone:** Currently undergraduate students are contributing \$17.00 per credit per year (over 5 years) to the renovation of the Zone (which works out to \$85.00 per year). I indicated that this number was beyond what graduate students could afford, and that a revised number would be necessary. Through further conversations we arrived at \$50.00 per year, which is approximately \$17.00 per term. Just as it is for undergraduate students, this amount would be due over the course of 5 years, at which point the fee will drop to roughly a dollar per term to cover the costs of equipment replacement and repair. No fees shall be charged until the

facility is open. Expect a Memorandum of Understanding to come to the Board at our December meeting for feedback and input.

**Mental Health:** I recently attended the Student Wellness and Accessibility Advisory Committee and provided input on behalf of graduate students for an upcoming awareness campaign for services provided on campus. I also received an update on projected costs for the services Graduate Students have asked to be provided by Health Services on campus. As you might imagine these costs are significantly more than the contributions the GSA currently provides, so I will be working with the Director of Student Wellness and Accessibility to come to an agreement on how to reflect student needs as well as their ability to contribute financially.

**Update on Campus Food Service Provider:** The university is currently in negotiations to address the expiration of the previous food service contract on campus. Expect any changes to take effect May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

**Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS):** Last week I had the opportunity to attend the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies. I attended with several members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, including the Dean and Associate Dean. The conference provided an excellent opportunity to meet with other graduate student leaders and discuss best practices and common struggles. This was particularly true for institutions in Ontario who are facing significant changes as a result of SCI. We spoke collectively to the needs of graduate student associations as being distinctly different from undergraduates, and that SCI is going to leave a mark, maybe we can stay and wait it out but the fears remained across the board when it came to the frequency and duration of opt-out availability.

**Leadership Session:** On October 10<sup>th</sup>, I attended a Leadership session hosted by the University for Chairs, Directors, GPDs, AVPs and Vice Provosts which served as the first in a planned series of semi-annual professional development events for administrators. President Fearon spoke about the changes in Post-Secondary Education and reviewed the Institutional Strategic Plan. Deborah Spar, a George Baker Foundation Professor at Harvard Business School and former President of Barnard College delivered the Keynote address on the current and future state of Postsecondary Education, covering such aspects as the current funding model, changing demographics and differing demands by students, which included the needs of lifelong learners, and international students as well as the role and future of online education.

## **DECEMBER 2019**

**Graduate Student Food (In)Security:** I met with representatives from the university and BUSU over several meetings to discuss progress on addressing issues of food insecurity. The new initiative will likely include a new website, and have a grocery pickup service through local stores. Student need would be assessed through BUSU (as it is now) and a referral would be made to the closest store for a package to be assembled. The working group continues to meet monthly and further updates will be provided as progress unfolds.

**Campus Ombuds Update:** Services remain on track to be transferred to the University beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. I am currently negotiating the contract that will exist between all

three parties, as the initial draft included language that the GSA could not meet. This process is ongoing, and I will hopefully be able to provide an update at our January board meeting. Hiring for the role is ongoing as well, candidates were shortlisted by the interview committee and interviews will take place on Friday and Saturday this week with the goal of having a candidate in place for the beginning of the winter term. The composition of the interview committee mirrors exactly the new 'Advisory Committee' that has been outlined in the tri-party contract, which will meet bi-annually to oversee the operations of the service.

The GSA has paid the outstanding amount of the Ombuds contract we had with BUSU for the service provided over the term of September-December 2019, this contract will expire at the end of this month.

**The Zone Expansion:** The MOU to be proposed to graduate students is currently in development, and looks very similar to the one that undergraduate students approved in 2018. The key differences are around amount (\$17.00 per term versus \$17.00 per credit) and the provision of graduate student programming. This fee will be charged once the project is completed, over a five-year period, and will become a low-charge maintenance fee after that point. The MOU will be ready for our January Board Meeting. Additionally, the GSA has now been invited as a full partner in the project, which includes attendance at all senior level project and construction meetings as well as regular site visits and inspections. I will say that all partners of this project across the university are ecstatic that the GSA is now involved. Finally, I have been asked by Karen McAllister-Kenny, Director of Brock Recreation to gather input from graduate students as to what programming they would like to see in the new space once it is finished, but also in the existing space in the meantime.

**Mental Health Contribution Renewal:** The report provided to the Board of Trustees (see my update from the Board later in my report) caused significant concern for student stakeholders as well as for other board members. Given this I will be meeting jointly with BUSU and senior admin in order to get everyone on the same page and adjust expectations for any new fees being proposed to our students. Graduate students currently pay over \$20 a term towards mental health service provision on campus, and the requests appear to ask for a significant increase to this contribution. A similar ask has been made of undergraduate students and they have raised issues with this as well. I expect this to take up a significant amount of my time over the next month in order to have a finished proposal and MOU ready to be presented to the board in January for review and consideration.

**Campus Food Service Provider:** The university is currently in negotiations to address the expiration of the previous food service contract on campus. Expect any changes to take effect May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Some of the benefits of the new provider will include new all-you-can eat options, and a variety of other offerings to meet dietary, cultural and religious accommodations. This will also include a new full-service Tim Hortons Academic South, next to the current Hungry Badger, as well as a new 'genuine' Starbucks to be located in the Guernsey Market. Expect the new provider to be announced publicly once the contract has been signed by both parties, sometime during the winter term.

**Board of Trustees / President:** The second cycle of the 2019-2020 Board of Trustees' meetings was held on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. Currently I serve as a member of the University and Community Experience Committee and the Executive Committee as well as the whole Board of Trustees. There was no meeting of the Executive Committee during this cycle, but

there was of UCEC. The most impactful discussion of this meeting was a partially formed proposal from Student Wellness and Accessibility for a new fee for both undergraduate and graduate students to support improve access to Mental Health services on campus. The Committee was highly critical of the report and the proposal, and with my vocal opposition felt the university should do more to support its students on this issue rather than ask students to fund most of any expansion. This issue is one of the closest to my heart and one I champion constantly, it was wonderful to see that members of the board also recognize the need and recognize that students, who are already under financial stress, should not have to bear the full cost of these services.

A meeting of the full Board of Trustees was held the following day and focused on several in-camera items which I cannot report on. What I can report on is that the Board has made what is expected to be the final motion with relation to the 2021 Canada Games Park, to be located on Brock's South Campus. To contextualize, the 'South Campus' begins at Zone 2, and heads south through the existing baseball diamonds to the tree line. Most of this space will become restricted and used exclusively for the construction of the park. Owing to the incredibly tight timelines that this project faces, and the long odds at completing all of the construction prior to the opening of the games this has been a frequent topic of discussion at the Board level, so it is exciting to see this operationalized and for ground to be broken. In terms of expected impacts to student access to campus, please see the section of my report focused on parking.

**Legislation/Governance:** In January there will be a number of legislative updates coming to both the Governance Committee as well as to the whole board, and will necessitate a Special General Meeting as well. Broadly speaking these updates can be divided into two categories, Bylaws and Constitution.

1) Constitutional Updates: The Constitution is the GSA's highest governing document, and is voted on by members at a General Meeting. For years this document was not updated and became significantly out of date and drifted dramatically from our current practices. Over the past few years I have made it a mission to update the document to ensure that it reflects our current organizational structure. Last year we made updates in both January and April, and look to do so again this year. The need for a General Meeting in January is to update elements prior to an election, if they are to have any impact on it. While the updates are relatively minor, they will impact the election. The updates focus on who is eligible to stand for certain positions, executive voting ability, signing authorities, and board structure (to reflect our new structure). This document (with tracked changes) will be circulated upon return in January.

2) Bylaw Updates: Focus on identifying in greater detail the roles of a Director of the Board, an Honorary Member and the Chair of the Board. As it pertains to the latter it has always been my desire to create an independent Chair of the Board (ie the President does not automatically Chair the Board) as this follows best practice within our sector and the broader Canadian community. My position reports to the Board of Directors and it creates a significant conflict of interest for that same position to also manage and run meetings where they are supposed to be accountable.

**Strategic Planning:** Starting in the new year there are a series of workshops I want to incorporate into Board Meetings which will inform the Strategic Plan. Prior to this I hope to do a refresh exercise with the committee in January that will allow us to recommend either a renewal of our current mission, vision and values or a modified set for approval.

**Campus Parking:** Owing to the start of construction for the 2021 Canada Games Park there will be significant disruption to parking at Brock University over the next year and a half, particularly over the Winter 2020 term. The location of the park will be directly over top of two of the existing lots in Zone 2. As the removed parking lot surface will be reused as fill for the new lots, the new lots that will be built to offset the lost parking spaces will not be fully constructed at the start of next term. While there will be a direct one-for-one replacement of parking spaces (for every spot lost during construction, a new one will be built) but these will not be ready for the new term. Demand for spaces is expected to significantly exceed capacity during this time.

To address the excess demand over supply the university will be initiating a couple of different programs. The first, and most significant is a buyback program, where those with Zone 2 Fall/Winter passes will be offered \$420.00, plus \$100.00 in Campus Store credit if they return their pass. For comparison, the winter cost of the Fall/Winter Zone 2 pass is approximately \$300. Those who can access a bus route or other means of getting to campus (walk/carpool) are encouraged to do so, so that those who truly need parking in order to access the campus can still do so. Together we can, as a total university community navigate this difficulty and get to the Spring/Summer. The University will also be redistributing existing passes throughout campus to try to offset the demand, particularly to lots that have traditionally not had as much usage.

**Meeting with Dean Grad Studies Candidates:** Last week I met with one of the two finalist candidates for the role of Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies. I was joined by Sarah Walker; GSA Senator and we had a brief conversation with the candidate about issues affecting the GSA and its members. There was considerable alignment between our own hopes and the passion of the individual. I am excited to meet with the second and final candidate on Friday and ask the same questions we posed to determine the candidate the GSA would best like to work with going forward. Following the second meeting I will draft a response, with input from participating executive members, that I will send to the Provost (Chair of the Advisory Committee) on behalf of the GSA. This is something that the GSA has been inconsistent with in the past, we have a tremendous amount of influence and need to make sure our voices are heard when there are hiring's of this nature.

**Grad Student Housing:** A couple of weeks ago I met with the Dean of Graduate Studies along with members from the Student Life department of the university. The issue we were discussing is about how to improve the culture around graduate student housing, particularly trying to create an environment that fosters the collectiveness that undergraduates often receive at the graduate level. The main takeaway was that documentation provided by FGS needs to be updated more regularly to address the true cost of living and the expenses that graduate students will face, as much of the information available on the website is significantly out of date. I reiterated as well the concern that graduate students would be interested in dedicated residence on campus, but these spaces need to be reserved solely for graduate students, they need to have the correct amenities (full kitchen, laundry, etc) and they need to be priced appropriately. This information is being taken away by the various departments and I expect to hear more in the new year.

**Funding Package / Offer Letter:** One of the concerns I have been working closely with the Dean of Graduate Studies on is the lack of transparency when it comes to the Offer Letter and Funding Packages that graduate students receive. In particular, this applies to what dollars are

awarded as grants or fellowships, versus money that has to be earned over the course of a TA/RA contract. Additionally, I also pushed for a review of the terminology around ‘terms’ and ‘time to completion’, as one of the issues I faced when moving from undergraduate to graduate studies is the use of the Spring/Summer term. Seeing 6 terms to completion I thought that meant 3 years (as an undergraduate you are typically only enrolled in the Fall/Winter terms) but it actually meant 2 years as you maintain continuous enrolment at the graduate level.

**Grad Council / SGSC:** Two major issues were discussed at the most recent Graduate Council meeting, which is a meeting chaired by the Dean of Graduate Studies and is composed of all of the Associate Deans who have graduate responsibilities. The first was around Mental Health, where professors indicated their concerns that they are not prepared to support students in the ways that they need and that more training needs to be provided. The second was one I raised around international student tuition, which I am now working with the Dean on in order to secure tuition waivers for research-based masters students, as was done for international PhD students a year and a half ago.

**Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) AGM:** At the end of November, I attended the CFS AGM with our Vice-President, External Philip Dwomoh. While much of the conference was overly undergraduate focused, based on the population of the members participating. That aside the conference provided an excellent opportunity to engage with other Graduate Student Association’s both across the country, as well as in the province which lent insight to how other organizations were managing the Student Choice Initiative. Most meaningful was understanding how other organizations are structured as we look reorganize our GSA to more appropriately align with staff roles given the creation of our first Executive Director position. Such reorganization should free up time on behalf of the President, this will hopefully allow for more flexibility within the role. More information on this will be coming in the new year.

**Graduate Student Space:** Discussions around the potential for a new student building continue. I have made it clear that the GSA would be interested in partnering, regardless of whether the building includes all stakeholders (BUSU and Brock) or if it is just BUSU, to which all parties have agreed to keep us in the conversation. This is a significant win for the GSA as we generally aren’t considered in discussions for new space and most often are an afterthought.

In addition to this I have also opened a conversation with Scott Johnston, Senior Associate VP, Infrastructure & Operations about the opportunity to expand our space within the Mackenzie Chown Complex (the location of our current office, lounge and meeting room). Now initial hurdles have been presented, and as always, more information will be forthcoming.

## **JANUARY 2020**

**Graduate Student Food (In)Security:** Discussion remains ongoing, in December I visited the Fonthill Sobeys with BUSU representatives and members of the University’s senior administrative team to accept a donation of gift cards, which would be given to both graduate and undergraduate students. If nothing else, my constant pressure on behalf of the GSA has

resulted in the university ensuring that we are a part of all of these conversations going forward.

**Campus Ombuds Update:** Transfer of services has been slightly delayed owing to the late selection of the new candidate for the role (done shortly before the holiday break). Ombuds services are still being provided in the interim there is just no dedicated person acting in an Ombuds capacity. Expect this transition to be completed in the next month. I am still negotiating with the University when it comes to GSA expectations and vice-versa. Specifically, around language that the GSA cannot meet. Going forward the Advisory Committee for this role is expected to consist of five individuals, one of them being a representative from the GSA.

**The Zone Expansion:** The MOU has been completed and will be brought forward to the GSA Board Meeting at the January meeting. The MOU mirrors the referendum passed by BUSU in 2018, with the most notable difference being the amount of the graduate contribution. Graduate students will be contributing \$17.00 per term (versus \$17.00 per credit) which will ensure the provision of graduate student programming. This fee will be charged once the project is completed, over a five-year period, and will become a low-charge maintenance fee (\$1.25 per term) after that point.

I am delighted to add that the GSA has now been brought onboard as a full partner in the project, which includes attendance at all senior level project and construction meetings as well as site visits and inspections every two weeks. Finally, I have been asked by Karen McAllister-Kenny, Director of Brock Recreation to gather input from graduate students as to what programming they would like to see in the new space once it is finished, but also in the existing space in the meantime. A couple of weeks ago I received communication from her office for several new programs that taught by graduate students for graduate students.

**Mental Health Contribution Renewal:** A revised MOU has been prepared, and will come forward to the GSA Board of Directors at our January meeting. The MOU contains a number of changes from the previous structure passed in 2015, but most importantly there are new mechanisms to ensure accountability for graduate students while making sure that programming can be adjusted on an as needed basis to reflect the services that graduate students are asking for. The amount that graduate students are asking to contribute has been increased to reflect the expansion of services that the GSA and graduate students in general have asked for.

**Campus Food Service Provider:** The University is on track to finalize negotiations for May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. I am still not authorized to disclose who the new provider is, but I can say that the new contract contains significantly more mechanisms to hold the provider accountable.

In addition to this I am currently working with BUSU and Ancillary Services to determine the feasibility for re-opening the C-Block Café. For those of you who aren't old enough to remember, there used to be a concession stand, operated by Sodexo, located directly opposite our office in MCC302, which sold soup, sandwiches, snacks and coffee. The proposal is for a new stand, under a cost sharing agreement which would provide graduate student employment and a modest revenue source for the GSA.

**Legislation/Governance:** Updates to the elements identified in my previous report are as follows:

1) Constitutional Updates: The Constitution has been updated to reflect updates focusing on who is eligible to stand for certain positions, executive voting ability, signing authorities, and board structure (to reflect our new structure). This document (with tracked changes) has been circulated.

2) Bylaw Updates: Given the volume of other documents that had greater pressures in relation to timelines and approval, several bylaw pieces have been adjusted, expect documents detailing the roles of a Director of the Board, an Honorary Member and the Chair of the Board to come forward in February. This will include a recommendation to create an independent Chair of the Board as opposed to the President filling both roles (following leading practice in the not-for-profit sector). The President is accountable and reports to the Board of Directors and it creates a significant conflict of interest for that same position to also manage and run meetings where they are supposed to report. An additional Bylaw pertaining to the role of the Past-President will also be coming forward which will outline the role a previous president plays with the GSA, particularly in relation to their role as a member of the Board of Trustees (as they continue to serve on the Board for several months after their term as GSA President is complete).

**Strategic Planning:** Working with the Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, we have identified key priorities and a process for drafting the GSA's first Strategic Plan. The goal is to have the new Strategic Plan (2020-2025) approved at the Board Meeting and/or the Annual General Meeting in April.

**Recruitment for the Dean of Graduate Studies:** In December I submitted a letter on behalf of the GSA indicating our preferred candidate for the role of Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. I had a chance to meet informally with the Interim Provost on this topic and he indicated his pleasure in seeing the GSA be vocally involved with the process and letting the committee know our preferences. While I was not made aware of the name of the successful candidate, but was informed that the process has been completed and the committee has made their recommendation. At this time, it appears as though the timeline is on track for the new Dean to transition into the role in early July.

**Graduate Student Space:** Discussions around the potential for a new student building continue. I have made it clear that the GSA would be interested in partnering, regardless of whether the building includes all stakeholders (BUSU and Brock) or if it is just BUSU, to which all parties have agreed to keep us in the conversation. This is a significant win for the GSA as we generally aren't considered in discussions for new space and most often are an afterthought.

Regarding dedicated space for the GSA I have been meeting with a number of key stakeholders around campus. Particularly with Facilities Management and am in the process of submitting a request for space form, which is the first step to getting new space! In addition to these conversations I am also waiting for some preliminary drawings for what new space might look like for the GSA. While I'm cautious that there's no reason to get excited, given that this is only the first step towards expanding the GSA I will note that this step is a major one that we have never reached before.

**FEBRUARY 2020**

**Graduate Student Food (In)Security:** Discussion remains ongoing, as of our last joint meeting we are hoping to have a new system ready to pilot by early June, just prior to the arrival of new students for SmartStart as a ‘soft launch’, this will include a new website and partnership with the new campus food operator.

**Campus Ombuds Update:** The role has been filled and the new candidate is in place on campus, I am just working with the university to finalize the contract going forward and improve language that reflects the current structure of the GSA Ombuds Fee.

**The Zone Expansion / Mental Health Contribution:** I have received all of the promotional material BUSU used during the 2018 Zone Referendum, and have been given assurances that their graphics design department will assist the GSA in any modifications we need to make the documents (posters / social media) work for us. I will be working with the GSA Executive Team to action this referendum, along with the Mental Health referendum and get out the word so students are aware of the issues that they will have a chance to vote on. This holds true as well for the Mental Health referendum, and both documents will shortly be up on our website for students to view prior to the campaign period.

**Campus Food Service Provider:** The University is on track to finalize negotiations for May 1st, 2020. I am still not authorized to disclose who the new provider is, but I can say that the new contract contains significantly more mechanisms to hold the provider accountable. In addition, this provider will be required to partner with all campus stakeholders on food security strategies, including financial contributions towards existing or future programs (including FoodFirst).

### **Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario**

As you are aware this week I have spent my time in Toronto, at the Ontario Legislature speaking with MPP’s from a number of different political parties about the issues facing students in Ontario, particularly graduate students. Our discussions have focused mainly on system level concerns, including affordability, access, international students, indigenous students, student union autonomy and performance-based funding. There has been some positive reception to our asks, even from members of the government, and has been a great experience overall. It has been well over half a decade since I last spent time lobbying at Queen’s Park, so it was great to be back and as circumstances would have it ended up meeting a number of colleagues I previously worked with who happened to be there as well. On top of it all, meeting with nonelected government employees meant that I got to hang around and learn what life's about, and sitting in during question period, and having our local MPP’s call out the Brock GSA was a great way to end several days of intense work.

**Legislation/Governance:** Updates to the elements identified in my previous report are as follows: 1) Constitutional Updates: The Constitution has been updated; additional items will be brought forward for our April meeting to approve at our AGM. 2) Bylaw Updates: The updates noted in my January Report (Past-President Bylaw, Chair of the Board Bylaw, Honorary Member Bylaw and General Directors Bylaw) will all come forward at the March Board meeting for approval. 3) Issue Bylaw Updates: The Executive is currently working on an IB that will address the GSA’s stance on improving the existing procedures around evaluations for graduate courses and professors.

**Strategic Planning:** Notice has gone out in the GSA Newsletter soliciting feedback from our members on the work that the GSA does. An email address has also been set up, and we look forward to hearing from Board members as well on their thoughts on where the GSA should be in five years' time. At the meeting in February we will be looking for feedback on the current mission and vision of the GSA and what values best describe the work we do. After this we intend to host several in person feedback sessions to collect input on the draft priorities we have so far.

**Graduate Student Space:** Discussions around the potential for a new student building continue. I have made it clear that the GSA would be interested in partnering, regardless of whether the building includes all stakeholders (BUSU and Brock) or if it is just BUSU, to which all parties have agreed to keep us in the conversation. This is a significant win for the GSA as we generally aren't considered in discussions for new space and most often are an afterthought.

Regarding dedicated space for the GSA, this project has actually been converging in a very positive way and I have begun gauging buy-in from members across campus, including senior administration. As noted in a previous report around campus food, the project is expanding to include a conversation around a dedicated coffee shop/concession stand for graduate students outside of the current GSA office. While still in the preliminary stages this would exist above the proposed space below (in the MCC 200 level) and would provide graduate students with more dedicated space, as well as the opportunity to sell GSA branded items like clothing.

## **MARCH 2020**

Unfortunately, as we all know, our world changed significantly in March 2020 and we had to quickly adapt. We closed down our on-campus GSA Office on March 17/20, and transitioned to a totally virtual office. This was a very busy time, as you can imagine, trying to manage the office tasks, but also run an Executive Election, which was happening on March 25 & 26, 2020. We did manage to hold the monthly GSA Board meeting on March 26/20 (online) and these are the President's notes from that meeting:

The President provided a brief update, thanking both Senator's for their work in support of the referendums, hopeful for voter turnout to be high and that feedback from students has been relatively positive.

The plan for the weeks ahead would be to meet weekly, every Thursday moving forward to make sure that the GSA is responding as quickly as possible to any issues that arise. Given the attendance at the meeting will limit decision items.

Office on campus was packed up earlier this week, plan to move operations entirely off campus until we are given the green light by the university to return. All advocacy efforts are focused on minimizing the impact to graduate students, particularly research-based students, in the event of further restrictions to campus operations.

## **APRIL 2020**

The GSA Board Meetings did continue weekly in April 2020, online of course, and here are some notes from the meetings, complete minutes are posted on our website.

### **April 2/20**

- Convocation – to be postponed
- Development of Emergency Student Support fund, suggest contributing excess funds available from the Food First fund, Transit Summer Subsidy allowance from BUSU (\$3,500) and possibly other funds not going to be used this year. Will have to determine that funds are only allocated to graduate students and define the adjudication process before agreeing to supply the funds.
- Correspondence from Queen's University regarding the Tuition Suspension Campaign – Brock University not financially able to offer this type of tuition suspension, therefore, will explore other options to assist such as allowing students to take a second final stage status, allowing funding to work over an inactive term, and a number of others.
- Researchers will no longer be able to access labs after Friday, without special permission.
- Announced partial refunds will be issued to students for prepaid services such as parking, residence, etc.
- Inactive term possible for students who lack funding.
- Some international students are having issues paying their accounts because transfer of funds from some countries has been halted.
- To check with Brock University Financial services for allowances to be made because of virus (interest, etc).
- Ancillary fees – some will not be charged for the spring/summer term as facilities are not available – zone, etc.
- CFS advised that the Student Choice Initiative is being appealed in court by the Ontario government.
- Chris advised that the SCI does not apply on Brock campus anymore and fees return to mandatory, until the court appeal is completed.

### **April 9/20**

- Convocation – memo sent by university not exactly the option wanted for ceremony proposal. Students want to walk across stage with gown, crossing stage important. This could potentially impact Alumni as well.
- Brock advising possible extension of physical classes past Fall 2020. If physical classes do not start in September, they will remain online until winter term. Melanie asked about TA/RA ships for grad for fall term if that happens? – don't know yet. Consideration for fall resumption of GSA activities will take into effect environmental limitations.
- Announced partial refunds will be issued to students for prepaid services such as parking, but unclear on details for reimbursement. Apparently, how you purchased your parking pass is how you will be reimbursed. Cost of pass is 8 months (Sept-Apr), so prorated refund from Mar 15-Apr 30 = 6 weeks.

- Update on Graduate Emergency Student Support fund – university will contribute funds for both GSA & BUSU. Alumni put out call for donations to the fund. BUSU to contribute \$25,000 and GSA to contribute \$15,000 from unused budgeted items for year (eg Social). Criteria – asked university when adjudicating applications, to consider food, shelter and internet access insecurities. Applications will be available on FGS website, not One App.
- CFS lobbying for alternate to CERB for students. Being rolled out today, estimate won't last long.
- Melanie advised official grade offerings opened today on the Brock website.
- Sarah asked if any plans for research students for summer term since campus not accessible and some research data collection has been cancelled? Chris to discuss with Dean Dupont (FGS). Also currently discussing with her in regards to students who require access to specific software for their work.
- International travel ban could mean possible 40% reduction in grad students for fall term. Could also affect future enrolments permanently, so need to consider what that might look like. Senate does not have any plans yet, but need to start discussion for grad students, as other universities have already addressed.
- Sarah advised that researchers need more notice of stoppage of research because some experiments are difficult to stop in short time.
- GSA Health and Dental plan – usage this year was significantly over the cost of the plan due to high usage, therefore, looking at large rate increase for next year if no adjustments are made. We are going to have to make short term reductions on the plan this year to lower the price, as this increase is unacceptable. Will look at options for future years, including partnering with undergrad plan (BUSU) to save money and lower cost. COVID-19 has made parts of the plan unusable currently (dental, etc.), so usage will go down temporarily, but not sustainable.
- GSA new executive transition update – Chris will be inviting new execs to a one on one, 30-minute online meeting next week to talk about expectations of position, etc. Will also have weekly meetings each Wednesday with new execs to begin transition. Would like to have current execs set up conversation with the new exec transitioning into their role to provide guidance. Also, university President's office has invited all incoming and outgoing execs to meet for online meeting with him on April 30<sup>th</sup>. All of these actions will help to create a smoother transition.

**Motion: To approve GSA Contribution to the COVID-19 Graduate Student Emergency Bursary in the amount of \$15,000.**

**Moved by Siddharth, Seconded by Sarah, All in favour**

- Distribution of grad emergency funding – they want to roll it out gradually, as not to be overloaded. Only for those in dire need.

**April 16/20**

- Update on COVID-19 Graduate Emergency Student Support fund –applications are now available on FGS website. Please encourage only students who are truly in need to apply for this funding, as funds are limited.

- Met with university president this morning. Chris expressed concerns about issues surrounding graduate students and their research – meeting set up next week with concerned parties.
- Requested current executives set up transition meeting with the new incoming executive in their role early next week, before the weekly meeting on Wednesday.
- To meet with Greg Finn, Vice Provost, to discuss incoming fall enrolments and the operational impacts.
- Met with Josh Tonnos, Brock VP Finance, this morning and he advised that the new Zone Expansion fee will likely not be charged this fall now. The MOU states the construction must be substantially complete, and due to construction shut-down, this is unlikely now.
- Current Zone fee will not be charged in summer 2020 term as not accessible.
- Still discussing extension of payment options for tuition fees with the university.
- Advise students to discuss issues with their supervisors and committee first before involving FGS for support.
- Please set up your one on one transition meeting with the new executive transitioning into your role for Monday or Tuesday next week to provide guidance. Also, university President's office has invited all incoming and outgoing execs to meet for online meeting with him on April 30<sup>th</sup>. All of these actions will help to create a smoother transition.

#### **April 23/20**

- There is not much clarity on transition of authorities mentioned in Senate meeting. There might be reduction in the number of courses offered by the university as well. There will be a provision of Inactive term which will allow students to access the University online resources for the fee of \$125 (fee is being waved currently). Next week there will be an online meet of GSA incoming and outgoing executives with the President of Brock University.
- Since the usage of health and dental plan increased to almost 100% of estimated usage, there has to be an increase in the fee next year, as well as reductions to the existing services of the medical plan. This is unavoidable as our renewal rates are significantly higher. We will explore opportunities to partner with other groups to lower the price of the plan next year.

**Motion: To allow increase to the fee for GSA health and dental plan, of no more than 10%, for the 2020-2021 year.**

**Moved by Melanie, Seconded by Sarah, 5 in favour, one abstention**

- Due to the closure of University, students involved in research courses won't be able to complete their in-lab activities. Has mailed to the associate dean for research regarding the clarity on same. Voting was done in Senate to allow remote meetings in future.

#### **April 30/20**

- Explanation of proposed GSA Ancillary Fee Documents:
- Document 003A includes the MOUs for ancillary fees paid to and managed directly by the GSA – GSA Membership Fee, GSA Emergency Student Support Fund, GSA Capital Fund and

GSA Health and Dental plan fee. The Health and Dental plan fee will only be increasing by 5% next year, due to large increase in usage, rather than the 10% previously indicated.

- Document 004A includes the MOU for the GSA Ombuds Fund, paid to and managed directly by the university. Several more need to be added to this document (athletic & wellness, etc)
- An additional document will be created for ancillary fees payable to outside organizations, eg CFS and BUSU.

**Motion: To accept Document 003A and Document 004A as the new official GSA Ancillary fee protocols.**

**Moved by Sarah, Seconded by Philip, all in favour**

- Senate Graduate Studies Committee meeting – since English Equivalency testing sites are shut down around the world, they are piloting other options for testing such as Duolingo and Cambridge Assessment English. FGS advised that they are being flexible in their rulings for graduate students for requests such as inactive terms, final stage status, LOA, etc.
- More events being held online, including a Trivia night tomorrow on Crowdpuurr.

The bank balances of the GSA on April 30/20, at transition of power, were as follows:

Operating Account: \$277,429.93

Health & Dental Account: \$192,897.09

Our original AGM meeting scheduled for April 2020, had to be postponed until December 3, 2020 due to Covid issues.