

Graduate Students Association of McMaster University  
Council Meeting, Monday September 29, 2014-09-29  
GSA Office, East Tower Refectory  
6:00pm  
Minutes

Attendees: Talena Rambarran (President), Megan Murphy (VP Admin), Lucia Lee (VP External), Jack Huang (VP Internal), Rachel Kelly (VP Services), Alireza Taibakhsh (Business), Ali Vaezi (Business), Adhithya Ravichandran (Engineering) Sarah Kanji (Health Sciences), Neha Dewan (Health Sciences), Mai Yamamoto (Science), Ayush Ranawade (Science), Anumeet Toor (Social Sciences), Hytham Afifi (BOD), Marion Jamard (International), Vi Dang (International), Ashley Ravenscroft (DoO), Debbie Ritskes (Office Assistant)

Regrets: Igor Osowski (Humanities)

Absent: Carla Abarca (Engineering), Zeeshan Ahmed (BoG), Magjid Taghavi (Senate/Science), Cassel Busse (Senate/Humanities), Stephanie Marciniak (Senate/Social Sciences), Jeff Price (CRO), Charles Burke (BOD), Stephanie Butler (BOD), Frances Lasowski (Past President), Asim Soomro (Senate/HS)

1. Call to order at 6:10

2. Acceptance of the Agenda

Motion: To accept agenda, The GSA Council Meeting September 29, 2014

Moved by: Megan Murphy

Second by: Rachel Kelly

Carried

3. Approval of the minutes from August 20, 2014

Moved by: Adhithya Ravichandran

Second by: Megan Murphy

Carried

4. Reports from the Board

President's Report – Talena Rambarran

- Mosaic and payroll changes have taken effect.
- The significant changes that graduate students are noticing is the change to biweekly pay; however scholarships are still paid once per month.
  - Students would appreciate the ability to self-equalize to some extent their TA and scholarship pay in the future
- There is a loan program for TA's having hardships due to the new system – to qualify, students must have only 130 h TA in the second semester (no hours first semester)
- Grad studies would like to start a focus group regarding solutions and how to combat this issue long term.
- Talena reported welcome week was very successful and thanked everyone that helped out. Specifically the FRC's who put forth a great effort at the resource fair.

- Talena also welcomed Debbie, our new office assistant. Noting Debbie comes from a strong administrative background and will be an asset to our GSA team.
- Over the month of September, the GSA held interviews for a temporary part-time contract position for Ashley's maternity leave. The GSA has hired Lorraine Maida for 20-25 hours a week over the next year to take on some of Ashley's responsibilities when she is gone.
- Report from BOD – Talena summarized the First Board of Directors meetings noting that financial and strategic planning has moved to the BOD from the council level, as per the new governance structure. She noted there were two meetings held in September one of which was to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the Directors and review the financial statements prepared by KPMG. The second meeting was to approve the audit. Talena noted Megan will go over the audit in more detail in her financial report. Talena also noted the board began to discuss policy development for the association such as, employment, vacation, maternity leave. No formal policies have been voted on to date; however, passing policies is an objective at the next meeting. Talena also noted that all minutes will be posted and accessible to the public.

Senate Report - absent

Board of Governor's Report - absent

## 5. Committee Reports

Finance Committee (VP Administration) Megan Murphy

- Audit completed by KPMG and results were presented to the board, the statements are available on the website.
- Megan provided a high-level summary of the audit noting the GSA incurred a slight reduction in our assets and in our cash position; however, the executive are carefully monitoring this moving forward.
- Overall it was noted that the financial picture of Phoenix and GSA was a total loss of \$240,000 from previous year.
- Noting a cash loss of \$144 (this was the Phoenix Operations) and also Megan detailed the remaining amount was a non cash loss based on amortization for renovations of phoenix.
- The GSA continues to meet with Kevin to recover money from Phoenix.
- Megan noted that it was worthwhile for the council to know that amortization will last for the life of building of Phoenix.
- Megan is hosting a Financial meeting on October 6, 2014 to go over the financial statements

Phoenix Executive Committee (VP Administration) Megan Murphy

- Megan noted that the GSA hired a new bookkeeper, and received June July and August numbers.
- Collectively the executive, GSA management and Phoenix management made a plan for paying back monies owed to the GSA from the Phoenix.
- The GSA in consultation with the Universities consultant are looking at reducing the cost of the goods, changing pricing to improve margins, and putting new items with better margins on the menu to increase the Phoenix financial position.
- Labour costs, is still a challenge and is something the management of the Phoenix is continuously monitoring.

- Previous management purchased goods not based on demand but on potentially gaining a discount for buying in bulk; however, the wine that was purchased has not sold and as such it is still influencing the operations, as such Megan has suggested the GSA could potentially cover some of this old costs, as a result of mismanagement and not having the new manager burdened with contracts/ agreements he did not personally enter into.
- Megan noted the next PEC meeting is October 6, 2014 and they will discuss the Phoenix operations and atmosphere.

#### Events and Trips Planning Committee (VP External) Lucia Lee

- Lucia reported that the welcome week BBQ had 725 graduate students attend. Lucia thanked specifically the FRCs who helped out. A lot of new students clearly showed up and members of the GSA introduced themselves and talked with new students, which generated interest in the Association.
- Lucia also noted that the budgeting workshop held on Sept 11 and 18<sup>th</sup>, hosted by the GSA and SGS was attended by 20-30 graduate students. Doug Welsh Dean of Graduate Students, Brooke Gordon Director of SGS, and - RBC Branch Manager presented information on the following topics: on how to save money, changes in mosaic, and they also made themselves available to answer questions.
- Lucia discussed that the Student Issue Action Committee was working on a survey for what problems students face. They will be having another meeting to finish survey questions, and hope to include it in the I HAVE PLAN survey.
- Lucia noted that the Social Events Trip Committee hosted a planetarium show in September and 31 students showed up, she also indicated that in October the event for Graduate Students would be to Hanes Maze.
- Lucia also noted another one of her objectives was promoting Phoenix – Specifically noting that the Phoenix has the following events: Grad Student Wednesday – where graduate students receive 15% off and Trivia Tuesdays, which also bring in a fair amount of graduate students.

#### Academic Affairs Committee (VP Internal) Jack Huang

- Jack noted that the Welcome Resource Fair had very good feedback.
- He has not had a meeting for the AAC yet, but noted there would be one shortly as they do have Travel Awards to adjudicate.
- Jack also formally requested FRC's to sit on the The Valedictorian selection committee. Jack was able to gain one volunteer per faculty and noted he would send their information to SGS, as this was an external committee from the GSA.
- The volunteers were as follows; Anumeet Toor, Sarah Kanji, Ali Vaezi, and Mai Yamamoto

#### International Student Representative Report (International Reps) Marion Jamard and Vi Dang

- The representatives noted the International Fair during welcome week had more than 100 students participate.
- Replicated the event with what was used last time.
- They also noted they wanted to have a pizza thank you event for the volunteers and ask them to volunteer for January and May for similar events. Pictures of the boards were done so they don't have to start from scratch again and can build upon a template every time for the next time.
- They also noted that the Immigration Fair was October 8 and they would like to invite an Immigration Lawyer to help educate students on the process.

By-laws Committee (President) Talena Rambarran

- Four people said they wanted to be on the committee. As it was previously vacant there was little ability to hold meetings; however, now Talena will begin planning formal meetings.
- Talena noted in the interim that everyone should feel free to email her if there are any concerns regarding the bylaws.

GSA Summer Leagues Committee (VP Services) Rachel Kelly

- Rachel noted that both seasons were now over.
- Softball and Soccer, meeting tomorrow (September 30) discussing any changes and the MOU that they signed.

Graduate Student Services Review Committee (VP Services/President) Rachel Kelly

- Collaborating with SGS to start a pilot Wellness Work Shop on Tuesday regarding Nutrition. A registered dietician will be present and there will be a survey at the end to gauge the effectiveness of the workshop.
- Rachel also noted that during welcome week at the awards presentation all 5 GSA executives presented awards, which was great to have that sort of participation, as last year it was only one executive member. In line with awards Rachel noted that the MSU has contacted us on how we can collaborate together regarding the TA awards; however, this will be an ongoing conversation as it is complex.
- Rachel noted she had nothing to report regarding fee increase. Describing we have a 20 year old agreement and now the University would like to increase fees and as such the GSA is asking for new services if the fee is increased as many programs are geared towards the undergraduate students.
- Talena noted that any fee increase needs to be brought to an AGM and passed in March if it is going to increase.

Health & Dental Committee (VP Services) Rachel Kelly

- Rachel discussed the GSA possibility of implementing a plus plan. This would not take effect until 2016.
- She noted that many of the executive members met on Thursday with IHaveAPlan, to discuss this and a potential employee benefits plan. Rachel notes she will have an H&D committee meeting regarding the subjects above and will follow shortly after with their suggestions.
- Rachel also noted that the UHIP meeting last week gave lots of information, and there are three more work shops scheduled.

Talena also noted that the GSA was invited to MSU LINK conference on Sunday and Rachel is representing the GSA at the event. The conference is to help student organizations/clubs understand governance and finances among other things.

6. New Business

Discussion re:

International Students – Neha discussed career opportunities to add more income to students who cannot afford living expenses in their later years.

- Talena noted that the Student Issue Action Committees should look after this issue.

- Vi noted that it is hard to take personal finances to your supervisors, it would be good for them to know how much their students make and from there they can lobby not to increase International Student Fees and potentially change other financial problems.  
Talena noted that Engineering had 256 signatures to lobby SGS regarding the MOSAIC changes and clearly they were heard, so this might be an effective method.
- Talena noted that the President, Provost, and Administrators all want to help and they want to hear the issues that students are having with the new system. Specifically noting that equalization of payments needs to be worked on; as the loan is only a temporary fix. We need to know all the issues so we can get it fixed. Communication to the students was not great, and we know there are things that the administration has to work on, but they need to be approached about subjects if Graduate students want change.
- Administrator can let you know how much per month you will be receiving.
- Can a report be submitted – which ties into the survey that Lucia is doing. Collect data to get an overview and then take it to the FRC.
- Sara noted that in regards to communication that it might be possible to send out an email advertising that FRCs are available to go to if students have issues.
- The Business FRCs noted they are having a meeting at the end of October and they can find out any issues.

7. Next meeting – Monday October 20, 2014 at 6:00pm

8. Adjournment 6:57 pm

Motion to adjourn


Moved by Lucia Lee

Second by Adhithya Ravichandran

Carried

  
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Lucia Lee, VP External

Monday, Oct 20 / 14  
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Date

  
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Debbie Ritskes, Recorder (Office Assistant)

Oct 20 / 2014  
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Date