

One of the core mandates of the GSA is to promote the welfare and interest of its constituents. It does this in many ways, such as advocating for students internally at the University and externally for the HSR UPASS and Health & Dental insurance. The GSA also provides travel funding, bursaries, awards and financial aid to our students, along with contributing to other important aspects of student life, like clubs, social events, workshops, academic colloquiums and recreational leagues. The GSA also collaboratively works with community groups, university bodies, like the School of Graduate studies, Ombud's and CUPE (which represents our TA and RA *in lieu* students), on initiatives for our students.

The GSA can only realize these goals through supplementary fees paid by students.

However, the GSA realizes that students are facing many uncertainties and as such, we wanted to assure our members that our services will continue to reflect their needs! But we also understand that financial security is a concern for our members, and as such for the Fall Academic year, 2020/2021, students will see a singular GSA Organization Fee. This fee is \$49.97 per annum. It is historically lower than the GSA has been in the past and represents one of the many financial alleviation measures the Association put in place for students.

The organization also reduced the supplementary fee of the Capital Renovation to \$0, rather than the previous fee of \$37.20. And, we were effective in negotiating a further reduction in the cost of HSR for our students, saving students an additional \$43.58, or 10% just in HSR fees for the coming academic year.

We continue to strongly advocate for our students to receive a refund of 25% of fees paid last year for the months that HSR was free because of the pandemic.

Total savings to Graduate Students to date is more than \$140.00.

Fee reductions do not translate to a reduction in services but rather a conscious effort took place by the GSA to reprioritize goals and acclimate to the new normal.

For more information on what the GSA Organizational resources are, please read below!

- Social Events and Trips
 - The Social Events and Trips this year will be different from previous years. The GSA would like to run events with targeted departments and clubs so that students have a chance to casually connect with peers they would usually see on campus. We want to provide students with unique experiences (e.g. The Phoenix Craffhouse and Grill movie nights, pottery painting, weekly online themed trivia, etc.) and new skills (e.g. virtual cooking lessons, creative storytelling workshop, paint night art packages) that are memorable, health and safety conscious, and support local Hamilton businesses where possible! Given the isolation of a virtual

environment, we hope to have a stronger graduate student community than ever before.

- Committees and Workshops

- The GSA committees will continue to meet online and conduct work! Now more than ever, committee work is fundamental to the functioning of the GSA and committees are spaces where the GSA listens to and works collaboratively with students in identifying gaps in student experience, advocating for their needs, and developing plans/actions.
- To address the needs of students this year, we are also working on a large selection of different workshops ranging from leadership workshops, with our speaker Ms. Cate Hammond, to workshops on how to use LaTeX.
- Just this summer, we began a collaboration with Waterloo's Graduate Student Association and Western's Society of Graduate Students. Through this collaboration, we are providing free workshops for students from all 3 campuses to attend and network. We are also working with our Faculty Representatives and Associations to make faculty-specific workshops to assist you. For example, the Health Sciences Graduate Student Federation, which was recently accepted as a GSA Faculty Association, will be holding a SPICES-funded Science Communication workshop series to help students become better science communicators.

- Health, Dental and Student Assistance Program

- The GSA Health & Dental Insurance Plan will occur as it has in the past. In the next academic year, both insurance plans will have the same price as last year, with no reduction in services/coverage. We will also continue to offer a seamless opt-out process for eligible students (I.E- TAs/RAs in lieu- CUPE 3906).
- We have also strengthened the Student Assistance Program (SAP)! Your mental Health is IMPORTANT! We know during the pandemic that many students will experience various pressures, e.g. examinations, graduations, and job hunting. But don't worry, we have you covered! EMPOWER ME, available 24/7, 365 days a year, is a multilingual, culturally sensitive, general inclusive resource that connects you with qualified counsellors, consultants, and life coaches for a variety of issues. As a GSA member, you are entitled to sessions delivered in person, by telephone, by video-counselling, or by e-counselling.

- Advocacy

- We maintain an open line of communication with the administration of the University and give them updates on the latest insights from our graduate student body. We met with the administration at least weekly during the peak of the pandemic to ensure that our needs as graduate students were known and adequately dealt with. Working closely with them and the City of Hamilton, we were able to reduce the HSR fees.

- We also continue to maintain close relationships with other graduate student bodies across Canada. This is done through various advocacy efforts, such as ThinkGrad. ThinkGrad is a great example of our GSA Advocacy. ThinkGRAD a think tank of student leaders across Canada discuss and write about issues that concern Graduate Students. The group also collaboratively works with existing federal advocacy groups to ensure Graduate Student issues are heard at all levels of the Government. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting was set, and our respective student organization met discuss the new and unique needs of our students. These communications lessened internal redundancies and strengthened our advocacy efforts, as we were able to compare ourselves against similarly sized schools.
- Financial Aid and Funding
 - The GSA will continue to fund Graduate Student travel awards. Although travel might look a bit different this year, we will continue to aid students with their associated costs to present/attend conferences (usually in the form of online registration costs). We have also **increased** our BURSARIES and AWARDS, to get more money into students' hands! Our Emergency fund has also been replenished for September and is available for students in need to apply.

Thus, the GSA will collaborate with various groups, faculty associations, and clubs on numerous events. In addition to these collaborations, the GSA will support the programming of these groups through club seed money and event funding. Other services being offered to GSA clubs include free bank accounts and website services (please be sure to connect with gsaserv@mcmaster.ca for more details).

While the COVID-19 pandemic threatens the grad student life experience by physically isolating us and bringing with it so much uncertainty, the GSA is ever committed to the welfare of its constituents. The GSA's approach is to continue to communicate effectively and bring students events that break down isolation barriers while enriching the grad experience socially, academically and professionally. Most importantly, the GSA will actively listen to student needs and obtain feedback to ensure that we provide the best possible service.