



Graduate Students Association of McMaster University

Council Meeting

Nov 26, 2020

Teleconference - MsTeam

4:00 pm.

Minutes

Attendees: Shawn Hercules (GSA President), Caroline Seiler (VP Internal), Sydney Valentino (VP External), Anthony Quarshie (VP Administration), Wei Zhao (VP Services), Dhanyasri Maddiboina (FRC Engineering), Ghada Sasa (BoG), Pritpal Matharu (FRC Science), Shuwen Qian (FRC Health Science), Tiffany van Lieshout (FRC Science), Sarah Elshahat (FRC Social Science), Zarwa Saqib (FRC Health Science), Anita Acai (Senator Science), Ashley Ravenscroft (DoO), Mona Nasry (FRC Business), Pallavi Mukherjee (FRC International)

Regrets: NA

Absent: Alyaa Abdelhalim (Senator Business), Sushil Navin Chander (FRC Engineering), Hebe Hu (FRC Business), Sahand Sepehrvand (Senator Engineering), Rida Mohsen (FRC Social Science)

Guest: Max Lightstone

Call to order 4:05

1. Call for New Business.

MOTION: Approval of Agenda

- Shawn requested adding the following items to the new business:
 - The statement put forward by the Student Issues Action Committee regarding Antisemitism
 - GPA club budget

Motion to approve the amended agenda of November meeting moved by Wei, seconded by Caroline, all in favour, motion carried.

2. MOTION: Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting moved by Wei, seconded by Pip, all in favour, motion carried.

3. President & VPs remarks:

- Shawn mentioned that the Anti-oppression policy passed at the last board meeting.
- There are updates regarding travel insurance offered by Studentcare and these will be communicated over the next few weeks.
- The university pushed the start of the winter term to Jan 11.
- McMaster's lawyer and the city of Hamilton lawyer agreed to sign the HSR contract.
- In the GSA's last meeting with the university, the main point discussed that Athletics & Recreation Centre might open in January.
- The GSA is in communication with Student Wellness Centre (SWC) to combine our effort for mental health.
- The Phoenix now is on Uber eats.

- Caroline mentioned that the GSA continues working on academic workshops. We have 5k approved from CUPE for the workshop. The most recent workshops include one on data science which had 200 participants and another on leadership which had 100 participants.
- She is working with the continuing education department on academic workshops that will be part of the proposal that will be submitted to SGS to request for funding.
- She is considering charging \$5 for workshop.

- Anthony mentioned that the structure of the finance committee meeting has changed. We used before to focus on the financial statements only, however, moving forward there will be comparisons between budget vs actual and review of closing process, which include reviewing bank statements, credit cards, stale cheques ..etc.

- Wei mentioned that in the past month he worked with all clubs. He communicated that clubs would not be able to host in-person events. However, online events will be fine. He also communicated the procedure on how to schedule and request approval for online events.
- He met with Larissa at Studentcare to see the possibilities of opting in visiting students into the GSA plan for an extra fee.

- Sydney noted that after three months of organization, yesterday's grad students Canada wide trivia with MacGSA represented by 7 teams. She assessed that the event was very successful.
- She also noted SIAC is discussing student-supervisor feedback and library access on campus.

4. SGM

- a. Audit financial statement.
- b. GSA financials
- c. GSA updated budget.
- d. Phoenix Financials

Motion to approve the SGM financial statements and audit report and the moved by Anthony seconded by Zarwa, all in favour motion carried.

Motion to approve the updated the GSA budget moved by Anthony seconded by Wei, all in favour motion carried.

5.FRC Update:

EGS

- Dhany mentioned that they had 2 workshops last month: leadership and data science. They are waiting to hear from Dash to see what other technical workshops they can offer.
- They are planning some events for frost week in January.

SciGSA

- Pip mentioned that they talked to the science career and education department about setting up a new website. This is part of the new plan to help ready grad students for industry or academia.

Social Sciences

- Sarah mentioned that there were 2 upcoming events, McMaster Economic Society Grad Information Night, with an opportunity to speak with the economic graduate chair. The second event, on Logic Racial Justice, will take place in December.
- She met with Rida to discuss organizing events in Jan 2021, which is likely to be a faculty meet and greet.

Health science:

- Shuwen mentioned that they held a workshop on how to have a successful committee meeting. It went well with almost 100 participants.
- They are preparing to have another workshop about mental health next month along with a winter social.

- VPs of the mentorship program working with MacPherson institute to have a training modules.

IGSA

- Pallavi mentioned that they had 2 language cafe events;
- An immigration seminar planned for November;
- And planning to have a trivia night in early December

6. Senate / BOG Updates:

- Anita mentioned that the major update is still around COVID. Both faculty and students have expressed frustration with struggles caused by the pandemic. One such struggle is extending the winter break to Jan 11, which is not helpful to grad students.
- Changes being made to make the senate more accessible to students include not having meetings during the reading week, offering meetings through zoom, and reducing the number of signatures needed for nomination.
- Ghada mentioned that they talked about increasing the fees for continuing education.
- The university committed itself to be carbon neutral by 2050.

7. New business:

a. GPA club:

- At the last council meeting, this club was not approved as they did not provide a detailed budget plan. However, they updated their budget and sent an updated budget plan.
- They listed \$200 for zoom, however, Mac students have it for free so information will be communicated to them.
- Further clarification of their budget is required.

Motion to approve GPA club on condition that they meet with a GSA member to assist adjusting their budget moved by Anita seconded by Sydney, all in favor, motion carried.

b. The statement put forward by the Students Action Committee regarding Anti-Semitism:

- Shawn highlighted that one of the major changes to the SIAC is that the SIAC complete due diligence research and discussion at which 50% of the students have to be at the meeting, and 2/3 should attend all meeting, to pass a statement to the council. After council approval, the statement will be passed to the board for approval.

- Sydney mentioned that the SIAC had discussed the new definition passed by the Ontario government regarding Antisemitism. The definition is put forward by the "International

Holocaust Remembrance Alliance," and the government of Ontario accepted this definition without a public debate. The new definition could affect graduate students who may critique Israel because this definition conflates critique of Israel with antisemitism. The committee is looking to the council to denounce this definition of antisemitism that was recently passed.

- The SIAC had many discussions about this definition and what the implications are for academics on campus, and the current rights for freedom of speech for academics on campus. The university is yet to offer its stance on the issue but it is imperative that the stance which protects the rights of academics on campus is taken. SIAC noted that this definition of antisemitism can be linked to other forms of oppression, including white supremacy and Islamophobia. The SIAC provided links to support its case for review by the council.
- Max commented that the letter suggested by SIAC is flawed and does not correctly characterize the IHRA definition. The letter is not recognized by the Jewish community in any way and is actively harmful to fighting antisemitism. Some of the critical issues the letter states about the IHRA definition are aspects of anti Palestinian, anti democracy and a threat to academic freedom. The actual definition of the IHRA doesn't say that you can't criticize Israel. Nonetheless, it says explicitly that criticism of Israel should not be considered innocent. That's not antisemitism.
- There is also much inappropriate language in this letter, e.g., calling Israel a summer colonial apartheid state and calling the IHRA definition an appropriating resistance against antisemitism to perpetuate oppression without challenges. Both of these sentences are incorrect.
- Max mentioned that he would like to speak to the recent attack on IHRA at McMaster and the Independent Jewish voices definition proposing this letter. He noted that the Independent Jewish voices is not a Jewish organization, and the definition of their mandate doesn't have the Jewish community's backing, whether in Canada or globally. Independent Jewish voices are a political organization that is made of Jews. It is not like any other Jewish organization, where their activities include feeding the hungry, celebrating Jewish events and creating a Jewish community. So they shouldn't be confused with other Jewish Organizations like the Jewish Federation.
- There was a motion adopted by the executive of CUPE 3906, which stated that the IHRA definition was an attack on academic freedom, and because of that in the publication given out by CUPE, you had to oppose it. On the other hand, they have endorsed the global BDS movement, which includes an academic boycott, which explicitly considers an attack on academic freedom. So CUPE here violated their own equity statement and their own allocation to equity by saying its fine to discriminate based on origin.
- Ghada commented that she takes the accusation of antisemitism very seriously. She is doing her PhD on Palestine, green colonialism and greenwashing. What she finds problematic is to say the Independent Jewish Voices is not like the other Jewish communities. They are a are a Jewish grassroots movement that is progressive and supports Palestinian rights that say antisemitism is not separate from other forms of oppression like white supremacy, capitalism..etc

- She added that the definition considers that critique of Israel is not acceptable. The definition links to examples of antisemitism, and one of the examples is "Israel is a racist endeavour". Many countries are racist and there should be no exemption, which has nothing to do with the religion or the people. The definition was unilaterally passed by the Ford government without going through the planned public third party hearing. Like 100 Canadians were going to speak to it, the NDP also came out and condemned this.
- Regarding academic boycott, it is not like talking about disloyalty; anything in our opposition IHRA ever mentioned anything about loyalty or any anti-Jewish tropes. So it makes no sense. Regarding the academic boycott of CUPE, though, was modelled after the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and at the time, they weren't boycotting by calling for the boycott of South African academic institutions. They even boycott South African academic individuals. However, the Palestine boycott doesn't call for the boycott of Israeli academic individuals but rather the Israeli academic institutions because of their complicity.
- Shawn mentioned that according to anti-oppression policy point 7, SIAC could put forward a resolution to the council and the board. Any action that is deemed necessary after conducting research and outreach has to be voted on to establish common interest on the issue at hand. So any vote by this committee is subject to the majority of the quorum and any resolution made by this committee will be guaranteed to pass by the council and board, barring any issues with standing policy documents. Now the GSA shall review the letter proposed and make sure it doesn't interfere with the Letters Patent. The letter put forward by the committee does outline the fact that this definition might potentially not harm, but inhibit scholars of graduate students or professors alike doing any type of criticism to Israel. Thus, that part within the statement does speak to that part on the letter Patent so based of that, it would be fine to move on with a motion. Nonetheless, he suggests giving it some time to review the statement in more depth.
- Sydney mentioned that it was reviewed against the Anti-Oppression Policy and not the Letters Patent during the review of the statement as the committee believes that it wouldn't be an issue.
- Max mentioned that the SIAC had done much research; however, they refused to engage 90% of the Jews who live in Canada, noting it is clear that they have not engaged with the Jewish organizations on campus. He suggested that someone from the Jewish community be engaged as they are the ones impacted by this form of racism. Regarding the IHRA definition, it doesn't clearly state that you can't say Israel is a racist endeavour. The actual wording says you can't say that the existence of the state of Israel with a racist endeavour. It is important to define antisemitism so people understand the meaning and avoid this type of racism. This makes the IHRA definition very important. He suggested that the council adopt the IHRA definition in full to support its antioppression.
- Ghada mentioned that the definition says, "By claiming that the existence if the state of Israel is a racist endeavour, is an example of antisemitism to silence critique of Israel". Keeping in mind that there are scholars at Mac that are doing this type of research.

- Ashley mentioned that the GSA is not fully aware of what will be allowed in research and what's not. She recommended reaching out to the equity and inclusion office about research constructions specifically surrounding this issue because that might provide the GSA with better clarity to understand freedom of speech and students' right to freedom.
- Sarah mentioned that the SIAC statements call to stop the fear of the current definition of antisemitism as it is devastating for many groups.
- Shawn suggested that council members, if they like, can attend the next SIAC meeting on Dec 7.
- Ghada mentioned that this definition has been adopted right now at McMaster and can be used against her and other grad students. There have been cases at York University against a professor and at Windsor university. Some academics started to face pressure by advocating this definition.
- Max commented that he would like to speak to the case at York University. The professor had accused Jews of killing over 10 million people and that the reason the world didn't hear about it is that Jews control the media post, he added that Jewish people declared war on Germany and forced England into the war. Their partisans were responsible for the Holocaust. This was considered antisemitism. He added that there are no cases in Canada of somebody criticizing Israel and being fired for it from a University. It doesn't have this effect on academic freedom.
- Due to timing issue some of the council members had to leave the meeting, nonetheless, the council were still to maintain quorum.

Motion to endorse the letter proposed by the SIAC moved by Ghada seconded by Sarah

Discussion:

- Anita asked if anyone from the Jewish community had been consulted on the letter proposed by the SIAC. Sydney mentioned that the discussion regarding the letter took place at the SIAC. However, she is not sure about the backgrounds of the members who voted.
- Ghada added that the new IHRA campaign had been launched by the independent Jewish voices Canada, a progressive Jewish, so we are taking their call as we tackle what an anti-Palestinian motion is.
- Sydney indicated that all past members and council were invited to SIAC meetings.

Motion to endorse the letter proposed by the SIAC moved by Ghada seconded by Sarah , 5 in favour 2 opposed 1 abstain motion carried.

- Shawn suggested to continue having the conversation about the letter in case other members might need to add amendments. He added it needs a little wording change to be McMaster focused, and check to see if there are any objections against the Letters Patent.

8. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 5:25 pm

Action Items:

Item	Action by	Due date
Reaching out to equity and inclusion office regarding research construction and freedom of speech	Ashley	As soon as possible