



McMaster Graduate Students Association Executive Report (2019-2020)

Executive reports included: Shawn Hercules (President)
 Ruijie Zhang (Vice President Internal)
 Wei Zhao (Vice President Services)

Overview by GSA President

It's with great pleasure that I write this report to you as the we come to an end of our 2019-2020 year at the GSA! The past year has been great for the organization, even with the challenging year we were faced with. However, your GSA has been actively and closely working along with the University and other graduate student bodies across the country to bring solutions to these issues.

Over the past academic year, we've focused quite heavily on addressing the changes that came along with the provincial Student Choice Initiative and ensuring that this process went as smoothly as possible for us to make informed decisions. We also focused many of our resources on the administration of the organization which will ultimately positively impact our graduate student experience. We are currently in the process of restructuring the Executive roles of the Association and solidifying HR policies for our full- and part-time staff to serve you better and be better advocates for us as grad students. Our big projects this year among others, were focused on new international student initiatives such as the creating a comprehensive new student handbook document. We also purchased our own web server and have started building our GSA Website completely from scratch. This infrastructure will allow us to house web spaces for all of our existing and new GSA clubs and associations. Over the last year, The Phoenix also did incredibly well and as graduate students, our discounts rose from 15% to 20% on food purchases! Also, some of our grad student services and initiatives will be assisted financially by The Phoenix!

Overall, it was an enjoyable and rewarding time serving you this year and I am hopeful that according to our mission statement, the GSA will continue to "*Advocate for the needs of the collective, act as a resource, and provide support and services that improve the graduate student experience at McMaster*". Over the next academic year, we will prioritize more social and academic events so that we can meet other graduate students across various faculties at on campus and create a more cohesive and well-rounded environment among our diverse student body. If you are interested in getting involved, please feel free to reach out to me or our staff and get involved wherever possible through being an active member on any of our GSA committees or sitting on our council and/or Board of Directors. We need you to make this happen!

Shawn Hercules
GSA President



VP Internal Report

iCent App

- For September new students, update all GSA and IGSA information and their welcome week activities before August
- For January new students, update all GSA and IGSA information and their welcome week activities before December

Welcome Week

- Work on SCI Communication Plan
- Presentation on M-Phimac new students
- Updated the GSA Brochure
- Participated in the welcome week activities to familiarize new students with services GSA provided

Other duties

- Adjudicated awards GSA provided
- Adjudicate Sponsorships, Community Requests and club funding
- Reached MSU for “Get out to Vote Campaign”
- Oversaw FRCs; helping them in their faculty activities and adjudicate their funding request

Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) Annual Conference November in Halifax, NS

- Doctoral Student Professional Identity and Career Transitions
- Graduate and Postdoctoral Development Network (Experiential Learning)
- Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Task Force on Excellence in Graduate Studies
- CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC update

SPICES Workshops

- Contacted with Students Wellness Centre to hold a “go-to” workshop, in this interactive workshop, participants will learn to distinguish mental health and mental illness, different forms of self-care, how to support others, and the range of mental health resources available to them on campus and in the community.
- Approached to The Forge to hold an entrepreneurship workshop

Graduate Council

- A mental health focus group in partnership with the Student Wellness Centre;
- The graduate supervision questionnaire that had been circulated;
- Student-Supervisor Relationship working group plan to have workshops and survey to get more resources

VP Services Report

Clubs

We got several clubs recognized this year, such as DeGroot Doctoral Students Association, DeGroot Graduate Finance Club, McMaster Chemistry Graduate Student Society and so on. Most of these clubs are related to a specific faculty or department. After all, graduate students usually gather together in their department office. It will be much easier for them to have a club and some funding to know each other in both daily life and academic research. We also have a new student event portal for each club to register their events. This is extremely convenient to apply rooms to hold their events.

Health and Dental

Studentcare has continued to be our insurance broker this year. The fees of GSA Health/Dental insurance plan have been increased a lot this year. This is according to the formal decision, that is increasing the fee for a year and keeping the same for following several years. According to the annual claims report from Studentcare, GSA members have claimed more fees than collected insurance fees. So, the increase was reasonable. We also found that there were many exceptions, especially missing the deadline to enroll spouses and opt-out for part-time students. I believe we still need to highlight those deadlines more than we already do at the beginning of each term.

Airport pick-up

Before the beginning of Fall 2019 term, I planned and launched a pilot program to pick up new arrived students at Pearson airport by shuttle vans at a very low price. It can carry students directly to where they live. Since it was the first time that we worked on this, there were not too many students registering it. But I believe we will have better propagation and pick-up time interval available this year.

New student handbook

A new version of new graduate student handbook has been written and put on our website. Till now, it has 12 most importance topics which covers areas from basic enrolment to advanced health related affairs. I am continuedly adding more content to it, especially for banking, entertainment, cultural related topics and so on. In the future, I will put them to a Wiki services.

Server and Website

We finally make up our mind to buy a server computer to hold our new GSA websites. I have made the budget passed in the board meeting, and the server has been purchases and received. Our new website and Wiki service have been almost finished and tested on the new server. It will be



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online this summer. I will mitigate all the content from current website to the new website server and I will put everything in the new student handbook to the wiki pages. Once it is done, everyone can leave their new ideas and valuable experience on it.