



AGM EXECUTIVE REPORTS 2022-23

Graduate Student Association of McMaster

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McMaster GSA President Updates, May 2022 to May 2023

Thank you for a great term as President for 2022-2023! This past year has been busy for the GSA - we reinstated our overtime relief fund of up to \$3000, re-negotiated your HSR bus pass, negotiated the university's supplementary fee increases to be 1.9% below Ontario's CPI, and introduced the new unlimited mental health service *Conversation*.

Financial concerns are top of mind for graduate students now, especially with the current cost of living crisis. To address this issue, we extended the overtime COVID relief fund we created last year to support not only students delayed by COVID, but all overtime students facing delays beyond their control, providing up to \$3000 in funding to eligible students. We advocated to the University to better support overtime students not only financially, but also ensuring students graduate on-time. Through our advocacy efforts with other groups on campus, we received \$20,000 in funding each from the Alumni Association and CUPE 3906 to support overtime students. To promote similar student initiatives, we also created our Graduate Students Initiatives Fund of up to \$10,000 for students to apply to the GSA to fund projects that will benefit McMaster's graduate student community, including parental supports, sustainability, or other student need initiatives. Applications are currently open, so contact us to apply!

In the Fall, we re-negotiated our bus pass contract with the Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) to get: (1) a 12-month bus pass for the cost of 2.55 adult monthly passes; (2) prorated fees of 66.7% the annual pass for January starts; and (3) prorated fees of 33.3% the annual pass for May starts. This passed in our February 2023 referendum and is pending ratification at our March Annual General Meeting. We negotiated with the University to control supplementary fee increases for students, keeping supplementary fee increases at *1.9% below Ontario's CPI* and promoting ongoing quality of the services by meeting with representatives from athletics and recreation and the Student Success Centre to better promote athletics & recreation, career, and writing services for students.

The GSA advocates for you at the University on issues including student funding minimums, student housing, accessibility, parental supports, and more. We also met with groups across the country, including ThinkGrad and graduate student representatives at the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies annual conference. In Summer 2022, our Council voted to endorse the Raise the Floor Campaign initiated by CUPE 3906, and we advocated for a higher minimum funding floor to the University administration to better support graduate students and their research. We continue to advocate to the University for greater affordability at the new graduate residence and for all students to be able to apply for a spot in the residence rather

than only incoming students. We advocated for continued accessibility options at McMaster by encouraging online options to continue to be available for defenses and we advocated for student parents by meeting with University administrators and student parents to discuss potential supports. Through these efforts, we are currently working with student parents to create (1) a new bursary; and (2) a GSA club or network of student parents.

As the GSA, we returned to more in-person activities this year. Our Annual Welcome Week BBQ at the Phoenix had over 400 attendees and our snow tubing event at Chicopee tube park was sold out within 24 hours. We ran a flash charity raffle using Sza concert tickets to help raise money for Syria and Turkey disaster relief. We reintroduced our in-person coffee chat drop-ins at our GSA office to get more student feedback on what students want and we encourage you to watch out in your newsletter to see when you can drop in for a coffee and share your concerns with us. In March, we are working with students to create eco-art exhibits to promote sustainability on campus and we are excited to have students attend and help in this event. At the Phoenix, we've continued to run our trivia nights and encourage students to follow the @Phoenix.McMaster on Instagram to learn about their monthly events, like last month's Valentine's night and our karaoke night. We aim to continue providing events like this to have a fun campus experience and get students to have more opportunities to meet each other on campus, especially to help improve mental health. To address the current mental health crisis students are facing, we worked with our health care broker Studentcare to introduce the *Conversation* mental healthcare app with unlimited access to inclusive mental health professionals to get consultations until remission, medical support from physicians, and therapy sessions as needed at no additional costs above the health care plan. This proved to be highly used this past year and we are planning on extending this service for the upcoming academic year.

This past year I have enjoyed working to support you and am confident that the GSA will continue to fulfill its mandate of advocating for and providing support and services to McMaster graduate students. Although I'll be defending, I have confidence that next year's team will continue to support you by advocating for your financial well-being, prioritizing more in-person social and academic events, and working on providing more career supports to supplement the grad student experience. If you would like to get involved, please contact our fantastic staff or executive team and get involved through one of our committees, our Council, or our Board of Directors so that you can contribute and share your voice!

McMaster GSA VP Admin Updates, May 2022 to May 2023

It has been a pleasure to work as VP Admin this past year, my role has primarily focused on overseeing the financial affairs of the GSA and the GSA owned and run Phoenix Bar and Grill. I have also been involved in organizing and attending some in person events to discuss graduate student concerns and important social topics. Additionally, it has been a pleasure to be judging the Valedictorians for Fall 2022 presenting awards in person to our GSA awards winners.

In the Fall of 2022, the university completely reinstated in person lectures and there were no longer any pandemic restrictions. However, the GSA has recognized that students were forced to prolong the length of their graduate degrees due to pandemic-related delays. In Winter 2022, a COVID-relief fund was introduced to support students who had been affected by COVID-19. The GSA was able financial support 44 graduate students. The aftermaths of the pandemic sparked the introduction of an Overtime Student Fund, which similarly to the covid relief fund will be able to fund students in their 5th or more year of PhD and 3rd year of their project-based MSc program. We recognize that this fund will alleviate the financial burden placed on students who are trying to complete their graduate degree.

Another major area of focus has been negotiating the GSA's contract with the city of Hamilton's Service Rail (HSR). Every three years the GSA negotiates a universal transit pass with the HSR. This universal pass is a mandatory pass included in student's additional fees which gives unlimited access to graduate students to all buses in Hamilton. In the Fall of 2022, I was the lead negotiator for the GSA on this contract. We conducted a survey to understand student needs and priorities for the upcoming contract. We were able to include all graduate students in our upcoming 2023-2026 contract. In the previous contract, students starting in January would pay the full price for the universal pass and those beginning in may were not included in the contract. I was able to introduce a lower prorated fee for students who begin their studies in January and include students beginning in the May term into the contract.

Graduate funding has been a key issue which I have been working to address. I was involved in many discussions with the Dean of Graduate Studies on this matter and have worked on efforts to gather data on funding across the university. Graduate Student funding is a complex matter, as the university does not have any universal regulation on how funding is distributed. The sole regulation which is common in all faculties is that the minimum stipend which graduate students are allowed to receive is 13,500\$. Much of my work at the GSA has been to gather evidence of how funding is distributed in different faculties, departments, and

schools across campus. This data gather is an immense task, however, can lead to data-driven advocacy work with the university, as well as guide legislation beyond just our setting. Therefore, I have also partaken in meetings with ThinkGrad, a group of graduate student representatives from different institutions who focus on address problems affecting graduate students in Canada. I have also been working in collaboration with the “Raise the Floor” working group to work on mobilizing for fair student stipends.

I believe that listening to student voices is crucial in being a great advocator. It is for this reason, that I participated in the Welcome Week in September, Frost Week in January, other social events and set-up a monthly coffee hour with the GSA. These in-person events have really allowed me to understand the important issues affecting graduate students and relaying these back to meetings with the School of Graduate Studies and other bodies. I was delighted to be given the opportunity to judge the McMaster Valedictorians for the Fall Graduation, and additionally to have been able to present GSA awards at this year’s ceremony. This opportunity was an honour to partake in and really allowed the showcasing of the fantastic achievements of fellow McMaster graduates.

Furthermore, I was able to finalize and establish the creation of a few funding streams. Following discussions with student parents, I was able to organize, sought funding for and introduce a GSA parental leave fund. This funding will help support a parent during parental leave if they do not have any additional government funding and no paid parental leave as part of tri-agency scholarship. During my term, I was able to finalize and approve the creation of a student project fund, a large project fund which allows graduate students to submit community proposals to the GSA. This fund can fund project for a maximum of 10,000\$ each year. Therefore, students can initiate campus projects which interest them, outside of their academic careers. Additionally, streamlining the way the GSA adjudicated funding to GSA recognized clubs. This involved making some revision to the GSA policy documentation, which were review by the bylaws committee and the Board of Governors. Amongst many other responsibilities, I oversaw the financial audits of the GSA and the GSA Phoenix. I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to work as VP Administrator and wish the best success to the association and my successor.

McMaster GSA VP Internal Updates, May 2022 to May 2023

May

- Set goals for the coming year and compile a rough monthly goal schedule.
- Met with FRCs to plan for the coming year.
- Start GSA welcome events preparation.
- Met with SGS on GSA award application details, finalized the application deadline.
- Created application link, distribution award application information (contact VP external and SGS)

June

- In preparation for Fall Welcome Week and new academic year; discuss creating a Welcome Week committee with volunteers by advertising in weekly email.
- Met with SGS for welcome events collaboration.
- Reached out to GSA welcome event host on potential collaboration.

July

- Reached out to local restaurants and retailers for welcome week coupons.
- Kept finalizing welcome events details.
- Made posters and distributed advertisement information to SGS and VP external for advertisement.
- Approved multiple sponsorship and donations.

August

- Continue work on Welcome Week; meet with Welcome Week committee & delegate tasks.
 - o Wrap up details and promotion for Welcome Week events.
 - o Recruit volunteers from GSA-affiliated members for welcome events and establish a timetable.
- Approved multiple sponsorship and donations.

September

- Worked on Welcome Week events.
- Approved multiple sponsorship and donations; streamlined the approval process with VP admin and Executive Assistant

October

- Adjudicated GSA awards with Academic Affair Committee members; summarized and sent adjudication results to SGS and Executive Assistant
- Communicated with SGS on the disparity of GSA awards.
- Approved multiple sponsorship and donations.
- Updated the approved sponsorship and donation sheet with Executive Assistant

November

- Communicated with SGS on the disparity of GSA awards.
- Worked on Overtime relief fund with other exec members.
- Approved multiple sponsorship and donations.
- Updated the approved sponsorship and donation sheet with Executive Assistant

December

- Finalized GSA awards details (name lists, recipient's' information and ceremony details) with SGS; communicated with SGS on the disparity of GSA awards; polished GSA awards protocol, including application, adjudication, and result announcement.
- Worked on overtime relief fund with other exec members.
- Collected stipend data in University of Toronto and University of Waterloo. Summarized all data into a report and submitted to Caroline.
- Drafted a grad funding survey.
- Attended Dec GSA coffee chat.
- In preparation for January Frost Week

January

- Planned GSA Frost Week
- Distributed grad funding survey to collect McMaster grad funding facts.
- Host AAC/SIAC meeting on grad funding
- Held academic workshops.
- Host GSA Award ceremony
- Approved multiple sponsorship and donations.

* Attended weekly exec team meeting, monthly GSA Board meeting, monthly GSA council meeting and monthly Graduate Council Meeting. Attend seasonal Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee Meeting

McMaster GSA VP Services Updates, May 2022 to May 2023

As the GSA VP Services, I continuedly monitor the GSA Health & Dental Insurance Plan, club events and website maintenance. To be specific, the insurance plan runs well during the past academic year; Although 6 clubs have left us, we still recognize 3 new clubs, making the total number of clubs to be 21; The GSA website is running well.

May 2022

- Annually GSA website update is done.
- Start to prepare the EDL for incoming international students.

June 2022

- Fix bugs on the GSA website.
- Prepare the airport pickup for new international students.
- Prepare to start the GSA ukulele music lesson to provide more interesting events for the student body.
- Give the idea of scavenger hunt in the welcome week to allow students to explore the campus.

July 2022

- Prepare Club Fest.
- Prepare GSA brochure and MBAA brochure.

August 2022

- Finish GSA club re-registration. The result is that 6 clubs left.

September 2022

- Gave 3 workshops to new students.
 - Introduction to GSA Health & Dental Insurance Plan
 - Introduction to Public Transportation
 - Introduction to Private Transportation
- Help 3 student groups for club registration. The result is that two of them are successfully recognized.

October 2022

- Help recognizing a new GSA club.

December 2022

- Hold RBC Banking and Investment event.

January 2023

- Setup new club funding policy.
- Prepare GSA skiing trip.

February 2020

- GSA skiing trip.

McMaster GSA VP External Updates, May 2022 to May 2023

Dear Graduate Students

It was a pleasure serving you as the GSA VP External over the 2022-2023 academic year.

Please see below the initiatives I have conducted throughout my term.

- 1- Attending the GSA's weekly executive meetings, the monthly council meetings, and the board meetings.
- 2- Finalizing a final version of the communication policy I developed in my previous term and sending it to the GSA team to be posted on the website.
- 3- Introducing some changing to the format and design of the GSA weekly newsletter (e.g., adding a new section about what the GSA is doing now).
- 4- Designing posters and graphics for the newsletter and social media.
- 5- Attending meetings and holding discussions with the team about the transition of the Newsletter from the McMaster Email Distribution List Manager to MailChimp.
- 6- Doing research for MailChimp packages to proceed with formal subscription with the aim of facilitating the transition. The cost has been approved and subscription was successfully done with help from GSA team.
- 7- Taking the lead on creating MailChimp list and testing that with GSA team, before creating a formal "subscribe page" and tracking the number of subscribers.
- 8- Coordinating GSA Introduction Series to include in the newsletter.
- 9- Promoting the GSA welcome week events.
- 10-Following up with CUPE 3906 and communicating the progress of the situation during the strike happened in late 2022, until a deal was reached with the university.
- 11-Creating weekly emails on MailChimp and creating regular advertisements for social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) that are scheduled through buffer.
- 12-Continuing the "Places to Fall in Love with" initiative that I developed in my previous term to foster community-building and improve students' engagement with the GSA.
- 13-Co-ordinating submissions and winners in the "Places to Fall in Love with" contest to engage students and get them involved in the GSA. The initiative has achieved great success with, increasing the number of featured photos to 2 per week.
- 14-Starting a new initiative "Dishes to Fall in Love with" to foster sense of belonging and improve students' engagement with the GSA's newsletter.

- 15-Co-ordinating submissions and winners in the “Dishes to Fall in Love with” contest to engage students and get them involved in the GSA.
- 16-Continuing managing and promotion and on the new Instagram account, I created during my previous term. It turned out that Instagram will be one of the main GSA’s communication channels (better outreach than other platforms), which is great to see.
- 17-Coordinating with the student care representative for promoting the new conversation mental health and well-being services as well as the other health and dental services.
- 18-Helping in manually doing unsubscription of emails of students who requested that.
- 19-Responding to graduate students’ emails inquiring about events, services, or issues.
- 20-Helping in promotion for recruitment of new members to join the GSA committees.
1. The Graduate Students Association VP- External Annual Report for the academic Year 2022-2023
- 21-Producing and releasing an interim statement in support of the Iranian community following the incident late 2022 in Iran.
- 22-Coordinating with GSA team and promoting a joint Student Issues Action Committee and Academic Affairs Committee meeting to discuss graduate students’ funding needs.
- 23-Coordinating with the GSA team for survey about gauging graduate students’ interest in the continuation of HSR agreement.
- 24-Joining the team for discussions with CUPE 3906 about Raise the Floor Campaign and efforts to support overtime graduate students. This includes advocating for guaranteed funding for 5th year PhD students.
- 25-In collaboration with the GSA team, getting approval and helping in promoting the Overtime Relief Fund to support final year students whose studies were impacted by the pandemic.

Thank you so much and wish you a great new academic year.

Warm wishes,

Sarah Elshahat

GSA VP-External