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| AGM Executive Reports  |
| Term: 2023-2024 |

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# President Report – Letizia Dondi

Dear Graduate Student Members,

It has been a great honour to serve as your President for 2023-2024! This academic year has been filled with advocacy, efforts to increase the association’s visibility, strategic planning, and the organization of fun social events to foster a sense of community.

Student advocacy is always at the forefront of our operations as graduate students continue to face significant financial instability due to decade-long stagnant tri-agency funding, limited scholarship opportunities and a dire cost-of-living crisis. The Graduate Student Association has advocated for an increase in funding packages which reflect true living wage in Hamilton, both internally with the School of Graduate Studies, at Graduate Council and to the Task Force on Graduate Funding and externally with relationships to other Graduate Student Associations in Canada. We have championed policy reforms to address systemic issues such as funding discrepancies and disparities in departmental and faculty-level support, such as addressing and eliminating “scholarship clawbacks”. Furthermore, I attended the Canadian Association Graduate Studies conference which focused on excellence in graduate supervision and mentorship and networked with many student leaders to devise solutions on tackling graduate student issues nationwide.

Throughout the past year, we've consistently heard from and supported numerous students facing recurring challenges with their supervisors across various departments at the university. These issues have underscored the critical need for McMaster University to develop comprehensive guidelines and policies governing the conduct and expectations of graduate supervisors. Such measures are essential not only for safeguarding the welfare and academic success of students but also for fostering a positive and supportive environment conducive to their overall growth. Additionally, given the prevalence of these issues and the impact they have on the graduate student experience, it is imperative that the university takes prompt and decisive action. The establishment of clear guidelines and policies is not only feasible but also an urgent priority. Many other institutions have already implemented similar frameworks, demonstrating both the necessity and feasibility of such initiatives. By following suit, McMaster University can effectively address existing challenges, protect student interests, and enhance the overall quality of the graduate student experience.

As an international student myself, at many bodies I highlighted the issue of limited scholarships for international students and the precarious financial situation students face while undertaking their degree. We also continued to push the university to establish an overtime relief fund, modelling the funds we set up in previous years (e.g. COVID relief fund and Overtime relief fund) to support students navigating the challenges of extended study periods. We acknowledge and understand the lack of student participation in university governance, therefore we advocated for more paid student leadership positions to bolster student participation in university governance.

Our advocacy extends beyond financial matters to encompass the welfare of students residing at the 10 Bay Residence. Collaborating with the Tenant’s Solidarity Working Group, we have amplified their voices in dialogues with university stakeholders. In the near future, we envision the formal establishment of a self-governed GSA club for graduate tenants, providing a platform for prompt issue resolution and advocacy.

However, effective communication remains imperative for our operations and the association’s success. Despite persistent efforts, the university's reluctance to share student email directories impedes our ability to disseminate vital information and services to our members. Urgent resolution of this matter is crucial to ensure equitable access to association resources and programming.

As an organization representing students, we centre the student voice in all our work. This year we focused on increasing student participation in our committees, and in establishing self-governance at the faculty level by creating Faculty Associations. I am delighted to have worked alongside students in the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities to lay the foundations for what a faculty association could look like. I look forward to seeing the first batch of executives elected within these faculties in the upcoming years. Additionally, the GSA has amplified the student voice by participating in many reviews and strategic planning throughout the university, for example in the student accessibility services review, the strategic planning for the school of graduate studies and the task force of generative AI in teaching and learning. We also partnered very closely with other offices around the university such as the ombuds office and the student success centre to ameliorate the student experience.

Furthermore, we have made significant strides in fostering a sense of community and inclusivity within the graduate student body. Following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, we ramped up our in-person social events to improve the sense of community at McMaster as we understand how isolating graduate school can be. Through various social events and cultural celebrations, we have sought to create an environment where all graduate students feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed in their academic and personal lives.

We are currently undertaking our GSA Strategic Planning efforts, therefore will be gathering feedback from students, student groups, clubs and other stakeholders to further improve our services to the general needs of our diverse graduate body. We will be sending our surveys therefore make sure to have your say in the process!

I encourage you to stay engaged with the GSA, whether through attending events, participating in advocacy efforts, or reaching out with your ideas and feedback. You are the GSA, and your input is invaluable in shaping the direction of your association and ensuring that we continue to serve the needs of graduate students effectively. If you love advocacy and want more leadership experience do not forget our elections are just around the corner, so nominate yourself for an executive position or get involved in our board of directors.

Again, thank you for entrusting me with the role of President, and I am confident that the GSA will thrive in the years to come, unwaveringly championing the interests of our students!

# VP Internal Report – Kusum Bhatta

As the Vice President Internal, I am pleased to present a detailed summary of the activities and initiatives undertaken by the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) over the past year:

1. Valedictorian Application Assessment:

I facilitated the assessment of valedictorian applications through multiple rounds, providing scores to finalize the winners. I also ensured transparency and fairness in the selection process.

2. Welcome Week Activities:

I organized engaging welcome week activities in both Fall and Winter terms. This involved creating forms, handling registrations, corresponding with students and university bodies, booking venues, and overseeing event execution. Notable Fall events included a barbecue, yoga session, forest hike, and the initiation of a cultural event. In the Winter term, events included a chili event, continuation of the cultural event, and a painting event.

3. Academic Committee Meetings:

I coordinated and organized regular Academic Committee meetings to address academic concerns and initiatives beneficial to graduate students. I also actively participated in discussions and advocated for increased resources and support for graduate students during monthly Student Services Committee (SSC) meetings. Evaluated and approved sponsorship requests:

I evaluated sponsorship requests in collaboration with Jing, ensuring strategic allocation of resources. 4. Collaboration with CUPE: I maintained close collaboration with CUPE, attending their monthly meetings, representing GSA at rallies such as the Bay housing rally, and participating in their annual Raise the Floor event to reinforce GSA's presence and support.

5. Engagement with Senate and Graduate Council:

I raised pertinent issues, including AI-related concerns, Bay housing issues, and PNG-related topics, during Senate meetings. Commenced attendance at Graduate Council meetings in 2024, advocating for international students' concerns and highlighting the university's response to government changes affecting them.

6. Awards Adjudication and Outreach:

I corresponded with Catherine and Judi regarding awards adjudication in May, ensuring efficient and fair processes. I also attended Social Sciences Faculty Research Committee meeting and reached out to various departments to encourage participation in the GSA Board and Faculty Research Committees.

7. Active Involvement in GSA Governance: I regularly attended executive, board, and council meetings, actively engaging in discussions and providing valuable feedback to drive decision-making processes.

This report highlights my commitment and dedication of the GSA's Vice President Internal in facilitating various initiatives and advocating for the welfare of graduate students until February.

# VP External Report – Ana Portillo

It has been a great pleasure to serve as the VP External for the 2023-2024 academic term! Other than attending weekly executive team meetings, monthly GSA Board Meetings, and monthly GSA council meetings, I have worked on communicating events, professional and academic opportunities, and highlighting other initiatives through the GSA weekly newsletter and social media. I have also planned various events for graduate students this term.

The highlights of my work as the VP External are outlined below:

May to August 2023:

· Updating the GSA website including HSR information update, 2022-2023 Council meeting updates and GSA statements

· Drafting materials for newsletter including: FRC Highlights and GSA Team Highlights, and Graduate Student Highlight

· Drafting other promotional material for Welcome Week (Bookmark)

· Held Student Issues Action Committee (SIAC) to discuss graduate food security

September:

· Communicating important updates such as the HSR bus pass updates Insurance updates, Welcome Week Promotions/Highlights and Standing Committees Promotions

· Attending and helping facilitate welcome week events including the SGS Grad Fair, GSA BBQ and GSA Cultural Event

October:

· Drafted the Executive Team Introduction Series

· Engagement in SIAC meeting and policy discussions

· Held Trick or Treat at the GSA Office event for Halloween

November:

· Joined the University Registrar Selection Committee and attended the Equitable Recruitment and Search/Selection Committee Training

· Held an Events committee meeting to plan November to January social events

December:

· Planned two GSA Movie Night events

· Planned the GSA ski and snowboarding trip to Snow Valley

· Attended ongoing meetings for the Registrar Selection Committee (ranking candidates, attending interviews, post interview discussions)

January:

· Facilitated the GSA ski/snowboarding trip in January 09, 2024 to Snow Valley

· Attended more meetings as part of the Registrar Selection Committee

· Helping to promote the upcoming GSA elections and various positions open at the GSA through the newsletter and social media

· Participated in the winter term Welcome Week events (Chili event)

February:

· Helped facilitate the Cultural Welcome Week Event

· Will be involved in helping with the strategic planning for the GSA Strategic Plan

· Holding events committee meeting to plan social events in the spring

# VP Services Report – Wenjuan Yang

As the GSA VP Services, I continuedly monitor the GSA Health & Dental Insurance Plan, communicate HSR bus code with student, club events and website update. To be specific, the insurance plan runs well during the past academic year; Although 5 clubs have left us, we still hold the total number of clubs to be 19; The GSA website is running well.

My work has been diverse and impactful, encompassing both administrative and student engagement roles.

1. GSA Executive Committee and Council Meeting Activities: I played a role in participating in these meetings, smooth communication and effective decision-making processes within the GSA.

2. GSA/SSC Monthly Meetings: I attended these regular meetings and fostered a collaborative environment between the GSA and Student Services Center (SSC).

3. Dental & Health Insurance Provider Meetings: I engaged with our insurance providers to discuss and negotiate terms, aiming to secure the best possible benefits for our members.

4. Workshops for New Students: I prepared workshops aimed at acquainting new students with the GSA Health & Dental Insurance Plan and introducing them to the public transportation system, enhancing their university experience from the start.

5. Local Restaurant Discounts: I compiled a collection of discounts offered by restaurants in the area near the university, providing valuable savings opportunities for our members.

6. GSA Website Updates: I was responsible for updating the GSA website with the latest information on Dental & Health, HSR BUS PASS, and club information, ensuring that our members have access to current and useful information.

7. GSA Club Re-registration: I successfully completed the re-registration process for GSA clubs, with the outcome being that 19 clubs remained active.

8. Club Events and Seed Funding: I reviewed and approved club events and their requests for seed funding, supporting diverse and engaging student-led initiatives.

9. Welcome Week Preparation: I also attend the preparation for welcome week events, planning activities that would welcome and integrate new students into the GSA community.

10. Student Queries: I diligently answered questions from upcoming students and responded to their emails, providing timely and helpful information to assist their transition to university life.

11. Annual GSA Website Update: I completed the annual update of the GSA website, ensuring that all content is accurate, relevant, and engaging for the academic year.

12. Design and Promotion: Created posters and infographics for club events and the website, promoting them in newsletters and on social media to enhance visibility and engagement.

13. Updates and Awards Announcement: Posted updates on the GSA website regarding organizational changes and announced awards for graduating students, celebrating their achievements.

14. Policy Discussions: Participated in discussions on policies related to student protection in the aftermath of the Israel-Palestine 2023 conflict, advocating for student welfare and safety.

15. New GSA Club Recognition: I'm assisting in the process of recognizing two new GSA clubs, supporting its establishment and integration into the broader GSA community.

Each of these tasks has been undertaken with a commitment to enhancing the experience of graduate students in our university, ensuring they have access to essential resources, support, and opportunities for engagement and growth.