

VP Student Affairs Annual Report

May 2018- April 2019



Graduate Students' Association
University of Saskatchewan

April 5th, 2019

1. Introduction

According to the GSA bylaws the duties of the VP Student Affairs shall include, but are not limited to:

- i. Act as a liaison within the University community relating to graduate student issues;
- ii. To develop a program of social events for the enhancement of the graduate student experience;
- iii. To organize the Three Minute Thesis Competition and the Graduate Student Research Conference, if the Executive decided to host these events;
- iv. To coordinate with the University in its efforts to orient incoming graduate students;
- v. Advocate for resources that would improve the academic experience of graduate students at the University;
- vi. To be an advocate for graduate students in all matters relating to their university experience, as applicable; and,
- vii. To organize academic workshops of interest to graduate students.

Thus, this document intent to review briefly all the activities carried out during the year and the events organized by the VP Students Affairs (Edgar Martinez-Soberanes) from May 2018 to April 2019. These activities are aligned and fulfil the duties of the VP Student Affairs.

Most of my time in office was dedicated to the advocacy of all graduate students at the U of S either as a group or in occasions in individual cases that required personal attention and support of students individually. Advocacy and representation of Grad Students was always expressed at University Committees, University Council, and in College and University hearings.

Several events were also organized for all GSA members including orientations, workshops, social events, Graduate Research Conference, and the 3MT competition. The main objective for these events was to enhance the experience of all graduate students in campus. Orientations served to welcome incoming and returning students to a new study term; while, social events provide them with a space to relax and enjoy themselves with their peers in a none academic environment.

2. Advocacy

One of the main activities and probably the most important for my position is to advocate for students in general, either as a group or individually with anything related to a student life academically or non-academically such as life in residence, international status, and others.

2.1 Personal Cases

It is very unfortunate to see that several students had to go through unpleasant experiences during their studies due to a bad relationship with their professors or supervisors or due to the lack of knowledge on how to proceed and perform in a new environment. Most of the cases that I had to advocate for where due to misunderstandings between students and supervisors and academic misconduct such as plagiarism cases. It is important to note that in most of the cases the students were benefit from the hearing process and resolution to the conflicts were found.

2.2 Implied Status (Study Permit)

An issue related to the ability of work under implied status was brought to the GSA attention after a student was denied the option of working on campus due to his study permit had expired and it was on implied status. This practice was new for the University and it begun in middle of October 2018; however, this was never informed to the community or the student

employed. This change in policy affects several students and it will continue affecting more if it is not solved. The GSA had several discussions with high administration in order to address this issue since according to us and what is published in the government of Canada website it is clear that a student is allowed to work event when in an implied status. This matter is still unfolding, and the University is consulting directly with the government.

3. University Committees

I sat in several committees and couple of search committees where I had the opportunity to bring to the table the perspective of graduate students at the U of S. Some of the committees include: University Council, Academic Programs Committee (APC), Graduate Programs Committee (GPC), Parking and Services Committee (PSC), CGPS D.Sc. Committee, and two search committees in the Department of Engineering for the Associate Dean of Research and Partnerships and the Associate Dean of Graduate Student Programs.

4. Events

Several events were organized by the GSA this year (from September 2018 – April 2019) including orientations, workshops, social events, the Graduate Research Conference, and the 3MT competition. These events are briefly reviewed next.

4.1 Fall and Winter Orientations

The fall orientation took place on September 5th, 201 and it is GSA's biggest event of the year, which attracts over 1000 graduate students on campus. The fall orientation serves as a crucial opportunity for incoming graduate students to meaningfully interact with their peers and feel more comfortable at the University of Saskatchewan. It also introduces incoming graduate students to a wide range of important services and resources that are provided to students by the GSA, the university, and its partners.

As previous years, this year the orientation included a BBQ event at which food was provided for all the graduate students, incoming and returning, that were willing to come out to the event. During the BBQ, a stage was set, and time was provided for faculty and student groups representatives to deliver a welcoming and informative speech to all the guests.

The objectives for the GSA Fall Orientation 2017 were as follows:

1. To welcome and provide helpful information to incoming graduate students.
2. To create a welcoming and inclusive environment among students to make incoming students feel more comfortable at the University of Saskatchewan.
3. To provide incoming students with a meaningful opportunity to meet their peers.
4. To introduce incoming graduate students to a wide range of important services and resources that are provided to students by the GSA, the university, and its partners.

The winter orientation took place on January 9th, 2019 and it was organized to welcome new graduate students that start their programs in January. The winter orientation is much smaller in comparison to its similar in fall; however, it has the same objectives.

As in previous years, this year the winter orientation was hosted at the GSA Commons. At the orientation food was provided for all the graduate students, incoming and returning, that attended to the event. Additionally, time was provided for faculty and student groups representatives to deliver a welcoming and informative speech to all the guests.

In general, the event was much smaller than the fall orientation, as the number of incoming graduate students in winter is considerably less than those new registered in fall. Nevertheless, the winter orientation was very successful as many new graduate students (about 50) participated, food and GSA promotional material were plenty for all the people, and most of the invited faculty to give a speech attended the invitation.

4.2 U of S Graduate Students Research Conference

This year the GSA hosted and organized the Graduate Students Research Conference on February 27th and 28th, 2019. The conference was titled: Research for a Better World – A Holistic Approach.

This event was designed to share and celebrate the outstanding research of our dedicated students, and to provide students the opportunity to showcase the importance of their work. This celebration of research offers an invaluable opportunity for graduate students to compose and present their research in a way that engages the academic community and refine the quality of their work.

The conference was divided into four broad sections or themes: Humanics, Environment, Health, and Technology. We had a keynote speaker to open each of the sections and we had about 5 participants students on each section.

4.3 U of S 3MT Competition

The 3 Minute Thesis (3MT®) competition is an internationally recognized research communication competition developed by the University of Queensland in 2008. The 3MT® competition challenges graduate students (Master and Ph.D.) to present their research and its significance in three minutes using a single and static slide. The goal of the competition is not an exercise in trivializing or simplifying research but challenges students to consolidate their ideas and research discoveries so they can be presented concisely to a non-specialist audience. 3MT celebrates the discoveries made by research students and encourages their skill in communicating the importance of research to the broader community.

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celebration of research offers an invaluable opportunity for graduate students to compose and present their research in a way that engages the academic community and refines the quality of their work.

All 3MT® participants were competing for 1st, 2nd, 3rd place and people's choice prizes at the local level valued at \$1000, \$500, \$250, \$250, respectively. The winner secured a spot at the regional competition at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George (UNBC) on April 17.

This year we had 27 participants, which was a bit lower than previous years; however, many students cancelled for different personal reasons in the last minute. Thus, the event could not be promoted more in order to get more competitors. The judging panel was composed by: Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Salam (U of S Alumni, current employee of Nortek), Mr. Bill Lewis (Tomorrow Today Society Inc.), Mr. Eric Olauson (MLA Saskatoon University), Mr. Galen Heinrichs (City of Saskatoon Research Connections Liaison), and Mr. Khalil Sahtout (U of S Alumni, Freelance Consultant)

The winners were: 1st place, Mr. Farzad Dehghan; 2nd place and People's Choice, Ms. Miranda Zwiefelhofer, and 3rd place, Mr. Nicholas A. Belliveau.

In general, the event was very successful, but we realize that more promotion is needed if we want to make the event bigger.

4.4 Wine and Cheese and Holiday Social Events

Wine and Cheese Social is the most popular social event of the GSA, which attracts over hundred graduate students on campus. The Wine and Cheese Social serves as an opportunity for incoming graduate students to meaningfully interact with their peers in an informal environment, at which they can chat and relax.

As previous years, the Wine and Cheese Socials were held at the GSA Commons, and alcoholic and no-alcoholic beverages, such as wine, beer, and juice were offered. Snacks were also provided. Although the event is cover free, alcoholic drinks are charged to recover some of the money invested in the event.

4.5 Social Events

In addition to the Wine and Cheese Social, other two minor social events were hosted by the GSA, each for a different occasion or festivity. We had an event for Halloween and Christmas. The Halloween event was a movie night while the Christmas one was very similar to the Wine and Cheese, but in a smaller scale. In all of them light snacks non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks were available for all the attendees; however, wine glasses and beer cans were charged at \$3.00 per glass or can.