



University of Saskatchewan
Graduate Students' Association
Executive Committee
Retreat Agenda (9 AM – 5PM)
May 1, 2020

Present (Executives): Humaira Inam (President), Hadi Ramin (VP Finance and Operations), Carmen Marquez Mellidez (VP Academic and Student Affairs), Qasim Shahzad Gill (VP External).

Mery Mendoza (Guest), Naheda Sahtout (Guest)

Regrets: none

Absent: none

SESSION ONE: 9 AM – 12 PM

1. Call to Order / Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order on Friday, May 1st at 9:21am by the President, Humaira Inam. Merry Mendoza (outgoing president) and Naheda Sahtout (past president and GSA council member) were present at the meeting to facilitate the transition. The President attended the meeting online due to COVID-19, but the remaining attendees were physically present at the GSA Commons while observing social distancing protocol as determined by the Government of Saskatchewan. Executives Sahtout and Mendoza thanked everyone for being part of the GSA to advocate for all graduate students to the University of Saskatchewan, local community and to the

whole country. It is wonderful to see dedicated individuals on this year's executive team and she looked forward to a remarkable year ahead.

Sahtout indicated that the purpose of today's meeting was to learn about the governance structure of University of Saskatchewan, the GSA governance structure, and how the GSA coordinates itself with different offices of university. This was an informal meeting and it was expected that should anyone have any questions to please raise them when appropriate. Sahtout hoped that a discussion will ensue instead of it being a monologue.

2. Signing of Confidentiality Agreement

Mery indicated that in our position as executives, we will have access to information that must remain confidential. Not only does this include confidentiality of others' information, but also confidentiality of discussions that occur within the executives during meetings. Each executive signed this confidentiality agreement.

3. Executive Introductions / Structure of the GSA

The president asked each retreat attendee to introduce themselves. Each attendee shared their background, motivations for standing for election in the GSA, and motivations for representing graduate students.

4. Approval of the Agenda

Humaira asked whether there were any amendments to the agenda.

Motion: To approve the agenda. Moved by Carmen. Seconded by Hadi. Motion carried.

5. University Governing Bodies

Sahtout briefly discussed the governance structure of the University of Saskatchewan which includes the Senate, Board of Governors and the University Council. This was followed by a brief introduction of individuals in governance around the university.

6. GSA Structure

Naheda and Mery then explained the structure of the GSA and urged the executives to look through the constitution, bylaws, and policies.

- The Executive committee consists of the President and Vice-Presidents. The Executive is accountable to the council and regular membership.
- The President and Vice-Presidents act as Board of Directors in council. It is necessary to have a board to maintain not-for-profit status.
- There exists a Council, which consists of;
 - The Executive
 - A representative from each Academic Council
- Executive meetings occur once a month from May to August and twice a month from September to April.
- Council meetings occur once / bi-monthly from May to August and once a month from September to April.
- There is an Annual General meeting in April.
- The Office staffs consist of the Office Manager and the Commons Coordinators.

It was explained, as stated in the GSA Bylaws, that GSA executives must not miss more than 3 executive meetings in total, and 2 consecutive meetings. It is acceptable if executives need to teleconference / phone-in to meetings in order to ensure their attendance. Due to Covid-19, executives are expected to continue their meetings through online platforms.

7. Committee Appointments

Sahtout indicated that a graduate student representative sits on the University Council committees, CGPS committees, as well as other committees that are directly related to the student experience or academic life at the University of Saskatchewan. As per our bylaws, the executives must identify and determine who will sit on these committees. Sahtout circulated the committee list with recommended assignments. Most assignments were not based on any standards but were based on experience, background, interest, portfolios as well as individual's schedules and commitments outside the GSA. The fact that a certain executive had previously sat on a committee does not insinuate that the same executives sits on the committee this year, with the exception of some committees.

There was an in-depth discussion about the Governance Committee and the representative graduate student that would sit on this committee. Sahtout explained that currently the student representative is a non-voting participant and student status on this committee is again up for discussion for the following year. Sahtout stated that it was important that the individual who would sit on this committee have an in-depth knowledge of the university's policies and be able to participate in the discussions. There was a general consensus that it was important that the individual for this committee have a strong understanding of university policies so as to be of benefit to graduate students.

Carmen Marquez Mellidez asked whether guest graduate students can come to meetings. Sahtout and others explained that this is not possible unless the Chair of the Committee is aware of this and requests it. There are many circumstances in which guests come to meetings to talk about specific topics but then leave after the discussion of that topic. These should be discussed with the Committee Chair and there needs to be justification as to why the guest is being requested.

Sahtout indicated that it is crucial to commit to the committees that you will be appointed to and attend all meetings. This builds the credibility of the GSA and indicates that graduate students are involved and valuable members of the university community. Most University Council committees meet once a month, as do most CGPS committees. Some of the other committees do not meet as often or meet only during certain parts of the year. Committee terms of reference can be found on the university website. It is important to discuss with the Chair of your committee whether a delegation system is possible. For example, if you were unable to attend, could another executive attend in your place? Some committees may not permit this, so it is important to verify this at the beginning of September.

Motion: To approve the committee assignments. Moved by Humaira. Seconded by Qasim.

Motion carried.

Humaira will communicate these assignments to the necessary administration and individuals will be notified of meeting dates and meeting documents once they are added to the committee. Naheda

also indicated that as per our policies, executives sit on certain GSA standing committees by virtue of their position. These will reconvene starting in the fall term and so further discussions on this will occur at a later time.

It was agreed the following executives will sit on the following committee:

- ✓ University Senate: Humaira will sit on this committee. This occurs twice a year. Usually in October and April.
- ✓ University Council Committee: It happens once per month. Carmen will sit on this committee. This is the umbrella of the university. Naheda mentioned that the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs usually sits on this committee. The President reports to council every month, but in the absence of the President, the VP of Student Affairs will attend. In the absence of VP Student Affairs, VP Finance or VP External will make the report.
- ✓ Planning and Priorities Committee: Humaira will sit on this committee. Financial matters are discussed. The discussions are confidential, and it occurs twice per month.
- ✓ Academic Programs Committee: The discussion is related to program changes for both undergraduate and graduate. Humaira will contact a graduate student “Andrea Wishart “if she is willing to sit on this committee.
- ✓ Governance committee: Qasim will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Research Scholarly and Artistic Meeting: Hadi will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Scholarships and Awards: Hadi will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Teaching, learning and research committee of council: Teaching methods are discussed. Carmen will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Presidents Executive Committee: All Executives will attend this committee.
- ✓ Parking and Services Committee: Carmen will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Recreation and Athletics Advisory Council: Humaira will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Copyright Advisory Committee: Hadi will sit on this committee.
- ✓ CCR Advisory Committee: Humaira will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Faith Leaders Council: Qasim will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Fee Review Committee. Hadi will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Provost’s Advisory Committee on Gender and Sexual Diversity: a student representative will be appointed by Humaira at a later date

- ✓ Student Forum Executive: Carmen and Humaira will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Student Forum: Carmen, Humaira, and two councillors appointed in September will sit on this committee.

CGPS Committees:

- ✓ CGPS Committee council: All executives and two graduate students (Mery Mendoza and Khaled Zoroufchi Benis) will sit on this committee. Humaira will contact Khaled.
- ✓ Faculty Council: All executives and two graduate students (Mery Medoza and Khaled Zoroufchi Benis) will sit on this committee. Humaira will contact Khaled.
- ✓ CGPS Executive Committee: Humaira will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Interdisciplinary Committee: Qasim will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Awards Committee: Hadi will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Earned D.Litt / D.Sc: Hadi will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Graduate Academic Affairs Committee: Carmen will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Graduate Programs Committee: Humaira will sit on this committee.
- ✓ Equity and International Committee: Qasim will sit on this committee.

8. Team Building

Humaira indicated that it is important to outline the roles and responsibilities of executives at this retreat so that each individual can plan for the year ahead.

8.1. Executive Duties and Responsibilities

Each executive has two types of duties; those governed by our bylaws and those we chose to pursue during our tenure.

Humaira informed the executives that at each Council meeting, each executive is expected to write a report, (previous reports are available online as examples), that will be included in the agenda package, as well as do a 3 minute verbal report. These reports ensure that Council can keep up with our doings and as we are accountable to Council, it is important that Council is well informed. If individuals are unable to attend Council meetings, due to conference travel, they should provide Humaira with a statement that she can then read to Council on their behalf. They should also inform the Chair of their absence.

As per our bylaws, Executives must;

- Be familiar with the governing documents, the Non-Profit Corporations Act, the U of S Act, Roberts Rules of Orders and other documents;
- Determine which individual will go to CFS and ThinkGrad conferences;
- Act as ambassadors of the association within the university and in the community;
- Assist each other to ensure that the well-being of the association is maintained.
- Be professional, respectful, courteous and responsible in everything that they do and when presenting themselves.
- Ensure continuity of roles and seek assistance from other executives when feeling overburdened.

It is crucial to foster a culture of teamwork. It is also important to acknowledge mistakes as soon as they happen so that the executive team can learn and mitigate through these mistakes appropriately. Humaira indicated the importance for each of us to accept positive and constructive feedback from each other as this allows us to learn and grow as individuals. Carmen added that it is important to help each other during tough times we can contribute positively towards the betterment of the association.

Any communication with the members will be facilitated by Humaira through the Office Manager (Candace). Humaira, Carmen, and the Office Manager will look after Facebook posts/messages while the Office Manager will look after Twitter. Facebook / Twitter, content should be related to the services / events offered by the GSA or academic councils / social clubs or opportunities that would benefit graduate students, such as scholarships or workshop opportunities. Any executive is welcome to email Humaira with content to post on Facebook.

It was agreed that the emails will be sent to GSA members once per month during summer and twice per month in winter terms. Except for bursary announcement, which can be sent as deemed necessary. The usual procedure would be to send the information that needs to be circulated to Graduate students to Humaira and she will send it to the Office Manager who can forward it to the members. Office Manager has access to list serve and the President and the office manager will go through the training on how to efficiently manage it.

Humaira encouraged all executives to be at the GSA office at some part of the day when we resume normal hours, so that GSA student members can ask questions or give comments when necessary.

The President recognized that due to Covid-19 we cannot operate as normal at the Commons and we will move forward as appropriately recommended by the Saskatchewan Government.

8.2. Executive / Council Meetings

As per our bylaws, executives must meet at least once a month in May – August and twice a month from September – April. Humaira proposed that executive meetings occur on Thursdays from 5 – 7 PM. Executives agreed that Thursdays are suitable. Dates for Executive Meetings for May – August are;

- May 14
- June 11
- July 9
- August 13

Fall Executive meetings can be decided in the August executive meeting. Executives were in agreement with the scheduled meeting times.

As per our bylaws, Council must meet at least once from May-June, and once from July-August. Humaira proposed that Council meetings continue occurring on Tuesday from 5 – 7 PM.

Proposed dates for Council meetings are;

- June 16
- August 18
- September 22
- October 20
- November 10
- December 8
- January 26
- February 23
- March 16
- April 6
- April 6 (tentative AGM)
- April 13 (AGM)

Humaira will communicate with the Chair with regards to the June and August Council meetings and executives agreed that the fall / winter meetings can be confirmed at the August executive meeting.

8.3. Executive Communication

Humaira indicated that generally emails should be responded to within 48 hours.

Humaira proposed two methods of communication between executives;

- Formal: through emails

- Emails should generally be replied to within 48 hours
- If an opinion or decision needs to be made, if no response is received within 48 hours then that implies consensus with the decision
- If an urgent decision needs to be made, then the subject of the email should indicate the timeline and URGENT.
- Informal: through the Facebook/WhatsApp group chat
 - Just as important for bonding between executives
 - For informal questions or discussions that do not require decisions to be made

Executives were in favour of the email communication and understood the need to visit the Commons.

8.4. Executive Decision Making

Humaira indicated that the executives will follow Roberts Rules of Orders for all meetings. The decision-making process is a vital component of financial decisions, executive decisions and unique instances that come to the executives attention. Executives need to make a decision on the following items:

- There are 4 executive members; quorum is majority, so 3 members at least. ***All agreed.***
- Majority vote (3 yes, 1 no / abstentions) will be required to carry a decision. ***All agreed.***
- 2 yes's and 2 abstentions – this decision should carry as there will be circumstances when individuals must abstain due to conflict of interest. ***Agreed unless abstention is not due to conflict of interest and that further information is required by the Executives for a decision to be made.***
- Majority abstention (1 yes, 3 abstentions) indicates a failed vote. ***All agreed.***
- 2 yes, 2 no, 1 abstention further discussion is required. ***All agreed.***

Urgent matters requiring an executive decision may need to be made prior to an executive meeting, at which case it will be made via email. The 48-hour rule shall apply. Email voting will take place and the VP Finance and Operations will include these motions and votes to the upcoming minutes to ensure transparency for members. Humaira indicated that any emails requiring a decision via the executive should include a 'Reply All' in the subject so that all decisions are apparent to everyone.

Humaira indicated that your executive portfolio, as per the bylaws and policies, will dictate what communication is forwarded to you. For example, any issue pertaining to an Indigenous student will be forwarded to the Indigenous Liaison. Any financial issues will be forwarded to the VP Finance and Operations, any academic issues to the VP Academic and Student Affairs... etc. If the executive seeks input from another executive, they can choose to forward the communication as they see appropriate.

8.5. Communication to Graduate Students

Humaira indicated that it is important for the executives to visit the Commons once we resume normal operations to;

- Socialize with members
- Get to know other executives and office staff

SESSION TWO: 12 PM – 3PM

9. GSA Services

Executives will be responsible to ensure the following services are continuously offered and maintained.

9.1. GSA Commons

The VP Finance and Operations and the Office Manager are responsible for ensuring the proper maintenance of the Commons. The Commons is now equipped with a projector system. Coffee / tea / hot chocolate are available for graduate students during office hours, and not during events. Coffee is available at an extra cost for events. Also, as per the recommendations of the Sustainability Committee last year, the Commons is now equipped with reusable cups and plates that will be used for GSA events. The Commons also has a single stream-lined recycling bin. The students are also welcomed to put posters on the noticeboard, but they have to adhere to the university policies. Moreover, the students can request to have their artwork displayed on the walls

of the Commons. For this, Hadi or Candace need to be contacted. The Commons also has a single stream-lined recycling bin.

Humaira indicated that rental of the GSA Commons is a source of revenue that the association relies on and allocates budgeting for every year. Humaira encouraged executives to look at the website so that they are aware of the rules and regulations to bookings.

- Free for GSA ratified groups during office hours
- \$50 / hour for GSA ratified groups after office hours, during weekends and holidays
- \$75 / hour for GSA non-ratified groups
- Other costs include coffee, BBQ's and tables (once they are purchased). They can't take these outside of GSA premises.

Humaira explained personal use of the GSA Commons. Based on previous years, each executive could use the space twice (2) in a year for no charge, for their department or social group or for a personal event ONLY if usage did not require a coordinator. This promotes appreciation for the executive's work and as long as no coordinators are required, would not add an extra cost to the Association.

Motion: Executives approve that executives are able to use the Commons for one event at no cost, only if no Coordinator is required. Moved by Carmen. Seconded by Qasim. Motion carried.

Humaira indicated the importance of a balance between having events in the Commons and leaving the space event-free. The space is intended for graduate students and therefore it is important that events are not constantly hindering students from using the space for studying, for the computers, or for socializing.

9.2. ISIC Cards

As part of our affiliation with the Canadian Federation of Students, our members are eligible to obtain an ISIC card for free. These can be obtained online, and members will receive occasional reminders about this through email and social media.

9.3. UPASS

The UPASS offers huge savings for our members as it is a discounted price for the use of Saskatoon Transit. The pass is currently only offered in the Fall and Winter terms. Our agreement with Saskatoon transit dictates the opt-out eligibilities. USSU currently administers the UPASS for our members at a cost of \$1.50 / sticker, as per an agreement. This is ideal for the GSA as we do not have the staff / resources to administer the UPASS to our members.

In 2014, a referendum did not pass, and this eliminated the spring / summer UPASS. Surveys and discussions have indicated a split vote regarding the want for the spring / summer UPASS. The executives decided that they would look for other alternatives by discussing with Saskatoon Transit that better describes the opt-out options.

9.4. Health and Dental Plan

Students pay about \$459 for health and dental, through Studentcare. Kristen Foster is the Studentcare representatives and has been very engaged and communicative with the GSA. The executives will generally participate in an orientation session with them and Studentcare attends one of the earlier Council meetings to present the services provided under the plan. Studentcare has also been a strong supporter of many of our events and their generosity is appreciated.

9.5. Empower ME

This service was recently activated for graduate student to support them during the current situation with COVID 19. Executives will decide on the continuation of this service in future meetings.

9.6. Social Groups

Any group of graduate students who wish to be ratified under the GSA may do so under the guidelines provided in our policies. The VP Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for processing social club ratification forms. These can be academic, cultural, or social clubs that follow specific guidelines, as outlined in our policies. Ratification is required every September and is approved by Council. Groups must fill out the forms found on the website and once ratified are able to use the Commons as ratified groups and apply for funding. Social club funding is budgeted

for, and groups can apply for a maximum of \$500 / academic year. Once the application regarding the interest in being ratified from a social group is received, a member from the social group is invited to one of the executive meetings. The agenda is circulated among the executives prior to the meetings. The executives would ask questions to know more about the group and if deemed eligible, they would take it forward to the council.

9.7. Academic Council

The Council is a compilation of representatives from each academic unit, a single department, or a College. Each unit re-applies to be part of the Council before the September Council meeting. Ratification forms are directed towards the President. Depending on the number of graduate students within the unit, one or two representatives may be present on the Council. The forms are available online and a call for Academic Councillors will be sent out early September through the Chair and through email notifications to all graduate students. It is important this year to try and reach departments / colleges that have not been involved.

9.8. Human Resources and Commons Operations

The Vice-President Finance and Operations and the Office Manager are responsible for this. Certain policies have been developed last year to ensure transparency and accountability. We might need to hire 3 Coordinator in the near-future and the positions will be advertised through SECC and recruiting will likely take place in late August or September.

9.9. GSA Social Media, App and Website

The GSA has Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These are used as a means of communicating with our members. This generally falls under the VP External portfolio, but the executives have decided to distribute the duties between the President, VP Student Affairs, and Office Manager as per their experience. It was agreed that while it is important to post on social media, we must not over-post and we must post only content relevant to the GSA and its initiatives as well as initiatives that will benefit graduate students.

9.10. GSA Need-Based Bursaries

These are needs-based bursaries whereby applications are offered 3 times a year; June / October / February. This falls under the VP Finance and Operation's portfolio with the VP Student Affairs assisting in the Selections Committee. It was indicated that hard-copy applications have been effective in previous years, in ensuring that documents are complete and there is no missing information. It was proposed that in summer 2020, \$5,000 will be distributed (so 10 bursary applications). Calls for applications will be made through social media/PAWS/emails. A call should be made on June 1st. \$12,000 in Fall and \$12,000 for Winter will be distributed in 2020/2021. Call for applications will be done through social media, PAWS, and email announcements. The general timeline are as follows: 3 weeks for applications and 2 weeks for decision-making.

9.11. GSA Guppies

This service is under the VP External's portfolio and allows for graduate students to participate in campus recreation programs during the year. This is budgeted for and is an opportunity for the GSA to promote health and wellbeing for graduate students. The budget allows for a maximum of two teams each term.

SESSION THREE: 3 PM – 5 PM

10. GSA Initiatives for the 2020 / 2021 Academic Year

While these initiatives fall under the portfolio of VP Student Affairs and VP External, they will require all executives to pitch in and offer their assistance.

10.1. Fall / Winter Orientation

Orientations are key events and are organized by the VP Academic and Student Affairs. Carmen will reach out to Alejandra to learn from her prior experiences, and to learn more about borrowing tents and hosting events in the bowl. Orientations are key events and are organized by the VP Student Affairs. With the current situation due to COVID-19, further discussions are required to decide on Fall/Winter orientation initiatives.

10.2. Social Events

As part of ensuring that we build a cohesive graduate student community, a series of social events will be organized throughout the year. There are budgetary constraints and it is important to ensure that these events are inclusive to all members. All executives should be present at the socials and help the VP Academic and Student Affairs. The events to follow this year are:

- Fall Wine and Cheese Social: will be determined in the first executive meeting
- Halloween Party: will be determined in the first executive meeting
- Holiday Party: will be determined in the first executive meeting
- Winter Wine and Cheese Social: Will be determined in the first executive meeting

These are tentative due to Covid-19 and will be confirmed or adjusted to meet prevention guidelines by the Saskatchewan Government.

All executives agreed that such initiatives would be inclusive for graduate students across campus and would promote the Commons. Other events and initiatives will be discussed in future executive meetings to engage students while respecting social distancing protocols.

10.3. Workshops / Health Chats

The VP Academic and Student Affairs will coordinate a series of workshops for graduate students on topics that are of importance to graduate students. Health Chats was an initiative that was started three years ago by executives as a means of promoting personal wellness for graduate students. The VP External is responsible for coordinating a series of Health Chats. Last few years, those that were organized were well attended. These events are open to the general university community. This has been budgeted for as the intention is to continue these initiatives to provide an avenue for graduate students' alternative means of personal wellness.

These workshops/Health Chats are tentative and may be adjusted according to appropriate social distancing protocols.

10.4. Graduate Student Research Conference

Hadi will be responsible for organizing this event. The executives agree that with planning graduate students would participate in the conference as it is an excellent opportunity for them to participate in communicating their research.

This event is tentative and may be adjusted according to appropriate social distancing protocols.

10.5 Three-Minute Thesis Competition

The 3MT Competition is a popular event that the GSA hosts in collaboration with CGPS.

Carmen is responsible for the organization of this competition.

This event is tentative and may be adjusted according to appropriate social distancing protocols.

10.6 Annual Awards Gala

This event honours students and faculty for their commitment and dedication to research, scholarly and artistic pursuits, leadership and community engagement. This year, the Gala will be planned tentatively due to Covid-19 and the changing situation. Qasim is responsible for organizing the Gala in its entirety. The date should not coincide with the University Council Meeting.

10.7. Tax Filing

Being part of CFS, our members are entitled to use the free tax filing system called UFILE. This is a popular service that allows our members to save money. Four years ago, the executives first offered to assist our members with using this service and it has since then been popular. The VP Finance and Operations is responsible for hosting the “Tax Filing Clinic” during the April month for our members. This event is tentative and may be adjusted according to appropriate social distancing protocols.

10.8. Conferences

As part of our affiliations with CFS and ThinkGrad, we attend conferences. For the 2020/2021 academic year, these include the following;

- Circle of First Nations, Inuit and Metis, CFS (attended by Indigenous Liaison)
- Semi-General Meeting, CFS
- Studentcare Meeting
- ThinkGRAD August Meeting (TBD)
- National-General Meeting, CFS
- National Graduate Caucus, CFS
- ThinkGRAD April Meeting

The VP External usually attends these meetings, as per their role and unless otherwise indicated, and because of budgetary constraints. Humaira recommends that only one individual be sent to these meetings so that we can ensure maximum participation. If the VP External is unavailable, then another executive can choose to go to the meeting instead. There may be other conferences that are advertised through CFS; however, these will be contingent on fundraising efforts.

Humaira indicated that executives will discuss at executive meetings each of the conferences as they arise and delegate an individual to attend.

Due to Covid-19, conferences and travel may not be taking place this year, so these conferences are tentative for now.

11. Understanding of the GSA fees

Humaira went over the approved fees in brief but asks executives to direct any questions they may have to the VP Finance and Operations.

12. Understanding of the Budget

Humaira went over the approved budget in brief but asks executives to direct any questions they may have to the VP Finance and Operations.

Executives agreed that discretionary funds are to be used for circumstances that are for the betterment of graduate students and the GSA and NOT be used for personal expenditures.

12. Closing Remarks

Humaira was pleased to hear the discussions that took place today and acknowledged the diplomatic nature and respect that was prevalent. She looks forward to the year ahead and encourages executives to seek input from each other. Ultimately, our goal is to enhance the experience of graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan. The executives thanked Naheda and Mery for attending the retreat and for their guidance.

13. Adjournment of Meeting

Meeting adjourned at 5:40PM.