



University of Saskatchewan - Graduate Students' Association

Executive Committee Retreat Agenda (9 AM – 5 PM)

April 28, 2021

The GSA operates on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis Nation. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of our gathering place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

Present (Executives):

- Rifat Zahan (Incoming President),
- Ehsan Moradi (Incoming VP Finance and Operations),
- Olusola Akintola (Incoming VP Academic and Student Affairs),
- Leslie Tetteh (Incoming VP External Affairs),
- Tina Alexis (Incoming Vice-President Indigenous Engagement).

Guests:

- Humairar Inam (Outgoing President),
- Mery Mendoza (Outgoing VP Finance and Operations),
- Naheda Sahtout (Past President)

Regrets: None

Absent: None

SESSION ONE: 9 AM – 12 PM

1. Call to Order / Opening Remarks

The meeting was called to order on Wednesday, April 28th, 2021 at 9:09 am by the outgoing President, Humaira Inam.

Merry Mendoza (outgoing VP Finance and Operation) and Humaira Inam (Outgoing President) were present at the meeting to facilitate the transition. Naheda Sahtout (past President of the GSA) joined the meeting later. The meeting was held online due to COVID-19. Humaira and Mery thanked everyone for being part of the GSA to advocate for all graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan, the local community, and the whole country. Past executives were happy to see dedicated people in the executive team this year, and they are looking forward to a remarkable year ahead.

2. Signing of Confidentiality Agreement

Mery indicated that we would have access to information that must remain confidential in our position as executives. This includes confidentiality of others' information and the confidentiality of discussions that occur within the executives during meetings. Each executive signed this confidentiality agreement.

3. Executive Introductions / Structure of the GSA

Mery asked each participant in the retreat to introduce themselves. Each participant shared their ideas about how they can serve the students while working at GSA.

4. Approval of the Agenda

Humaira asked whether there were any amendments to the agenda. There were none. The agenda was approved with a majority of the vote.

5. University Governing Bodies

Mery briefly discussed the governance structure of the University of Saskatchewan, which includes the Senate, Board of Governors, and the University Council. Mery explained the GSA representatives in these Bodies and who can speak and ask questions. She then had a brief introduction of individuals in governance around the university. Mery then explained that she would introduce individuals to Rifat. Mery explained to Rifat that it is important to study the university's website and understand the rules of University individuals in governance since working with them needs to have enough knowledge about their responsibilities.

Mery continued her presentations with an introduction for the Provost's Advisory Committee (PAC). Mery introduced PAC individuals and how GSA interacts with them. At the end of this section, Mery asked incoming executives to study university services and policies very well. Rifat asked for Mery's presentation slides, and Mery mentioned that she would send the slides to the incoming executives.

6. GSA Structure

Mery went through the structure of the GSA and urged the executives to look through the constitution, bylaws, and policies. She starts with this fact that GSA is a non-profit organization, and explained the structure as below:

- Regular Membership. Executives should send their reports to the council.
- The Executive committee consists of the President and Vice-Presidents.
- 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 Executives
 - 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.
- Committees of councils.
- Social Clubs.
- There is an Annual General meeting in April.
- The office staff consist of the Office Manager and the Commons Coordinators. It was explained, following the reference of the GSA Bylaws, that executives must not miss more than 3 executive meetings in total, and 2 consecutive meetings. Due to COVID-19, executives are expected to continue their meetings through online platforms.

7. CGPS Committees:

- CGPS Committee council: All executives and two graduate students from candidates (Fahimeh Esmi, Elizabeth Ogunniyi, Mostofa Kamal, Khaled C., Christy Anderson, Nathan Oakes, Uliana Morozovskaia, and Naz Zarreen Oishie) will be invited to sit on this committee. Rifat will contact them to select two people for this committee.
- Faculty Council: All executives and two graduate students from candidates (Fahimeh Esmi, Elizabeth Ogunniyi, Mostofa Kamal, Khaled C., Christy Anderson, Nathan Oakes, Uliana Morozovskaia and Naz Zarreen Oishie) will sit on this committee. Rifat will contact them to select two people for this committee.
- CGPS Executive Committee: All Executives. Mery mentioned that all executives should stand for students without any conflict.
- Interdisciplinary Committee: VP External Affairs will sit on this committee, and VP Indigenous Engagement will act as a supporting person.
- Awards Committee: VP Finance and Operations will sit on this committee.
- Earned D.Litt / D.Sc: VP Finance and Operations will sit on this committee.
- Graduate Academic Affairs Committee: VP Academic and Student Affairs will sit on this committee.
- Graduate Programs Committee: The President will sit on this committee.
- Equity and International Committee: VP External Affairs will sit on this committee.

8. Team Building

Mery indicated that it is important for everyone to know the roles and responsibilities of executives so that each individual can plan for the year ahead.

8.1. Executive Duties and Responsibilities

Mery explained about the duties and responsibilities of the executives. As per the GSA bylaws, Executives must;

- Be familiar with the governing documents, the Non-Profit Corporations Act, the U of S Act, Robert's Rules of Orders, and other documents;
- Determine which individual will go to Canadian Federation of Students (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.

There were discussions about teamwork. Rifat, The President, The VP External Affairs, and the Office Manager take care of Facebook posts / messages, Twitter, Instagram.. Social media content should be related to services / events provided by the GSA or Academic Council / Social Clubs or opportunities that are useful to graduate students, such as scholarships or workshop opportunities. It was agreed that email newsletters would be sent to GSA members once a month.

8.2. Executive / Council Meetings

Mery asked incoming executives to choose specific dates for meetings. As per our bylaws, executives must meet at least once a month in May-August and twice a month from September – April. Mery proposed that executive meetings occur on Thursdays from 5 – 7 PM. Executives agreed that Thursdays are suitable.

Dates for Executive Meetings for May-December are;

- May 20, 2021
- June 17, 2021
- July 15, 2021
- August 19, 2021
- September 2, 2021
- September 16, 2021
- October 7, 2021
- October 21, 2021
- November 4, 2021
- November 18, 2021
- December 9, 2021

Executives decide on 2022 meeting dates in the next executive meeting. Winter Executive meetings can be decided in the August executive meeting. Executives were in agreement with the scheduled meeting times.

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

Proposed dates for Council meetings are;

- June 22, 2021
- August 24, 2021
- September 21, 2021
- October 26, 2021
- November 23, 2021
- December 14, 2021
- January 18, 2022
- February 15, 2022
- March 15, 2022
- April – TBD, 2022
- April 13, 2022 (AGM)

8.3. *Executive Communication*

Incoming and outgoing executives exchanged their phone numbers and created a group on WhatsApp. Mery indicated that generally, emails are official communication and should be responded to within 48 hours.

Mery proposed two methods of communication between executives;

- Formal: through emails
 - Emails should generally be replied 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 favor of the email communication.

8.4. *Executive Decision Making*

Mery indicated that the executives will follow Roberts Rules of Orders for all meetings. 60% (2/3) attendance is needed to attend for a quorum. The decision-making process is a vital component of any decisions that come to the executives' attention. Executives need to decide on the following items:

- There are 5 executive members; quorum is a majority, so 3 members at least.
- Majority vote (4 yes, 1 no / abstentions) will be required to carry a decision.
- 3 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.

- 2 yes's and 3 abstentions – indicates a failed vote
- Majority abstention (1 yes, 4 abstentions) indicates a failed vote.

Mery explained that if an executive misses many meetings, other executives can waive his/her honorarium. Urgent matters requiring an executive decision may need to be made before an executive meeting, at which case it will be made via email. The 48-hour rule shall apply.

8.5. *Communication to Graduate Students*

Communication to the graduate students should take place through email newsletter, PAWS, GSA website, and social media.

SESSION TWO: 1 PM – 4PM

Humaira, the outgoing President, started the second session of the meeting. She continued with a brief introduction to graduate students and GSA's mission. Humaira offered her help to the incoming executive. The outgoing President stated that we advocate for students in different ways.

9. *GSA Services*

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

9.1. *GSA Commons*

The outgoing President discussed the use and operations of GSA Commons. The VP Finance and Operations and the Office Manager are responsible for the proper maintenance of the Commons. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commons is closed and will remain closed until further discussion with the Pandemic Response Team (PRT).

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 significant 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 eligibility.

9.4. *Health and Dental Plan*

The executives will generally participate in an orientation session with Studentcare to get familiarized about the benefits and services provided to our members.

9.5. *Ratified Social Groups*

The executives were familiarized with the ratified social group and how GSA has worked in the past with the social groups.

9.6. *Other Discussions*

There were discussions about Academic Councils, GSA need-based bursary. Incoming executives asked general questions, which were answered by the two outgoing executives.

10. GSA Initiatives for the 2021 / 2022 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. The following events were planned tentatively for the 2021-2022 academic year:

- September, 2021: Fall Orientation
- October 2021: Halloween Social
- November 2021: Multicultural Night
- December 2021: Holiday Hangout
- January 2022: Winter Orientation
- February 2022: Graduate Student Research Conference
- March 2022: Three Minute Thesis Competition
- April 2022: Annual Awards Gala

Other events and initiatives will be discussed in future executive meetings.

10.1. *Workshops / Health Chats*

The VP Academic and Student Affairs will coordinate a series of workshops on health and wellness for graduate students.

Humaira mentioned some of the Chats that held in their term:

- Yoga nidra
- Sleep workshop
- Financial literacy seminar.
- Academic integrity and plagiarism,
- Ace the interview workshop,
- LinkedIn and networking workshop
- Financial literacy seminar
- Land acknowledgment seminar
- Scholarly publishing workshop

10.2. *Graduate Student Research Conference*

VP Finance and Operations will be responsible for organizing this event (**February 15-17 2022**). 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.

10.3. *Three-Minute Thesis Competition*

The 3MT Thesis Competition (*March 25, 2022*) is a popular event that the GSA hosts in collaboration with CGPS. VP Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for the organization of this competition.

10.4. *Annual Awards Gala*

This event (*April 9, 2022*) 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 according to the evolving situation due to COVID-19. VP External Affairs is responsible for organizing the Gala in its entirety. The date should not coincide with the University Council Meeting.

10.5. *Tax Filing*

The VP Finance and Operations is responsible for hosting the "Tax Filing Clinic" for the graduate students during the month of April. The outgoing President encouraged VP Finance to continue last year's program and invite CRA tax experts for tax season.

10.6. *Conferences*

As part of our affiliations with CFS and ThinkGrad, we attend many external conferences or meetings. The VP External usually attends such meetings, as per their role.. If the VP External is unavailable, then another executive can choose to go to the meeting instead.

10.7. Due to COVID-19, conferences and travel may not be taking place this year.

10.8. *Understanding of the GSA fees*

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

10.9. *Understanding of the Budget*

The outgoing VP Finance and Operations went over the approved budget in brief but asked executives to direct any questions they may have to the current VP Finance and Operations. The outgoing VP Finance and Operations went over the discussion about signing officers of the GSA. She mentioned that she needs to have a meeting with the incoming President and VP Finance and Operations about the tuition so they can plan for discussion with the graduate students.

Mery also mentioned discretionary funding and how it should be used to support the interests of graduate students.

Humaira and Mery added some points for more guidance for incoming executives:

- They explained the GSA Crisis financial aid budget line and that the President and VP finance should contact the student finance and awards office and write the check and send it to the award office.
- Humaira mentioned the Travel Award budget line and explained that the fund provides financial assistance to full-time students who are participating in a conference. She proposed to incoming executives to contact ISSAC for use of this fund for students. Then Mery explained that for moving a budget we have to go through council. For such a decision we need to prepare rational documentation and reasons.
- Humaira explained the GSA orientation financial details that it needs to approve for the financial budget for items in swag bags and how we want to hold the orientation. She stated that VP academics can suggest gifts in the bag. Olusola is in charge of finding the prices for the gift and all executives should prepare bags and decide the distribution process of the bags. Humaira proposed two methods for bags distribution, Curbside pick-up and Pick-up by appointment only. As last point humaira explained how important student-supervisor agreement is and GSA should send reminders to students for signing this contract.

11. Closing Remarks

Naheda Sahtout, the past GSA President during the 2019-2020 academic year attended the meeting and gave important advice on duties and responsibilities to incoming executives. She adds that it is really important to avoid conflict by transparency and respect for each other through effective communication. In continuation of Naheda's words, the outgoing President advised the incoming executives on avoiding conflicts, and to have effective resolutions, if conflict arises. The outgoing VP Finance and Operations, Mery asked the incoming executives to reach out for help to the outgoing executives.

The incoming President, Rifat was pleased to hear the discussions that took place today and thanked Naheda, Mery and Humaira for attending the retreat and for their guidance.

12. Adjournment of Meeting

Meeting adjourned at 4:12 PM