



**University of Saskatchewan
Graduate Students' Association
GSA Council Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 28th 2020. GSA Commons**

As Council gathers, we acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of our gathering place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

Attendance: *See appendix A*

1. Call to Order

The Chair of Council welcomed all councilors back for the new year and held a moment of silence to honor all the lives lost on Ukrainian International Airlines Flight 752 in Iran. The Chair officially called the council meeting to order at 5:07 pm after quorum had been met. Mr. Osai Clarke acted as the recording secretary for the meeting.

2. Guests:

President Peter Stoicheff

President Stoicheff was the first guest to address the councilors. He thanked the Chair for holding a moment of silence and acknowledging that we are on Treaty 6 Territory. He thanked the GSA Executives who he has met in the company of his colleagues from the President's executive committee at very important monthly breakfast meetings. In his perspective, it is very significant that they have stepped up to be leaders when there is no imperative for them to do such. He went on to thank all the councilors in attendance. USASK is a member of U15 which means we have medical, doctoral and strong graduate programming with a large number of graduate students at the Master's and Ph.D. levels relative to the other 97 universities in Canada. U15 is akin to the Russell Group universities in the UK. The U15 designation is important for two reasons, namely: 1) it makes the university more attractive to prospective graduate students as U15 universities are the most research-intensive and potentially hold the greatest capacity for them to realize their academic dreams and ambitions. And 2) a U15 university will have a very strong research commitment and capacity and for institutions like ours to continue to be part of the U15, it means we have to continuously be upgrading that research capacity in terms of the research infrastructure that can be defined in a number of ways. Simply put, the value of a degree from a U15 university is indisputable. Canada offers very strong programming throughout its 97 universities which are not tiered to the extent that other countries like the U.S.A are but certainly if you're getting a U15 degree it holds immense value.

For those reasons, it is very important to a university's senior leadership that graduate students feel like they can achieve their academic ambitions and that the groundwork is laid to do so, that means the associated infrastructure, funding and that the personnel and the talent are there to strengthen and complement the graduate studies. Essentially, we need the conditions to support a strong graduate cohort to continue to be a member of U15. President Stoicheff said it has become increasingly important for him as a leader at the university that all levels of programming are preparing students with the right kind of skills for the contemporary workplace. He was very influenced by a report by the Royal Bank of Canada's (RBC) program called "Humans Wanted" and the main take-home messages from that report were: the contemporary and future workplace is not one that we can easily predict as in the past. This calls into question whether universities are adequately training its students for that new workplace reality, so President Stoicheff has been encouraging senior leaders at the university to understand the consequence of the work that we are doing in preparing students for the workplace. If it's true that it is no longer easy to define the jobs in the workplace and what specific job-related skills are necessary for all our students to thrive in a future workplace; then it stands to reason that we teach those transferable skills of creativity, communication, cultural awareness, and the list goes on. The reason why the university is well suited to do so is that polytechnics and professional colleges in other jurisdictions are training students specific skills for specific jobs and are finding that they are facing quite a few challenges in this regard as those jobs are not as definable as they once were but universities that are research-based and can offer those transferable skills are better positioned to do so.

Provost Tony Vannelli

Provost Vannelli was the second to address the councilors. Provost Vannelli followed up on the general message of the President by saying that the care and focus that his administration has for the programming offered, distinguishes us from other universities. He informed the councilors the general goal is to turn out lifelong learners which is the fundamental academic mission at the university. The world that our students are preparing to enter in the next 2-5 years will change very quickly based on some key demographic information. Professional programs in particular, like engineering, law, and medicine will suffer from major human resource droughts as the baby boomer generation retires. There will be a shortage of about a hundred thousand engineers in Canada alone, computer science will be even higher with about a hundred and fifty thousand. We're looking at arrangements with international partners and students that we'd like to retain here in Canada which means immigration laws will change to address that need. This is not limited to science and medicine but social sciences, the humanities, the fine arts will be in heavy demand.

He assured councilors that they were in the right place to be finishing up their degrees giving immense need. Two areas of focus: thesis-based masters and doctoral programs which we have about half of 4000 graduate students enrolled in. The masters are becoming the new norm as many industries seek out masters students and previously it was thought that doctoral candidates only come back to teach within the university but what we're seeing is that doctoral candidates are held in high regard and are in high demand in all sectors. It's important as a university that we maintain the quality of programming at that level so with the other deans and senior leadership during consultations, that our students are funded properly to ensure your success.

The coursework-based masters are completely being flipped upside down because of the innovations that have been taking place in the programming. Provost Vannelli shared with the councilors that he was in a meeting with other provosts in Ottawa to discuss graduate student training across Canada. The focus even for the other institutions has become that of the lifelong learner, even if you have your degree, industries are very much looking at credentials for the training of their employees. The master's degrees are becoming more tiered, you start hearing terms like nano masters and micro masters which are layered with packages and courses rather than a fixed number of courses.

Provost Vannelli closed by saying his team was committed to providing graduate students with the tools for success, which include a number of supports from financial to health and wellness.

Dean Trever Crowe

Dean Crowe was the third of the guests to address the councilors. He mostly echoed the sentiments of the first two guests. He started by telling the gathering that a degree is a Badge of completion and that USASK is committed to ensuring that we turn out graduates that are ready for life after graduation. The question asked of him and the other guests were what are those professional development skills that the university is making available to graduate students to help them stand out amongst other competing graduates from around the country and across the globe.

We have very strong partnerships with the Gwenna Moss center for teaching and learning, the University Library and the International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC) to help with your professional development but even with those partnerships and resources, it is important that our students commit to continuous learning. Things like writing skills, something that is so crucial in preparing a thesis manuscript or a paper for publication, math and numeracy skills, statistics are things that can sometimes be overlooked but are the kind of transferable skills that add value to our graduate students.

A few courses that will help broaden your skill sets are GPS 981 academic preparation for international graduate students, GPS 982 mentored teaching, introduction to university teaching and the TA success series. Don't overlook the value of those programs to help bolster your transferable skills. The graduate professional skills certificate is a program that is offered through the Gwenna Moss Center and the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) has funded it so that students don't incur any cost to take that program. Critical and creative thinking, professionalism, ethics, communication, intercultural competence etc are topics that students learn within the program. There are a variety of other seminars that are offered through student learning services from the library that have titles like "Preparing for Comprehensive and Qualifying exams", "Mastering Presentations in Graduate School" and "Understanding Graduate level Procrastination". Backpack to Briefcase program is run by the Alumni association, students get to hear firsthand from graduates who have successfully integrated into the workplace.

Dean Crowe closed by saying he'd like the university to at some point in the future to be in a place where students can register part time so they can be working and getting a head start on their careers. They can be earning a salary to help offset the cost associated with graduate school.

Professor Loleen Berdahl

Professor Berdahl was the last of the guests to address the councilors and she opened by asking those in attendance how many of them were feeling a little bit anxious with all the talk about jobs and skills, to which most of the councilors expressed feeling anxious. Professor Berdahl told the councilors that she has a job and those topics still make her anxious. She also shared with the councilors that she finished her graduate studies at the end of the 90s and went into a non-academic position for 10 years. From that experience she assured students that the things that they're learning in graduate school are incredibly valued and truly transformative but it's hard to recognize while you're in graduate studies since everyone around you are also graduate students who are just like you and they seem to do all the stuff you can do, with some of them seeming to do it more easily. It's hard to recognize what you have and how valuable it is especially since this is not a polytechnic and you're not focusing on a narrower set of skills for a specific position.

The greatest thing about graduate school is that the skills that you're gaining, don't date. Professor Berdahl used the example of learning all the computer programming there was in the 90s and how today this would be pretty useless. What research universities teach is creative thinking, part of your graduate degree is picking a problem to solve that no one has solved yet, that can be frustrating but very rewarding. This is something that struck her when she worked outside academia so when Professor Berdahl started her career in academia she would ask her students and she would get a sense that they didn't understand what they really had or how to articulate that to others since it's so familiar to you.

In collaboration with the Gwenna Moss Center for teaching and learning, with the support of CGPS and the GSA, Professor Berdahl is working on a project called the "Transformative Skills Project" geared at not only developing but helping you recognize and articulate those skills to the rest of the world. For the next couple of months, they're going to be doing some consultations which will start with some surveys to faculty who supervise graduate students, followed by surveys to graduate students and graduate chairs within the different departments to get their perspectives. Professor Berdahl will also be interviewing graduate deans and other graduate professional skills personnel from several universities across Canada, all of which will come together for part of this pilot program. The graduate student surveys will be emailed out by CGPS sometime next week. Professor Berdahl asked that councilors get other students in their circles to do the surveys that way it can be communicated to your graduate chairs that the students care about those skills and their development.

Questions & Answers:

Councilor: In my tenure on the GSA executive, my team noticed a lack of relationship between the university and the external community and partners. A lack of relationship with innovation and communities within innovation enterprise and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, so what I'd like to know is what type of partnerships does the university currently have and what are we doing to build more partnerships so our students can benefit from in the way of internships or co-op positions?

Provost Vannelli: Current Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the City of Saskatoon is geared at expanding the areas of innovation that will affect the city and the university, which will include but not limited to things like power generation and storage. We've opened a new campus in Prince Albert, which we call it the gateway to the north, which is aimed at a lot of programs in nursing, education, arts, and science. Different colleges have different agreements with industry partners. We have partnerships with Cameco and Nutrien which has funded the Global Institute for Food Security which comprises quite a number of high-end researchers. We have a similar arrangement with the Global Institute for Water Security. I guess to answer your question we have to do a better job at making sure those partnerships don't remain the best-kept secrets.

Councilor: When it comes to sustainability on campus, there seems to be a lack of emphasis on this topic unless it comes to how we do recycling. I would like to get an idea of the university's sustainability initiatives if there are any?

Provost Vannelli: The President has started a sustainability committee. The environment (water and food) and energy concerns are things we are taking a serious look at. Initiatives like reducing our carbon footprint become very relevant as we try to do our part as an institution as well as hopefully reducing the associated power bills to a point where we no longer incur a cost to run our facilities. That money then can go towards the further upgrades of our infrastructure and assist us in financially supporting our students.

Councilor: That's what the university is doing but what are the students doing, are we building awareness?

Dean Crowe: I think what you're asking is not what the University is doing as an institution but how do we make sure that the students understand the importance of sustainability and that's where inclusion comes in. I think if we get the student body to participate in those initiatives it really helps to ensure that the students, we turn out can further such initiatives once they leave. We are actively talking about the School of Environment and Sustainability (SENS) offering programs along the lines of energy, food, and water nexus that help build awareness.

Provost Vannelli: I think the programing that we need to deliver in the area of sustainability shouldn't matter to your college or department. It may be that, the college is invisible but it's the program that is shared by the colleges so, in the end, it doesn't matter the college in which you've earned your degree, but the pillars of sustainability are grasped before graduating.

Councilor: How does the university strike a balance between those benefits you've mentioned and the associated cost (tuition)?

Dean Crowe: When we talk about cost-benefit analysis, if a student is going to gain those skills and credentials, we need to compare to other universities that are going to offer the same services/credentials. All our programs are of high quality, what you're talking about is the return on investment. We are very active in my office comparing the cost of those credentials and those courses to our students to comparable credentials earned at other U15 institutions. There is no doubt in my mind that tuition and the fees we charge here are in fact lower than you would find at any of the other U15 universities.

Councilor: One of my colleagues started in 2017 and has seen his tuition go up by 25% since then but his funding has not increased once, mental health issues are a big factor for graduate students and lack of finances can trigger a lot of those issues. What steps are the university taking to address those issues?

Dean Crowe: I think it is important to see the financial aid increase as tuition increases. That's why in the proposal for tuition fees next year and the next 4 years after that, we have incorporated a certain portion of those tuition fees to be reinvested in the form of financial aid. By the year 2025 we would have used \$10 million of tuition reassessed in financial aid. Anyone returning in September of 2020 will receive a bursary because we are committed to those 5 principles the Board of Governors has set and one of those is predictability and because we acknowledge the proposed increase in tuition could not have been anticipated prior to entering one's program those bursaries in September will offset the amount being proposed and what is typically expected for a domestic or international students. We want students to be able to focus on the graduate studies and not worry about finances, so they don't have to take a second job off-campus.

Provost Vannelli: It's important that when we set the tuition, a cost-benefit analysis of your education is done. We want to guarantee funding for PhDs for 4 years and 2 years of guaranteed funding for masters. We want to make sure the funding covers all the students living expenses, so they never feel like they have to drop out of school or complete the degree part time.

Councilor: It's becoming increasingly difficult for international students to sustain themselves at USASK. I have friends who have Google in attendance at the career fairs and have guarantee Teaching Assistant (TA) positions, what are we doing to make sure we are competing with schools like the University of Toronto?

Dean Crowe: We do have career days on campus it may not be on the same scale as those you get at the University of Toronto but we're growing. USASK has the lowest graduate tuition and fees combined than any of the U15 universities. One of the mechanisms that we intend to spend some of that \$10 million per year is to provide international differential fee waivers/ scholarships. Basically, incoming scholarship caliber international students entering from 2020 will pay domestic fees.

Provost Vannelli: There will be more students in the future so there will be more opportunities for TA positions. We have to start looking at the experiential learning offered through internships for our graduate students across the board.

The Chair thanked all the guest speakers for being at the Council meeting and engaging councilors.

3. Approval of the Agenda

The Chair asked if there were any amendments to the agenda as circulated.

President Rengifo requested that Item 6 be changed to a tuition discussion.

Motion to amend the agenda (Rengifo/Fonseca)

Carried

Motion to approve the agenda as amended (Fonseca/Rengifo)

Carried

4. Approval of the minutes from December 3rd, 2019

Motion to approve December 3rd minutes. (Mostafa/Rengifo)

Carried

5. Information to be received

- November 18, 2019, Executive meeting minutes

Motion to receive agenda item 5A. (Alam/Ezekwesili)

Carried

6. Tuition Discussion:

President Rengifo, mentioned that there is a proposal for USASK to move tuition fees to the median value of the U15 universities over the next 5 years. This means starting from September 2020, there will be a 10% tuition increase for domestic students. Currently, international students pay 1.58x that of the domestic counterparts, the 0.58 is the differential fee. This multiplier will increase by 7% every year for the next 5 years for our international students. There is a caveat to the bursary to all graduate students that was mentioned by the Dean. As it stands, that bursary will only apply to students enrolled in their first 2 years of masters and the first 4 years of a Ph.D. which means to all the students who don't finish within those time frames you are expected to foot the entire cost of the tuition increase. Upon discussion, with some of the graduate community, we are requesting that tuition increases don't apply to current students so that they are not negatively impacted by the lack of a bursary. You should also be aware that master's students typically finish their program in 3 years and Ph.D. students in about 6 years.

Q: Tuition consultations never seem to be a true consideration; the administration already has a proposed increase and have the discussion to give the appearance that our concerns are valid.

President Rengifo: The tuition consultation shall be held on the 6th of February 3-5 pm, so I ask that you continue to make your voices heard.

7. Executive reports

- **Report of the President**

President Rengifo shared that her report was before council. The Chair asked if there were any questions for the President. There were no questions for President Rengifo.

- **Report of the VP External**

VP Ezekwesili shared, as well that her report was before council. The Chair asked if there were any questions for the VP External. There were no questions for VP Ezekwesili.

- **Report of the VP Finance and Operations**

VP Alam shared that the Bursary applications will open from February 3rd, 2020. The Chair asked if there were any questions for the VP Finance and Operations. There were no questions for VP Alam.

- **Report of the VP Student Affairs**

VP Fonseca share that her report was before council. The Chair asked if there were any questions for the VP Student Affairs. There were no questions for VP Fonseca.

8. Other Business/Announcements

The Chair thanked councilors for their engagement and participation at the meeting and mentioned that the next meeting will be on February 25th, 2020.

9. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn (Alam/Mostafa) at 6:50 pm.

Carried

Appendix A

Academic Council	Name of Councillors and (alternates)	Sep.24 2019	Oct.15 2019	Nov.5 2019	Dec.3 2019	Jan.28 2020	Feb.25 2020	Mar.17 2020	Apr.7 2020	Jun. 2020	Aug. 2020
Agricultural and Resources Economics (ARE) Graduate Student Association	Ran San (Valentina Ofori)	N/A	P	P	P	P					
Animal & Poultry Science Grad Students' Assoc.	Muhammad Imran (Kiana Rieger)	P	A	P	A	A					
ARCHAIA	Adrienne Ratuszniak (Michelle Gowan)	P	P	A	A	P					
Biology Graduate Student Association	Rebecca Smith (Ruth Greuel) (Carmen Marquez) (Andrea Wishart)	N/A	P	P	P	P					
Chemistry Course Council	Naheda Sahtout (Doug Fansher)	P	P	P	P	P					
College of Medicine Graduate Students Society – Anatomy, Physiology & Pharmacology	Kushagra Parolia (Andrew Roebuc)	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	A					
College of Medicine Graduate Students Society – Biochemistry, Microbiology & Immunology	Sampurna Ghosh (Megha Rohamar)	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	A					
College of Medicine Graduate Students Society – Community Health & Epidemiology	Harini Aiyer (N/A)	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	P					
College of Medicine Graduate Students Society – Health Sciences	Michael Zaki (N/A)	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	A					
Computer Science Graduate Council (CSGC)	Rifat Zahan Muhammad Aminul Islam (Md. Nadim)	N/A	p	p	P	P					

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Engineering Graduate Community Council (EGCC) – Biological	Tumpa Sarker (Peyman Alizadeh)	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	A					
Engineering Graduate Community Council (EGCC) – Biomedical	Subashree Srinivasan (N/A)	N/A	N/A	N/A	A	A					
Engineering Graduate Community Council (EGCC) – Chemical	Shahab Minaei (Khaled, Zoroufchi Benis)	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	P					
Engineering Graduate Community Council (EGCC) – Civil, Geological & Environmental	Ajay Shrinivas Muthukumar (Mohanad Zaghloul)	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	A					
Engineering Graduate Community Council (EGCC) – Electrical & Computer	Karim Shahbazi (Jose Alvim Berkenbrock)	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	P					
Engineering Graduate Community Council (EGCC) – Mechanical	Alireza Razmavar (Hadi Ramin)	N/A	N/A	N/A	P	P					
English Course Council	Lindsay Church (Michelle Kent)	P	P	P	R	R					
Geography & Planning Grad Council	Selena Schut (Renata Leonhardt)	P	A	P	P	P					
Graduate Geological Society (GGS)	James Schulte (Brayden McDonald)	P	P	P	R	P					
Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy Students' Association	Manreet Kaur Nehal (Syed Adnand Khalid)	N/A	N/A	P	R	P					
Kinesiology Graduate Student Council	Natasha Boyes (Natalie Houser)	P	P	P	P	P					

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MBARC	Alexander Mueller (Megan MacDonald)	N/A	N/A	P	P	A					
PEGASUS	Kimberlee Dube (Ethan Runge)	P	P	P	P	P					
Pharmacy & Nutrition Graduate Students' Council	Janine Rover (Mujtaba Badr)	P	P	P	P	P					
Physical Therapy Student Society (PTSS)	Julia Koop (Brandey Blahut)	P	P	P	P	P					
Plant Sciences GSA	Asanka Godakanda (Berenice Romero)	P	P	P	P	P					
Psychology Graduate Students' Association	Farron Wielinga (Josh Katz) (Brandon Sparks)	P	P	R	P	A					
SENSA	Mostofa Kamal Purbasha Mistry (Layane Moura) (Anita Bhatt)	P	P	P	P	P					
SPHSA	Aisha Sajid Humaira Inam (Janessa Tom) (Chunbei Liu)	N/A	N/A	P	P	P					
Sociology GSA	Connor Morrison (Cerah Dube) (Alana Demkiw)	N/A	P	P	A	P					
Soil Science Graduate Student Association	Rachel Brockamp (Aimee Schryer)	P	P	P	P	P					

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Toxicology Graduate Students' Association	Mikayla Oldach (Alana Weber)	P	P	R	P	P					
Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) GSA	Breanne Murray (Zeyad El Karsh)	P	P	P	P	P					
Exec. President	Mery Mendoza Rengifo	P	P	P	P	P					
Exec. VP Finance and Operations	Mohammad Wajih Alam	P	P	P	P	P					
Exec. VP Student Affairs	Alejandra Fonseca	P	P	P	P	P					
Exec. VP External	Chiamaka Ezekwesili	P	P	P	P	P					