



GRADUATE  
STUDENTS'  
ASSOCIATION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION  
GRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING  
Tuesday, November 29, 2022, 5:30 PM**

**Attendees:**

Saaka Sulemana Saaka, President  
James Steele, VP Academic  
Cameron Armstrong, VP Finance and Services  
AC Cameron, VP External  
Masume Akbarki, VP Student Life  
Keira Gunn, Chair/GSA AVP Labour of Labour Relations Committee  
BrettC Nelson, Speaker  
Quinn Goddard, Clerk

**Meeting Began 5:30 pm**

**Online Registration 5:30 pm**

**Territorial Acknowledgement (Cameron Armstrong) 5:35PM**

**Approval of Agenda 5:36PM**

Opposed: 0  
CARRIED

**Approval of October 2022 GRC Meeting Minutes 5:36PM**

Opposed: 0  
CARRIED

**Tuition and Fees Consultation Committee [Penny Werther, Christine Johns, Amy Dambrowitz, Bruce Evelyn, Robin Yates, Verity Turpin, Albert Lamartino, Ben Matchett] 5:36PM**

- *Tuition and Fees Regulation*
  - Set by Alberta government
  - University funded largely through Alberta tax dollars (as a public institution)
  - Past three years saw tuition freeze
    - Created discrepancy between tuition in Alberta and elsewhere, created greater burden on Alberta taxpayer
    - Urged to shift burden to student, not taxpayer
  - Average domestic tuition can increase by Alberta CPI (CPI for purpose of tuition increase is set at 5.5%)
  - Have observed that students don't want tuition freeze and then massive jump to catch up to inflation, would rather have predictable increase
  - Tuition and Fees Consultation Committee (TFCC)
    - Don't want to appear as if tuition fees are happening "behind the scenes", or lack transparency, so TFCC making effort to consult with students

- Proposed increases:
  - o Domestic students:
    - Thesis-based program (MA, MSc, and PhD) increase by 2.0% (below CPI)
    - Professional and course-based increase by 5.5% (CPI)
  - o International students:
    - Thesis-based programs increase by 2.0%
    - Professional and course-based increasing by 10%
  - o Student services fees increasing by 5.5% (CPI)
  
- **Question:** Are you planning to open up avenues to secure additional funding for students, to compensate for tuition increases? Personally can't handle 2.0% increase
  - o Yates: Continuing IGTA<sup>1</sup> scholarship [for international students], bursaries, minimum funding guarantee [for thesis-based]
    - Programs recognize tuition and cost of living increasing, and that funding policy may need to change
      - e.g. Cumming School of Medicine looking at own internal funding policy to ensure basic cost of living increase
  - o Werther: Needs-based bursaries and scholarships have gone up considerably since 2017, committed to continuing to do that
    - **Question:** How many graduate students have benefitted from those? 50? 100? It won't serve all graduate students
      - Dambrowitz: 600 graduate students (out of 7,000+)
  
- **Question:** Would those additional means of securing funding reflect the 10% increase?
  - o Yates: Not necessarily
    - DGAs should start conversation for negotiating program-internal funding possibilities
  - o **Response:** Should not be responsibility of student to have to advocate for own funding to ensure it meets standard of living.
    - Graduate students in more advanced years of their program (e.g. 5th year) may move beyond funding, so given sessional instructor position to secure income. However, sessional instructor funding has been cut, and TAs now often making more than sessional instructor (money derived from scholarships)
    - Don't have salaried position since a sessional instructor only has a contract, so can't get student loans
    - Have personally taken cut in paycheque
      - (Clarification from Gunn, AVP Labour, in response to challenge from Werther: Student is losing top-up that would equate sessional funding to GA(T)<sup>2</sup>)
  
- **Response:** We're not as bad off as other universities, but know many students who need to rely on food banks
  - o [Asked everyone to stand up, and to sit down if they agree with argument being presented by panel]
  - o [No one sat down]
  
- **Response:** Don't appreciate rhetoric that international student is burden on Alberta taxpayer

---

<sup>1</sup> International Graduate Tuition Award

<sup>2</sup> Graduate Assistant (Teaching)

- **Response:** Why look to students to make up difference in revenue, when they are already the ones who are financially struggling?
- **Response:** Tuition increases not reviewed frequently enough (e.g. reviewed at time when rent was not as high as it currently is)
- **Response:** Should stop normalizing idea that graduate students are poor. Almost couldn't continue in program despite having best possible marks since they couldn't afford to pay for rent, food, etc.
  - o Support staff<sup>3</sup> are extremely overburdened, making it difficult to get responses from them. Can't get clear picture of funding
  - o If don't stop tuition increase, could you hire back support staff?
- **Response:** It's anomalous that students with departmental funding have to pay tuition at UCalgary (tuition is typically waived at other universities for departmentally-funded students)
  - o **Response:** Makes minimum guaranteed funding a lie, since tuition reduces overall stipend
  - o Werther: Need to place tuition and fee proposals in U15<sup>4</sup> context
- **Response:** Can each of members on panel speak to whether they have had a recent cut in their paycheck, and if they would be willing to take a proportional cut ( $\approx 10\%$ ) in solidarity?
  - o Werther: All dean salaries both been frozen both before and after cuts, so there have been no increases
- **Question:** Many graduate students don't live in city because not required on campus, so would there be option to opt-out of non-instructional fees if the student derives no use from them?
  - o Turpin: Currently no option, and on premise that they are available if you want to come to campus ("there for you when you need us")
    - Operations and budgets not structured on people being able to opt-out

### **GSA Strategic Plan Update and Discussion [Sherry Choma] 6:18PM**

- Strategic Plan project has been structured in three phases
  - o Phase 1 – Shared picture of GSA's current status
    - Assessing organization, strengths and weaknesses, analysing environment
  - o Phase 2 – Create content for high-level document for future GSA direction
  - o Phase 3 – Implementation
- Sketch of plan:
  - o Identity statement: The GSA represents the collective voice of UCalgary graduate students.
  - o Vision: community of highly engaged and thriving UCalgary graduate students
  - o Values: Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Accessibility; Student Voice, Balanced Well-Being, Transparency + Accountability, Collaboration
  - o Priorities/High-level goals:
    - Broaden, deepen student engagement (ensure diverse voices)
    - Address critical barriers to thriving (alleviate financial, mental health barriers)
    - Grow impact (build capacity of GSA to be able to serve students well)
- Posed question to audience: how does this plan resonate with you?
  - o These are grounding point for organization, meant to be re-visited yearly

---

<sup>3</sup> This point was being raised by a graduate student in Political Science, whose support staff have formed a pod with Economics and Social Sciences.

<sup>4</sup> U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities

- [Asked students to break into small groups to discuss proposed plan, and then submit results of their discussion in a follow-up survey]
- **Response:** Plan is sufficiently vague that success is unquantifiable
- **Response:** Why not have some kind of actionable outcome from all of this to hold future GSA boards accountable (“a lot of really nice fancy words that don’t speak to my ability to live”)
  - Armstrong: More actionable goals will come from individual VP portfolios, vagueness of plan partly stems from aggregating all portfolios

## Executive Reports 6:46PM

- **President’s Report [Saaka Sulemana Saaka] 6:47PM**
  - Appreciate all those who attended meeting, since much higher attendance than previous meetings
  - Emergency housing support:
    - Housing crisis
    - AC worked with vice provost student experience
  - GSA bursaries
    - Recognize problems with bursary distribution, will revisit in January
- **VP Academic [James Steele] 6:51PM**
  - PEER Beyond (FEB 11-12) – graduate student conference put on by graduate student
    - Want to ensure that certain departments, faculties that are historically underrepresented
    - Will be sending out email to DGAs of such departments to encourage abstract submission
  - Student advocacy and the Football Effect
    - Often get footballed from office to office and never get answers
    - Want students to talk to him to address paths that need to be in place for students to actually get answers
  - Thanked students for participation in tuition discussion period
    - Encourage students to vote for a government that represents graduate students in spring, since need to recognize that government is squeezing postsecondary budget
- **VP External [AC Cameron] 6:54PM**
  - Recently returned from CASA Advocacy week<sup>5</sup>
  - Calgary Student Alliance
    - How to make UPass more affordable for students?
      - Return offer: Create two-tiered system (one for regular adult, one for low-income)
      - Current UPass contract up for review in roughly 6 months
  - Thanked students for advocating for themselves in provost discussion
  - Nourish to Flourish: university-wide working group to address root causes of food insecurity
    - Launched by the provost

---

<sup>5</sup> An opportunity for students to meet with Members of Parliament, Ministers, Senators, etc. to advocate for improving post-secondary institutions in Canada, hosted by the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA).

- If interested in joining, send Cameron an email
      - Want to create survey to get good data on how funding interacts with food security
  - Advocacy Engagement Working Group (contact Cameron if want to get involved)
- **VP Finance & Services [Cameron Armstrong] 6:59PM**
  - Fee structure changing – now everyone synced onto September schedule
    - StudentCare making everyone on same payment schedule so more predictable (no longer pay May-May, January-January, etc.)
  - Haskayne Dean Search Committee
    - See as opportunity for what you'd like to see in university
    - Members of Haskayne very high up in leadership all through university, would be good to see more diverse representation
- **VP Student Life [Masume Akbarki] 7:01PM**
  - Thanked students for participation
  - Meetings with EDI team, 2SLGBTQIAP+, international students
  - Provide supports for DGAs and GSGs
  - Lots of successful events to improve student experience
    - Want to highlight A Letter to Home – for students who are far from home, might feel homesick during holidays, provides time and space for them to write letter home

#### **DGA Consultation Period [Saaka Sulemana Saaka] 7:03PM**

- Opened floor to discussing issues in departments
  - **Response:** Tuition increases and funding. So many issues raised in Strategic Plan could just be solved if students had more money
  - **Response:** Looked at previous GRC meeting minutes from 2021, and saw someone had asked about if GSA could look into stipend increase along with tuition hike, and GSA's response was that GSA was "looking into it". What happened to that plan?
    - Saaka: Financial difficulties. If don't increase now, then increases much more in future to catch up, so only option is to try to keep negotiating
      - Have had some suggestion that there will be increased funding to emergency bursaries, but want a guarantee
    - Steele: In every meeting, he says "tuition increases are wage erosion", try to push for stipend increases tracking tuition increases, but always gets shut down
      - Suggest that all students write in to try to affect real change
      - Up-hill battle since just got minimum funding guaranteed
      - Needs-based funding concerning: Had double applications for needs-based bursaries from last year
    - Armstrong: Everything aggregate in how its reported, difficult to get answers in how much money is going to which department, etc.
  - **Response:** When trying to access Empower Me app and Wellness Centre, students<sup>6</sup> are getting hung-up on

---

<sup>6</sup> Student is speaking from interactions with other History graduate students.

- Students are asked if they are suicidal, and if not their ability to get help is delayed
- Akbarki: Need to recruit more consultants, don't have enough staff to provide one-on-one counselling, need budget increase
  - Will start monthly sessions in January for students
- Saaka: part of asks in Tuition and Fees Consultation (need shorter wait times for accessing mental health resources, etc.)
  - University reportedly will be hiring new associate director of wellness centre, hiring student advisors, and conducting external review of wellness centre operations
- Steele: Provost often use UCalgary being (e.g.) 9th in U15 as evidence of success, but not in wait-times for mental health services, or that other universities help fund health plan, or minimum funding
- Armstrong: KPI are national indicators within own system, unfortunately no way to quantify hanging up on students, etc.
- **Response**: Performance-based metrics forced on university (to justify getting funding) is root of evil. So, should try to elect government that will fund universities
- **Response**: Need to think of "smaller ideas" to help students
  - e.g. Finding childcare is issue for many students (knows several students whose wife has work permit but can't work since she has small child)
  - Could have community-based childcare, shared meals, etc.
- **Response**: History department used to have guaranteed number of AGES scholarships<sup>7</sup> every year, but now regulated by Faculty of Arts (so can't guarantee number of funding packages based on that every year)
  - Funding packages offered to international students not enough to take steps for permanent residency status (stuck with less money, higher tuition, less opportunities to make home for themselves in Canada)

#### DGA Period 7:21PM

- SCPA: Currently putting on production of Much Ado About Nothing (MFA candidate's thesis project)
- Psychology Graduate Students Association having a holiday party
- Chemistry GSA Mental health event in February (bringing in alternative mental health providers, e.g. group music therapy, art therapy, etc.)
  - If other departments interested, talk to CGSA
- SGSC weekly meal for students, and non-perishable pantry foods in February
- Akbarki: \$300/year now increased to \$1300/year for departmental student-organized events
  - Please use budget, to show that students need it (students are applying for a lot of Quality Money grants but not using the \$1300)

#### Announcements 7:27PM

- GSA Emergency Bursary and GSA Support Bursary applications accepted year-round
- Holiday closures (University: DEC 25-JAN 1, GSA DEC27-JAN 2)

---

<sup>7</sup> Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship (AGES)

### **Other Business 7:28PM**

- History graduate student union has put out call for abstracts for Bow River Conference
- Vice Chair Outreach of Graduate Labour Union<sup>8</sup>: introduced themselves since in new position, want to reach out to students to identify what students need (esp. if academically employed graduate student)
  - o Encourage students to do Labour Steward training program, compensated for time
  - o Gunn: wanted deeper connections with all departments, create something adjacent to GRC for working grad students (so that Labour Stewards ≈ GRC Reps)
    - Want help building network so that all departments have connection to labour union
- Fall economic statement: federal government abolished interest rates on federal student loans

### **Meeting adjourned 7:33PM**

Opposed: 0  
CARRIED

---

<sup>8</sup> Recent re-branding; formerly Graduate Labour Relations Committee (LRC)