Christine Cao: VP External Candidate

Who am I?
Hello my dearest reader! My name is Christine, and I am running to be your GSA VP External! I am a MSc student in Electrical & Computer Engineering, where I am using applied machine learning to see how we can design a safer urban neighbourhood. Outside of my research, I am very passionate about student advocacy, which is why I have been a voting member in the GSA Graduate Representative Council as the Graduate Engineering Students’ Consortium representative.

What is this VP External position?
The VP External is the one primarily responsible for student advocacy and outreach to various levels of the Canadian government and to other graduate student bodies across Canada. To simply put, I am the ambassador representing you, the grad student, to the university / government / interest groups. Some of the main governance bodies I sit on would be: Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (abGPAC), Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), the University of Calgary Senate, and many more.

Why am I qualified?
I have been in student government for a long time, and I have sat on similar committees. I understand the best way to communicate what we students want to the university and government officials. Currently, I am the Chair of both the Electrical & Computer Engineering Graduate Students’ Association (ECEG) and the Graduate Engineering Students’ Consortium (GESC), meaning I already represent the graduate engineering student body on the GSA as in the Graduate Representative Council. My involvement with the GSA this year prepared me to work as a GSA Board member. Outside of student governance, I am also involved in a variety of technical committees, where I implemented many professional development programs that helped students in their post-graduate careers.

What will I do for you?
If you elect me as your VP External, I promise to put your interest first. Grad school is already hard, and I want to make your life easier in any way possible through my position. Specifically:

1. Advocate for work hours on a study permit to count towards permanent residency. A very large percent of grad students are international students, currently in Canada on a study permit, but hoping to stay in Canada afterwards as a permanent resident. However, none of the working hours accumulated on a study permit counts towards permanent residency. International graduate students produce tremendous research, teaching, and other skilled work, and these hours should be recognized in the first step towards your Canadian citizenship. As your VP External, I will advocate alongside the abGPAC to streamline the permanent residency process for international graduate
students by asking the government to recognize the hours of work done while the graduate student was on a study permit.

2. **Fight for more scholarships and continued tuition transparency.** The tuition increase issue will continue well into the 2020-2021 term. The provincial government proposed a new performance-based funding for University of Calgary, where the university will receive money directly proportional to how well it is doing in post-graduate employment, enrolment, etc. This new funding model could lead to direct cuts in research and TA stipend. As your VP External, I will ease your financial uncertainties by advocating for more provincially funded scholarships and consult with the university to promise an increase to the baseline level of research funding for each graduate student.

3. **Create more post-graduation opportunities.** Getting a fantastic job or academic position post-graduation starts with a strong support network offering internships and professional development programs helping graduate students to acclimate to the Canadian work culture. The current government has no commitment towards renewing any graduate professional development programs. The graduate students will benefit from having these programs, and the provincial economy will benefit from the retention of these skilled graduate students. As your VP External, I will advocate for the provincial government to continue funding professional development programs, to increase students’ post-graduation employability, including incentivizing companies to offer more internships to graduate students.

**What can you do?**

1. If you would like to see these changes, **vote for me! March 9th – 10th**
2. If you have any questions, email me at slcao@ucalgary.ca
3. If you want to follow along on this campaign, sign up at:  
   [https://forms.gle/6oeNSuKSIsLutzesHA](https://forms.gle/6oeNSuKSIsLutzesHA)

Thank you for reading! See you on the campaign trails!