Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

This report includes my updates from the internal task list for the 2018-2019 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The following are projects that I have initiated in the past few months since the most recent updates on the SWP to GSA Council in October.

- I have continued to take all opportunities to discuss mental wellness with various stakeholders on campus, and participated in the second Healthy Campus Alberta Summit in November, which was held at the University of Alberta. In addition, in October, I attended the Canadian Mental Health Association Conference, along with the Students' Union Vice-President Student Life, to learn more about post-secondary institutions’ role in supporting mentally healthy campuses.

- Through my work with the Dean of Students’ Advisory Council (DAC), I brought forward issues that my attention has been drawn to concerning mental health supports and Indigenous experiences on campus. Finally, in collaboration with the Students’ Union Vice-President Student Life, we developed a mental health world café to assist DAC in collecting further feedback about student mental health, campus supports, and potential barriers.

- Along with a representative from the Students’ Union, I met with the Assistant Dean of Students, Health and Wellness Services, to review the University’s report to the Government of Alberta on the use of the mental health grant funding that they provide to the U of A, and providing feedback on the University’s mental health strategy. I will continue to focus on advocating for the continuation and enhancement of dedicated funding from the University and the government to support mental health services on campus (with respect to government funding, I will work in consultation with Sasha and Zhihong as they serve on the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council). We also continue to raise concerns about the Government of Alberta’s new mandate that the U of A use this funding to increase the awareness and prevention of mental health, rather than on-campus treatment.

- I attended the recent Studentcare Stakeholder Conference to learn more about the services provided through the current GSA Health and Dental Plan and have worked with several graduate students to resolve issues they experienced with the Plan.

- In furtherance of the goal of maintaining a strong advocacy presence within the U of A concerning the necessity of top tier health and wellness resources, I met with a representative from University Human Resources to evaluate the services provided through the Graduate Student Assistance Program, and to review the GSA’s usage of this program.

- In working to ensure that students’ culture and/or religious requirements are appropriately accommodated, and following conversations with the Dean of Students, Campus & Community Recreation circulated a survey to explore the possibility of offering gender-specific swim times. This survey was circulated through the GSA newsletter to all graduate students. Gender specific swim times are now available on an ad hoc basis, more information can be found here.

- In consultation with the GSA office team, we developed a 101 session on the topic of GSA funding opportunities, and fifteen graduate students attended. Another GSA Funding 101 session will be scheduled prior to the opening of the April 1, 2019 granting period.

Sincerely,

Fahed Elian, 2018-2019 GSA Vice-President Student Services