Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

16 November 2018

Attached you will find a proposal for recommended changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy on GSA Council developed by the GSA Speaker (who is a non-voting member of the GSA Governance Committee and who is responsible for presiding over all meetings of GSA Council) and myself. The recommended changes to GSA Bylaw and Policy presented in the attached proposal can be summarized thusly:

- The Standing Orders of GSA Council currently exist as a freestanding document. It contains the rules by which GSA Council operates. The recommended changes have incorporated the core elements of the Standing Orders into current GSA Policy on GSA Council, and have made clarifications and removed redundancies where needed.

- The creation of a seat on GSA Council for an Indigenous graduate student. As members are aware, when myself and my Vice-Presidents developed the GSA Board Strategic Work Plan for 2018-2019 we included among our priorities:
  
  o “Initiatives and programs that specifically support Indigenous and international graduate students.”

  o “The GSA will work to sustain a respectful, supportive, and welcoming environment for all graduate students, (including Indigenous graduate students, international graduate students, and graduate students who parent, among others), and will further sustain working relationships with stakeholders to ensure an inclusive campus free from discrimination; one that offers support for graduate students in diverse circumstances and with diverse needs.”

In pursuit of these goals, we discussed, among other matters, the lack of representation from Indigenous students in both the University and the GSA governance structure. Accordingly, over the summer, I (as GSA President) met with representatives from the Indigenous Graduate Students’ Association (IGSA) to seek their assistance in developing a proposal concerning the addition of a seat for an Indigenous graduate student on GSA Council. As a result of those discussions, they have put forward the following background information regarding the creation of this seat:

- “The Indigenous Graduate Student Association is a new graduate student group at the University of Alberta. We consist of graduate students who have come together from a variety of departments and faculties across the University of Alberta with the goal of expanding, developing and strengthening opportunities for Indigenous graduate student voices to be heard on campus.
and in University governance. We support the creation of an Indigenous graduate student voting seat on the GSA Council for the following reasons.

(ONE) Alignment with broader institutional movements and previously established commitments: The greater institutions we live and work within (the University of Alberta, the Government of Canada, the United Nations) have recognized that making space for Indigenous peoples and their voices is a priority.

(TWO) Recognition: That Indigenous people in Canada have been historically and currently are marginalized in decision-making.

(THREE) Representation: Indigenous graduate students are found in every department and faculty at our University. However, there is no forum at the graduate level for these students to bring forth their specific concerns related to being an Indigenous student except through their departmental or faculty GSA representative. We suggest that Indigenous students rarely, if ever, approach their departmental or faculty GSA representative to carry forth a specific issue related to Indigenous graduate students, and we suspect that non-Indigenous GSA student representatives may not feel comfortable or equipped to bring these issues forward.”

- Myself and my Vice-Presidents agree strongly with the points they put forward and, following this conversation, we developed this proposal, which details that the seat will be filled by an appointment process carried out by the IGSA and subject to the same GSA Council attendance and remuneration policies as departmental representatives, and clarifies that the representative will also be eligible to be elected by GSA Council to serve on various GSA Standing Committees.

- The recommended changes outline what occurs in the case of a tie vote within GSA Council and GSA Standing Committee, which is not addressed in current GSA Bylaw and Policy. Current practice is that a tie is considered a loss and the addition of wording to this effect is recommended.

We look forward to discussing these recommended changes with you in November.

Sasha van der Klein,
GSA President and Chair of the GSA Governance Committee

and

Pranidhi Baddam,
GSA Speaker and non-voting member of the GSA Governance Committee