November 2nd, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Establishment of Indigenous Graduate Student Seat within the GSA

The newly formed Indigenous Graduate Student Association (IGSA) aims to serve all Indigenous graduate students (both Masters and PhD level) within the University of Alberta. They have completed the necessary paperwork to become an official student group, which has provided them the opportunity to elect a governing executive to speak on behalf of students. This group has filled a gap at the university by creating a formal mechanism for Indigenous graduate students to organize, come together to share ideas, and also support each other. While the membership of this group continues to grow, it is vital that IGSA be incorporated into university governance from the outset. As Dean of the Faculty of Native Studies and Co-Lead of the Indigenous Initiatives Office (in the Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic) I am writing in support of the establishment of an Indigenous Graduate Student Association’s representative seat on the Graduate Student Association.

While the Faculty of Native Studies (FNS) already holds a seat within GSA for our student body, it is important to note that FNS does not and cannot speak on behalf of all Indigenous graduate students. Furthermore, the Faculty of Native Studies is a student-centred, research-oriented faculty that provides a common ground for all students regardless of ethnic background to learn, research, explore, and critically examine the historical and contemporary experiences of Native peoples and communities, and their relationships with Canada and other countries. Therefore, it would be a disservice to the FNS students and all Indigenous Graduate Students at the University of Alberta to conflate the role of FNS and IGSA within the GSA.

In the spirit of reconciliation, I encourage the GSA to establish a voting seat on its council for the Indigenous Graduate Student Association to represent the voices of all Indigenous graduate students at the University of Alberta.

Pishshapmishko,

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