Dear GSA Council Colleagues,

5 April 2019

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 January, in addition to attending the regularly scheduled meetings of the many governance committees on which I represent the GSA.

- Following the receipt of a proposal from the Indigenous Graduate Students’ Association (IGSA) to add a separate voting seat for an Indigenous graduate student on the Council on Student Affairs (COSA), I spoke in support of this proposal at several committee meetings, and I am happy to report that at the 25 February 2019 General Faculties Council (GFC) meeting, the addition of this voting seat to COSA was approved. As the IGSA’s proposal outlined, while there was a originally a dedicated seat on COSA for an Indigenous student, as appointed by the Aboriginal Students’ Council (ASC), in the original draft terms of reference, Indigenous graduate students face different challenges compared to Indigenous undergraduate students.

- In response to graduate students bringing to my attention concerns about the procedural transparency around the adjudication process for scholarships and awards at the departmental and faculty levels, and the fact that appeal processes do not seem to exist for these decisions, Sasha and I met in March with the Interim Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) to discuss this matter in more detail. To move this project forward, we researched whether other Canadian post-secondary institutions have scholarship and award adjudication policies that allow for appeals. During my conversations with the Interim Vice-Dean, I continued to advocate for the establishment of enhanced transparency mechanisms, such as the creation of feedback rubrics that could be provided to students following the adjudication of an award or scholarship within their department, their home faculty, or the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.

- As part of my ongoing efforts to encourage graduate student mentorship, I raised the idea of providing a modest supplementary stipend for graduate students involved as supervisors or co-supervisors in projects associated with the Undergraduate Research Initiative (URI), to ensure that they are recognized academically and financially. When I presented the idea of creating a modest stipend for graduate student participants to the URI Advisory Committee, committee members responded favorably, and as such, I worked to develop a formal proposal to bring forward to the URI Advisory Committee before the end of my term. This proposal stipend would also be provided to post-doctoral fellows serving as supervisors or co-supervisors for URI projects.

- Through my participation with the FGSR Policy Review Committee (FGSR PRC), we have been revisiting the current FGSR policy that graduate students are not permitted to take re-examinations, specifically for course-based graduate students. Members of this committee agreed to conduct more research to determine the frequency of re-examination cases. The FGSR PRC is also in the process of determining whether full-time graduate students should be able to shift to part-time status (with the exception of international graduate students, who must maintain full-time studies for the purposes of their study permits). When reviewing the proposal to allow full-time graduate students to shift to part-time status, and if such a policy is eventually implemented, I emphasized the importance of ensuring graduate students are well-informed about any implications that this shift could have on their ability to access funding opportunities (especially scholarships that are restricted to full-time students only).
• As I reported to GSA Council in October 2018, and in response to some graduate students bringing to my attention concerns about the scheduling of graduate courses during evenings and weekends or last-minute changes in scheduling, this past year, I raised this issue in three different committees (the General Faculties Council Academic Standards Committee (GFC ASC), the General Faculties Council Committee on the Learning Environment (GFC CLE), and the FGSR PRC). My goal was to see the introduction of a University policy concerning the scheduling (and any subsequent rescheduling) of University courses as none currently exists and I will continue to bring this matter forward throughout the duration of my term.

• Since January, I have been participating on the FGSR Learning Outcomes Framework Working Group, which is working to develop templates for graduate degree learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are statements that describe the essential knowledge and abilities that students are expected to possess once they have completed their graduate degree program. The pace of this project has been moving along quickly, and the working group will be presenting on this project to FGSR Council in April 2019 for pre-consultation. I also participated in two of the sub-groups (Scoping Exercise and Guide for Graduate Program Learning Objectives and Assessment) that worked on developing the details of the new framework.

Sincerely,

Masoud Aliramezani, Vice-President Academic