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 January.

- Negotiations for the next Graduate Assistantship Collective Agreement (CA) have been ongoing for several months and updates on negotiations have been shared with all current academically-employed graduate students. As per the regulations outlined in the Labour Relations Code, a final ratification vote was sent to all current academically-employed graduate students in January. As this ratification vote did not pass, collective bargaining continues. Over the past few months, I have been actively engaged in continued consultation with academically-employed graduate students (AEGSs) to inform these ongoing negotiations, which has included hosting two Labour Town Halls, and implementing standing office hours each week to meet with academically-employed graduate students. This work has also involved responding to approximately 5 – 8 emails per week from academically-employed graduate students with feedback or questions about the negotiations.

- I am pleased to report that at the 15 March 2019 meeting of the Board of Governors, and as a result of negotiations done concurrently but separately from those involving the Collective Agreement, an increase to the Graduate Student Support Fund (GSSF) was approved. The amount of the GSSF, which was previously $814,000 is now 1,064,000 (please note that the actual amount of the GSSF for 2019-2020 is $964,000 but $100,000 was carried over from 2018-2019). This fund serves as a benefit to all graduate students, and is used to fund the GSA Academic Travel Grants, GSA Child Care Grants, GSA Emergency Bursaries, and GSA Recognition Awards and I am extremely happy that we were able to negotiate an increase in these funds.

- As reported previously, a large portion of my portfolio involves meeting with individual graduate students in person or over email regarding the interpretation of and compliance with the Collective Agreement. I have continued this work by responding to approximately 10 email conversations with graduate students per week, and meeting with approximately 4-5 graduate students per month, to assist with more complex issues.

- Along with Sasha, I met with Wade King, Director of the Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights, to discuss graduate student supervision and ongoing GSA work associated with the development of a document detailing graduate students’ rights.

- In February, I attended the second meeting of the University’s new Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee, which was established as part of the provincial government’s new Occupational Health and Safety Legislation. This committee continues to work on establishing a process for graduate students to electronically report any perceived violations related to health and safety (including harassment).

- In addition to participating in the Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee, I have also met individually with representatives from the Post-Doctoral Fellows Association (PDFA), the Non-Academic Staff Association, and the Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta (AASUA), to strengthen connections with these labour unions.

- Through my participation this past year in the Campus and Facilities Safety and Security (CFSS) Working Group, its members have been discussing the feedback from various stakeholders, including GSA Council in January. The draft report was presented to the General Faculties Council (GFC) in February, and the final report, which was approved in March, was sent to the U of A Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) and Vice-President (Finance and Administration). The CFSS Working Group will now be transitioning to a standing committee to continue it work, and two subcommittees on communication and education will be established. The GSA and the Students’ Union will have representatives serving on
the new CFSS Committee, and these two subcommittees.

- I have also been working to expand the GSA’s role as a union by developing strategies for outreach and engagement, in collaboration with GSA management. To build on the conversations and consultation with academically-employed graduate students that were carried out during the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement negotiations, these strategies will include regular email updates to the bargaining unit, bi-annual town halls, and frequent GSA Labour Relations Committee meetings.

Sincerely,

Beth Richardson, Vice-President Labour