University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students’ Association

University Council Report - May 2020

The Graduate Student’s Association welcomes a new executive team who will be representing and advocating for the graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan from May 2020 to April 2021. The new executive team is made up as follows:

**President:** Humaira Inam

**Vice-President Finance and Operations:** Hadi Ramin

**Vice-President Student Affairs:** Carmen Marquez

**Vice-President External:** Qasim Gill

On behalf of the new executive team, we are deeply honored to represent graduate students at this institution and look forward to working with our partners around campus. We will continue to provide the necessary tools and resources to achieve the academic and professional excellence of our students. Concurrently, we will foster a diverse, supportive, and equitable environment so that they have a positive experience in our institution. Consequently, for this academic year, the representatives of the Graduate Students Association will focus on four main areas:

1. **Requesting student representation on governance committee of council and crisis management teams**

On behalf of the GSA executive, I would like to express my disappointment with the university decision of excluding graduate student leaders on both, the Governance Committee of Council and the Crisis Management Team. During this time, it is critical to have open lines of communication so that we can properly inform our members of the actions being taken as well as
directly advocate for their needs in these spaces. In an effort to request graduate representation, the GSA executive has forwarded a letter to senior administration which is found below as appendix 1. We will continue our efforts to make sure our graduate students are well represented on both committees.

2. **Enhancing resources that support student mental health**

Stress affects the lives of our graduate students and it is something that needs to be taken seriously, especially considering the difficult times that many students are facing during this pandemic. Being socially isolated for example can have detrimental effects on our mental health, and concurrently affect other aspects of our lives. At times, it can also become very difficult for us to recognize how dangerous stress can be to our mental health. In fact, our graduate students feel very overwhelmed by a combination of financial and professional pressures, resulting in lack of sleep and social life. Those pressures can vary from doing research, teaching classes, collecting data, taking courses, writing reports/theses/papers, concerns about visa status, tuition, etc. Furthermore, these pressures have now been exasperated due to Covid-19, and the preventative measures taken to contain this pandemic will be taking a toll on many. Therefore, it is very important for us to recognize and address signs of mental illness, to understand where to turn for help, and to work towards eliminating stigmatization while promoting wellness. The Graduate Student’s Association will continue its efforts to promote positive mental health, increasing the available resources that can help to identify when students are at risk and helping them to get support from our university and community.

3. **Enhancing and improving opportunities that already exist for a better student-supervisor relationship**

The student-supervisor relationship is the core of the academic success of all graduate students and has been discussed previously. The Graduate Student’s Association has previously initiated a student-supervisor agreement that specifies the roles and responsibilities of both student and supervisor, which will help students to communicate better, and recognize mutual responsibilities while increasing their chances of success at the university. The GSA executive will continue working towards the improvement of the student-supervisor relationship, promoting the resource
checklist that has critical information for all new graduate students and faculty, developing the graduate student handbook that will help our graduate students to navigate their programs. Overall, we aim at enhancing and improving availability of resources to support the unique relationship between students and their supervisors.

4. **Enhancing activities to develop graduate student skills**

Graduate student skills in academic writing, effective communication, leadership, independent work, time management, networking and relationships, etc. are essential in supporting career building for future roles within the work force. We hope to provide resources, workshops, events, and activities throughout the year that help graduate students in learning these necessary skills that can be transferable to real life jobs once they graduate. Overall, we will continue to strive for excellence in the resources and support our graduate students need to enhance their academic experience at our institution so that they become the leaders that the world needs.

We look forward to working with members of the University throughout our tenure this year. Together, we can improve the academic and community experience of our students on campus, as well as prepare them for a successful career.

Humaira Inam

President, Graduate Students’ Association
Appendix 1:

April 29, 2020

RE: Student Membership on Governance Committee of Council and Student Engagement on COVID-19 Crisis Management Teams

To the Governance Committee and USask administration,

We are disappointed that the Governance Committee, on April 21, 2020, voted to not proceed forward with assigning voting membership for students on the Governance Committee of Council. This decision was made on the basis that the Governance Committee is different to other Council Committees, and therefore does not warrant voting membership for students. The basis of this decision is contrary to the values of our university, and therefore, is unacceptable.

Students have played integral roles in Council Committees and have shaped many of the discussions that have taken place. With this decision, we continue to build a wall between students, administration and faculty, and with this wall, we are pushing students away. We continue to be one of the few U15 institutions that attempts to legitimize a lack of student engagement on institutional governing bodies.

Furthermore, the university administration continues to exclude students, appointed by the USSU and GSA executive, on any of the COVID-19 Crisis Management Teams. Student leaders are at the forefront of addressing the needs and concerns of their membership and it is critical that we have open and direct lines of communication every step of the way so that we can properly inform our members of the actions taken as well as directly advocate for them.

As student leaders, we are disheartened to see these decisions move forward; as an institution it seems we are taking one step forward and two steps back. We can certainly do better to ensure students are part of the shared governance structure and part of the decision making process. In keeping with our university’s mission, we again request the rightful inclusion of our student representatives on these committees.

USSU Executives and GSA Executives