

# Unionization — Overview of Process

## BACKGROUND

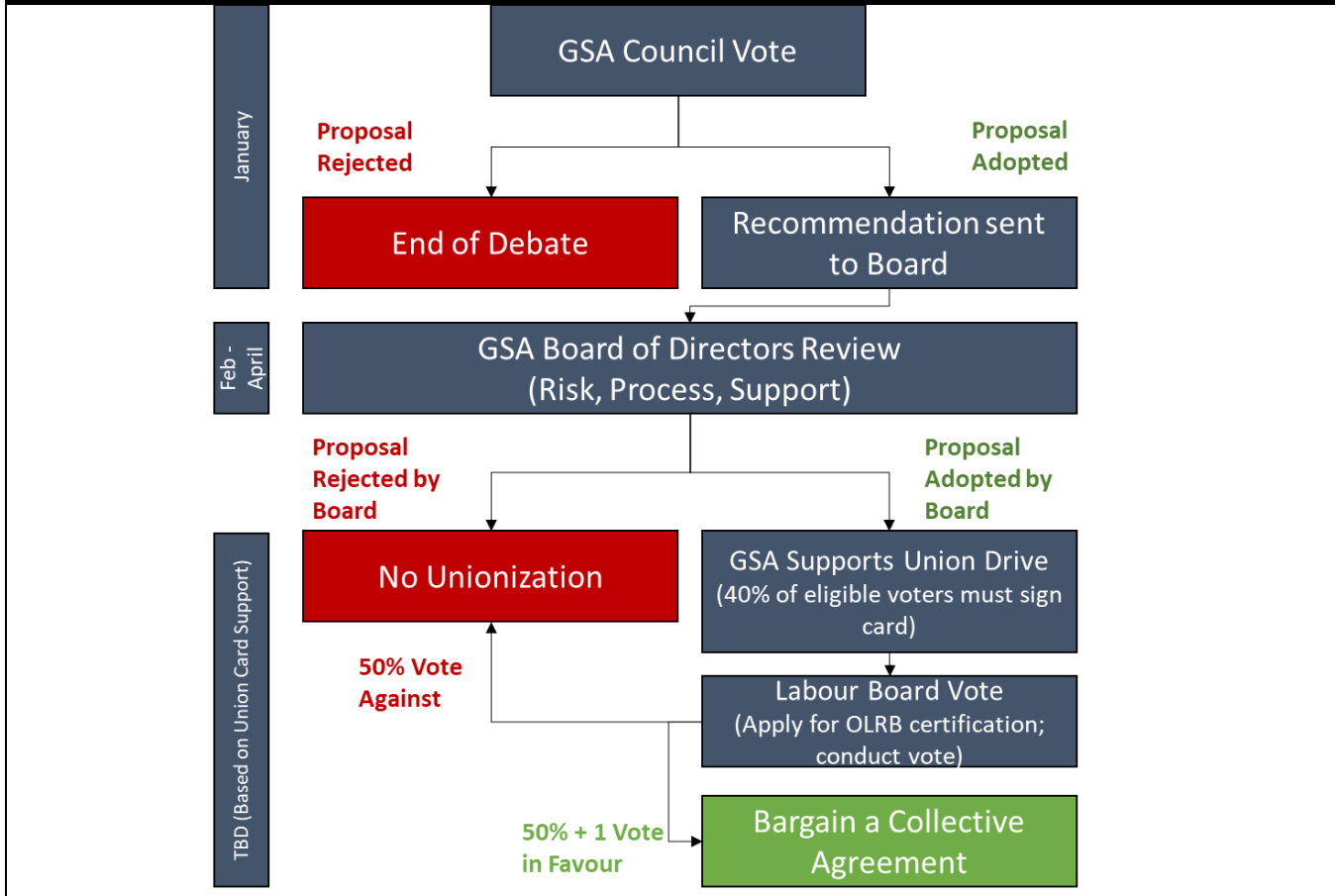
- November 2019: the GSA Council expressed interest in exploring the benefits and disadvantages in the formation of a graduate student union at UWaterloo.
- The proposed union would cover uWaterloo graduate Teaching and Research Assistants, as well as sessional instructors.
- If a union vote is advanced, there are many variables that must be considered – such as the GSA’s relationship with University, TA compensation, funding changes, and general bargaining power.
- On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the GSA Council will hold further discussions on the potential of supporting unionization – a subsequent Council vote is proposed to take place online on January 17<sup>th</sup>.
- If successful, Council will formally recommend unionization to the GSA Board of Directors – who will then examine the issue and, potentially, organize a formal union vote.
- Note that the GSA will not serve as the bargaining agent – this responsibility falls to the selected union representative. The issue at hand is whether to mobilize GSA resources to support unionization.

## PROPOSAL

In January 2020, the following proposal will be voted on by GSA Council:

***BIRT the GSA Council recommends that the GSA Board of Directors review and organize the unionization of graduate TAs, RAs, and sessional instructors at the University of Waterloo.***

## PROCESS & TIMELINES



# Unionization — Overview of Viewpoints

## SUPPORTING VIEWS



### PROTECTION OF WORKERS RIGHTS

- Without a collective agreement, uWaterloo has the unilateral ability to modify wages, benefits, and working conditions.
- Further, many students have expressed unfair treatment from their supervisors (e.g., delay in funding, inappropriate behavior, excessive work demands).
- Establishing a collective agreement will better protect fairness in the workplace, and will provide graduate student employees of uWaterloo with the ability to engage in a grievance procedure, ending with binding arbitration before a neutral third party.



### COMPENSATION

- Lower hourly TA rate than Guelph, Western, McMaster, and Toronto.
- Hourly compensation for grads does not reflect the totality of committed hours. Many individuals are working well beyond the allotted hours provided by uWaterloo – resulting in an actual hourly rate much lower than advertised.
- For context, unionization and collective bargaining at McMaster resulted in significant increases to compensation and benefits.

## DISSENTING VIEWS



### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GSA AND UW

- The GSA has a positive and productive relationship with uWaterloo administration, and unionization risks changing the dynamic from collaborative to combative.
- Many of the issues sought to be remedied by unionizing are being addressed in ongoing discussions with campus officials through the development of policies, guidelines, and processes.
- Unionization could discourage individuality (i.e. individual students will not have autonomy in their decisions), as a union may participate in activities which impact students whether they agree or not (e.g. strike).
- Opposition to government policy could be better achieved via alternative means (e.g., joining the Canadian Federation of Students).



### COMPENSATION

- There is no guarantee that unionization will result in increase pay.
- uWaterloo offers competitive compensation (considering cost of living and minimum funding requirements).
- Unionization would create mandatory union dues for workers – potentially resulting in a net financial loss for graduate students working on campus.

## CONSIDERATIONS

- TAs, RAs, and Sessional Instructors represent front line academic workers who mentor and support students in their everyday life.
- Regardless of whether unionization proceeds, the GSA will continue to work with campus stakeholders to support fairness in the workplace.
- That said, proceeding with unionization may—for better or worse—fundamentally change the relationship between the GSA and campus officials.
- WLU's recent graduate student unionization was not supported by their GSA – it was managed by a group of independent graduate students.
- Note that it is possible to have MOUs with uWaterloo without having a TA/RA/Sessional union. FAUW currently has an agreement even though they are not unionized and it works well for their members.