The Graduate Student Association – University of Waterloo

2016-2017 Strategic Plan

An agreement between:

The GSA-UW Council and
The GSA-UW Executive Officers;
Robert Bruce, GSA-UW President
Jessica Brake, GSA-UW Vice President
Norman Kearney, GSA-UW Student Affairs Officer
Indi Madar, GSA-UW Communication and Marketing Officer
Sondra Eger, External Affairs Officer – CASA
Max Salman, External Affairs Officer – OGSA
INTRODUCTION

This document reflects a shared understanding between both the GSA-UW’s Council and the Executive Officers on the current advocacy interests of University of Waterloo graduate students. Council directs the Officers to give their attention to assessing the current state of these advocacy interests and to report regularly to Council any pertinent information. Council may direct the Officers to take specific actions to advance advocacy interests from time to time.

BACKGROUND

This document addresses 11 advocacy themes. These themes were identified through a consultation process that took place over the Spring 2016 term. The GSA-UW administered a survey (see Appendix A) to its Board of Directors, Council, and Executive Officers, which asked them questions about what the GSA-UW should be focusing on this year. After the survey was administered and the results were analyzed further consultations and discussions occurred with members of the executive and Council to further explore what the GSA-UW should be advocating for on behalf of graduate students. This document reflects that themes that were identified in collaboration with all stakeholders through these processes.
ADVOCACY THEMES

The following 11 themes will guide what the GSA-UW advocates for on behalf of graduate students at the University of Waterloo for the remainder of the 2016-2017 year.

1. SUPPORTING THE COMPLETION OF HIGH QUALITY DEGREE COMPLETION

Funding sufficient to cover the cost of all fees and typical living expenses in the Waterloo region and reasonable expectations of research rigour and output for all students to enable concentrated study and professional development and the completion of degrees at a high level of quality within reasonable timeframes.

2. TRANSPARENT DECISION-MAKING

Transparent processes for assigning teaching and research assistantships, scholarships, and other sources of funding.

3. PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

Direct and advance notice to affected students of any upcoming fee increases.

4. SUPERVISORY EXCELLENCE

Promoting a culture of mutual respect and accountability between supervisor and student, and dedication on the part of the supervisor to the student’s professional development.

5. FAIR EMPLOYMENT

Teaching and research assistantships and other academic employment opportunities, such as sessional course instruction, that promote professional development and mitigate impacts on the student’s own studies.

6. TEACHING EXCELLENCE

High quality teaching that supports knowledge acquisition and retention and promotes curiosity, critical and creative thinking, and intellectual leadership.
7. CAREER SUPPORT

Opportunities for all graduate students to promote themselves and their research to the public and to academic and non-academic employers, and training and initiatives that support these activities.

Opportunities for all graduate students to gain paid experience in non-academic industries where their talents may be employed.

8. COMMUNITY

A culture of collegiality, both social and academic, among not only graduate students but also with faculty and staff and among departments.

9. WELLNESS

Initiatives to promote the physical and mental wellness of both individuals and communities, and action to mitigate underlying causes of stress affecting graduate students.

10. ADEQUATE SPACE

Well-ventilated, quiet, naturally lit, dedicated office space with ergonomic desks and chairs, shelving, and lockable storage units for every full-time, research-based graduate student.

11. PERMANENT RESIDENCY

Support for improved access to permanent residency status for international students in recognition of the strengthening effects that they have on the quality of Canada’s postsecondary education and research output.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the 11 themes that were identified within this document will be used to guide the GSA-UW’s advocacy and service efforts for the 2016-2017 executive year.

The GSA-UW advocates for its members at the following levels: University, Municipal government, Provincial government, and Federal government. The themes within this document will help to shape some of the conversations that are had at each of these levels so that we can work with each of these stakeholders to enhance the academic and social experiences of graduate students at the University of Waterloo. There are various ways in which each theme may be advocated for such as, but not limited to: committee work, conversations with various stakeholders, and involvement in external organizations (i.e. CASA/OGSA).

Some of the areas identified within this document may require further exploration so that we can better understand graduate students’ needs with respects to each of the themes. Thus, this document may also be used as a conversation starter and a tool that can be used to further explore the needs of graduate students at the University of Waterloo.
Appendix A
Strategic Objectives Survey

Board of Directors/Officer Version

Dear Director/Officer,

The Graduate Student Association (GSA-UW) would like to thank for visiting our strategic plan survey.

If you choose to participate in this survey your responses will help to inform the process of developing a strategic plan that will help us better serve graduate students. This pilot survey is the first step in the process used to identify key needs of graduate students and to assist the GSA-UW in developing its 2016-2016 strategic plan. The data collected from the survey will only be used for the described purposes.

This survey will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. Your responses are voluntary and will be kept confidential (within the limits of the law).

The survey will be open until Friday July 22nd at 5:00pm.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Jessica Brake, Vice-President of the GSA-UW at gsa-vp@uwaterloo.ca.

Thank you,

The Strategic Planning Committee of the GSA Council.

Background Information

1. Name

Survey Questions

1. What, if anything, is standing in the way of students at UW realizing their goals?

2. What are some things that could be done to enhance the experience of graduate students at UW?

3. What are some things that have benefited graduated students at UW that you would like to see continued?

4. Is there anything specific that you feel we should be advocating for this year (i.e. 2016/2017)?

5. Any additional comments?
Council Version

Dear Councilor,

The Graduate Student Association (GSA-UW) would like to thank for visiting our strategic plan survey.

If you choose to participate in this survey your responses will help to inform the process of developing a strategic plan that will help us better serve graduate students. This pilot survey is the first step in the process used to identify key needs of graduate students and to assist the GSA-UW in developing its 2016-2016 strategic plan. The data collected from the survey will only be used for the described purposes.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Jessica Brake, Vice-President of the GSA-UW at gsa-vp@uwaterloo.ca.

Thank you,

The Strategic Planning Committee of the GSA Council.

Background Information

1. Name

2. Department

Survey Questions

1. What, if anything, is standing in the way of students in your department realizing their goals?

2. What are some things that could be done to enhance the experience of graduate students at UW?

3. What are some things that have benefited graduated students at UW that you would like to see continued?

4. Is there anything specific that you feel we should be advocating for this year (i.e. 2016/2017)?

5. Any additional comments?