

GSA Executive Meeting Minutes – March 30, 2009, 4-6pm, Champlain SCR

Present:

Allison
Andrea
Colin
Jean
Jenn
Josh
Katy
Lynette
Nina
Tom
Lindsay (new pres candidate)
Rathika (candidate)
Shera (candidate)

Absent with regrets:

John
Peter

- Guest: Doug Evans – Dean of graduate studies came to speak about changes to graduate studies. Introductions were made. Doug began with a brief overview as follows:
 - Provincial graduate expansion initiative
 - 4 or 5 years ago, the government decided to embark on a graduate expansion. The expansion quota was based on proposals put forth by the universities detailing areas of interest for expansion. In Ontario, funding was only provided for domestic students, not international students. Following the expansion exercise, Trent University received an allocation of spaces for graduate students and consequently added some new programs, English, History, and a Ph.D in Cultural Studies among them. The ENLS program also underwent an expansion. Student enrolment was 110 before the expansion and is now at 160. The expansion created 14000 new spaces across the province. Additional expansion places were put forward to 6 large universities, which had not even met their original quotas, while smaller universities were not allotted any additional funding. We anticipate some new spaces will be funded by the government in the future. Several new programs that were conceived need more spaces, including Psychology, Masters in Education, and Sustainability.
 - Traill College conversion to the graduate college.
 - Recent changes to the college include: The Trend (Sunrise Café introduced as the food provider; refurbished), new offices spaces, and graduate student apartments.
 - Grad studies has begun working on professional development workshops (e.g. writing grant proposals). The Dean would like to expand on

professional development in the future, including reading courses for foreign language. Any suggestions are welcome.

- Funding for Traill College is a key issue. The college runs entirely on revenue generated from student college fees, and with only graduate students at Traill, this will only amount to approximately \$6000. Currently, a large portion of the college fees that grad students pay goes to the GSA. Funding will therefore be an ongoing issue, which the GSA will need to address in the future.
- A question was posed concerning whether there are proposed cuts to funding for Arts programs.
 - Most Arts programs at Trent do not directly provide funding for their students, but Trent provides guaranteed roughly \$13000. Reducing this would affect the quality and type of students the Arts program receives and the Dean will not endorse it. Funding for the Arts is different from funding in the Sciences. SSHRC grants tend to be smaller than NSERC and not ongoing. Therefore, faculty in the Sciences must provide additional funding to the GTAs, while the University provides additional funding to Arts students.
- Trent University's current financial situation:
 - There is currently some debate as to whether or not the graduate program at Trent is financially sustainable. Costs of GTAs can be attributed in part to both Undergraduate and Graduate budgets, though the actual distribution of these costs is unclear. Teaching of graduate courses is another key cost because faculty teaching these courses are usually senior and so are paid higher salaries.
 - Tuition fees
 - Why are graduate tuition levels higher than that of undergraduates, since graduate students do not take as many courses and seem to require fewer University resources? Traditionally, graduate tuition fees have been higher because the rewards are higher (i.e. you get more out of a graduate degree than an undergraduate degree). Also, at the provincial level, graduate tuition fees have been permitted to increase faster than undergraduate tuition fees
 - A question was posed about the current situation of the Dean of art and sciences also serving as the V.P. Academic, essentially creating a conflict of interest in authority because she is her own boss. This situation will hopefully change soon after the new president takes over.
 - Will there be continued cuts to small universities? There has been some discussion of providing more funding to large universities for graduate programs, which would likely create a two-tiered system of "research" and "teaching" schools. The expansion has shown that most successful small universities have gone ahead with expansion. Even if the funding is not secure, these schools are then in a better position to justify a need for further funding.
- Course reductions

- There is not a lot of room for reductions. A suggestion was made to conduct a survey to determine interest in courses or combining courses together. A Canadian Graduate Student Satisfaction survey was conducted two years ago, with another one planned for next year. This survey is very helpful, but if the GSA wanted to conduct a survey, it would be welcomed. Graduate students can only take one undergraduate course, due to a provincial rule that states no more than 1/3 of graduate courses be at the undergraduate level. The newly reduced course requirement for Ph.D. students leaves no undergrad course options.
- Course-based masters
 - Trent University has three course only options in Canadian Studies, History, and English. There will likely be more support for course-based masters in the future.
- Corporate sponsorship
 - Fundraising has been vigorous lately in terms of graduate funding. Consider the Centres of knowledge proposal that ties together areas of environment, humanity and culture, people and communities, and health. There is a lot of support generated from this funding.

1. VP Operations

- a. Approve Minutes – March 2, 2009 and Spring GM meeting

Motion by Katy to approve minutes March 2, 2009

Seconded: Andrea

Approved: 5

Abstentions: 2

Motion passed

Motion by Katy to approve minutes of Spring GM

Seconded: Jenn

Approved: 5

Abstentions: 2

Motion passed

2. President

- a. Traill College Council
 - i. TCC would like to create an award for a graduating graduate student, and they require guidelines. Any recommendations should be sent to Andrea. In general, it should be a student that is graduating in Sept., Dec., or Apr. so the award is not limited to just spring graduating students. Also it should include community or non-academic guidelines.
- b. Discrimination and harassment policy – everyone was advised to read the e-mail that Andrea sent out.
- c. Charter
 - i. The Charter was approved by the Board of Governors at Friday's meeting, and it will come into effect in September
 - ii. An e-mail was sent out with the latest revisions to the charter. Revisions were passed and will go into effect in September.

d. Meeting with new president

- i. Report back; Andrea, Lynette, Jenn, Josh, John, Allison attended. Discussion mostly surrounded the future of graduate studies at the university. The new president seems extremely interested in working with the GSA, and is in great support of graduate students. One issue of concern is that he is very much in favour of corporate sponsorship, which contradicts Trent's general outlook. However, he seemed amenable to this sentiment. He would also like to return Trent's focus to academics rather than finances.

3. VP Executive Affairs

a. CASSC

- i. transportation issue. Bus passes will increase from \$200 to \$236. Students are currently subsidizing the costs of staff bus rides, which are incorporated into their benefits package. CUPE is working with human resources to resolve this issue.
- ii. Overall the budget has increased, and confusing debate arose about what percentage of budget should be devoted to different areas, such as snow removal.

b. Elections/Referendum

4. VP Finance

a. SAF

i. Wellness

1. A \$1.50 increase was already approved for the wellness budget; however, at CASSC it was suggested that the fund be increased even more. The wellness committee said that they could not use extra money: they do not have space for additional counsellors, and they already have an emergency fund. The issue was still pushed forward, and wellness must return with a revised budget.

ii. Transportation

1. When the transportation budget goes to CASSC, CASSC will already be dissolved. The incoming GSA will likely have to resolve the transportation budget.

- b. Letter – feedback was good. A copy of the letter has been appended below.

Motion by Nina to have the GSA support the letter she drafted regarding provincial funding for graduate students at universities in Ontario.

Seconded: Josh

In favour: unanimous

Motion passed

5. VP Communications

- a. Website: files are up but they are old because cannot be changed. Hopefully this will be sorted out soon.

6. Senator

- b-a. Traill cabinet has dissolved. Their two seats on Senate can be redistributed to other cabinets/associations..

Motion by Colin that GSA seeks one of the two Traill College senate seats, with the remaining Traill undergraduate students retaining one of the current seats.

Seconded: Allison

In favour: Unanimous

Motion passed

~~6.7.~~ VPs Student Affairs

a. April

- i. Spring fling – Saturday Apr 4. Volunteers are needed to help decorate. Food donations or \$2. Also there will be a raffle to win a basket including \$20 sunrise café gift certificate, GSA merchandise, and Easter chocolates.

8. CUPE rep

- a. CUPE will have a general meeting on Tues, April 7th at 7 pm at the Trend. The board has ratified the collective agreement and there will be back-pay on March GTA checks.

- b. CUPE, TUFA, and OPSEU are working on a coalition to discuss the current economic state among other things.

~~b.c.~~ Undergraduate markers received a pay increase from \$9 to \$13.

7.9. Sub-committee reports back

a. Constitution (Jenn, Katy, Lynette)

- i. Accumulated funds spending information – meeting was running late so this issue was not discussed.

b. Health Care (Allison, Jean, Josh)

c. Student funding, fees, tuition (Tom - Chair, Vladimir, Jean, Colin, John)

d. Symon's Series (Tom) – 56 tickets for the Gala have been sold so far. The last series is this Wednesday, April 1st.

~~8.10.~~ Next meeting

- a. Exec meeting – Tuesday April 14, 2009 – 4-6pm, Traill SCR. Turnover details will be discussed. Please send Andrea agenda items for the turnover meetings.

- b. Turnover meeting – Monday April 20, 2009 – 4-6pm, Champlain Senior Common Room.

~~9.11.~~ Other business

- a. GSA merch (Allison) – what about GSA exec getting free merchandise? This will be decided at the next meeting when cost is confirmed.

- b. Allison's letter – letter concerning recently discussed changes to graduate student programs, addressed to Christine McKinnon, V.P. Academic and Dean of Arts and Science. The letter will be edited according to feedback received and a final version will be presented at the next meeting of the Academic Planning Committee.

Motion to have GSA endorse letter written by Allison to Dr. McKinnon outlining concerns GSA has regarding grad student funding, pending minor revisions.

Seconded: Katy

In favour: unanimous

Motion passed

Motion by Katy to adjourn

Seconded: Andrea

In favour: unanimous

Meeting adjourned

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DRAFT letter regarding provincial funding for graduate students at universities in Ontario

March 23, 2009

«AddressBlock»

I am writing today on behalf of the Trent Graduate Students' Association to ask you, our local representative in parliament, to call out to your party and the house to recognize the dire need which Ontario Universities are currently in. While many would point to the recession as the problem, it is clearly not the case as our schools have been accumulating in-year deficits for more than two years, which have turned into large accumulated deficits.

There are three very good reasons to support education in Canada and specifically Ontario:

1. Net Tuition decreases can mean a gain in equity for families in the provinceⁱ

Net Tuition can be reduced in Ontario by the addition of greater tax relief to families and individuals in the form of income tax rebates. Ontario's average net tuition is one of the highest in the country – not due to the fact that tuition in our province is the highest, but because we offer the lowest tax relief. Please consider easing burdens on families and individuals during this time of economic stress by implementing an improved tax relief system that is on par with the other Provinces in our Country.

2. Increasing funding to Universities for infrastructure and for education will create jobs, improve class sizes and yield a greater quality of education for studentsⁱⁱ

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association represents about 15,000 faculty and academic librarians, and is urging the Liberal government to spend \$1.5 billion in the coming year on higher education in its budget on Thursday. Close to 2,000 faculty members and academic librarians at 22 universities across the province responded to the association's questionnaire. More than 60 per cent said class sizes had increased over the past three years, while 22 per cent said full-time faculty who had left their posts were not replaced.ⁱⁱⁱ The Trent Graduate Student Association supports their cause and also urges the liberal government to consider education in their budget on Thursday.

3. Educating students means long-term stability in our economy and promotes economic growth.

An educated population contributes to the long-term economic growth of a society. The Rae report presents evidence that currently there are barriers in Ontario to post-secondary education, including income, aboriginal status, language, and to those with disabilities.^{iv} By providing these currently disenfranchised individuals with equal access to a quality education and

increasing the quality of our education to all of our students, Ontario will create a large and powerful workforce.

As a current Graduate Students involved in studies, research and teaching, we feel that we understand the importance Ontario's Universities to the development of technology and the contribution of culture and arts to the overall pulse of the province and country in a unique way. This is because we are able to interact with our youth and tomorrow's leaders, help to shape their knowledge while hearing their distinctive perspectives. By fuelling the fire of Ontario's Universities, our government will be lighting the sparks of future financial force.

ⁱ Usher, Alex, and Duncan, Patrick (2008). Beyond the Sticker Shock: A Closer Look at Canadian Tuition Fees. Toronto, ON: Educational Policy Institute.

ⁱⁱ Profs fret that quality of university education in Ontario falling. The Canadian Press, March 22, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Profs fret that quality of university education in Ontario falling. The Canadian Press, March 22, 2009.

^{iv} The Honorable Bob Rae. Ontario: A Leader in Learning, Report and Recommendations. February 2005.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Denina Simmons,
2008-2010 Trent GSA Vice President of Finance
Trent Graduate Students' Association