



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the President
May 2016

Dear Councilors,

In my first week as the president, I had extensive consultations with the Equity Office, Human Rights Office, and the Chair of Senate Educational Equity Committee, as well as our executive team and executive director, about the needs of students with disabilities. I had a chance to present the results of these consultations to the Board of Trustees on its May 6th meeting, focusing on current policies on accommodations, low number of SGS embedded counsellors, and limited or no wheelchair accessibility in over 25% of campus buildings. I also pointed out that in the operational budget submitted to the Board for next year, the amount allocated to solve these problems does not seem to be enough.

I also attended a meeting with Kingston Transit, mostly focused on transit between the West campus and Main campus. While this doesn't affect most of our members, I would be happy to hear if there are any specific concerns needed to be communicated to the City, on this issue.

In the second week, so far, I have attended a meeting of aboriginal council, where I learned about queen's initiatives for better representation of aboriginal history and culture, and participated in an education exercise about effects of colonialism on the aboriginal peoples.

The executive had a chance to introduce ourselves to the incoming provost and highlight the areas that we are hoping to focus on for the next year.

I have also met with the principal and the incoming provost, to discuss two important issues: time to completion for graduate students, and student-supervisor or student-faculty relations. These conversations are at the preliminary state and we are hoping to develop a better mutual understanding of these issues from the perspective of both the students and university, over the summer.

I have put these on our agenda for my meeting with the Dean of School of Graduate Studies for next week as well, to receive an update for on what SGS has done in the past to tackle these issues.

Over the summer, I'm hoping to be able to gather the relevant data to present to the Office of Provost. Parts of these necessary data are already available through surveys by the SGS. We need to additionally run some independent research. It would be of great help if the Councilors can speak to the importance of participation in this research, to their constituency.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Respectfully,

Saba Farbodkia
President, SGPS
president@sgps.ca



Hi all,

Thank you for taking interest in your society's governance and allowing me to represent you as your Vice President Graduate for the upcoming academic year. This year's executive is committed to:

1) Improving internal structures within the SGPS to provide out membership as fairly as possible

2) Increasing transparency and communicating effectively with our members

3) Increasing access and quality of student support services

We are currently working on our year goal plans and are planning to release a cohesive, executive plan so that council is aware of our goals for the year and can hold us accountable to them.

Here are some specific updates from the VPG portfolio:

Student Advisor Program

- Applications are now closed. We have received 26 applications for 3 positions and are in the process of hiring our next round of student advisors.
- There has been some talk of rebranding the program. This would hopefully serve to increase awareness of what the program offers. We would love to hear your feedback in regards to this.
- On Wednesday May 4, Pam Asselstine (Dir. Logistics) and I, attended welcome day for the incoming education students to promote the program and SGPS services. On Saturday May 7, Jeremy Butler (student advisor), Tabasum Akseer (student advisor), and I attended the education student's mental health breakfast to further promote the program.

Board of Trustees

- Saba Farbodkia, Stuart Clark, and I all attended open sessions for board of trustees on Friday May 6. Saba made an impressive opening speech to board about the importance of bettering student support services and advocating for marginalized students. Last Monday May 9, we met with the incoming provost Benoit-Antoine Bacon and will be holding monthly meetings with the new provost throughout the year.

Graduate Student Life Advisory Group (GSLAG)

- Last Wednesday May 4, GSLAG met to discuss various issues surrounding graduate student life. One item of discussion was how we could better supporting students requiring academic accommodations from the university. At Queen's, Student Wellness Services provides documentation to students to present to their supervisors which outline the academic accommodations required by the student. Although supervisors are expected to comply with the documentation, having students present documentation on their own behalf can sometimes be uncomfortable, and embarrassing, especially if the supervisor is keen to know extensive details regarding the student's disability or personally disagrees with the accommodations given.
- I am hoping to follow the lead of other universities such as UWO, which give the student the option of presenting required accommodations on their own behalf OR *having the accessibility office present the required*

accommodations to supervisors on the student's behalf. I presented this issue to GSLAG and received the impression that they thought changing our current system is unnecessary. To follow up on this, I am looking to better understand this accessibility issue and provide factual evidence that this problem exists. If you or someone you know has had difficulties with the current process of obtaining academic accommodations for their disability, please pass along my email (vp.graduate@sgps.ca). All information will remain confidential and be treated sensitively.

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Networking Opportunities for Graduate Students

- Have been in conversation with Cathy Keates from Career Services on ways we can be better connecting graduate students to young professionals in their fields of interest.

It's been a fun 10 days in the role! Really hoping to have a lot of great conversations and discussions with you throughout these upcoming months.

Regards,

Sebastian Gorlewski

PS- Big shout out to Kyle Curlew for planning some awesome social events and always enthusiastically performing his role. Check out his BBQ at the Grad Club next week.



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Vice President Professional
May 2016

Hello SGPS Council Members,

I would first like to say how excited I am to be a part of the 2016/2017 SGPS Executive. In the past two months I have gotten to know the incoming executive better and can report that we have a truly motivated group, and I am excited to see all that we can accomplish. I would also like to sincerely thank the outgoing VPP, Mark Asfar, who had an excellent term and I would like to extend thanks for all that he has done for the SGPS and for assisting me during my transition period.

For those of you whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting, I would like to formally introduce myself. I'm Kishan Lakhani, and I just completed my first year of law school. This past year I served as the Class of 2018 LSS President, and was an Executive member on numerous clubs and societies. I also was a host for Pro Bono Radio on CFRC. Previously, I studied at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom where I graduated with an MPharm (Master of Pharmacy). During my time in Manchester, I served as Events Chair for the Manchester University Pharmaceutical Society, was a Project Coordinator for Sexpression UK Sexual Health Testing, and served as Vice-President of the Manchester Debating Union. I believe my experience in my past endeavors will allow me to serve the SGPS membership diligently, and I am excited to make a positive impact on the SGPS.

In the first ten days of my term, I have been focusing on evaluating the SGPS services we offer to ascertain what has been operating exceptionally, and what services could improve the experience of the SGPS membership in the coming year. As part of my campaign, I promised to focus on improving services the SGPS offered with regards to professional development and mentorship to allow for greater support for graduates in both graduate and professional degrees. As part of this effort, I will be working with the VP Graduate, Sebastian Gorlewski, to build a network of mentors who are recent graduates from Queen's programs under the SGPS. These mentors will then hopefully be able to provide guidance and support for the membership with their respective programs, as well as career development and networking. I am very excited about establishing such a program, and will continue to update council as the program develops. I also look to continue the excellent work my predecessor has done with streamlining operations through the use of policy, and working to build a greater networking community throughout the SGPS membership.

Finally, I would like to say that I look forward to working with all of council and representing the membership's best interests. You can expect to hear more about my initiatives later into the summer, but in the meantime, feel free to contact me if you have any questions, or would like to discuss any other ideas you wish to explore. Until then, have an excellent few months until the next council meeting!

Cheers,

Kishan Lakhani
Vice-President Professional
Vp.professional@sgps.ca



Council Members,

It is a pleasure to provide our first report to Council for the 2016-2017 SGPS Executive. I know I speak on behalf of the rest of our executive when I express that we are excited for the opportunity to work together in the coming year. Over the past three weeks, our Executive Team has undergone a rigorous transition into our new portfolios, and we look forward to codifying and presenting our goal plans for the coming year when Council returns in later in the summer. With that in mind, I want to flag a few outstanding issues/ongoing projects for your attention:

Online Bursary and Grant System

In accordance with the new Bylaw and Policy changes to the Grants and Bursaries system, the SGPS has moved to a more accessible, more flexible online application system. The immediate advantage of the system is faster processing speed for applications and greater flexibility for students to amend bursary applications after submission with the required information.

Measurement of Student Needs for Better SGPS Advocacy

Our executive has identified the SGPS's ability to measure student advocacy concerns as a major area of weakness for the organization. We are exploring a range of options to better quantify student priorities and measure important issues to improve the ability for the SGPS to advocate on behalf of its constituents, including focus group testing, greater use of member surveys and regular data collection from SGPS services.

SGPS Strategic Framework and Operational Review

We have begun the process of conducting an internal review of our financial and operational controls. The goal of this will be to establish new, more transparent procedures that apply to everything from office equipment procurement, the signing of cheques, and the budgeting process. In the long term, these improvements will make our organization's finances easier to manage and make executives more accountable to members for SGPS spending.

Student Fee Policy Review

The Finance and Services Standing Committee will be undergoing a review of the SGPS student fee policy in accordance with the mandate granted at the April General Meeting. Our permanent staff are hard at work collecting the necessary background information and reports required to begin this rigorous deliberative process. I look forward to delivering the full report once we have completed this process.

As always, I am free to take your questions.

Respectively Submitted,

Stuart Clark
Vice President (Finance & Services)
Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS)
vp.finance@sgps.ca



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the VP Campaigns & Community Affairs
May 2016

The first few weeks as VPCC have been pretty quiet, considering I am currently conducting research in Russia. However I was able to communicate with and participate in the annual Provost's Advisory Committee for the promotion of the Arts, contributing towards the adjudication of grant money to a number of strong applicants. I also started work on collaborating with the International Student Commissioner and the QUIC, as well as Andria, to develop ways to better integrate international student needs and interests into both regular orientation week and other start times, including January and May. I am looking forward to working further on this project upon my return and appreciate any feedback international students can provide on what they would like to see done differently during Orientation Week this September.

-Anastasiya



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Council Speaker
May 2016

Hello Council,

As I have been in office for less than two weeks at the time of this writing, I will be brief. My work thus far has been primarily focused on administrative tasks such as preparing the Agenda for this month's meeting, compiling reports, etc. I have also been gathering the records of past council meetings and general meetings so that I can have them transferred onto the new website as quickly as possible. If all goes well they should all be available on the website by the time you are reading this. Having said that, I will be making an effort to post the most recent documents first and work backwards in time, so that if the process goes slower than expected the documents most likely to be relevant to you and our members will be available soonest. Other than that, my time has largely been spent familiarizing myself with both Robert's Rules and the SGPS Bylaws and Policies. I expect to have a more detailed report in August, once I have had time to settle into the role.

Respectfully submitted,
Travis Skippon
SGPS Speaker
speaker@sgps.ca



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Graduate Student Senator
May 2016

(no report submitted)



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Trustee
May 2016

(no report submitted)



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Athletics Commissioner
May 2016

(no report submitted)



Dear SGPS Members,

Unfortunately I will not be in attendance at this month's Council meeting, as I am away in Vancouver. However, if you have any questions or comments about my report that can't be answered by someone else at the meeting, please feel free to email me directly. Here are some updates from my portfolio:

SGPS Indigenous Art Initiative

At last month's Council meeting, a motion was passed that tasks the SGPS with sourcing locally-made Indigenous art for our office spaces here on campus. I will be leading this initiative in the upcoming months with the help of the Finance Standing Committee, the Executive, Council, and the Equity Issues Standing Committee.

SGPS Equity Strategic Plan

Over the course of this summer, the Equity Issues Standing Committee will be putting together an Equity Strategic Plan for the SGPS. This will align us with similar plans that are being adopted by the AMS, the ASUS, and other campus bodies. We will provide updates to Council on the progress of this project before presenting it to Council towards the end of the summer. We will also be soliciting input from the membership in regards to what they would like to see in the strategic plan. Please contact me if you would like to get involved or if you have any contributions you would like to make.

Equity Issues Standing Committee

The Equity Issues Standing Committee has received an overwhelming amount of interest from SGPS members who want to join the committee. Over the next couple of weeks I will contact those individuals who expressed interest to me directly and we will begin our work together in the near future. Thank you everyone for your interest and commitment to equity and diversity.

Commission Review Final Report

The final report of the Commission Review, a sub-committee of the HR Standing Committee, will be presented at this month's Council meeting. I want to thank and congratulate the members of this sub-committee for their commitment and service to producing this detailed and extensive report. I look forward to seeing how the findings and the recommendations from this report will be turned into policy and practice.

Non-departmental Seats Review

The Equity Issues Standing Committee will be reviewing the non-departmental seats on Council to ensure that they are being fully utilized in the best way possible. If you have any feedback on what changes you would like to see, if any, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Erica Baker
Equity & Diversity Commissioner



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the International Student's Affairs Commissioner
May 2016

Hello SGPS Council Members,

I have been working on putting together a "Welcome Package" for International students joining Queen's Fall 2016 onwards. For the purpose of this project, the International Students' Standing Committee is looking for members who are willing to work together in:

- Identifying interests, needs and concerns of international graduate and professional students at Queen's;
- Voicing opinions and ideas on the possible improvements and making recommendations to the International Students' Commissioner

I wish to bring the interested members together as a "Summer Working Group" to plan an all inclusive orientation package along with QUIC and the School of Graduate Studies. I have already met with QUIC's Director and members of the GSLAG committee to discuss their possible contribution which adds great value to the project. The group will also take the lead in planning fun gatherings, events and trips for international students and their families during the summer. Volunteers for this committee will attend biweekly meetings and enjoy the full benefits of being a member of the International Students' Standing Committee. If interested, please email me at [**international@sgps.ca**](mailto:international@sgps.ca)

My request is for the representatives and members of the Council to spread the word among the international graduate students across different departments. The turn out has been very week so far but I am hoping the Council member's support will aid in completing this project.

Please feel free to contact me for any suggestions and ideas that would improve our overall performance.

Best Regards
Sara SidAhmed
International Students' Affairs Commissioner

international@sgps.ca



Dear members of council,

It has been an absolute honor to engage with the Social Commission and the Social Event Standing Committee (SESC). Since my last report, quite a lot has happened. I will try my best to sum it up for you. The SESC has been formed, had its first meeting, and has begun hosting events. We have decided to meet monthly and do much of our work over a Facebook group. This group can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/209280279441933/>. If you are interested in keeping up to date with our happenings or volunteering—please feel free to join us. The committee has decided to run on a consensus model in order to effectively crowd source our ideas for events. We also decided to meet just before the start of a new month to agree on the details of the next months events.

After our first meeting we decided the May month events. This included a board game night on May 9th, titled, “Dice & Conquest” at SBT Comics. A successfully fun night. A BBQ mixer on May 14th at the Grad Club (<https://www.facebook.com/events/866507340144292/>). And finally a Science Fiction themed costume party, disco, and speed meeting event at the Grad Club on May 27th. This event does not have advertising yet. We have hired Studio Q to do a really awesome sci-fi themed poster. I will advertise this event as widely as possible once we get the poster (p.s. you should come, there is a costume prize!!).

The Social Commission is hiring Social Event Facilitators. We have hit the deadline and extended it so that we could attempt to get more applicants. I will report on the success of this endeavor at the August meeting.

Myself, and our lovely office staff, have pretty well booked orientation week. In addition to the regular orientation events, we will be pulling off an LGBTQ* themed and friendly mixer at the Grad Club—titled, The Glitter Manifest. We also successfully booked Portsmouth Harbor for the Semi-Formal. Things are looking to be exciting.

As you may have noticed, I have submitted a motion to council. This motion is quite important to the Social Commission. There is a reason behind this. When I came into this role as Social Commissioner all I had to go on was the previous commissioners year plan and final report to council. This was very helpful. However, it left a lot to the imagination. I have been collecting files, plans, and event documents in a folder on my personal computer. My proposal is to insert a new role into the Social Commissioners job description to mandate that they keep this file up to date, on a thumb drive, and pass it down to the next Social commissioner in the transition period. This would create an important institutional memory. It will also save all my hard work in this position for review with the next commission. I hope this motion is to your liking.

Finally, on the Special Awards Committee front—I have been working on policy changes that will now be reviewed and further worked upon at the Executive Committee. I am incredibly interested in adding awards that have an Equity and Diversity focus. These awards, pending their review, should encourage students from all social and cultural groups to get involved in the community. They are unfortunately not yet ready for review with council. However, we need councilors (three to be exact), to get involved in the committee. If you are interested in honoring the great work of our members—please get in touch (social@sgps.ca). I would be happy to have you. This committee will be involved in reviewing policy, advertising awards, and deciding awards based on the nomination forms.

Unfortunately, I am away to Montreal for a conference and will be unable to attend the May meeting of council. I am very sorry about this. If there are any questions about the motion I have submitted—please email me. I hope that everything is to your liking.

I will see you at the SGPS social events in the future.

Best regards,
Kyle Curlew,
Social Commissioner, SGPS.



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the University Rector
May 2016

(no report submitted)



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Chief Returning Officer
May 2016

(no report submitted)

2015 - 2016

SGPS Commission Review Report

Commission Review Committee

Queen's University

May 10, 2016

SGPS Commission Review Committee Members

Nimrat Shergill, Master of Industrial Relations Candidate

Catherine Wright, Master of Industrial Relations Candidate

Marsha Rampersaud, Master of Arts Candidate

Fate Mayanloo, Master of Public Administration Candidate

Mathieu Crupi, PhD Candidate in Pathology and Molecular Medicine

Cavina Tsoi, Master of Industrial Relations Candidate (Commission Review Chair)

Erica Baker, Master of Kinesiology and Health Studies (Equity & Diversity

Commissioner, Ex Officio Member)

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Introduction

The Commission Review Committee was created in January 2016, comprised of six graduate students, and one ex officio member to conduct a review into the commission structure of the Society of Graduate and Professional Students. The subcommittee was created in response to criticisms and concerns voiced by members of the SGPS regarding the changes made in the Fall of 2015. From January 2016 to May 2016, the subcommittee members conducted an analysis comprised of: interviews, email communications, internal policy comparisons, and external policy comparisons. A summary of the commission review committee's findings, and recommendations are presented in this report.

Timeline of October 2015 Changes to Commission Structure

October 14, Email Thread: Mark Asfar to Eric Rapos

On October 14, Mark Asfar, VP Professional, sent an email to Eric Rapos, Council Speaker, stating that he was looking to restructure the SGPS Commission and Coordinator structure. He was requesting guidance from Mr. Rapos in terms of policy requirements and timeline of this potential restructuring. The email acknowledged that hiring was supposed to take place in a month. Mr. Rapos noted that there was no way to restructure in time without violating by-law or policy requirements, though he acknowledged that past practices have indeed led previous teams to operate outside of by-laws and policies. It was clarified that, while commissioners and coordinators exist in by-laws, specific positions are outlined in policy, meaning that an emergency meeting of council could hypothetically be called to revise positions. Moreover, an emergency council meeting could potentially approve an extension to the required hiring date of November 1st, as well as an extension of contracts for existing commissioners. This is ultimately the course of action that was chosen. This committee has found that the decisions were mildly rushed, without significant consultation, and poorly communicated. Though, it was clear that members of the Executive were under significant pressure due to a changeover in Executive Directors and resulting lack of support. While no concrete explanation was found with regard to Mr. Asfar's motive for restructuring the commissions, the committee finds that the changes brought forward were likely well-intentioned, and made in an honest effort to ensure policy reflects the reality of the society's operations.

October 16, Executive Meeting Minutes

Excerpt:

(Mark Asfar, VP Professional): SGPS Commission hiring and review has hit a speed bump. I will be revising SGPS policy this weekend and there will be an emergency council meeting in about two weeks to accept new commission changes, and the removal of coordinators.

This halt was presumably caused by the review of policy which led Mr. Asfar to reach out to Mr. Rapos.

By all information made available to this committee, it appears that these decisions surrounding hiring and policy changes were made unilaterally by Mr. Asfar. While this may not have been the case, the rushed nature of the changes led to a lack of transparency in process and general mistrust from students.

October 23, Executive Meeting Minutes

Excerpt:

(Mark Asfar, VP Professional): Informed staff about HR and structural changes and everyone is on board. Social is very concerned about the changes and have requested a meeting for Monday. The main thread is that policy does not reflect reality.

Recommendations for Further Policy Implementation

1. Commissioners, as well as staff and volunteers generally, should be at minimum notified and ideally consulted before policy changes are brought forward affecting their contract or the future of the positions. While this committee does not see fit to provide prescriptive recommendations in this regard, the executive or HR Standing Committee should develop a plan for shifting the internal management culture to be more communicative and consultative with staff.
2. The SGPS Executive and Council should strive to be democratic, transparent, and accountable in decisions which affect student employees and volunteers, as well as students at large. Decisions should not be made without reflecting on the impact to students and staff, nor should they ever be arbitrary, or appear as such. Where an executive member wishes to make changes in policy, councillors, staff, volunteers, and members at large should have access to adequate information necessary to understand the reasoning for such changes, and raise concerns as they see fit.
3. It is clear from the interview respondents that the changes and possibility of rehire were not made clear enough. Communication streams need to be strengthened to ensure issues such as this do not arise in the future, and this could be achieved with regular monthly update meetings.

SGPS Interview Portion of Report

Method & Objective

In this portion of the report, we will look at the feedback of present and past SGPS members and staff. The Commission Review Committee conducted seven interviews with various members willing to give their feedback regarding the changes that were made at the end of 2015 (October), as well as the current commission structure as it stands today.

The structure of the commission according to policy was altered in a special meeting in October of 2015 (see report, and meeting notes on SGPS website). These concerns were the catalyst for the formation of the Commission Review, due to the outburst from several individuals criticizing the lack of transparency in the changes (ref: Journal article). The objective of this Commission Review Committee is to review, and to provide recommendation to improve the commission structure.

The individuals interviewed were solicited through email due to their past or present positions, as well as through voluntary submission through an online survey that gave responders the option to provide further information through an interview with the Commission Review Committee. The survey responses will be discussed in a separate section of this report. All interviews were conducted by the chair of the Commission Review Committee (Cavina Tsoi) to ensure concentration of the knowledge provided by the interviews, and supported by various other members of the committee.

The interview focused on a few key areas: the recent implementation of changes to the commission structure, the commission structure as it stands currently, as well as suggestions and areas of particular concern of the interviewees.

Analysis

Implementation of Changes – October 2015

A common complaint was found over several of the interviews regarding the implementation of the changes in late 2015. Interviewees across the board found that there was a lack of transparency and involvement regarding these changes. The interviewees who were most affected by the changes of the commission structure felt undervalued and barred from contributing any kind of opinion either before or after the implementation of the changes.

Most of the respondents were notified of the changes post-implementation, whether through a mass email of the council agenda, online special meeting notes, or through attendance of special October meeting. Many also voiced concerns regarding the lack of clarity regarding the changes and thought them to be unclear. In particular, a few individuals were unsure whether there was an opportunity to reapply for their positions after these changes. Overall, all individuals in affected positions felt job insecurity and were disappointed by the lack of information provided by the executives regarding these changes.

Commission Structure – Present

In regards to the actual structure of the commission, the responses have both negative and positive. When looking at the negative responses, it's quite clear that most of the problems stemmed from a lack of communication between executives and the commission alike. Several responses found a lack of executive involvement in commission activities, and vice versa. This is further supported by the lack of foreknowledge from commissioners of the previously mentioned structural changes. The commissioners found that there was an overall "hands-off" approach from executives that stifled the efficiency of the commissions. While there is more autonomy given to the commissions after the changes, many of the end decisions - such as budgeting allowances, and posting job vacancies – still lie within the power of the executive board. The hands-off approach taken is found to be unproductive, inefficient, and discouraging to commission members whom lack access to be truly independent.

The recent changes have given the commissions more power, but without the support from executives, they are left feeling undervalued and helpless. Consistently, responses have shown that although more autonomy is a positive attribute for the health of the commission, the lack of training and experience may stifle commission operations. In particular, the new changes to the structure have given commissioners more responsibility to manage their own human resource activities such as hiring and salary determinations. However, due to a lack of actual management experience, and human resource training, many have voiced concerns of potential problems for commissioners to make fair and just decisions. Additionally, with the additional weight of needing to hire and fill these positions on their own, the events and activities normally run have become an afterthought as the commissioners do not have enough resources to fulfill hiring, management, as well as planning activities and events on their own.

Some positive feedback from multiple interviewees was in regards to the ability of commissioners to hire more coordinators than before. This is especially useful in commissions that require more work due to the nature of their work. Many found this

to give commissioners to have more autonomy to decide what to make of their commissions. However, some voiced the possibility of nepotism, as commissioners now have enough power to dictate who is chosen in hiring.

The policy requiring past commissioners to reapply for their jobs (alike a new applicant), received mixed responses. While some found that was a positive change and allowed for new talent to be cultivated, some found it to be counter-productive for already effective commission teams.

Suggestions from Interviewees

The interviews have provided some key suggestions on what changes to implement with most mentioning increasing communication with the executives as a key necessity. Without the commissioners asking for a meeting, the executives rarely come into contact with the commissions.

Another suggestion is to make changes to the hiring process. As of right now, the process is too lengthy and does not allow the commissions to focus on their objectives. The commissioners are required to submit a plan, undergo the hiring process, before being able to have a team to plan the events for the year. This has caused all commissions to suffer, which is reflected in the lack of events provided this past year (2015-2016).

Interviewees have also voiced concerns with the process of hiring and training new commissioners. For new commissioners, the period it takes for them to learn the duties of the job is too lengthy. Unlike the SGPS executives, the commissioners do not have a transition period in place. Therefore, it would be useful to implement a transition period for commissioners to shorten the time new incumbents need to learn their role.

There have also been concerns regarding budgeting issues. Since commissioners are not given explicit budgets, planning events were very difficult, and unnecessarily tedious. Commissioners must plan the event, then ask the executive director to ensure sufficient funds to plan the event. This cycle could sometimes repeat several times depending on circumstances. Additionally, the interviewees found the lack of discussion on how budgeting decisions were made to be very discouraging and confusing. The Executive should endeavour to make the process surrounding budgeting clear to commissioners early in their terms, so that they can plan accordingly.

Internal Analysis

Internal Comparator - The Alma Mater Society

Method

A subcommittee of the Commission Review Committee undertook a comparison of the undergraduate student government at Queen's, the Alma Mater Society (AMS). The AMS has six commissions which aim to provide programming to members, and advocate for students' interests towards university administrators, municipal and provincial government. As this organization is familiar to many on campus, our review and recommendations will be brief.

Analysis

Academic Affairs Commission

- Advocates internally toward the university on academic issues facing members, as well as the provincial government through the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
- Provides volunteer opportunities through internal committees and the Academic Grievance Centre
 - Comparable roles are President and VP Graduate.

Campus Activities Commission

- Includes Orientation Roundtable, as well as two internally run orientation weeks.
- Runs events and activities in-house to the Commission (Queen's Model Parliament, Queen's Model United Nations, etc.), and offers support and resources to other campus events. Largest volunteer base in the AMS
- Represents students at SOARB and toward Athletics & Recreation.
 - Comparable is the Social Commissioner, as well as Athletics Commissioner

Commission of the Environment & Sustainability

- Runs Bikes & Boards shop, and various program-based committees
- Facilitates the AMS portion of the Sustainability Action Fund
 - Comparable is the now-defunct Sustainability Commission

Commission of Internal Affairs

- Coordinates AMS Assembly alongside the speaker, maintains governing policies, oversees the Judicial Affairs Office (at arm's length), as well as the clubs Office
 - Not under Commission purview in the SGPS

Municipal Affairs Commission

- Advocates externally toward the City of Kingston, as well as nearby neighbourhood associations
- Internally runs 6 program-based committees operating in the Kingston community, as well as the Housing Resource Centre for students.
- Oversees the Holiday/Summer Housecheck service, as well as the Student Maintenance and Resource Team.
 - Comparable roles are President and VP Campaigns & Community Affairs

Social Issues Commission

- Oversees 11 internal committees in the areas of seeking to promote awareness and education on human rights and social issues, including a yearly publication
 - Also runs the Peer Support Centre and Food Bank
 - Comparable to Equity & Diversity Commissioner

Recently, the AMS commission structure underwent a short review,¹ which results in minor changes at the volunteer level of all commissions, and a major restructuring of the Commission of Internal Affairs (dissolving the commission). Largely, the CIA is comparable the Officer of Council roles in the SGPS.

Transition Periods

The AMS, like many other student governments, has staff transition periods which span longer than a month in order to ensure a smooth changeover of staff. Currently, this is during the last two months of a commissioner's term, where the incoming commissioner shadows the outgoing and is paid an honorarium contingent upon

¹ AMS Assembly Meeting Agenda, January 14, 2016

meeting specific learning outcomes of the transition. This can be done by determining a set number of transition hours, or by successfully mastering the knowledge and functions required for the job as measured by something as simple as a checklist.

External Analysis

External Comparators: Alberta, UBC, Calgary, McGill, SFU, UofT, Waterloo, UWO

Method

The Commission Review Committee struck a subcommittee comprised of three members to review graduate student government policy and procedure documents from other major Canadian universities, including University of Alberta (Alberta), University of British Columbia (UBC), University of Calgary (Calgary), McGill University (McGill), Simon Fraser University (SFU), University of Toronto (UofT), University of Waterloo (Waterloo), and University of Western Ontario (UWO). The subcommittee compiled data on organizational structure, reporting procedure, hiring and dismissal practice, and the process by which policy and by-laws are amended at each of these eight institutions. Many similarities were found between institutions; noteworthy findings are summarized below.

Analysis: Reporting Structure

Organizational Structure

The organizational structures of graduate student societies of the institutions which were examined were all relatively similar when considering key positions. All societies were comprised of a general council of elected representatives, elected executives, and various committees, commissions and/or caucuses of council. However, the societies varied in the number of executive members, responsibilities and titles of roles and the compositions of the committees.

A significant responsibility of the commissioners, which was common among most societies, was the requirement of regular written reports to be submitted to their executives and the general council. Reports are typically required to be submitted every month. The policy of the graduate society of McGill provides an outline of what is required in the commissioner reports. Essentially the report should provide the executives and the council with an update of the committees operations, the work performed by the commissioner, and any further information or recommendations. McGill also requires regular executive and commissioner meetings. Failure to attend 3 or more of these meetings, or all council meetings will be considered a resignation of the commissioner. These policies are consistent with other institutions as well.

The most significant difference was that four institutions require executives to sit on the committees of council (number of committees varied depending on the nature of

their role) to oversee the operations or have some direct role in the committees with the assistance of their commissioners (titles of this role varied in different institution). All organizations allowed executives to appoint commissioners, coordinators or facilitators to assist them with the execution of their initiatives or to lead the committees. However, the graduate society of the UofT was different as the committees of council required executive officers to be the chairs of the committees. The committees are comprised of the officer, a staff member, and all interested graduate students (with no policy specifying the role of a commissioner/facilitator/coordinator).

While the Review Committee is not suggesting any organizational structure changes, it is valuable to assess external institutions to gain an insight on the similarities and differences of key position requirements of graduate societies.

Management/Supervision

Most schools reviewed mandate that the Executive/Board have either weekly, or bi-weekly meetings that are typically closed to general membership, and to Commission members. The particulars of each organization are as follows:

- Waterloo: allows for presentations to be made to the Executive/Board on issues of concern, but only with permission of the Chair/President.
- UWO: provides their Executive/Board discretion to call a meeting of the Executive/Board, Executive Officers, Commissions, and/or Committee Chairs to discuss Society issues, which must then be reported on to Council
- UBC & McGill: require Commissions to report on their meetings and activity to Council, and to bring forward issues from their constituency to Council and the Executive/Board as appropriate for action.
- UBC, & Calgary: have appointed oversight bodies. Calgary in particular has an oversight body that mediates conflicts or concerns between bodies of governance, has the power to strike hiring and election committees, assists the Executive Director in hiring staff, and hires for special positions (i.e. Ombudsperson). At UBC the oversight body directly oversees the operations of the Executive/Board and the Ombudsperson.

Appointments

Schools reviewed differ in their hiring process of Commissions:

- UWO: jointly gives the Executive/Board and Council together authority to create, dissolve, or amend Commissioner and Facilitator positions, and to create or amend the terms of reference for each position by resolution
 - requires that Commissioners and Facilitators be elected by Council,

- and serve one year term from date of election
- gives the President of the Executive/Board the responsibility of coordinating contract renewal process for Society's office staff
- Calgary & McGill: appoint their Commissioners and Facilitators
- UBC: requires Commissioners and Facilitators to sign a letter of agreement with the Society that outlines the terms of their employment (including specification of hours of work) and their responsibilities.

Remuneration

Of the schools reviewed, UWO's distinctive remuneration policy is worth noting:

- UWO: requires that Commission members' honoraria be outlined in Society Policy

Governance

School policies and by-laws were reviewed to determine whether explicit instructions of governance were outlined:

- UBC: gives Executive/Board responsibility of reviewing Policies, terms of appointment and remuneration, and to recommend changes to them when necessary
- UWO: tasks the President of the Executive/Board with maintaining organizational charts that reflect the mandate, operations, and needs of the Society, and with updating these annually
 - denies Commission members voting rights on Council, and permits Commissioners/Facilitators to hold only one such position at any given time.

Analysis: Hiring and Dismissal Practices

Each policy and by-law document was combed for general hiring and dismissal practices which may be of use to the Queen's SGPS. Noteworthy findings, include:

Hiring

Schools differ in their approach to hiring:

- McGill: Commissioners shall be appointed by the Executive/Board. These appointments must be ratified by Council
- UBC: requires transition reports be provided from past members, to new members
- UofT: requires there be a subcommittee of the Executive/Board to be referred

to as the Human Resources Subcommittee consisting of at least three (3) members of the Executive/Board, and the Staff Supervisor. The Subcommittee shall exist to fulfill all duties related staffing and human resources management. This committee will also be empowered to make recommendations to the Executive Committee with regards to the establishment of human resources guidelines

Term of Office

Most schools outline that a Commissioner's term will be no longer than one year (12 months):

- SFU: will only allow Executive/Board members to be emeritus members by 2/3 resolution of Council in order to complete their terms of office, and will not permit emeritus status for more than one semester.
 - Facilitators are elected for one year, commencing on first day of January and ending last day of December. Facilitators are replaced by by-election.

Dismissal

All schools allow Commissioners to resign at any time by submitting a letter of resignation to the Speaker; resignation is effective immediately upon receipt of letter. Additionally:

- UofT: Council may impeach any Commission member by a majority vote.
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- UWO: a Commissioner or a Facilitator may be removed from their position for unsatisfactory performance of his/her responsibilities by resolution of the Executive or Council. The vacancy shall be filled in accordance with policies and by-law.
 - A Commissioner who fails to call (to try to hold) meetings at least once per term, and/or who fails to attend these meetings are subject to recall procedures.

SGPS Structure & Policy Recommendations

After careful analysis of the external, and interview results, the Commission Review Committee recommends the following:

1. Development of academic advocacy objectives
 2. Implement a transition period for commissioners
 3. Increase communication and accountability
 4. Tasking newly formed human resource committee
 5. Implementation of an oversight committee
 6. Changes to policy pertaining to timing limits
 7. Creation of an organizational chart
1. The SGPS should develop either volunteer or staff positions which support its academic advocacy objectives. While many of the AMS' commissions provide comparable programming and services to that of the SGPS, the Academic Affairs Commission is uniquely resourced to support advocacy efforts that can foster meaningful change for Queen's students. This committee understands that this portfolio is presently handled well by executive members and the Student Advisor Program, but suggests that the SGPS explore avenues to engage more students in discussion of academic issues.
 2. Of common concern is the lack of transition support for new commissioners. Due to the nature of the commissions, the implementation of a transition period can increase the productivity of new commissioners. Alike the transition period utilized by the SGPS executives, as well as other organizations (ex. AMS), the newly hired incumbent will be asked to job shadow the former incumbent to understand the duties of the role. This should speed up the learning process, and allow the new commissioner to ask questions that might be difficult to find answers to otherwise. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the committee recommends that formalized thorough transition program be developed.
 3. The SGPS should aim to increase communication and accountability between executives and commissioners. Although the commissioners are now given increased autonomy to fulfil their roles, the number one concern across the interviews is that there is a lack of communication between executives and commissioners. This is further supported by other policies found in external institutions (ex. UBC, McGill, etc), which have more integration between these two parties in comparison with the SGPS. This report recommends monthly meeting between each executive, with their reporting commissioner.

During these meetings both parties can share their progress as well as go over their monthly reports. There should be repercussions put into place in case of a failure to uphold a minimum number of meetings or submissions of the required reports.

4. This committee also recommends the use of the new human resource committee. As the 2016-2017 year will be the first term with this committee, there are a few key tasks that should be allocated. In particular, this committee should focus on supporting areas of recruitment, selection, and compensation. By providing training and being available for consultation, commissioners will be make better supported hiring and compensation decisions. The executives may also task the human resource committee with facilitating the online job postings for commissioners. The result of these changes should empower commissioners, while freeing the executives from these duties in order to fulfill other role requirements.
5. Timing of the policy changes undertaken in October were a principle concern. The External Subcommittee recommends the SGPS consider adopting an Oversight Committee for purposes of mediation, and to oversee actions of the Executive/Board; contract renewal shall be undertaken by the Executive/Board under the supervision of the Oversight Committee, and in accordance with Policy and By-laws. This body shall be independent of the Executive/Board, Commissions, and Council. Having an independent Oversight Committee will help with keeping the Executive/Board in line with policy-mandated timelines, and to ensure that major decisions receive an adequate degree of review and consultation before taking effect.
6. The SGPS Executive found the timing, as detailed in policy, a roadblock for them when carrying forward a motion they felt would strengthen the SGPS hiring process. To avoid this in future, the External Subcommittee recommends that the SGPS policy be reviewed in defined intervals and undertaken jointly by the Oversight Body and Executive/Board, and shall include consultation with the Commissioners and the Executive Director. All proposed amendments must be accepted by Council.
7. Interviewees are concerned with the lack of communication that occurs at present among the various bodies that make up the SGPS. To ease communication, and to clearly delineate pathways of reporting, the External Subcommittee recommends that the SGPS Executive create an organizational chart which details the reporting structure and portfolios of the Society. This shall be reviewed annually by the Oversight Body and Executive/Board, and shall include consultation with the Commissioners and

the Executive Director. All proposed amendments must be accepted by Council.

Conclusion

These conclude the findings, analyses, and recommendations of the Commission Review Committee from the period of January 2016 to May 2016. The recommendations have been based off of analysis from email communications, interviews, internal comparison analysis, and external comparison analysis with other organizations. The Commission Review Committee strongly encourages the Human Resource Standing Committee develop and implement policy based on these recommendations in the upcoming 2016-2017 academic year. The recommendations concerning inter-SGPS and external communication, transition reports, and oversight bodies (2,3, and 7) are particularly highlighted for their noted importance by interviewees and for consistency with other university bodies. The implementation of these changes will improve transparency, predictability, and accountability within the SGPS hiring structure and will help facilitate the effectiveness of the Commissioners, Executives, and Committees in their work.