SGPS
Society of Graduate & Professional Students

2017-18 Strategic Plan
OPENING MESSAGE

Dear Students,

The Executive Strategic Plan is the chief planning document that sets forth the Executive’s vision for the 2017-18 academic year. It is comprised of three sections: a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), guiding principles, and strategic initiatives. Collectively, the Plan presents a holistic agenda that was developed with the core purpose of improving the graduate and professional student experience.

In previous years, each member of the executive would produce their own strategic plan. This demarcation ignored the symbiotic relationship between executive members, and contributed to issues of communication that our predecessors warned us of. That is why our Plan was developed through extensive collaboration and reflects the reality that successful initiatives require the participation of multiple team members.

Ultimately, we endeavor to leave the SGPS in a better position than it was when we took office. This demands a student-centered approach to decision making and an ambitious collection of initiatives. We hope students find that our Plan does just that. We also want to underscore that our Plan could not be possible without the support and engagement of the full-time staff, commissioners, SGPS Council, and so many others across the Society. We thank you for your work – past, present and future.

Sincerely,

Adam Grotsky
President

Tyler Morrison
VP (Community)

Lauren Peacock
VP (Finance)

Stefy McKnight
VP (Graduate)

Russell Durward
VP (Professional)
SWOT ANALYSIS

This section will provide a brief overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that the Society faced at the outset of our Executive term. It is through our strategic initiatives, as developed in conjunction with our guiding principles, that we will preserve strengths, capitalize on opportunities, rectify weaknesses, and subside threats of the Society of Graduate and Professional Students.

**Strengths**

- Diverse membership leads to a range of ideas, initiatives and events
- Strong permanent staff offer valuable insight, financial expertise and institutional knowledge
- Extensive bursary program that supports students in need
- New website that makes important information easier to access
- Transparent budgeting ensures students know how their money is being spent
- Changes to the Health and Dental Plan better meets the needs of SGPS members
- Seats at committees and bodies across all units of the university allows for strong representation
- Council is actively engaged and serves as an important body for legislative action and accountability
- Student Advisor Program is becoming an increasingly reputable and reliable source of academic support

**Weaknesses**

- Lack of membership participation in events
- Time to completion creates difficulties for graduate students to get involved at high levels, while few low commitment opportunities exist
- Poor perception of the SGPS across many facets of the university
- Minimal engagement with the Kingston community
- Disconnect between SGPS and many department student councils
- Insufficient data to guide planning and decision-making
- Current event sanctioning system has unnecessarily harmed the relationship between the SGPS and faculty societies
- No position in the Society dedicated to human resources
Opportunities

- One collective strategic plan, rather than five separate ones, will help reduce Executive sequestering
- Budgeting from zero will save money without making undesirable cuts
- The principal’s annual goals include improving the graduate student experience
- Develop stronger relationships with campus partners, including the university administration, AMS, department student councils, Grad Club and PSAC 901
- Many stakeholders have expressed support for graduate-specific space on campus
- Internal restructuring over the past year has freed financial resources
- Desire to engage and communicate with councilors outside of Council
- Utilize Council committees in a more consistent and meaningful way
- PICRDI and TRC reports provide a foundation to address diversity issues
- New vision for the grant system will better support key initiatives

Threats

- No long-term planning has impeded the ability to advance key advocacy goals from year to year
- Low interest in SGPS positions, particularly elected positions, does not provide members with adequate options
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our strategic initiatives are driven by what we have identified as four guiding principles for our Executive term. These principles will serve as the framework for our year’s operations and guide our decision-making. We crafted these principles because they holistically represent both our term-specific goals and the Society’s broader mandate to enhance the experiences of graduate and professional students. The four guiding principles are:

- **Strengthen community**
  
- **Improve wellness and access**
  
- **Increase academic and career support**
  
- **Reform and enhance internal structures**

It is through balanced attention to these four principles, and the initiatives that comprise them, that the Society will experience a strong year that advances the interests of its members. Applying this comprehensive vision, we believe we can continue the work of our predecessors and pave the way for our successors.
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Strengthen community

1. Advocate for the creation of graduate-only space
   There is currently no space on campus exclusively for graduate students. On a campus dominated by our undergraduate peers, it is crucial that graduate students have space to study, connect, and congregate. We will work with the university administration to secure academic and social space for graduate students. This includes the pursuit of study space in Stauffer Library, as well as multi-purpose space that can serve as a hub for graduate students. The specific space needs of students will be determined through extensive consultation with SGPS Council and survey data collected from the membership at large.

2. Develop Homecoming programming for graduate and professional students
   SGPS members rarely attend Homecoming, which is a unique opportunity to experience Queen’s at its best: alumni and students coming together with infectious spirit and energy. We are committed to working with the AMS, Alumni Association, and Grad Club to integrate graduate and professional students into Homecoming programming. The ReUnion Street Festival, Homecoming’s largest event, is a natural starting point. We’re seeking the addition of a “grad student zone” to the festival grounds and want to incorporate graduate student musical groups into the night’s performances.

3. Re-establish SGPS Trivia at the Grad Club
   Last year, the SGPS Executive terminated our weekly trivia partnership with the Grad Club. This was done because neither party had a copy of the agreement, nor was there a clear understanding of what the large weekly expenses were actually going towards. We recognize the high demand amongst our membership to partake in SGPS Trivia. As a result, we will work with the Grad Club to negotiate a fair written agreement that will re-establish the weekly tradition. We are currently planning to kick off the new partnership with an SGPS Orientation Week Trivia at the start of September.

4. Incorporate the SGPS into the revitalization of the Queen’s Reads program
   The Principal is bringing back “Queen’s Reads” this year, which was formerly a program that gave a free book to the incoming class of undergraduate students. The book is selected by a committee and based on relevant themes and issues
affecting our society. We are working with the organizers of Queen’s Reads to offer this year’s book, “The Break” by Katherena Vermette, to SGPS members. There will also be programming tied to the book throughout the year, including book clubs, panel discussions, and a meet and greet with the author. Don’t forget to opt-in for your free copy in September!

5. **Work with SGPS Council to draft an electoral engagement strategy**
   Last year, voter turnout in the SGPS elections was a mere 6%, and all positions were uncontested. These issues are highly problematic for the ongoing stability and success of the Society, and require immediate attention. We will form a committee through SGPS Council that is tasked with developing an electoral engagement strategy. This strategy must address two key questions: (1) how do we better engage students at large with the SGPS?, and (2) how do we increase the number of candidates for elected positions?

6. **Act on the findings and recommendations of the PICRDI report**
   Queen’s has been plagued by a long history of racist incidents that ultimately led to the Principal’s Committee on Racism, Diversity and Inclusion (PICRDI). These troublesome events have no place in our community. In response to the PICRDI final report, we are committed to: (1) establishing an award to recognize a student or group that has made a significant contribution to issues of diversity and inclusion, (2) creating a grant to support diversity and inclusion initiatives on campus, and (3) starting an equity-based blog on the SGPS website to facilitate further and deeper discussions.

7. **Act on the findings and recommendations of the TRC report**
   The Queen’s Truth and Reconciliation Task Force was formed in response to the national commission’s calls to action that relate to post-secondary institutions. In response to the TRC final report, we are committed to: (1) engaging in meaningful consultation with the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre about how to better support indigenous students, (2) ensuring the graduate student space we pursue is culturally validating, (3) incorporating local indigenous artwork into SGPS spaces, and (4) promoting the new diversity and inclusion grant to indigenous groups on campus.

8. **Connect professional programs to bridge silos between faculties**
   It’s easy for students to get caught in the bubbles of their respective departments or faculties. Faculties in particular, such as law and education, are susceptible to this
habit. We will organize networking and social events targeting specific faculties to connect students and expand their personal and professional networks.

9. **Refresh and improve the perception of the SGPS**
   It is apparent that some students, staff and faculty have a negative view of the SGPS. Although addressing this problem will be difficult to measure, we are committed to adopting practices that will steer us towards correcting perception issues. This includes professionalism when dealing with the administration, openness when engaging with students, and strong branding across our platforms of communication.
**Improve wellness and access**

1. **Expand health and dental coverage to better meet the needs of students and their families**
   A survey conducted by our insurance provider in 2016-17 revealed common gaps and aspirations for the SGPS health and dental plan. Based on the feedback members provided, the 2017-18 benefits were expanded to better reflect what students expect from their plan. Among the more notable additions is an expansion of mental health coverage and new dental benefits. We are also working closely with our provider to improve awareness and promotion of the full slate of plan benefits.

2. **Work alongside community partners to enhance sexual violence prevention, response, and awareness**
   Sexual violence is an issue that disproportionately affects people on university campuses. While steps have been taken across Queen’s in recent years to combat sexual violence, the issue persists and more must done. We are committed to: (1) implementing the “Ask for Angela” program at the Grad Club, (2) offering bystander intervention training and recruiting SGPS bystander program facilitators, and (3) partnering with the AMS to create a video campaign raising awareness of sexual violence myths.

3. **Advocate for online appointment booking and mobile check-in technology at Student Wellness Services**
   Early discussions with Student Wellness Services (SWS) have revealed a strong interest in pursuing both online booking and mobile check-ins. More than a convenience measure, these initiatives have the ability to reduce wait times and increase the number of appointments available per day. Given the clear benefits that would be accrued to SGPS members, we are committed to supporting SWS as they secure funding to develop these technologies.

4. **Pursue the creation of a graduate Peer Health Educator program**
   The health needs of SGPS members can differ from those of undergraduate students. There is also a disconnect between SGPS members and the existing Peer Health Educator (PHE) program. We will work with SWS to develop a graduate branch of the PHE program, providing volunteer opportunities and unique workshops and events that cater to our membership.
5. **Form a partnership with the AMS Peer Support Centre, giving SGPS members access to support services and volunteer opportunities**

The AMS Peer Support Centre (PSC) is a valuable community service that provides students with listening, support, resource referral, and practical assistance. While the Centre is currently limited to undergraduate students, we will work with the AMS to give graduate and professional students access to the PSC, both for support and volunteering purposes. This expansion of service will complement the SGPS Student Advisor Program, which has a primary mandate of providing academic support to students.

6. **Act on the findings of the 2016-17 SGPS mental health survey**

The mental health survey conducted by last year’s Executive yielded important data regarding the state of the mental health of our members and how to improve support. The findings suggest a partial lack of awareness around existing services, as well as a need to expand and tailor support to graduate and professional students. According to the respondents, “academics” and “finances” are the two most difficult elements of life to handle. 71% of respondents reported that their level of stress has resulted in a significant disruption in their graduate work. Specific initiatives that were widely requested and will be implemented this year are workshops on destressing, healthy eating, and effective sleeping habits.

7. **Expand the portfolio of the Athletics Commissioner to include “wellness”**

An idea that was championed by our Athletics Commissioner, we will expand the portfolio and rename the position to the Athletics and Wellness Commissioner. This broader mandate will allow the Society to dedicate more resources to improving the wellness of our members, including through the workshops referenced above. Also, be sure to stay up to date with the wellness tips that will be included in the redesigned SGPS newsletter!
Increase academic and career support

1. **Partner with Career Services to tailor services and programming to graduate student needs**
   One of the most pressing questions for graduate students is “what’s next?”. Career Services offers a wide range of services to help students answer that question, including one-on-one appointments, career fairs, workshops, and “major maps”. We will partner with Career Services to make students more aware of these services and, when appropriate, offer graduate-specific programming. Don’t miss the “Careers Corner” section of our newsletter, which will contain helpful career-based information to guide your planning and reveal the breadth of on-campus support. If you’re unsure about your career prospects, or want to know what else you can do with your degree, we’ll also have a binder with major maps housed at the SGPS main office!

2. **Work with departments and the School of Graduate Studies to improve student-supervisor relations**
   One of the most frequent issues brought to our attention by graduate students is their relationship with their supervisor. Many supervisors do an outstanding job with their students, while others do not provide the support that is desired of them. We are committed to improving student-supervisor relations by working with the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and departments to: (1) improve the SGS Supervisor Handbook, and (2) explore the feasibility of student-supervisor contracts. We will also use survey data collected throughout the year to better understand the specific issues students have with their supervisors.

3. **Help students better manage the stresses of time-to-completion**
   Many students find the current time-to-completion targets highly difficult to meet. Oftentimes, this issue relates to student-supervisor relations, awareness of deadlines, expectations, and turn-around-time for revisions and feedback. The implementation of student-supervisor contracts, as proposed above, provides one opportunity to reconcile these challenges. In addition to exploring a contract, we will form an ad-hoc committee of SGPS Council to garner feedback and proposals to help students meet completion times while minimizing correlated mental health problems.

4. **Organize regular thesis writing sessions for graduate students**
   Retreats organized by the SGS for thesis writing are highly regarded and well-attended. Students often enjoy the change of scenery, dedicated writing time, and
the collegiality of working with others. As such, we will organize regular writing sessions at various locations across campus to help students stay on track and minimize the solemnness that can be all too familiar with thesis work. We may even provide snacks and stress relief items at the sessions!

5. **Expand the criteria of the Student Activity Bursary to include conference costs**
   The current criteria for an SGPS bursary restricts the funding of conference-related costs. We recognize the importance of conferences for academic success, as well as the high costs that can be associated with attending. As part of a larger bursary and grant restructuring (which will be outlined in the next section), we will ensure that the revised criteria for the Student Activity Bursary includes conferences.

6. **Enhance SGPS Careers Week through new programming**
   Careers Week is a popular SGPS event that gives members an opportunity to sign up for professional headshots and attend resume workshops. We are committed to building on the existing programming by adding new events, including on-site career counselling and skills-based training. Through these additions, we will be able to better prepare students for what lies ahead.

7. **Create research assistant positions within the SGPS**
   Following our goals to use a data-driven advocacy approach and to increase experiential learning opportunities, we will create paid student research opportunities within the SGPS. There are a range of topics and issues that could benefit from research, which would allow the Executive to make more effective decisions on issues impacting the student body. Our membership is well-qualified to conduct such research, and would benefit greatly from the out of classroom experience. It’s a win-win!
Reform and enhance internal structures and operations

1. **Simplify and improve the event sanctioning process**
   - The event sanctioning process utilized last year was an extreme approach to risk management that created unnecessary hurdles and restrictions for societies and clubs. This resulted in a troublesome rift in relations between the SGPS and faculty societies. We have redesigned the sanctioning process this year to ensure that low-risk events can be held with minimal red tape, while events considered high-risk are organized and reviewed using a risk mitigation approach. To that end, we’ve also created an event planning guide, accessible through the SGPS website, to increase transparency surrounding event approval and assist organizers with their planning.

2. **Create a Department Student Council (DSC) system for graduate departments**
   - Currently, department student councils and associations have very little interaction with the SGPS. Some seek ratification through the Clubs Office, while others maintain complete autonomy. This is a flawed system that impedes the ability for coordinated advocacy and communication sharing. We will create a structured DSC system, where student councils register with the SGPS and then have access to funding for events and initiatives through a DSC Grant.

3. **Restructure and expand the SGPS grants**
   - Rather than a single SGPS grant that funded student activities last year, we are proposing an expansion of our grant system to better reflect the needs of our community. This will result in four new and revised grants: (1) Sustainability Grant, (2) Accessibility Grant, (3) Diversity and Inclusion Grant, and (4) DSC Grant. These new and revised grants will provide students and groups with greater resources intended to improve the student experience at Queen’s. As with other changes to by-law and policy, this proposal will ultimately require the approval of SGPS Council.

4. **Form an SGPS Orientation Roundtable to strengthen communication and coordination between stakeholders**
   - There is little coordination between the SGPS and departments that host their own orientation events, which inhibits the ability of incoming students to fully and effectively experience Orientation Week. This is problematic, which is why we will form an SGPS Orientation Roundtable to bring these groups together. By providing a forum for communication and collaboration, we will avoid future overlap in programming, share ideas and best practices, and improve the first impression incoming students have of Queen’s.
5. **Renegotiate the Queen’s Clubs Office agreement with the AMS**
   The previous clubs agreement with the AMS cost the SGPS nearly $20K per year. This was a disproportionate contribution, as the SGPS was responsible for 3% of the clubs but 40% of the clubs office budget. We are in the process of renegotiating the agreement to ensure the SGPS is paying its fair share while maintaining access to the office’s resources, insurance and administrative support.

6. **Redesign the repurpose the SGPS newsletter**
   You’ve probably already seen the first SGPS newsletter sent with the new graphic-based design. The previous pdf attachment, often dozens of pages long and text-heavy, was not an effective way to deliver important information to our members. That’s why the new design only includes limited and highly relevant content for graduate and professional students. The five sections of the newsletter are: SGPS Updates, Featured Events, Careers Corner, University Updates, and Wellness Tips.

7. **Administer surveys to advocate and make decisions using a data-driven approach**
   For the SGPS to effectively represent its members, we must know what our members want. This year we’re partnering with a graduate student, who is studying the graduate student experience, to administer a two-part survey to SGPS members. The comprehensive survey and findings will be an essential means of informing the decisions we make and improving the services we offer. We also hope that the survey framework will be re-used year over year.

8. **Improve Executive transition practices to better prepare our successors**
   Very few practices or guidelines currently exist to guide the transition between Executive members. This can lead to an incomplete understanding of the role, and gaps in knowledge that can harm the success of the incoming team. A strong Executive transition is critical for success, which is why we will: (1) mandate transition hours between incoming and outgoing Executive members, (2) improve transition documentation, and (3) hold an incoming-outgoing Executive retreat.

9. **Assess whether the SGPS should sign the Non-Academic Misconduct agency agreement**
   Since the new non-academic discipline system was implemented at Queen’s, the SGPS has not signed the agency agreement that would permit the Society to manage cases that fall under its purview. This is a decision that should be re-assessed and debated by SGPS Council. Signing the agreement and creating the
necessary judicial structures would ensure that graduate and professional students involved in NAM cases are disciplined and supported by a jury of their peers.

10. **Begin the development of an SGPS long-term strategic plan**
   A threat to the advocacy efforts and general stability of the SGPS is that no planning documents exist that extend beyond a particular Executive term. This makes it difficult to achieve multi-year goals and solicit external buy-in on multi-year projects. The future viability of the SGPS requires the development of a long-term planning document. We will create a committee through SGPS Council to begin the development of such a plan.

11. **Undertake a broad restructuring of the Society**
   The current structures of the SGPS are not conducive to maximize success. Among other issues, SGPS Council has identified issues with accountability, there is no employee or position dedicated to human resources, and the size of the Executive is surprisingly large for the portfolio it collectively manages. We will work with SGPS Council to review the current structures and propose recommendations that will improve the Society’s efficacy.