

The logo features the acronym 'SGGPS' in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below it, the full name 'Society of Graduate & Professional Students' is written in a smaller, black sans-serif font. The text is centered within a white circular area. This white area is surrounded by a thick, multi-layered border composed of overlapping, curved bands in shades of blue, yellow, and red, creating a dynamic, circular pattern.

# SGGPS

Society of Graduate &  
Professional Students

2018-2019 Strategic Plan

# OPENING MESSAGE

Dear Students,

The Executive Strategic Plan is the chief planning document that sets forth the Executive's vision for the 2018-19 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 2017 the Executive chose to create a cohesive Strategic Plan rather than a separate year plan created by each Executive. This approach more accurately represents the nature of the Executive as a team endeavor, and this year's Executive has decided to continue with this approach. Everything contained in this document is the product of discussion and planning among the entire executive. This document lays the groundwork for future planning and successful transitions.

Ultimately, we aspire 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,

Tyler Morrison  
President

Isabel Luce  
VP (Community)

Abel Hazon  
VP (Finance)

Leo Erlikhman  
VP (Graduate)

Lauren Peacock  
VP (Professional)

# SWOTANALYSIS

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
- Transparent budgeting ensures students know how their money is being spent
- Seats at committees and bodies across all units of the university allows for strong representation
- Student Advisor Program is becoming an increasingly reputable and reliable source of academic support
- A new simplified event-sanctioning process has made it easier to assess risk and ensure enjoyable and safe SGPS sanctioned events
- One collective strategic plan rather than five separate ones has helped reduce Executive sequestering
- A new fiscal year that aligns with the Executive's term provides more accountability
- Strong relationships with University Administration and the AMS create endless opportunities for collaboration
- An enthusiastic team of commissioners dedicated to planning and facilitating events that appeal to all graduate and professional students

## 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
- No position in the Society dedicated to human resources

## Opportunities

- The principal's annual goals include improving the graduate student experience
- Develop stronger relationships with department student councils
- SGPS members voted heavily in favour of redevelopment of the JDUC, if the AMS passes a similar fee SGPS members will see a large designated space of their own in the JDUC
- 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
- The search for a new principal provides the opportunity to hire someone with a proven track record of increasing graduate well-being and community

## 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
- Inadequate council membership of some departments and faculties on SGPS council has meant that many of these groups are under represented

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Last year the Executive identified four guiding principles. This year's Executive has chosen the same set of principles, both as a recognition of their importance, and as an attempt to create stability through long term planning. These principles are the foundation of the initiatives and advocacy goals of the Executive. The four guiding principles are:

***Strengthen community***

***Improve wellness and access***

***Increase academic and career support***

***Reform and enhance internal structures***

While the principles remain the same, many of the strategic initiatives have been expanded. The Executive have also added several new strategic initiatives that reflect the common goals we share.

# STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

## *Strengthen community*

### **1. Advocate for the creation of designated graduate space**

Several studies have shown that graduate students lack the same sense of community as their undergraduate counterparts. The SGPS recently sponsored a study by the Faculty of Education in which preliminary reports have shown a correlation between loneliness and lacked sense of belonging to whether that student had a space, outside of their office, to congregate in. The Executive remains committed to advocating for designated graduate space, whether that be through the re-development of the JDUC, or elsewhere.

### **2. Create graduate designated space using current SGPS spaces**

While we await the AMS referendum on the JDUC, or the development of a graduate specific capital project, the Executive is committed to re-purposing spaces already controlled by the SGPS to create designated graduate community space. The SGPS Lounge in room 237 in the JDUC is now open for any SGPS member to enjoy. The room can be booked on the SGPS website, and keys can be retrieved from the Front Desk of the SGPS office.

### **3. 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. Last year marked the SGPS's first time being involved in the ReUnion Street Festival. While many graduate and professional students came out to the event it was clear that more could be done. This year the Executive hopes to expand our partnership with the ReUnion Street Festival with the goal of making it more appealing to graduate students. Through consultation with SGPS members, the Executive hopes to get a better idea of what members wish to see in future years at Homecoming.

#### **4. 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) promoting the diversity and inclusion grant for initiatives on campus, (2) holding an annual diversity and inclusion conference to create a space for individuals to learn about and discuss matters of diversity and inclusivity on campus, (3) and finally to look into hosting a diversity and inclusion forum to give graduate students another space to have their voices heard on this topic.

#### **5. 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) promoting the new diversity and inclusion grant to indigenous groups on campus.

#### **6. 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.

#### **7. Continue to refresh and improve the perception of the SGPS**

The SGPS has had a great couple of years engaging stakeholders on and off campus. The Executive wants to both continue to bolster the advocacy presence of the SGPS and ensure that its members view the Society as a positive and helpful resource.

**8. Use student feedback to improve SGPS events to better foster community and student engagement**

This year the Executive has implemented a formalized post-event feedback survey that will be sent to every event participant to better gauge whether an event was successful and how we may improve upon it for future years.

**9. Introduce event programming designed to engage our mature graduate and professional students**

Mature students often report a greater disconnection from the graduate community. We are committed to developing events that will fill the gap we are currently seeing and reaching out to these members, whether it is monthly meet-ups or creating a Facebook group where these individuals can get connected.



## ***Improve wellness and access***

### **1. Creating a new graduate peer-to-peer mental health service**

Currently, there is no space on campus for graduate students to access peer-to-peer mental health support. The AMS's Peer Support Centre is limited to undergraduate students only. The need for graduate students to have a space to connect with their peers is a top priority for this year's Executive. The service will also offer our students new opportunities for paid and volunteer positions on campus to enhance their overall student experience.

### **2. Review our current insurance brokerage contract as it expires August 31, 2019**

Our three-year term with Student VIP as our insurance broker is expiring. This means we have the infrequent opportunity of reviewing the service provided by Student VIP and entering conversations with other Insurance brokers to determine where our needs will be most effectively met. The SGPS expects to have this process of consultation finished by the Winter 2019 term.

### **3. 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 be done. We are committed to: (1) offering bystander intervention training and recruiting SGPS bystander program facilitators, (2) partnering with the AMS to create a video campaign raising awareness of sexual violence myths and (3) continuing to make students aware of the "Ask for Angela" program at the Grad Club.

### **4. Advocate for online appointment booking and mobile check-in technology at Student Wellness Services**

Student Wellness Services (SWS) has indicated that they are going to pursue an online system that will allow for booking and check-ins to be completed from a computer or mobile phone. As the SWS moves into the new Innovation and Wellness building they will not be able to begin this

initiative until after the move. The Executive plans to ensure that this online system be built in a timely fashion.

**5. 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.

**6. Act on the findings of the 2017-2018 Graduate and Professional Student Wellness Survey**

Last year the SGPS Executive commissioned a two-part study with students from Faculty of Education to better understand the issues surrounding graduate and professional student success. One survey was distributed in the Fall, and the other in the Winter. The report is being compiled and the data we receive will be used to advocate for more space and resources for our students.

**7. Commission a second Graduate and Professional Student Wellness Survey**

We received such an overwhelming response from last year's survey that we have asked these same students from the Faculty of Education to continue this survey during the 2018-2019 year in order to have more robust statistics.

**8. Form a stronger partnership with the Athletics & Recreation Centre (ARC) and develop programming catered specifically to graduate and professional students**

Last year the portfolio of the Athletics Commissioner was expanded to encompass Athletics and Wellness. This broader mandate has allowed the SGPS to dedicate more resources to improving the wellness of our members, including through workshop, but also to increase our collaboration with the ARC. This past summer we ran a Free-For-All week where just SGPS members could try out any fitness class at the ARC for free during that week. Due to its success, we plan on implementing it again for the fall semester.

## ***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 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) create awareness of the new student-supervisor agreement. 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. Continue to develop and expand the Thesis Thursday program**

Our Thesis Thursday partnership with the Student Academic Success Service (SASS) provides students a space to develop their academic skills in a collaborative environment. This program will need to continue to develop to ensure that we are targeting the most relevant academic needs of our members moving forward. Thesis Thursday will become our flagship academic service with the plan now to soon offer department specific training sessions in the future. A paid position will complement this new service to ensure that content is relevant to all students.

#### **5. Critically examine the structure of SGPS Orientation to make it more inclusive, and re-form the SGPS Orientation Roundtable to strengthen communication and coordination between stakeholders**

The SGPS Orientation Week consists of largely the same events each year with little critical thought given to how we can make these events more accessible to students with families and students with accessibility concerns, and more appealing or engaging to our students. This year we have developed an event feedback survey that has been sent to each participant of our eight orientation events, and from this feedback we will develop a game plan for up-coming years to ensure greater participation and fulfillment at these events. A recurring issue we encounter during Orientation Week is also the lack of 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.

#### **6. Enhance SGPS Careers Week through a partnership with the School of Graduate Studies**

Careers Week is a popular SGPS event that gives members an opportunity to sign up for professional headshots and attend resume and cover letter workshops. We are committed to building on the existing programming by partnering with the SGS. Students can look forward to seeing new skills-based training like Excel and Outlook training sessions. 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**

While great strides were taken last year in this regard, the SGPS still has more work to do before the event sanctioning process can be considered most effective and efficient. We continue to find ways to ensure students can have their events sanctioned as quickly as possible while remaining as safe and risk free as possible.

### **2. 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.

### **3. 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.

### **4. Ensure that Graduate and Professional Student Non-Academic Misconduct Procedures include an SGPS member on any panel involving an SGPS student**

While the SGPS has made the decision that it would be a waste of resources to create a Judicial Committee equivalent to that of the AMS' for level one NAM incidents, it is the Executive's goal to ensure any panel that assembles for the adjudication of an incident involving an SGPS students will include an SGPS member.

## **5. Continue the development of an SGPS long-term strategic plan**

Before last year a threat to the advocacy efforts and general stability of the SGPS was that no planning documents existed 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. This Strategic Plan was built on the foundations of last year's plan and serves to be planning document for years to come.

## **6. Undertake a broad restructuring of the SGPS**

The current structures of the SGPS are not conducive to maximize success. The Executive is going to explore ways to make the SGPS the most efficient and effective as possible. This also means finding ways to create more student positions and opportunities to get involved in the SGPS. This restructuring may involve being critical of the current Executive structure and potentially introducing a Board of Directors.



BROUGHT TO YOU BY

*your* **SGPS**