



Good Afternoon Colleagues,

I hope that this report finds you well and enjoying the beginning a winter season full of the warmth of family, friends, and colleagues. As we are all settling into the acceptance that 'normal' is a lack of normalcy, predictability, and consistency I want to take the time to report how the SGPS has handled this change over the past 6 months. This report mirrors the November GM report as there has been very limited changes between that date and now.

Firstly, thank you all for your continued dedication to your departments and to the SGPS as a whole! It has been a pleasure to work with you all though the first half of my tenure and your dedication is what makes the SGPS so amazing!

BUS SUBSIDY

During the early days of the pandemic the AMS had made the decision with the City of Kingston to terminate the 'Bus-it' contract which provided students with a bus pass. This contract required all eligible students to pay a \$90 mandatory fee which in turn gave these students access to Kingston Transit. This incredibly low fee was possible in part because of the large numbers of students who pay into mandatory fee slates. With the majority of students being off-campus or learning virtually it was appropriately decided that charging this fee to all students was not fair or equitable.

This did however, mean that students that would still be in Kingston or attending classes on campus would have to buy alternative bus passes which totaled \$119/per semester. This meant an increase of \$267/year for students to be able to access reliable transportation. Myself and the SGPS vowed that these students would not suffer financially and we are proud to have been able to deliver on that promise. Due to a rebate from the City of Kingston we have been able to create a collaborative subsidy program for students that covers up to \$90/per semester for transit passes. This means that a student who buys three passes over the year will only be paying the original price of the Bus-it contract, \$90.

At this time we have around 400 applications with over 300 being SGPS students leading to a fall semester disbursement of over 36,000\$. It took a lot of work on the part of both student societies but is an incredible example of how out of the box thinking and commitment to the financial success of our students can lead to agreeable outcomes. We are committed to students being only charged for services and fees that they are able to access and it was a wonderful to see that changes can be made to previous policy and programming to ensure that everyone can thrive.

SOCIAL EVENTS/SUPPORT

Over the past weeks we have had incredible engagement with SGPS Members to determine what social programming actually works during this time and what students really need/want to participate in. Students are experiencing a number of stressors on top of the regular academic programming and it is our goal to provide fun and social engagement in a way that will benefit the health of our students. Students are struggling and it is important that we prioritize social, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health with academic expectations. Over the past months we have hosted a number of really well attended events, many of which are listed below:

- Cooking with Grandmas
 - o Collaboration with Student Affairs Faith and Spiritual Life where folks learn from the pros to cook a delicious home cooked meal

- SGPS Gets Real
 - o An open-ended venting/talking session with members of the Graduate Peer Support Centre (GPSC) and Peer Academic Advisors (PAA) present to allow students real-time advice and a compassionate ear
- EmpowerME
 - o 24/7/365 access to support services within North America and 20 additional countries
 - o Free support from qualified individuals on a number of topics from financial insecurity to anxiety or depression
- President Office Hours
 - o Weekly open hours with myself to engage with students and reply to any questions or concerns and provide appropriate resources
- Graduate Peer Support Centre Hours
- International Student Check-ins
- Active Club
 - o Walk, run, bike club to allow students to keep active with their peers
- #SGPSatHome
 - o Campaign to show the realities of working and living at home paired with a contest for students who share their home-work stations
- Queen's ESPORTS x SGPS Games night o Monthly games night for QEA and SGPS communities
- Monthly Townhall meetings

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Although engaging with SGPS Members is vitally important to any and all student leaders, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more so. I am very happy to have been able to implement several avenues of virtual student engagement that I truly hope will continue into the future. Weekly office hours, monthly townhall meetings, and a 24/7 anonymous feedback form have created safe and consistent environments for students to engage with myself and the Executive team. While these opportunities are great, I am most proud of the bi-weekly newsletter which has successfully been circulated since my first week in office. No matter the week or the size of the newsletter I always receive emails from students who have questions, concerns, or are appreciative to have been informed of upcoming events or news.

Transparency within an organization like the SGPS can often be overlooked and my goal with this newsletter was to make sure our Membership is aware of the current goings-on. It will be my recommend that this incoming President take up this newsletter as a communication tool and would like to expand it so Departmental Representatives can also share information. We receive a few requests to promote events and such but it would be amazing if Representatives could use this as a way to advertise outside of their departments, encouraging extradepartmental collaboration! Although we are all unique and important as individual departments, we are one SGPS and I can see so much good coming from our shared engagement.

I really do hope that you are all well and the stressors have been kept to a minimum lately. Please if you have any questions or need anything at all, feel free to contact me any time.

Yours in Health and Wellness,



Justine Aman
SPGS President



Dear Council and SGPS Members,

Not much has changed since the fall AGM. As such, I have modified my earlier report to reflect the changes that did occur. We are halfway into our position as executives of the SGPS. The past 6 months have not been easy. In addition to onboarding and transitioning into our role, so we could continue to provide services to our members, we (all) have been faced with the adverse task of doing so through this pandemic. COVID-19 has required me to adapt my role to the needs of our staff and members. Please find a summary of my activities below.

Hiring

We have had to hire several positions for the SGPS. These positions included new positions created to address the needs of unrepresented student groups, empty positions and vacated positions.

As HR for the SGPS I sat in and decided on who should be hired as commissioner also. Along with Anthony, our VP Community, I was instrumental in ensuring that the commissioners hired were able to 'hit the ground running' so to speak. Which is why we decided to recruit the successful candidates based on their past relationship with the SGPS, from among the other very qualified candidates.

External Contracts

The Grad Club is an institution within Queen's that provides services to our members. As a result, the SGPS sponsors the Grad Club and furnishes them with funding. The funding is directed toward the Grad Club's trivia nights. I was responsible for drafting a new contract, which outlined the changes we intend to institute with respect to the funding during COVID-19, since trivia is unlikely to be in person. A new contract was submitted to the Grad Club. At this point several terms are to be clarified with them, which will occur during their board meeting. We have received clarification and are now implementing the requisite changes.

Permanent Staff Contracts

We have two permanent staff members at the SGPS, Sandy Beaton, who is our Director of Finance and Andria Burke who is our Executive Director.

Sandy's contract came for renewal in late Fall. I was able to extend his contract for another year with terms that allowed for flexibility during crises, such as the one we are currently facing.

Andria's contract came for renewal shortly after Sandy's. Her contract was for 2 years, which I was able to extend for another 2 years. This contract was more involved and took a little longer to finalize.

Creation of New Position

In discussion with fellow Executives we have decided that the SGPS is in dire need of a separate HR personnel. While the role of HR, and its functions, can be adequately performed by someone in my position, it cannot be done in an efficient

manner that benefits the organization as a whole. A key deficiency we identified in how the current HR duties are mandated is the diffuse nature and lack of coordination for how they are to be carried out. Some HR duties fall on me, as VP professional. These duties are enumerated in the SGPS Bylaws but are not adequately expressed. They divide this role between the President of the SGPS and myself. Other duties however, are enumerated in Andria's employment contract. Therefore it is difficult to carry out any acts as HR, as coordination becomes very difficult. The idea behind having a singular party acting as HR, and not anything else, would help coordinate that role and allow for faster access to services. Therefore I have advocated for a separate HR person, to whom my fellow Executives agreed.

Moreover, there is significant oversight with respect to the necessity of institutional memory of the SGPS. Having spoken with our permanent staff during their employment negotiations, I was brought to the attention of inconsistent behavior by prior executive and employees which I would not have known otherwise. With the constant turnover of student representatives who act as leaders in the SGPS, it is difficult to pass on important information. Therefore, an HR person, or even just having that role, would systemically procure all institutional memory and hold it in an easily accessible location. This would greatly enhance the SGPS' ability to render services and draw insight from past decisions.

Change in Services

I have had students request some of the services that we offered in the past. These services include the professional photos we would provide. Unfortunately due to COVID some of these services, such as the professional photos, which required students to attend campus physically, will no longer be available. I've been searching for alternative ways to render these services to no avail, but will continue to conduct this search in the coming months.

Although physical distancing proves offering services difficult it also provides opportunities for increased participation. Observing the success of student groups who have provided seminars over digital platforms, I have initiated my plan to bring a new seminar on business development to professional students. As professionals, students will be required to in most cases bring in new business at some point in their career. Being socially distances may prove to be a difficulty in accomplishing this. To help guide these students I've planned a seminar on digital business development. I've currently spoken with personnel in the legal field who are enthusiastic about offering their insight to students, but to avoid being limiting I'm currently in the process of reaching out to medical professionals and other professionals. I'm hoping this seminar will have a transformative effect on our constituents.

Final Thoughts

I apologize for the brevity of this report, with everything having gone digital it is difficult to maintain all records in one place. Despite this, I strongly believe the SGPS is in a much stronger position than we were in 6 months ago. I have confidence in my fellow executives that they will continue to work tirelessly on behalf of our members. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me at my email below.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Jeyaratnam

Vice President (Professional)

Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS)

vp.professional@sgps.ca



Dear Council,

It is hard to believe we are in the last month of 2020! I hope exam and paper preparation is going well, and that everyone is looking forward to 2021.

Since the Fall AGM, my focus has been on disbursement of fees and on bursaries. Below, is a brief update on both.

Disbursement of Activity Fees

Fees have been distributed to all societies who signed the Fee Declaration Form. Funds are being processed by the bank and will be in society accounts in 2-3 business days.

As of the December 1, 2020, there are three societies that have not signed the Fee Declaration Form, hence their fees have not yet been distributed. We had hoped to send all disbursements at once to save on transaction costs; however, we decided it was not fair to hold off on distribution altogether, nor was it fair to distribute fees to societies that had not signed the forms. These three societies will have their funds distributed in a second batch once we have received their Fee Declaration Forms.

The Fee Declaration Form was implemented last year as a means of encouraging accountability. The form is signed by society executives as a commitment that funds will be used only for the purpose for which the funds were collected for. It was decided this year that no societies would be exempted from this requirement.

Part of the delay in distributing fees was providing societies an equal opportunity to offer rebates to students due to the challenging nature of budgeting during COVID. After sending an email to all societies detailing the amounts they would be receiving for the Fall and information regarding a rebate, we had only two societies decide to offer a rebate. I sincerely appreciate the decision these two societies made and want to say thank you on behalf of all SGPS members.

Bursaries

Bursary applications officially closed on December 1st. The finance committee and I are finishing reviews of the applications we received just prior to the closure. As a reminder, bursaries will reopen on January 4th.

Holiday Break

The SGPS offices will be closed December 18th to January 4th. As a result, I will be out of my office during this period, and any emails received during this period will be answered January 4th.

I hope everyone stays healthy and enjoys the upcoming holidays!

Respectfully Submitted,

Tamara Mitterer

Vice President (Finance and Services)
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Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Athletics & Wellness Commissioner
December 2020

Hello Council,

I hope you all well and looking forward to the upcoming break and holiday season!

SGPS Running and Active Clubs

The SGPS Running and Active Clubs continue to grow. There are conversations surrounding running and staying active as the weather drops, providing advice, tips and tricks on clothing and attire, motivation and best routes.

Virtual Cooking with Grandmas

We have our last session of the year coming up on December 16 at 5:00pm-6:30pm. Registration (can be found [here](#)) is open now and closes on December 13th, with a cap at 20 participants. We are extremely thankful and excited to share that Student Affairs Faith and Spiritual Life are offering grocery subsidies to anyone, regardless of need, where we simply send a grocery store gift card in the mail, no questions asked! We have also confirmed our continued partnership for SGPS Cooks with Grammas for every third Wednesday of each month from 5:00pm-6:30pm for the next semester! Please keep an eye on the SGPS social media for all the registration information!

I am currently in the planning phases for next semester's events with my fellow commissioners, so stay tuned for a fun-filled semester!

As always, please feel free to contact me (athletics@sgps.ca) with any suggestions, questions, or comments about these or other events.

Sincerely,

Madison Danford
Athletics and Wellness Commissioner



Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Report of the Equity & Diversity Commissioner
December 2020

Dear Council,

I hope everyone is doing well and in good spirits!

This will be a brief report, as I have provided two reports detailing progress on current projects in November.

I continue to attend committee, council, and sub-council meetings across the university. Most recently, I participated in the Student Recruitment, Support and Success sub-council, discussing ways to improve recruitment of and support for underrepresented groups at both the undergraduate and graduate level at Queen's.

As part of the ongoing work for the Soft Infrastructure working group, Paige (Indigenous Graduate Liaison), Rohit (International Commissioner) and myself have started putting together a resource guide for the EDII and International graduate student representatives from each graduate student association. This guide features the resources that are available both on campus and off-campus, highlighting the available support for questions and concerns regarding human rights and anti-racism, accessibility, LGBTQ+ support, student organizations and much more. Once this is complete, we look forward to sharing it with the EDII representatives as well as the broader graduate student community. Related to this, I would like to gently remind everyone to circulate the information regarding the creation of EDII and international graduate student representative positions within your respective departments.

If you have any questions or concerns about the EDII and International Student representative positions, or anything else in the report, please do not hesitate to get in touch at equity@sgps.ca

Wishing you all a productive end to the semester and a joyful and relaxing December break!

All the very best,

Fikir (Fifi) Haile
Equity and Diversity Commissioner 2020-2021



Dear Council,

Here are a few things I have been working on as your Indigenous Graduate Liaison:

1. Indigenous Reads Talking Circle

The last circle for the fall will meet December 3rd to discuss the final chapters of Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian*. We are starting up again with a social in the winter on with a reading on *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* by Daniel Heath Justice which will start on **January 14th, 2021 from 4-6pm EST**. If you would like to join the conversation, please email me at indigenous@sgps.ca.

2. Indigenous Writing Group (SELF IDENTIFIED INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ONLY)

In working with the SAGE/Indigenous Student Advisor at Four Directions, we are developing a student led writing group that will start in **January 13th, 2021 from 9am-noon EST** and run for twice a month with one of those meetings each month being attended by a professional to answer questions and provide guidance on the writing process with an indigenous mindset and methodology. If you know of any self-identified indigenous peers in your departments who would be willing to participate in this activity please give them my contact information, indigenous@sgps.ca.

3. Soft infrastructure working group

I have been working with the SGPS Equity and Diversity Commissioner and International Commissioner on the creation of the soft infrastructure working group. We are currently working on a EDII SGPS resource guide that will assist students in navigating EDII work within their respective departments.

If you have any suggestions, ideas, or concerns as they relate to indigenous matters and happenings at Queen's, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope you have a lovely holiday and restful break.

Gichi Miigwech,

Paige Van Tassel

SGPS Indigenous Graduate Liaison

indigenous@sgps.ca



Dear Council!

I hope you all have a happy holiday season. The end of the semester is almost here, and it can be stressful part of the year, but don't forget to take out time for self-care. Good luck everyone with the final week of classes for the fall term!

TA/RA/TFs now eligible to receive contracts regardless of their current residence

I am happy to inform that the PSAC 901 and University has arrived at a Settlement on the issue of employment for members residing outside Canada. In late August, the University had made a decision of not to offer employment contracts to graduate students who were/are currently residing outside of Canada. This decision had an adverse impact particularly on International Student-Workers, who have been locked out of Canadian borders due to travel, immigration and health& safety restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Unit 1 members, registered as students at Queen's as of January 1, 2020, are now eligible to receive Teaching Assistants (TA)/ Research Assistant (RA) /Teaching Fellow (TF) contracts regardless of their current place/country/location of residence, and can perform the duties remotely starting Winter 2021 term. They may also apply for any TA/RA/TF positions available in any and all departments.

Art Auction Fundraiser for International graduate students

I am pleased to inform you that our collaboration with International student working group (ISWG) on Art Auction Fundraiser for international graduate student has been huge success. All benefits of this auction will go towards international graduate students at Queen's who have been financially struggling as a result of the high tuition fees and hardships imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. More details on mode of distribution would be announced soon.

Soft Infrastructure Working Group

I have started working with the SGPS Equity and Diversity Commissioner and Indigenous Graduate Liaison on building soft infrastructure working group. The aim of the group is to create a resource for International graduate student representative and EDII from each graduate department. This sort of and solidarity is crucial to getting a sense of belonging and what is happening on across the university. Moreover, this would provide us the platform to start speaking amongst ourselves so that we can work together and can improve the graduate student experience on campus.

International student check-ins

Unfortunately, due to some technical glitches the monthly student check in (30 November 2020) was affected and I apologize for that. I am hopeful and optimistic that our next check in most probably in winter would be a good one. I would encourage you to let your international students know about these as we would like them to continue through the winter session too. The details of the event would be advertised on our Facebook page and SGPS events page, Keep an eye on it.

International Graduate Student Scholarships

I am in the final stage of finalizing International Scholarship Awards. These competitive awards aims to access academic excellence and trying to even the gap in how many opportunities international students have available to them. I am also working on panel discussion event with Anthony (VP Community), which would be hosted with beyond Canada conference. Details of the awards and panel discussion would be announced soon in my next reports. These are the most significant updates I have for you at this stage. I am looking forward for my first QUIC Advisory group meeting this week and I would update you on that in my next council report. I am always open to any comments, questions, or suggestions. Please feel free to contact me at international@sgps.ca.

Best,

Rohit Shukla



Hello Council,

I hope you are all doing well, I have been very busy this month preparing for two events which has involved liaising with two guest speaker/instructors for the two events, price checking, running around buying art supplies, assembling art kits, making example pieces, and sharing the events among grad and professional students.

“Show and Tell” Plants (no cost)

Join us this December 11th for our first session of the “Show and Tell” series which brings together graduate and professional students to share their unique knowledge and skills. This first session themed “Plants” will involve a Master of Biology student sharing tips and tricks for indoor plant care such as identifying and eliminating plant pests, a sharing session (show us your plants!) and discussion time, sign up for sharing seeds/plants, and plant bingo or draw for prizes. (We currently have 8 registrants for this event)

Holiday Crafting (\$0-10 cost)

Do you want the materials and knowledge to paint galaxies? Felt soap? Make your own ornaments? Or just a space to make your own art and chat? Join us this December 18th for holiday crafting! This event will involve some work on your part, you need to register for your art kits by Dec 5th (first one is free), and then join us with your kit(s) or own projects on Zoom for a guided crafting session. The zoom will be open for 2 hours of crafting fun, with the first hour reserved for brief tutorials on: ornament making, galaxy painting, and soap felting, followed by time to craft and chat while facilitators remain online for any questions. Kits for the three tutorials are available for delivery within Kingston, and the first kit is free, followed by \$5 for each additional kit. All are welcome to join and BYOP (bring your own project) to work on in the crafting space. Participants must register for kits by December 10th. (We currently have 15 registrants for this event)

Progress pictures of kits and final pieces:



Upcoming Events

Join us this January for events such as “Show and Tell” Birds where we meet at a conservation site and hike on easy trails (1-2m wide fine gravel) and feed the birds. In addition January will have a Paint Nite involving watercolour painting. These events will all be incentivized by offering a free art kit/materials, draw, or games with incentive such as gift cards.

Please feel free to contact me at social@sgps.ca if you have any feedback, questions, concerns, or want to be involved in future events as a speaker/ co-facilitator or volunteer.

Warmly,

Kel Martin
Social Commissioner