



Good Afternoon Colleagues,

Welcome to the end of 1 year of remote SGPS and the beginning of the new push to return to normal. Thank you all so very much for your dedication and commitment during these times, the SGPS is so much stronger with you on the team!

INCOMING EXECUTIVE TEAM

President Justine Aman
VP Graduate Rohit Shukla
VP Professional Jennifer Li
VP Community Anthony Lomax
VP Finance & Services Courtney Bannerman
Graduate Student Senator Emils Matiss

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.

After the second round of the Winter2021 subsidy we have been able to subsidize the cost of transportation for approximately 350 SGPS students. 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. This program will continue into Summer2021 and for the 2021-22 school year.

SOCIAL EVENTS/SUPPORT

Over the past year 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.

Here are just a few examples:

- 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
 - 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
 - 24/7/365 access to support services within North America and 20 additional countries
 - Free support from qualified individuals on a number of topics from financial insecurity to anxiety or depression
- President Office Hours
 - 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
- Loom beading and soap felting workshops
- International Student Check-ins
- Active Club
 - Walk, run, bike club to allow students to keep active with their peers
- #SGPSatHome
 - 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
 - Monthly games night for QEA and SGPS communities
- Monthly Townhall meetings

ANTI-RACISM PORTAL

On August 13th, 2020 our SGPS advocacy page went live; EDII reports and statements from the Principal, Vice-Principal and Provost (Academic), Rector, and Dean SGS from the past decade were collected and placed in one location. We hope that by creating a platform of institutional memory there will be a reduction of labor to individuals looking to hold the Administration accountable and that these offices will be faced with their previous empty promises when crafting new statements. The SGPS Equity Commissioner and Indigenous Student Liaison and Commissioner team have recently updated the portal with an EDII resource guide meant to help students create a more EDII conscious departments. This has been an incredible collective effort of SGPS Commissioners, Academic Advisors, and the Executive team and the project is under investigation to become a national campaign through the CFS. Please take the time to visit our portal to see more on the Anti-Racism work the SGPS has committed to. <http://sgps.ca/advocacy/>

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ENGAGEMENT

Student engagement will continue this semester with a number of new initiatives implemented in Fall 2020 carrying forward into 2021. These include but are not limited to:

- Bi-weekly President newsletter
 - Every other Tuesday
 - If you ever have a Graduate or Professional program advertisement or PSA you would like to include in my bi-weekly newsletter, please, please reach out! Our Executive Director, Andria does an amazing job bringing together important dates and notes but we are always looking to support you!
- Weekly President office hours
 - Tuesdays noon-1pm EST
 - Feel free to send any of your constituents my way if they have an issue that may be SGPS related and I can *virtually* sit down with them to discuss. The meeting rooms are private so they will have the ability to engage 1-on-1 with no outside pressure
- Monthly Town Hall
 - First Saturday of each month @2:30pm EST
 - While these are largely informal updates provided to interested students by Executive I encourage you

to bring up any issues to me in advance that you would like to spend time discussing. We leave open the ability to add agenda items all the way up to Saturday morning.

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 recommendation 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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'A' being particularly large and stylized.

Justine Aman BAH, MSc(c)
President, Society of Graduate & Professional Students



Hello everyone!

This is my last report of VPG. Thank you everyone for helping me and listening to my council reports. I know Rohit will be an amazing next VPG!

U15 Graduate Student Group: I sit as a representative on the U15 Council, which is a council made up of graduate student associations from the U15. We recently wrote a joint letter Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne with 4 main requests. They are:

1. Increase Tri-Agency Funding to a livable wage to support graduate research
2. Prioritize funding a national childcare program & Partner with universities to coordinate and incentivize on-campus childcare services
3. Expedite the path to citizenship for international students after graduation
4. Eliminate interest on federal student loan and extend the Canada Student Grant program to graduate students

The letter was just recently submitted, Rohit will be able to keep everyone up to date on the status of this campaign

GPSC hiring! We are in the process of hiring our next GPSC coordinator! This is a paid position at \$500/month. This person is in charge of running our graduate peer support center. Applications can be found on our website at <https://sgps.ca/jobs/> with the application closing on April 22nd. A big thank you to our outgoing coordinator Caitlin Stone for her amazing work this challenging year.

PhD tuition reduction: Just a monthly reminder to all international PhD students that you must select that you would like the domestic tuition rate ***by May 1st, 2021, this is a hard deadline.*** Instructions on how to select this lower rate have been sent out via email. Please reach out to me if you were not sent this email or if there are issues getting the lower tuition. Students who do not select a tuition rate by May 1st will automatically be opted into the higher tuition amount.

Cheers!

Courtney Bannerman



Dear Council and SGPS Members,

This has been an entirely different year from any that passed before. Having to work remotely for the entire school year has been a challenge, and not the experience I was expecting in this role. Despite this challenge, I'm very proud of the service and advocacy we were able to provide during these unprecedented times.

This is my final year at Queen's and therefore will not have the opportunity to represent the SGPS next year. However, I think my successor, Jennifer Li, who I'd like to take this moment to congratulate, will be a good fit. She also hails from my faculty and has prior student governance experience. My sincere hope is that things go back to normal and she is able to get some facetime with our members. An opportunity I wasn't fortunate to get this year.

External HR subscription

One of the more fundamental institutional changes this Executive is trying to implement is the acquisition of an external HR service provider to address some of the fundamental needs we have long overlooked. We were fortunate enough to be joined by a lawyer and articling student from Sherrard Kuzz, a leading labour and employment law firm, who advised us on some of the more dire shortfalls we have been neglecting.

We were attuned to not having or implementing contracts in a manner that excludes us from liability in various ways. Having no knowledge of this, we have been functioning as some would say in 'the dark ages'. We are looking to address this problem by recruiting a service provider that is not only economically feasible, but one that can also serve our organizations particular needs. The Executive is aware that we have very limited staff and don't require a full time HR personnel. However, we are looking to address some of the issues that have been raised by various members of the SGPS and staff. These issues are, but not limited to; hiring, contract management, discipline, workplace training, orientations and the like.

We have currently sent out a request for proposal from various well established law firms and are in the process of determining what will be the best fit with our organization.

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 distanced 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,

First of all, I want to thank all of you for your continued participation in the SGPS. It has been an unprecedented year, and with meetings being mainly virtual, I know many of us are facing Zoom fatigue.

This will be my last report, before Courtney Bannerman, takes over as Vice-President Finance in May. Many of the pertinent updates were addressed in my AGM report, so I will keep it brief.

Student Activity Fees

The fee slate for next year has been created in collaboration with the incoming Vice-President Finance. There will be an increase in the health and dental fee, as well as the society fee. The health and dental plan was utilized more this past year, and we are foreseeing that there will be an increase in cost to administer the plan in 2021-2022. The society fee has also been increased to pre-COVID levels as well as we are planning for the possibility that some programs can return next year.

Finance and Services Committee

The Finance Committee will be finishing their terms at the end of April. I want to thank the members for the work they did over the course of the year assisting with review of bursary applications and the fee referendum.

The Finance Committee is still in the process of reviewing the fee referendum package from OPIRG.

Bursaries

Bursary applications closed on April 5th. We received 26 completed applications that were a mix of dental, emergency, activity, and international student bursaries. Those applications are currently being reviewed by the Finance Committee. There is also some follow-up required for some of the incomplete applications submitted.

External and Internal Meetings

I have two more meetings with Queen's University committees before the end of the year. These are for the Academic Integrity Subcommittee and the Campus Master Planning and Advisory Committee. I will also continue to attend Executive meetings until the end of the month.

Transition

I am meeting with Courtney Bannerman on a weekly basis to help her transition into the role.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tamara Mitterer
Vice President (Finance and Services)
Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS)
vp.finance@sgps.ca



Hello Council,

I hope you are all getting to enjoy some sunshine and these warmer temperatures and preparing for the end of this academic year!

SGPS Running and Active Clubs

The SGPS Running and Active Clubs have continued to grow. More SGPS members are joining and participating in conversations surrounding routes, attire, and motivation to staying active when it's cold and icy. As the warmer weather approaches, we are looking forward to engaging even more in this active community we have built in the past year.

Virtual Cooking with Grammas

SGPS Cooks with Grammas has continued with our monthly sessions, with our **last** session coming up on **Wednesday, April 21 at 5pm ET** (registration can be found [here](#)). We have increased participation and have had more SGPS members joining from across Canada. This virtual event has afforded opportunities for those who reside outside of Kingston the opportunity to connect with peers and community members. Thanks to the folks at the Faith and Spiritual Life, grocery subsidies has been offered all year to anyone who requests one, increasing the opportunity for all the join, learn and connect

Cooking with Kookums

On March 10, during Indigenous awareness week, QNSA and the SGPS collaborated on hosting a virtual cooking event, Cooking with Kookums. The event was led by Elders Wendy Phillips and Deb St. Amant, who shared their recipes for a few popular Indigenous dishes, and shared stories along the way. Similar to previous cooking events, registered participants received a grocery subsidy as requested. While learning how to make a couple new, tasty dishes, we learned and shared stories and had several laughs as well!

Politics of Movement Conference Panel

I had the opportunity to collaborate with Fifi (Equity & Diversity Commissioner) in creating a panel for the Beyond Boundaries Conference. The panel focused on the "Politics of Movement", where we combined physical movement with critical discussion. We began with a Muay Thai practice, instructed by a SGPS member, followed by a critical discussion on the politics of movement. This panel offered the opportunity to physically learn something new and engage with graduate students on the politics surrounding different movement practices, as well as contemporary forms of co-optation and appropriation.

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



Dear Council,

I hope you are all keeping well as the semester draws to a close.

In my last report as the Equity and Diversity Commissioner, I want to highlight some projects, committee work and events I have worked on during my tenure.

Soft Infrastructure Working Group

One of the most important goals I set when I assumed this position was the creation of a soft infrastructure network that connects graduate student associations across the university. I am happy to report that in collaboration with Paige, Claudia, and Rohit, we finalized the detailed position descriptions for this network and circulated them among SGPS council reps at the end of 2020. We continue to encourage departments to create two additional positions: An Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigeneity (EDII) representative and an International Graduate Student Representative. While the individuals elected/appointed to each of these roles serve their respective departments, they will also have a seat on the respective SGPS committees that are being created to meet the needs of these graduate student populations: The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigeneity (EDII) Committee and the International Graduate Student Network. Detailed descriptions for each of these positions have been distributed. We are very happy to report that some departments have already created these positions and elected students to fill them, while others are beginning to do so. This is very encouraging! While we appreciate that all departments have not been able to fill each of these positions immediately, we encourage you all to begin the process of writing these positions into your graduate student association by-laws. This soft infrastructure network was conceived to foster solidarity and unity among graduate students, which is more important now than ever before.

As part of the ongoing work for the Soft Infrastructure working group, Paige (Indigenous Graduate Liaison), Rohit (International Commissioner) and myself have put 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 concerns regarding human rights and anti-racism, accessibility, LGBTQ+ support, student organizations and much more. This resource is available on the SGPS website, feel free to refer to it should you have any questions and feel free to share it with your departments and networks.

Committees

As you all know, a large part of work as the Equity and Diversity Commissioner involves committee work. As such, during my tenure, I have regularly participated in meetings with campus groups, organizations, and committees to represent and advocate on behalf of graduate students. As part of my work with the University Council on Anti-Racism and Equity (UCARE), I sit on two sub-Councils: Inclusive Community Sub-Council and Student Recruitment, Support and Success Sub-Council. In these sub-councils, we have been working methodically through the PICARDI report, identifying those recommendations that have been implemented and highlighting those that still need more work. We are set to present our final report to UCARE in April. Additionally, in my work on the Senate Educational Equity Committee (SEEC), I have been raising issues related to equity and diversity in relation to educational outcomes, surveys, and programs. Moreover, I continue to represent graduate students in the Built Environment Advisory Group (BEAG). In these

committees and other meetings, I have highlighted issues and concerns specific to graduate students and emphasized the need for graduate student representation across decision-making bodies on campus.

Events

Madison (Athletics and Wellness Commissioner) and I put together a workshop for the Beyond Boundaries Conference titled "Politics of Movement". While attendance was not as high as we expected, this was a wonderful workshop featuring a half hour Muay Thai class followed by a critical discussion on the historical and political dynamics of sports as well as contemporary forms of co-optation and appropriation. We thank John and Brittany, our two panelists, for their attendance and enlightening presentations!

As my term as the equity and diversity commissioner wraps up, I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to you all. To say that it has been an unusual year sounds trite, but I thank you for your emails, questions, and continued engagement with our work. Here's hoping for a better, brighter year ahead!

All the very best,

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



Dear Council,

I hope you are in good spirits as warmer weather approaches and the winter semester comes to an end. Here is a quick update on a few of the projects I have been working on as your Indigenous Graduate Liaison:

1. Indigenous Reads Talking Circle

New membership has closed for the rest of term as we are dealing with sensitive and often personal issues. Cultural counsellor of Four Directions has joined in on the conversation to help facilitate a safe and welcoming space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to speak on such issues. Our last circle will be held on April 8th, 2021.

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

In working with the SAGE/Indigenous Student Advisor at Four Directions, I am facilitating a student-led writing group which will 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. We have two circles left on April 7th and 21st, 2021 from 9-11:30am via Zoom. 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 have developed an EDII SGPS resource guide assisting students in navigating EDII work within their respective departments which is live on the SGPS website. If you need any assistance in the creation of an Indigenous Student rep within your respective departments, please do not hesitate to contact myself at Indigenous@sgps.ca or equity@sgps.ca

4. Indigenous Student Caucus (SELF IDENTIFIED INDIGENOUS STUDENTS ONLY)

In collaboration with Four Directions and Office of Indigenous Initiatives, I am working on a call for members of the newly formed Indigenous Student Caucus. If you have any interested Indigenous graduate students in your departments, particularly law, business, and engineering so we can aim for equitable representation across all faculties, please do send them my contact email indigenous@sgps.ca for more information.

This will be my final council meeting with SGPS members as my contract will be up at the end of April. I look forward to transitioning the new person who will enter this role. Thank you for wonderful experience and knowledge I have gained in serving the SGPS. Miigwech to the amazing support from the SGPS team in making me feel as comfortable as possible in being the first person to serve this role. Best wishes for the new person who enters this role and best wishes to all the members as we near the end of term.

Gichi Miigwech,

Paige Van Tassel

SGPS Indigenous Graduate Liaison
indigenous@sgps.ca



Hello Council,

I hope you are all doing well, I have been loving this weather and getting out hiking!

Events this month

“Show and Tell: Gardens” (no cost)

Join us on April 15th @3pm to meet others and talk gardens and plants! A guest speaker Master of Biology student will be sharing a presentation on gardening basics, and covering topics such as hardening off plants, basic garden care, pest control and more. After the presentation we will have a “show and tell” where you have the opportunity to show of your own indoor plants or gardens, we will have some time for brief discussion, and an optional sign up sheet for seed/cutting sharing with others, and we will close with three rounds of plant themed Bingo with prizes.

“Watercolour painting” (no cost)

Join us April 22nd @4pm to meet others and watercolour paint! Sign up for a free art kit (delivery within Kingston), and then tune in to zoom and paint with us. You may paint your own idea, or even bring your own project, however if you are interested in painting along with me I will be guiding the group through painting a birch forest.

Get Involved

The “show and tell” series is an opportunity for you to share your knowledge with other grad and professional students, this can include a short presentation and an activity, craft, or game, and/or a discussion. A “show and tell” event often has both educational and social aspects. If you are interested in working with me please don’t hesitate to email me at social@sgps.ca.

Closing and Thank you

Working with you for the past months has been a wonderful experience, and I will miss facilitating events as your social commissioner, as of the end of April my contract is ended as I graduate soon, however a new social commissioner will be bringing you even more wonderful events.

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