

*University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society*  
**Graduate Representative Council**  
(ONLINE VIA BLACKBOARD) MEETING MINUTES  
DECEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2020, 5-7 PM

**Elected Academic Unit Reps (1 vote per academic unit) Present:**

<b>Anthropology:</b> Robert Gustas	<b>Curriculum &amp; Instruction:</b> Adair Ng	<b>French:</b> Tiffany Kuo
<b>Art History &amp; Visual Studies:</b> Mel Granley	<b>Earth &amp; Ocean Sciences:</b> Chrissy Schellenberg	<b>Geography:</b> Brianna Brandon
<b>Biochemistry &amp; Microbiology:</b> Michael Allison	<b>Economics:</b> Brooklynn Trimble, Gerard Wu	<b>Pacific &amp; Asian Studies:</b> Maeve Milligan
<b>Biology:</b> Nicholas Planidin	<b>Electrical &amp; Computer Engineering:</b> Alexandros Dimopoulos	<b>Psychology:</b> Thomas Ferguson
<b>Chemistry:</b> Gregory Gaube, Archita Adluri	<b>English:</b> Elyse Loewen	<b>Social Dimensions of Health:</b> Courtney Majewski
<b>Civil Engineering:</b> Aryia Eini, Maryam Monazami		<b>Visual Arts:</b> Liam O'Sullivan

**GSS Executive Board (1 vote per elected board member) Present:**

<b>Chair:</b> Drake RUSHFORD	<b>Director of Student Affairs:</b> Antoine ROSE
<b>Director of Communications:</b> Matty CERVANTES	<b>Executive Director:</b> Kyla TURNER (non-voting), <b>RECORDER</b>
<b>Director of Services:</b> Daniel GUDIÑO	

**Other GSS Members Present:** Nicole Kent and Adam Brennan-Smith.

**Regrets:**

Jacob Hunt – Director of Finance  
Rachel Colquhoun – Germanic and Slavic Studies  
Michelle Snidal – History  
Tieess McKenzie – School of Music

**Absent:**

**Computer Science:** Masoud Mokhtari  
**Educational Psychology & Leadership:** Lauren Petersen, Meng Qi (Annie) Wu  
**Law:** Adekunle (Kunle) Adewumi  
**Medical Sciences (Neuroscience):** Hannah Reid  
**Nursing:** Erin Donald  
**Physics & Astronomy:** Bobby Bickley  
**Political Science:** Brianna Parent-Long  
**Public Administration:** Amanda Leclerc, Luisa Trux, Hannah Kim  
**Sociology:** Talya Jespersen, Mandana Karimi  
**Theatre:** Devon Goldie

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**CALL TO ORDER AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

RUSHFORD called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

ROSE provided a personal statement of land acknowledgement, in French.

## STANDING ITEMS

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### 1. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

*MOTION: RESOLVED that the agenda is approved as presented.*

*M/S TRIMBLE/KUO*

*CARRIED*

### 2. TIMEKEEPER VOLUNTEER

BRANDON volunteered.

### 3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

*TABLED until January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021.*

### 4. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES/PAST MEETINGS

RUSHFORD: The Mi'kmaq solidarity statement was released. The VPN letter has not yet been drafted.

TRIMBLE: The letter on VPN issue should be sent before start of term to protect the rights of TAs.

TRIMBLE: asked for confirmation of her appointments to UVic's Childcare Services Advisory Board and Multifaith Centre Advisory Committee.

**TASK:** RUSHFORD and TURNER to confirm the Childcare Services Advisory and Multifaith Centre Advisory Committee appointments.

### 5. REPORTS

#### A. MEMBERSHIP REPORT

**GSS Membership:** As of November 24, 2020 there are 2913 GSS Members.

**GRC Membership:** Since the October 27<sup>th</sup> GRC meeting, there has been 0 resignations, and 0 new elected Councillors. Therefore, GRC now has 30 academic units represented (out of 47 units eligible).

**Meeting Quorum:** With four regrets received, quorum for tonight's meeting is 13. The meeting was quorate.

#### B. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Thanks to all who came out to AGM. The AGM was a massive success and we passed all items. The new Executive Director, Kyla TURNER's, first month has been going very well. The Winter term class start date feedback was submitted with thanks to the grad reps who checked in with their colleagues. (See Appendix A for a full copy of the submitted report.)

#### C. EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORTS – QUESTIONS ARISING AND MOTION TO APPROVE

*MOTION: RESOLVED Grad Council approves the Executive Board Reports received for the months of October and November 2020.*

*M/S KUO/KENT*

*CARRIED*

#### D. GRC STANDING COMMITTEES – APPOINTMENTS AND REPORTS

##### **GRC COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS:**

*MOTION: RESOLVED that Michael Allison is excused from the 2020-21 GRC Communications Committee and is elected to the GRC Student Affairs Committee.*  
M/S KENT/KUO  
CARRIED

##### **GRC STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

- Appeals – GUDIÑO: Request that grad reps be aware of information for opt-in/out dates and communicate them to your academic units.
- Events – GUDIÑO: Training series continues with naloxone training in second half of January.
- Stipend Review – PLANIDIN: anticipate doing a review of duties of executive board to adjust for scope creep and review the number of hours per position.

#### E. GRADUATE REPRESENTATION ON UVIC COMMITTEES – VACANCIES

##### **COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS:**

*Motion: RESOLVED that the resignation of Eva Linde from the Senate Committee on Appeals, and the Make Transit Work Coalition is accepted, with thanks for the previous year's contributions.*  
M/S KUO/GUSTAS  
CARRIED

Faculty of Science Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee: TRIMBLE spoke to the work to get a seat for a graduate student on this committee, particularly to ensure TA perspectives on supporting diverse students were taken into account. TRIMBLE encouraged GRC reps to consider volunteering or helping to recruit for this vacancy and the other representative vacancies.

#### F. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

No reports.

BREAK

#### MEETING NEW BUSINESS

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##### 1. DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION APPOINTMENT

Lead: Brooklynn TRIMBLE, GSS Electoral Officer.

Purpose: for decision.

TRIMBLE called for nominations to fill the Director of Communications midyear vacancy. Nominations were received from three GSS members, all in good standing:

- Adam Brennan-Smith
- Nicole Kent
- Maryam Monazami

Each candidate made a short personal presentation to the members in attendance.

A secret ballot vote was held, and with 22 votes cast, Nicole Kent received the plurality of votes. TRIMBLE declared Nicole KENT to be duly appointed by the GRC to fill the midterm GSS Director of Communications vacancy.

*Motion: RESOLVED to destroy the ballots*  
*M/S RUSHFORD/KUO*  
*Approved by CONSENT.*

## 2. GSS ELECTORAL OFFICER APPOINTMENT

Lead: Brooklynn TRIMBLE, GSS Electoral Officer

Purpose: for decision

TRIMBLE has resigned the position as the GSS Electoral Officer as of December 31, 2020.

Discussion: RUSHFORD, GUDIÑO and TRIMBLE spoke to the importance of the Electoral Officer role, the governance skills which the successful candidate can expect to build, the schedule of work and the existences of the stipend.

*Motion: RESOLVED that the appointed 2020-21 Electoral Officer is Tiffany KUO.*  
*M/S RUSHFORD/CERVANTES*  
*CARRIED*

## 3. DEPARTMENT GRANT FUND UPDATE

Lead: Matty CERVANTES and Daniel GUDIÑO

Purpose: for consultation

REF DOCS: 2020-21 Department Grant Application Form – DRAFT only

Discussion:

GUDIÑO introduced the necessity of adapting the Department Grant due to COVID-19. Previously this funded primarily social and academic activities or projects. A taskforce of Executive and staff was struck to make revisions. The main criteria are: projects/activities must adherence to public health guidelines, the academic unit must have an active, in good standing rep, the project/activity must be organized by and for graduate students, must be free of charge and completed by March 31, 2021. There will be two levels of funding available. \$250 for academic/social projects and activities. \$350 for academic unit association development.

CERVANTES stressed that we are looking to support and empower graduate students to form academic unit associations to increase representation.

RUSHFORD and GUDIÑO shared that this fund is meant to get money to students ASAP.

## 4. DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION STIPEND

Lead: Nicholas PLANIDIN, Chair Stipend Review Committee

Purpose: for decision

Discussion:

PLANIDIN: Without this motion, the work of the new Director of Communications during December would not be reimbursed. The amount was an estimate of the upper limit of the time that will be put in. RUSHFORD was thinking a lower amount to reflect attendance at the next Executive Board meeting on December 21, 2020. Due to the GSS closure from December 19-January 3<sup>rd</sup> inclusive, the workload will be

light. Most training will take place in January, expecting about 3 hours of work in December. TRIMBLE suggested an amount of \$100 would be a fair stipend to award the incoming Director of Communications for work and participation prior to their official start of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

*Motion: RESOLVED that Grad Council approves the payment of \$100 to the incumbent Director of Communications.*

*M/S TRIMBLE/KUO*

*CARRIED.*

*AMENDMENT: The amount in the motion is changed from \$349.05 to \$100.*

*M/S RUSHFORD/PLANIDIN*

*CARRIED*

## 5. STIPEND REVIEW COMMITTEE SIZE

Lead: Nicholas PLANIDIN

Purpose: for discussion

REF DOCS: Stipend Review Committee ToR

Stipend Review Committee Draft ToR

Discussion:

PLANIDIN: Current committee size is equal to quorum (3). This means if any member cannot make the meeting, Committee cannot make quorum. It might be helpful to increase the size to 4-5 members, it would open up this committee to others who want to join, and should not take away members from other Committees with more substantial workloads.

RUSHFORD: Mehdi drafted new Terms of Reference for most committees and recommended creating members at large within committees to address quorum issues. Any suggestions for changes to Committee Terms of Reference can be brought to the Bylaw and Policy Committee if members of the committee feel that they can be improved.

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## CLOSING ITEMS

### IMPORTANT DATE REMINDERS

GSS Closed: December 19 – January 3.

GSS re-opens 'online': Monday, January 4, 2021 at 10 am.

UPass Opt-Ins/Outs for Winter term: available December 15-18, 2020, and again from Jan. 4-31, 2021.

Health and Dental Insurance Opt-Ins/Outs (only for graduate students beginning their programs in January) will be accepted January 4-31, 2021.

Next GRC meeting: January 26, 2021.

- Please have any potential agenda items, with supporting materials, to the Executive Board for consideration, in advance of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
- Agenda, Notice of Motions to be posted: January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT/ADVOCACY/PARTICIPATION

TRIMBLE: The Faculty of Science Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee is looking for financial support for EDI training.

RUSHFORD: The Executive has the ability to re-allocate funds within the budget. TRIMBLE requested to email.

CERVANTES: Offered thanks for the GRC collaboration in her term, and also thanked the Executive Board.

RUSHFORD: Thanked CERVANTES for her excellent service.

ADJOURNMENT

*MOTION: RESOLVED to adjourn the meeting.*

*M/S TRIMBLE/ROSE*

*CARRIED*

The meeting adjourned at 6:46 PM.

kt/klp

X 

Drake Rushford  
GSS Chair 2020-21

X 

Kyla Turner  
GSS Executive Director

## APPENDIX A: RESPONSE TO SENATE RE: JANUARY CLASS START DATE CHANGE

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### UVIC GRADUATE STUDENTS' SOCIETY INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE

PREPARED FOR: Senate Committee on Agenda and Governance

SUBJECT: Temporary delay to the first day of classes for January 2021

#### BACKGROUND:

As the Senate Committee on Agenda and Governance is considering shifting the first day of classes in the second half of the Winter term to January 11, the GSS would like to highlight several perspectives and concerns for the Senate's consideration of this proposal. These relate both to issues raised by our membership regarding their academic and personal planning, and those raised in relation to our service provision for the graduate Health and Dental plans and UPASS. As our membership and staff have diverse needs, I have included different subsections within this report to capture the differing opinions related to the topics of health and dental insurance administration, student perspectives, and UPASS administration. Where beneficial, direct quotes from GSS members and staff have been included.

2020 has been an extraordinary year in almost every regard. I want to offer my thanks to the Senate and the entire leadership community at the University for considering deeply the added burdens of stress and uncertainty for our faculty and students.

#### DISCUSSION:

The Graduate Students' Society consulted with our staff, Executive Board, and the Graduate Representative Council in preparing our response. Given the turn around time for our reply, we were unable to hear from all academic units or GRC representatives. The GSS urges the University to allot additional time for thorough and early communication with the entire University community about the changes that can/will result from the proposed change to the start of classes. This communication must ensure that the additional stress and administrative workload for students and staff due to the changed start date can be adequately offset by the additional time off over Winter break.

#### HEALTH AND DENTAL INSURANCE:

As noted in the November 26 memo, changes to the start date of the term will impact other important dates including the add/drop dates, withdrawal dates, and the tuition payment deadline. As the GSS relies on enrolment data and transfers of tuition fees to administer our Health and Dental insurance plans, the deadline extensions in the first half of the Winter term this September caused a number of challenges in administering our plans. This increased financial burdens for students and impacts the GSS's mandate to provide comprehensive coverage to our members. As the changes to the first half of the winter term were made with relatively short notice, the GSS did not have sufficient time to negotiate the changes to our registration dates with our insurance provider, Pacific Blue Cross.

The extension of the add/drop and withdrawal deadlines meant that graduate student eligibility for the Health and Dental plans were subject to change for an extended period of time. This resulted in:

- Students becoming ineligible for Health and Dental coverage due to dropping classes: Graduate students tried to enroll their families for insurance coverage, only to later discover that due to the drop in course(s), they were not longer eligible to pay for insurance through their UVic Tuition for themselves.
- Students becoming ineligible for Health and Dental coverage when they took leave: Graduate students have complained that they were unaware that by taking leave from the September term would result in

their fees being change on their tuition account. Graduate students have mentioned they felt that they were not warned of implications of taking leave by GARO and FGS.

- The black out period for coverage extending until October 29 due to delays in having final registration in the plans available based on full-time student registration with the University. This lead to long wait times for students being reimbursed for services received in the black-out period, adding to the financial strain of an already difficult time.
- Financial stress while waiting for reimbursement for fees: Students were confused regarding how to receive the credited amount on their tuition account back.
- Significant increases in both the opt-ins/opt-outs and the appeals for late opt-in/opt-outs

Regarding the increasing in opt-in/out appeals, it should be noted that students mentioned to the GSS Health and Dental Coordinator that their Tuition Account did not immediately show changes in their assessed fees as they added or dropped classes and therefore they were unaware of their actual fees before the opt-in/out deadline. During the 2019-20 school year, our office processed 13 appeals to opt-in/out of our plans. Thus far this year, we have processed 18 appeals, with another 11 before the Appeals Committee. For students unable to opt-in dependants or themselves or opt-out of our plans, this can be quite costly in terms of out-of-pocket medical costs or insurance payments for plans that will go unused. While 29 appeals still represents a small absolute number, the significant increase indicates many more students are struggling with health-related costs at this time.

Finally in regards to health insurance, we have had a large number of international students who have struggled to secure appropriate MTMI or MSP coverage for their arrival in Canada/BC. At present, MTMI is still set to start January 01, 2021, which may need to change if the first day of classes or international students' arrival date in Canada changes. For international students currently residing in Canada, there have been difficulties in extending their MSP coverage. Extending MSP coverage is directly linked to their Visa dates from IRCC. While international students are advised to submit extension paper work 6 months in advance (due to a 95 day processing delay), many of them did not expect or plan for this pandemic to shift their defense dates.

International Graduate students (identified 15 and counting) that have arrived in Canada that do not reside in BC have experienced other issues that were flagged by our office:

- Those that reside in Ontario and Quebec to be close to friend and/or family in Canada have stated that they cannot obtain OHIP or RAMQ after MTMI has completed due to the legislation in those provinces
- Information from UVic's ISS website only show information for those that reside in BC
- While they can choose to extend their Guard.me coverage, they are required to pay upfront for the whole amount.

While we appreciate that travel delays and challenges are caused primarily by factors outside the University's control, late-notice changes to term start or end dates adds to the challenges faced by international students arriving in Canada both in terms of their student visas as well as MTMI coverage and later MSP eligibility. This jeopardizes the health, safety, and wellbeing of our international graduate students.

#### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES:

Many of our members (including those in the SEOS, Music, History, Nursing, Sociology, English, Anthropology, and Economics academic units) have stressed that they would appreciate shifting the start date to January 11 to increase downtime for mental wellness and increase the time that international students arriving in Canada have to self-isolate before the start of classes. The added self-isolation time would benefit any students returning to their home communities over the holidays or arriving in Victoria for the January term, regardless of whether students are domestic or international. Additionally, and of particular concern to graduate students, one GSS member stated that the extension would allow more time for students to care for their children, as many school districts across the country are considering an extension to the K-12 break as well.



Within the School of Nursing, one graduate student also highlighted that the additional 5 days would give the University community a better sense of the post-holiday spike in COVID cases.

The graduate students we heard from who were in favour of the extended break showed a clear and decisive preference for scenario 2, removing one day from the exam period. I have included below student comments that I'd like to highlight.

"Given the number of students effected [by scenario 2] (about 780), the University might consider providing additional support to those students, perhaps circulating a survey at the beginning of term to ask what types of support would be helpful to students if they had same-day/back-to-back exams. Consultation with the Student Wellness Centre also seems advisable."

"Graduate student sessional instructors have performed SO much unpaid labour this term by working well beyond the hours they usually would in order to learn how to teach online while doing it, that a longer break is well deserved."

"While extending Winter Break does create complications in the Spring examination period, the day-to-day tumult of the pandemic makes the Winter break extension a welcome relief while the possible complications of the exam period are just that --possibilities. No one can be sure how the Spring term will look due to pandemic rules/regulation/advances/etc. but everyone is certain to benefit from an extended break after such a tough and isolating semester."

"It's really reassuring to see how much thought has gone into this. If it's relevant, from my memories of undergrad I'd probably advocate for scenario 2 from the table. And definitely opposed removing spring break (which I know has already been shot down, but just in case someone brings it up again)."

"The majority of us [in the French Department] are **not** in favour of eliminating Reading Break and are willing to accept a shortened exam period (no preference indicated)."

We did also hear from a minority of students who would either prefer that the winter break remain unchanged or that further guidance be given if it is extended. For example:

"It should be noted that some feel like this option came way too late and there's noticeable frustration as other universities made this decision weeks ago." – GSS member

"I would want clarification on library and lab schedules during the extended break. I anticipate that many of the graduate students who live in Victoria will need/want to continue accessing these resources in their 'time off' and I hope that an extended break would not lead to prolonged closures." – GSS staff

Among the students who felt strongly that the break should not be changed, there was a wide range of reasons behind their position. One Civil Engineering graduate student expressed serious concern that the change to the first day of classes may affect his ability to enter Canada on the date of his pre-arranged travel.

While most graduate students from the School of Nursing supported the extension, one student is concerned about a condensed workload during the term, which is particularly challenging for mid-career graduate students.

The School of Music graduate representative stated that students were unconcerned by the exam schedule changes as there are few exams for their students, however, they failed to see the "real benefit of a slight extension to the winter break... For students who have plans for the end of term, who work on weekends, and who are potentially moving at that time, the proposition of changing the schedule for the April exam schedule was received by many as being unnecessary and stress-inducing."

Within the Anthropology department, one graduate student requested clarification around winter term tuition as they are planning to defend in early January. They would also appreciate an explicit statement about how changing the break would affect their situation.

We heard from two students in the Germanic/Slavic Studies unit who felt that the change would cause more harm than good to student wellbeing and education. "Both as a student and as an instructor, I think it is always good to ease in the semester by having a shorter first week..."

I am also concerned that this was proposed by academic leaders, and, therefore, might not align with students' best interests." "I feel that losing a week of schooling will only put students and instructors behind schedule with no demonstrable reduction of harm. The University, needs to and has been following the COVID guidelines with great success. The suggestion to delay the start of term seems to arise from a misguided and unscientific urge to avoid placing strain on students with no consideration of the strain (and altered quality of education) which will result from abbreviating the semester. In short I would urge the University to keep the semesters scheduled as usual, and to avoid making reactionary choices which affect the academic, mental and emotional health of students with- I stress, no demonstrable pay off."

#### UPASS:

While our primary concern in changing registration/tuition dates focuses on our Health and Dental plans, many of the same issues impact our UPASS program. Delays to this program can cause transportation challenges for our students residing in and around Victoria, financial burden for students, and the potential for strain in our relationship with BC transit due to delays in receiving funds from the University. While there has been more flexibility in adding and removing members to this services, our staff did find that some students were opting-in to this service, then changing their registration so that they were automatically assessed for the service, and getting double charged. The delays in getting refunds to such students adds financial strain.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

##### HEALTH AND DENTAL INSURANCE and UPASS:

The GSS must be provided with additional notice regarding the changes in add/drop, and tuition deadlines. With the changing of registration going until the tuition deadline, this resulted in our offices having to wait before we could fully start the coverage for graduate students under our group policy. If the Senate is considering changing the start date of next term, we need to be able to inform Pacific Blue Cross immediately in order to fulfill our mandate.

The University should produce messaging alerting students to the fact that adding or dropping a class will change their assessed fees for services. This messaging should include timeframes for when updated fee assessments will be available online so students can plan to add or remove services as needed.

Graduate students applying for leave must be informed to contact the GSS about how to maintain or terminate their insurance coverage for the academic year or term.

##### STUDENT PERSPECTIVES:

International students who have already arranged for entry into Canada must be connected with ISS to clarify how the changed start date of classes will impact their immigration. As well, all international students should receive consultation with ISS about how this change will impact travel plans to Canada which may not yet be finalized.

Graduate students defending their theses must be alerted to what these changes will mean for tuition and fees.

Additional mental health supports should be put in place for students during a compressed semester and especially exam period.

Members of the GSS expressed a strong recommendation for scenario 2, to extend the exam period by one day. They further recommended consultation with the following:

- CUPE 4163 regarding marking load for teaching assistants and sessional instructors at the end of term and grade submission deadlines
- Student Wellness Centre
- Co-operative Education
- The Library
- Learning Commons
- DSC

The GSS appreciates the consultation the Senate has undertaken for these proposed changes and our inclusion in this process. I hope I can impress upon the SCAG that these issues relating to our service provision do not simply reflect internal administrative issues for the GSS, but sources of stress, financial hardship, and confusion for graduate students already enduring unanticipated difficulties in participating in our University community and in continuing to advance UVic's standing as an excellent research university. We look forward to increased communication from the University to support our smooth operations for all UVic graduate students.

