

GSA Visioning/Council Meeting - September 25th 2012

GSA House – 10:00am

Present:

1. Call to Order (not done) ~10:30am (12:50)
2. Appointment of Chair and Secretary (announced, elected in the afternoon)
 - 2.1. Facilitator: Daria; Secretary: Kiley;
3. Visioning: Opening Remarks and presentation of feedback from councilor outreach
 - 3.1. Poor attendance – feedback for why was scheduling
4. Visioning: Introduction, motivation and Goals
 - 4.1. Introductions
 - Daria (President), enjoys advocating for students
 - Patrick Lennard (Finance), inspired by the student movement
 - Simon Vickers, when the strike came about exposed holes in his dept association structure; hopes to get structural changes for power to the departments; Today – talk about how we could move forward GSA acts more as a rep body of students rath
 - Audrey (councilor), strike made her realize student gov is organized differently here; Today, some projects for the year
 - Tobin, get more grad students to know about GSA, come and get involved; Today – take a look at the budget, planning for events for the year
 - Tarek, was on the mobilization committee last year, motivated by last year, representing the students who are having trouble accessing education;
 - Kovian, involve with university life in undergrad, thought he could make a contribution; Today – share goals and objectives, vision for next year
 - Katherine (Arts & Science rep), active last year, impressed with how much of an impact we have together; Today – get to know everyone, share vision, GSA vehicle of change;
 - Erik, previously on council, VP, senate, BoG, looking at higher structures of university, hopefully new board will be more receptive; Today – share experience, get new ideas.
 - Nadia, worried that momentum from the strike would be lost if she didn't continue, making students aware of the associations and power dynamics in the university; Today – get to know each other, do we have common principles
 - Mahmood (JMSB council member), tuition increase, GSA support; Admin assistant, ; Today – vision, strategy for year, breaking into smaller goals, avoid deviating from main goal
 - Roya (VP Internal), former admin assistant, publicizing GSA services; Today – what others thinks we should do, what is the ultimate purpose of GSA,
 - Tara (JMSB rep), what is life like beyond MB? Background in membership based organizing, hope; Today – focus energies to define goals, board meetings, more efficient, make GSA more effective. Recognizing JMSB has a different perspective and help bridging both worlds.
 - Nirnanjan, involve with student govt in undergrad, working with GSA to broaden perspective on working with people, but also getting people involved; Today – get to know everyone

- Abis, provide a platform for graduate students to give a friendly environment and have good relations at Concordia. Get out of the labs and enjoy Concordia. Organize events;
 - Hasanain, last year felt GSA not representing me, Engineering, felt there was a lot the GSA could do to help. Today – find a way to share ideas and where we are going, what is everyone thinking.
- 4.2. Define what motivated each of us individually to be involved with the GSA
- 4.3. Describe what our individual goals are for the visioning day (ie. What you personally want to get out of the day)
5. Visioning: GSA Mission Statement (in groups)
- GROUP 1 – Tarek &
 - o Idea meant to make visible an explicit what is implicit in the mission; two changes to the mission
 - **The GSA seeks to protect, stimulate and enrich academic and social interests, while raising the political awareness of its constituency**
 - History of student movement/etc “defends” student rights; the thing that best defends their rights by raising their political awareness and culture, so they can defend themselves; part of the education process as opposed to being depoliticized. Giving them the tools that they can be politically aware of what’s happening, know their rights and defend themselves
 - **The association is, and will remain, a democratic, non-profit and *politically progressive* corporation.**
 - “progressive corporation” open ended terms that can encompass alternative gender ; not aligned with government political alignment
 - “empower” too vague
 - GROUP 2 – Tara
 - o Complete re-write
 - **The GSA is an accessible, transparent non-profit corporation that fosters on equitable environment that meets the educational and social needs of all graduate students at Concordia University, by listening to you, ensuring your voices are heard; advocating for your rights; and gathering and uniting our diverse graduate community.**
 - Unpacking the term “democracy – what does it mean, to clarify how : transparency, equity, etc.
 - GROUP 3
 - o Discussion of key terms
 - “To protect, stimulate” – what does protect mean? Administration, individual
 - What do we know about our constituencies, how to do we foster these ideas to come from them?

- PGSS (grad association McGill) structured differently; council of 80-100 with a rep from each dept. – how can we involve departments despite a different structure
- Many of the terms are vague, which wanted to leave so it would be up to the council to interpret how to fulfill them

Discussion:

- How to proceed; are we trying to make a new mission to be ratified by next general assembly
- Process: new by-laws created last year, trying to ratify over the summer but never met quorum. Not to say we shouldn't change, but should be part of longer reflection.
- This exercise was not intended to be a revision of the mission statement but to understand the mission when talking about our goals for the visioning
 - Interested in the by-laws through this exercise, perhaps to form a by-law committee, perhaps find someone to interpret last year's draft
- GA in two days; we can present the mission, the fact that there is a mission, possibility of amending, or completely re-write; then transition into the priorities for the year
 - Good idea but technically need to give 10 days' notice for a GA to change by-laws
 - Perhaps as a working mission?

-lunch-

Proposal: Table agenda point 7, 9, and 10;

6. Visioning: Priorities for the year

- Group 1: Build a sense of community of belonging b/w department which can in turn encourage grads to become more involved in the social, political and educational activities of GSA and/or broader community
- More specifically:
 - Fun social events
 - Apple-picking
 - Trips, montreal/quebec history tours
 - Activities with other universities
 - Diverse workshops not offers;
 - Grad pro skills & others
 - Bartending, English/French café
 - Free schools, yoga, etc
 - Gardening
 - Caucus of dep't representatives
- Activities vs. services, PR, political issues, differences between grad association, undergrad association, Club vs association.
- How can we represent the students without reaching out to them?

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- For example, 600 students at BBQ but hard to make quorum at GA (~50). We need events so people think GSA is our association; Yet we missed the opportunity to inform people about special projects funding, etc.
- Careful usage of the term “political”, seems to be a lot of people using this word for different meanings
- GSA is “political” in the sense that we come together collectively
- Is it the place of the GSA to organize these things? All members can organize events, apply for funding etc, while the GSA can promote these things and make connections. Meanwhile we can focus on defending student rights.
- Tailor events to specific parts of the constituency – you don’t please anyone by trying to please everyone (eg. cricket vs art films)
- Last semester, felt GSA was not political enough – frustrating how people look at politics. Not advocating for an ideology, but for accessibility of education... why a fear of politics? Just because we spent so many resources on social events, less on workshops, capacity building, advocacy;
- Re: proportion of social-vs-politics; in the end 10% toward events but cannot attract enough students for quorum.
- How to apply for special projects funding should be more clear
- CSU services like HOJO not available for grad students... serious needs of international students.
- Group 2:
 - o Priority :
 - outreach; department level communication with membership, and dialogue
 - Regular meetings with dept reps
 - More transparency in governance;
 - caucus with reps
 - o Some strategies
 - Incentive based school tournament
 - Partner with TRAC to outreach to departments
 - Council meetings could be broadcast (? Last year CUTV was not very receptive to this)
 - Publicize TV at the house -- seems to be a good way to have people in the space
- Group 3:
 - o Reach out to students
 - o Present this to the GA
 - create a suggestion box, get actual feedback from the membership, work with that
 - Ask specifically how to reach out to your dept, your dept associations
 - o Next visioning
 - how to reach out, but also WHY to reach out.

- Wrap-up:
 - More funding for dept associations, allocations
 - Decentralization process... way to go about it – since many associations work on the same types of things that could benefit by working together
 - Just giving money tends to isolate them more
 - Teams for each faculty to promote GAs etc
- Next meeting:
 - Have another meeting soon (2 weeks): send out a doodle
 - Next GA:
 - Two broad objectives to present:
 - Reaching out to members
 - Through departments
 - Transparency of governance
 - How to achieve these objectives
 - Present the existing mission

Adjournment (2:15)