

Graduate Student Committee

Report to the CASCA Board — June 2019

1- GSC Membership

The 2018-2019 Graduate Student Committee (GSC) consists of fourteen members representing ten universities. The current members of the graduate student committee and their university affiliations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The 2018-2019 GSC members and their associated host universities.

Executive		
Maan Hani	Chair	University of Victoria
Douglas Rennehan	Vice-Chair	University of Victoria
Representatives on other committees		
Margaret Ikape	EIC rep.	University of Toronto
<i>Vacant</i>	EPO rep.	
Taylor James Bell	LOC rep.	McGill University
Carter Rhea	LOC rep.	Université de Montréal
Melissa Marquette	LOC rep.	McGill University
Members		
Claire Guimond		McGill University
Dhruv Bisaria		Queen's University
Adam Gonzalez		Saint Mary's University
Antoine Darveau-Bernier		Université de Montréal
Anne Boucher		Université de Montréal
Kenny Van		University of Alberta
Anna Ordog		University of Calgary
Mainak Singha		University of Manitoba
Anita Bahmanyar		University of Toronto
Ruth Digby		University of Victoria
Megan Tannock		University of Western Ontario

Note: The Education and Public Outreach officer remains vacant. This position has been substituted with a representative on the Education and Public Outreach (EPO) Committee.

2- The Graduate Student Workshop & the Annual General Meeting

The 2019 Graduate Student Workshop (GSW) will feature three sessions focusing on current graduate student needs and interests as reflected by the GSC's department representatives. The GSW was designed to align with the GSC's vision and the astronomical society's values.

The GSC will feature a session on Ally-ship and diversity which aims at providing graduate students with tools allowing them to be better allies to marginalized communities or members of our community. The diversity workshop aims to provide a broader perspective and appreciation to some of the issues which plague the astronomical society whilst allowing a moderated environment that favours open discussions. This session will be jointly presented/moderated by McGill's Social Equity and Diversity Education Office, and the Université de Montréal physics department's diversity group.

The second session will focus on science communication promoting efficient science communication at academic and a public outreach levels. Graduate students are rarely trained to properly communicate their work. This session aims to leave attendees better equipped and more comfortable at communicating their work. The session will be presented by Frédérique Baron (Université de Montréal).

The last session of the workshop is designed to promote networking with industries and provide graduate students with a better view of what it is like to pursue a non-academic career. There are often many misconceptions regarding which of our academic/research skills best prepare us to pursue non-academic careers. This session will shed some light on careers in some non-academic streams. The session will be moderated by GSC representatives and includes four-five guests representing different fields.

The GSC developed a website dedicated for the workshop this year. The website includes a feedback form to ease the collection of student's feedback on the GSW and particular sessions. The feedback form will **not** include any personal/confidential student information. In order to optimize the feedback process and eliminate any biases, McGill's Social Equity and Diversity Education Office helped develop a questionnaire.

3- GSC Internal Governance & Strategic Planning

As outline in the Fall 2018 report, the internal GSC's internal governance suffers severely from poor documentation. The absence of proper governance and procedural documents has hindered progress in the past. The GSC's continuity, transparency, and institutional memory would benefit enormously from properly documented procedures, and terms of reference. The GSC drafted a brief description of the various positions on the GSC (see below).

A. Duties and Responsibilities of Graduate Representatives

Grad representatives shall:

- Provide direction to the GSC in the affairs of the graduate student body
- Attend the regular committee meetings (i.e. monthly)
- Represent the best interest of fellow grad students at the GSC
- Report back to respective academic units on discussions and decisions made by the GSC
- Where possible, sit on one of the GSC's working groups

B. Duties and Responsibilities of the GSC Reps. on other CASCA committees

The terms of reference of the positions are outlined under the respective committees procedures. The graduate representatives on those committees should abide by their committees' guidelines whilst upholding the graduate students' interests.

C. Duties and Responsibilities of the Chair

The GSC's chair shall:

- Regularly chair meetings of the GSC except where another meeting chair is appointed by the Executive Board for the Grad Council meeting
- Act as the primary spokesperson of the GSC
- Be responsible for coordinating campaigns advocating for graduate students on a national level and within CASCA
- Represent the interests of the graduate student body
- Act as the primary liaison with CASCA's executive board (i.e. chair), CASCA's committees, and the graduate student membership at large
- Be responsible for other duties as agreed upon and assigned by the GSC

D. Duties and Responsibilities of the Vice Chair

The GSC's vice chair shall:

- Assume the role of Chair in their absence
- Record and maintain a record of the GSC's meeting minutes
- Be responsible for other duties as agreed upon and assigned by the GSC

Additionally, knowing the fast turnaround in student leaders that the GSC witnesses, we established a transition capsule which, in addition to the governance documents, which include short-range recommendations (i.e. pseudo strategic plan) and adequate documentation of continuing project which the GSC leads.

4- GSC Elections

In previous years, the GSC's elections have been held during the GSW with little notice to the graduate students. This approach excludes students who could not attend the GSW, and leaves the students in attendance uncertain about their commitment to their position on the GSC. Additionally, the process by which students from all institutions vote for a given institution's representative is fundamentally flawed. While the positions of the Chair and Vice Chair should be voted for by the general graduate student membership, university representatives should be voted for by their respective institutions. This year, departments will be contacted prior to the workshop to nominate their representatives and the vacant positions will be made available (along with descriptions of responsibilities/duties) prior to the GSW (see the workshop's website). Departments are encouraged to nominate multiple representatives which is optimal in the case of larger departments. Furthermore, including multiple representatives will help target some of the diversity concerns raised in the Fall 2018 report. The chair and vice chair's positions, as well as the representatives on other committees (i.e. EIC, EPO) will be open for a vote at the GSW. Nominations are accepted prior to the GSW and members will continue to be allowed (and encouraged) to self-nominate or be nominated during the GSW. The election will be performed by a volunteer electoral officer.

5- Graduate Student Awards

One of the GSC's responsibilities during CASCA AGMs is awarding the graduate student awards for best oral and poster presentation. The judging process has been broadly unstructured and non-uniform owing mainly to inadequate (often non-existent) guidelines. In order for the award to be productive and just, the GSC developed a systematic and holistic judgement criteria.

Presentations are evaluated based on two broad categories: (1) scientific content, and (2) quality of presentation. This new approach is based loosely on AAS Chambliss Student Achievement Award's judging criteria.

6- GSC Services

As mentioned in the Fall 2018 report, the GSC services have been mostly limited to organizing the GSW, providing awards for the best oral and poster presentations at the AGM, and stochastic graduate student advocacy and representation. The GSC recognizes the ubiquitous challenges that many graduate students suffer from (e.g. mental health, impostor syndrome, career uncertainties, supervisory relationships, professional training). Therefore, the GSC continues to develop strategies and compile a list of local resources for graduate student members.

7- GSC Communication

Website: With the recent migration of the CASCA website, the GSC should return to developing the GSC's webpage to align with the graduate student needs.

Social Media & GRADhighlights (update): Following the finalization of CASCA's social media policy, the GSC has committed to undertake the development of strategies to better communicate and connect with the graduate student body. In addition, the GSC is ready to launch a new program at the AGM: GRADhighlights. The goal is to present one interesting research highlight per month in a brief format which is accessible to the broad community and undergraduate students in the physical sciences who are interested in active research.

Community Building & Career Development (update): The GSC recognizes the importance of building a stronger community amongst graduate students and alumni in both academic and non-academic careers. The GSC has established a LinkedIn group to connect current graduates with alumni and their employers. This will be the first step in launching a networking series which is hosted locally at host universities around the country bringing graduate students together with alumni and future alumni.

8- GSC Advocacy and Representation

As mentioned in the Fall 2018 report, the GSC is planning a survey to understand the financial status, well-being, academic experience/climate, and the supervisory relationships and their influence on CASCA's graduate students. Following a discussion between the GSC and the EIC, a first draft of the survey has been finalized. The GSC has consulted local equity and human rights expertise to ensure the survey is free of implicit, and social desirability biases. The survey draft is at a mature stage. We recommend that GSC 2019-2020 consult with local resources regarding data hosting, administering the survey, non disclosure agreements, and anonymity. In addition, CASCA's EIC should be consulted again with a new version of the questionnaire.

Maan H. Hani
Chair, GSC

6 June, 2019