

ADVANCED DEGREE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

At its first meeting in April 2008, the newly elected ADSA Board and Executive recognized, as its primary mandate, the task of re-evaluating our constituents' access to a variety of University of Toronto services. ADSA has long been aware that many of its members want access to essential U of T resources as well as better health and dental insurance. Accordingly, in consultation with the Director of TST, Dr. Alan Hayes, ADSA pursued two separate channels to make a wider array of professional and support resources available to its students.

The first channel was to make arrangements with the U of T division of Student Life Programs and Services so services for AD students would be in line with U of T and TST student bodies. This would give AD student access to critical services such as the Career Centre (including the Graduate Dossier Service), Counseling and Learning Skills Service, Hart House, Health Services, International Student Centre, Multi-Faith Centre, Psychiatric Service, Student Housing Service, Centre for Community Partnerships, First Nations House, and other Student Life Programs. In October 2008, ADSA presented its members with a referendum where, for the cost of \$300 per year, students would have access to the above services as well as Athletics and Recreation. While an overwhelming number of students voted, a slight majority decided to not accept the U of T offer for better services.

The second channel was an attempt to establish a relationship with the U of T Graduate Students' Union (GSU). All TST students are members of the U of T undergraduate students' union and the U of T Students' Union (UTSU). While UTSU has offered us some excellent services, including a Health and Dental Insurance plan for full-time students, ADSA has long believed that GSU could represent the needs of its graduate constituency better. Accordingly, while the 2008-09 Board attempted to establish a stronger collaboration with UTSU from the beginning of the academic year, it also believed that it would be in the best interest of its members to explore membership with GSU. ADSA officials had meetings with both GSU and UTSU officials. While the conversation reached a standstill when GSU determined that as long as ADSA members are not students of the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), GSU would have little desire to accept them as members, conversations with UTSU progressed much more successfully. ADSA has in fact taken the important step of guaranteeing TST student representation on the UTSU Board, a position that has remained vacant for a number of years. Simultaneously, ADSA contacted students from other professional faculties at U of T (including Law, Music, Nursing) who are also members of UTSU, to seek new ways to make the specific needs of professional students heard on the UTSU Board.

Important steps were also taken with the English Language and Writing Support (ELWS) program of the School of Graduate Studies and with whom ADSA has partnered the past three years to offer writing services to AD students. As the relationship was evaluated, ADSA requested that it become a partner in conversation with TST administration while the current financial arrangement underwent a radical overhaul. Student fees would be transferred directly to ELWS through ROSI, rather than being collected by ADSA through TST. ELWS accepted this administrative change, but requested that students pay fees for the summer semester, since statistics showed that most TST students accessed ELWS during the summer months. ADSA members had a referendum in March 2009, where a strong majority accepted to continue having

access to ELWS services, as well as to pay for the additional summer semester in order to guarantee access to services all year round. The relationship with ELWS will be re-evaluated again next year by TST, ELWS and ADSA.

ADSA's own activities throughout the academic year continued to be highly successful. The beginning-of-year-barbeque was very well attended and students along with their families and friends engaged in friendly camaraderie with faculty and staff. The end-of-year-party coincided with our AGM and also attracted many members of the TST community.

The success of our Professional Development seminars continued to grow, and the four seminars had very strong and enthusiastic participation as students increasingly recognize the importance of these events for their professional development. The topics this year were: Scholarship and Grants Application, Academic Publishing, Academic and non-Academic Careers in Theology, and Effective Teaching. The two Works and Wine seminars were also highly successful. This year we introduced faculty respondents to our student presentations making the cross-departmental conversation ever more lively.

ADSA has also continued with its support of academic activities both on and off campus. Six students were each awarded a \$200 travel bursary for conference presentations outside the province of Ontario, and ADSA has renewed its support for TST student-run seminars such as the Patristics Seminar, Biblical Seminar and Liturgy Seminar. To commemorate TST's fortieth anniversary in 2009-10, ADSA has set up a student committee to organize a conference to mark the occasion. Financially, at the end of the academic year ADSA was in the black after paying all ELWS fees and other expenses.

Respectfully submitted,
Nadia Delicata
President, ADSA Board, 2008-09