

TGSA Board Meeting
Wednesday January 27, 2021 3:00 - 5:00 pm
Via Zoom

In Attendance: Mia Theocaris, Samuel Needham, Jordyn Tower, James DeGurse, Patrick Nolin, Nathan Williams, Josefina Leventhal-Noble, Hannah Scanlon, Jordan Balint, Maureen Ononiwu

Regrets: N/A

1. Prayer and Territorial Acknowledgement

- Mia T. calls meeting to order at 3:08pm; Hannah S. offers prayer; Mia T. acknowledged the traditional territory upon which the Toronto School of Theology operates

2. Approval of Agenda and Meeting Minutes from December 9th, 2020

- Samuel N. motions to accept the agenda and meeting minutes from December 9, 2020
- Nathan W. seconds
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

3. Resignation of Nathan Bradford Williams, VP Conference and Andrew Youssef, Trinity College Rep

- “Dear Mia Theocaris and College Representatives, please accept this letter as a notice of resignation as Trinity Representative effective immediately. I (Andrew Youssef) would like to thank each and everyone of you for your warm welcome when I joined. May your hearts continuously beat with love and service for the community of colleges at Toronto School of Theology.”

- Hannah S. moves to accept resignations
- Gustave I. seconds
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

4. Nominations: Nathan Bradford Williams, VP Academic; Patrick Nolin, VP Conference; Morgan Bell, Secretary; Vincent (Jizhang) Yi, Trinity College Representative

- Sam N. motions to elect nominees to their respective roles
- Gustave I. seconds
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**
- Members of the board introduce themselves.

5. Reports

A. PRESIDENT

Referendum

- Area representatives reflect the old PhD program where defined areas of study were more prominent. This configuration no longer reflects the intersectional and interdisciplinary nature of the PhD offered by TST today.

- The proposed constitutional change would add a VP Communications position to the executive board and replace area representatives with two at-large positions
 - One at-large representative must be an MA representative
 - Michael Rogers has offered to help with the proposed wording for the constitutional change
 - This wording will be approved by the board before being put to the student body for a referendum vote
- Sam N. and Mia T. discussed the logistics of proceeding with a referendum
 - Sam N. will further investigate the procedure and report back to the executive on how that process would unfold
 - Mia T. asks if it is too late in the 2020/21 academic year to proceed with a referendum before the end of term. Would it be better to wait for the fall semester?
 - Mia T. will confer with Michael Rogers to ask his opinion on a timeline
 - Mia T. will bring the proposed language for the referendum to the February meeting

Tuition Fee Exemption

- Pamela Couture, Director of the Toronto School of Theology, suggested that the college representatives schedule meetings with their respective graduate directors and heads of college
 - Mia T. asks that this be done by the next TGSA meeting in February
 - Mia T. will send an email to college representatives outlining the topics that will need to be covered in these meetings
 - The School of Graduate Studies provided a waiver for dissertation-phase students
 - Mia T. suggested there be requests to member colleges to provide examination-phase financial coverage given the library closures and limitations
 - Hannah S. asks Mia to clarify who counts as “students in their examination phase”
 - Mia T.: students who were in their general exam phase on or after March 17, 2020
 - Nathan W.: should it not be students who have completed their coursework before March 17, 2020?
 - Mia T. will email Pam Couture to get clarification
 - Mia T. also suggested that college reps have a broader conversation about general financial relief for students given the difficulties of the pandemic
 - St. Mike’s has a COVID-relief fund (raised by professors and faculty) that students can access
 - Josefine N. noted that St. Mike’s also offers aid if students have inadequate internet access – this may be something for which other college representatives can lobby for their own colleges
 - Gustave I. added that college representatives may also lobby for extended funding if students are required to remain in the program

longer than intended because of COVID – can students receive funding for an additional semester?

- Mia T. agreed that it may be a possible point of discussion between college representatives and their college leadership

Meeting with Director of TST

- Pam Couture noted that TST is going through a restructuring process that would potentially reduce some administrative roles
 - Pam C. expressed that she was committed to student success in this process
 - The restructuring is being roughly modelled on the consortium structure at the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley
 - Hannah S. asked what the defining features of the GTU model are?
 - Nathan W., while unsure of all the details of GTU's structure and the salient features that TST might wish to replicate, did note that the President and Graduate Dean of GTU are the same role

Content Warning: sexual violence, abuse, and assault

- Over the course of the meeting, Pam C. also spoke about awareness about and prevention of sexual violence at the Toronto School of Theology
 - Pam C. did not speak specifically about the situation at Wycliffe College which the TGSA addressed in a letter to Wycliffe's leadership. She rather spoke about sexual violence and its prevention more broadly and with specific reference to the upcoming event on Feb. 5 (see "Events and Workshops")
 - Pam C. reassured Mia T. that sexual violence prevention has been on her agenda for a long time
 - Long-term, Pam C. would like to see the development and implementation of professional training for students and faculty vis à vis sexual violence and its prevention
- The conversation with Pam C. also touched on the pandemic and the mental health of students, faculty, and staff; the potential creation of wage-earning positions in academic administration for students; and the GCTS sponsoring workshops/colloquia on a variety of topics pertaining to professional and academic development
 - Pam C. wondered about creating a transcript requirement so that students would attend these colloquia – a longstanding practice at Emmanuel College
 - Moreover, over the course of the discussion it was asked whether the area studies and course design class was still needed – perhaps being replaced by these workshops/colloquia or pedagogical training taking place under the tutelage of students' supervisors
 - It was noted that the elimination of the second-year cohort class would free up another credit for electives of the students' choosing
 - Patrick N. asked whether the loss of the course would eliminate a lucrative piece of the program – namely professional pedagogical training

- Patrick N. and Hannah S. wondered if the first cohort course (methodology) might be a better candidate for elimination than the second cohort course (pedagogy)
 - Nathan W. noted that the first year cohort course did not come up in the conversation with Pamela C.
 - Nathan W. expressed interest in the required colloquia – it would allow students to pick and choose colloquia that correspond to their interests and needs while providing ongoing community amongst the cohort beyond the completion of coursework
 - Jordan B. noted that these colloquia are modelled on the practice of Emmanuel College. As a once-per-semester event, he noted, they might not provide the level of community desired.
 - Gustave I. shared that he benefitted greatly from the area studies and design course – it made him focus on his own area of study and hone his research
 - Maureen O. also related her similar experience
 - Mia T. reiterated that these were simply ideas that Pam C. is entertaining – there are no set plans to alter the course of study for the PhD program as of now
- Mia T. related that Pam C. has been working closely with the GCTS staff to help facilitate the transition of the new assistant registrar, Victoria
 - Pam C. said that they are working to ensure a two-week turnaround for immediate projects
- Mia T. also shared that on Friday, February 26, TST will be offering a workshop on building online presence (see “Events and Workshops” below)
- Sam N. motions to accept the President’s report.
- Nathan W. seconds.
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

B. VP ACADEMIC

- New VP Academic Nathan W. attended an Academic Council Meeting on January 18, 2021
 - There was nothing of concern to TGSA
- As outgoing VP Conferences, Nathan W. has been handing over materials to new VP Conferences, Patrick N. (email accounts, etc.)
- Mia T. will give Nathan W. the dates for the Graduate Studies Council meetings
- Patrick N. motions to accept the VP Academic’s report.
- Hannah S. seconds
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

C. VP EXTERNAL (also Social Chair)

- Sam. N. stated that he will focus on the actionable items he has been assigned regarding the proposed referendum
 - He further noted that there has been a longstanding question in the TGSA as to whether we should belong to the undergraduate students union (UTSU) or a student union that covers graduate students in research programs (GSU)
 - These student unions are the bodies which negotiate and supervise health/dental/vision/insurance as well as provide access to gyms and resources on campus
 - Sam N. reminded the TGSA that there was a referendum on the structure of TGSA in 2018 which also asked whether we should belong to UTSU or GSU
 - It was a close vote, but both motions were defeated; we are still members of UTSU
 - Many students wanted to stay with UTSU because it is cheaper than GSU membership
 - Further, Sam. N. suspected, many did not want to be automatically enrolled in all the benefits of GSU (eg. Commuter students did not require gym access)
 - Sam N. recommends that the membership referendum question not be included on the restructuring referendum ballot but that the TGSA rather wait until students return to campus. So doing, students would be able to see the benefits they would be afforded upon admission into the GSU and would be in a better position to choose according to their observations.
 - Jordan B. cited past attempts to join the GSU, agreeing that many were upset about the increased payments to GSU
 - Sam N. wants to create a fair process for considering such a big decision and that we should wait until campus reopens
 - Mia T. requested a vote on tabling the GSU portion of the referendum, to be visited when students return to campus
 - Hannah S. moved to table the GSU portion of the upcoming referendum.
 - Deborah K. seconds
 - **All in favour. Motion carries.**
- Mia T. asked whether an online social event would be in order
 - Sam N. expressed excitement at the prospect of another social mixer
 - Sam N. will email details about a future mixer
- Patrick N. moves to accept the report of VP External.
- Gustave I. seconds.
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

D. VP CONFERENCE

- Patrick N. spoke about Nathan W.'s help in transitioning into the role
 - Looking ahead, Patrick N. wants to promote professional development among students (including MA students)

- He is also beginning to think about the TST 50th Anniversary conference, hosted in conjunction with the TST office
- Patrick N. is also seeking to populate the Conference Committee
 - Interested parties can email Patrick N.
- Nathan W. spoke to professional development
 - Could be relaying information about upcoming workshops, conferences, call for papers, etc. rather than simply workshops or the like
 - Such services may not necessarily be items to put on CV, but Nathan W. argued that they help students enter more deeply into scholarly life
 - Patrick N. agreed that making this information available was important
- Sam N. moves to accept the report of the VP Conference.
- Nathan W. seconds.
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

E. TREASURER

- Hannah S. reports that TGSA is entering the year with a budget surplus. There were few expenses last year due to COVID.
 - Our only expenses were Colleen's goodbye flowers, a yoga event, and a modest honorarium for our conference speaker.
- Patrick N. motions to accept the Treasurer's report.
- Sam N. seconds.
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

F. COLLEGE REP'S:

Emmanuel

- Jordan B. spoke about the online community lunch on January 13, 2021
- He informed the board that there is graduate financial assistance for which students can apply online
- Emmanuel College also hosted the TST-wide service commemorating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity today at 1:30 via Zoom. The service was well attended.

St. Mike's

- Gustave I. said that there is liturgy offered via Zoom each Wednesday and student-led prayers on other days
- Guest panelists are speaking via Zoom to St. Mike's AD students on regular basis
 - Josefina N. agreed that the panel discussion have been going well
- Gustave I. commended St. Mike's blog and articles to the members of the board and their respective constituencies

Knox

- Deborah K. noted a workshop on racism and misconduct in the local congregation

Wycliffe

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- Hannah S. reported that there is still no response from Wycliffe College's leadership to the letter sent expressing concern about sexual violence
 - It was reported that Wycliffe College was in contact with its lawyers over the matter
 - It looks as though Wycliffe may focus on future measures (such as its sexual misconduct policies) without addressing its past
- Hannah S. also reported that there are monthly theology pub nights being hosted online at by the college which are open to the general public.
 - Usually posted on Facebook if anyone is interested
 - Further, there are smaller biweekly theology discussions with Profs. Radner and Mangina
- Mia T. asked if the victimized party had heard back from Wycliffe College
 - Hannah S. said that to her knowledge, the victimized party had not
 - Wycliffe College leadership have assured other that they are working on their policies without mentioning the specific grievances that have been raised
 - Mia T. suggested that Hannah S. meet with Pam C. to speak specifically about the situation unfolding at Wycliffe College
 - Hannah S. will seek a further update before moving forward to a meeting with Pam C.

Regis

- James D. related that Regis has weekly liturgies on Zoom
- On Feb. 12, the school will be hosting a Mardi Gras celebration
- Some Regis PhD students are worried about financial stability given the complicated and inconsistent funding process at Regis
 - The process for the disbursement of funds seems to change year by year, and is it clear who students should speak to with their concerns
 - Patrick N. reported that there has been a delay in the distribution of funds to students such that many students only received their funds (which were allocated for the fall semester) in the new year
 - Patrick N. emailed the graduate director, registrar, and dean but only heard back from the graduate director; there have been no communications with students about why this delay is occurring
 - Josefina N. noted that St. Mike's has similar problems – can this be addressed as a TST problem?
 - Mia T. and Nathan W. will bring this issue to the Graduate Studies Council
 - Deborah K. said that some Knox students have had to pay their tuition upfront and that their scholarship is not applied until later as a reimbursement
 - Nathan W. asked whether this was a perennial issue or specific to this year due to pandemic
 - Mia T. said this was an issue that has been heard before and she has had personal experience with funding discrepancies

- Gustave I. and James D. shared their own personal experiences of funding discrepancies in the past
 - Nathan W. asked whether a uniform deadline across TST would be needed, upon which all member colleges must disburse their funds
 - Patrick N. agreed that concrete dates are needed – it allows students to budget and provides peace of mind
 - Gustave I. wondered if the colleges would be able to coordinate with each other given the different disbursement models at each member college
 - Patrick N. agreed that maybe TST suggest rather than require member colleges provide dates for disbursement

Trinity – N/A

- Nathan W. motions to accept all college representatives' reports.
- Jordan B. seconds
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

G. AREA REP'S:

Master of Arts (MA)

- Jordyn T. reported that the MA cohort class has finished
- Nothing further to note

Master of Theology (ThM)

- Nothing to report.

Contextual

- Nothing to report.
- Patrick N. motions to accept the area representatives' reports.
- Gustave I. seconds.
- **All in favour. Motion carries.**

H. NON-VOTING CHAIRS

I. Communications

- Maureen O. reported that the TGSA social media platform is transitioning to a new Facebook group. She further noted that now the Facebook group is set up, she and Mia T. will start inviting students into the new group.

6. Events/Workshops

- **Friday, February 5th, 2:00-3:30pm — Graduate Student Town Hall**
 - Part 1: Meet Angela Treglia, Director of the U of T Sexual Awareness and Prevention Centre (2:00-3:00)

- Angela Treglia will introduce the services of the U of T Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre and do an introduction of their work in education, advocacy and support for persons who experience or have experienced sexual harassment and violence. It is aimed at professional training for graduate students who will go into the world as leaders in education, churches, nonprofits, and other institutions. This program is part of a larger effort designed to help TST create “a culture of consent” and ongoing professional education for graduate students.
- Part 2: Meet Victoria James and Jen Bardeggia (3:00-3:30)
 - With all of the staff changes at GCTS, have you been wondering about who answers your email when you have questions? Come online and meet Victoria James, the new Assistant Registrar and Coordinator of Institutional Research, who will increasingly be answering your questions, and Jen Bardeggia, who in recent weeks has been answering or forwarding many of your emails. Victoria has been with us about six weeks now; Jen has been at TST for many years. It’s time for grad students to meet the recent and long-term people behind the GCTS email.
- **Friday, February 26th, 10:00-11:00am — “Building an Online Presence”** with Mary McAuliffe from the Career Exploration & Education Centre

7. Questions/Concerns/New Business?

- **Next meeting(s):**
 - Wednesday, **February 24th** from 3:00 - 5:00 pm
 - Wednesday, **March 17th** from 3:00 - 5:00 pm
 - Wednesday, **April 7th** from 3:00 - 5:00 pm

Sam N. motions to adjourn.
Meeting adjourned at 4:51pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Morgan Bell
January 27, 2021*