

# COMMITTEE REPORTS

## Occupational Health and Safety Committee

**Chair:** Jacqueline Giesbrecht (OHS Officer)

**Committee members:** Jake Morrow (Co-Chief Steward), Islamiat Abidemi Raji, Nashita Syed, Natalie Niro, Guilherme Braga de Freitas, Dan Reddy, Saeed Bagherifam, Sanjeev Dahal, Brittainy Bonnis, and Abdul Rahman Alashraf

The Occupational Health and Safety committee met in February with Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) reps giving brief updates on what's going on in their committees and general discussion about things like potential first aid training for members and the Spring Cleaning Campaign. It would be beneficial to have more involvement from our general membership in the future, as this year the committee was made up predominantly of our JHSC reps. However, since this was the first time this committee had met in a few years, it was a good start. I expect that membership education and engagement will continue to increase as the OHS committee settles into a routine.

The committee did not meet in the Fall semester; instead, the JHSC reps submitted their reports (usually given at OHS committee meetings) to be included in a Health and Safety newsletter in January. A similar newsletter will be sent out at the end of April/early May. The newsletter in February received good engagement, with an increase in members getting in touch with reps, Stewards, and Exec about health and safety issues (e.g., campus cleanliness, workplace hazards, injuries, etc.). This increased engagement shows the importance of membership awareness on H&S matters. As a union, we try our best to prevent workplace hazards through our JHSC involvement, but some will slip through the cracks or can't fully be prevented (accidents happen). As a result, we depend on members recognizing and reporting H&S issues when they arise. Therefore, I recommend making an H&S Newsletter a regular committee initiative to help promote H&S awareness. Over time, members could give input about which topics they want to be covered (or even contribute to it themselves!)

## Mental Health Committee

**Chair:** Jacqueline Giesbrecht (OHS Officer)

**Committee Members:** Astrid Hobill (President), Jake Morrow (Co-Chief Steward), Brittainy Bonnis (Information Officer), Justyna Szewczyk-El Jassem (VP Community), Gabriella Castillo (VP RA), Sarah Smith (MHC RA), Erin Gallagher-Cphoon, and Jamie Grove

The Mental Health Committee met to discuss the Mental Health and Hardship bursary and discern how to distribute the fund as efficiently and equitably as possible. The Mental Health

survey (developed by the Mental Health Committee RA, Sarah Smith, and sent out in Fall) informed the discussion.

The first round of applications had a deadline of Jan 31<sup>st</sup> for Fall semester expenses, with a rolling deadline for emergency expenses. The number of applications received (~40) shows the necessity of this bursary and the new Food Support Fund. Around half of the applications include expenses that fall under the 'hardship' portion (most often, groceries and rent).

The review process went reasonably smoothly but, as to be expected, has room for improvement.

The committee will continue to discuss potential adjustments to the bursary application to improve the application review process further so that it can best serve our members. The next deadline (Winter semester expenses) is on May 31st.

The committee discussed future possibilities, including planning mental health awareness campaigns, events, and training. These ideas are all still in the brainstorming stages, as the meeting mainly focused on the bursary. This committee has much potential, so it will be exciting to see what happens in the future!

## **Political Action Committee Report**

**Chair:** Justyna Szewczyk (VP Community)

Political Action Committee resumed its activity in December 2022 thanks to the robust Stewards' Council. The first action taken by the Committee was to prepare an FAQ sheet about CUPE Education Workers' Strike. The Committee wanted to draw attention to the fact that what happens in other educational sectors inevitably affects us, graduate student workers.

In February, upon the initiative of PAC members, PSAC 901 issued a solidarity statement with victims of deadly earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. We called on the university to recognize this tragedy and the ways it affects our members from Syria, Turkey and the region.

After the success of the Town Hall and February Abolish Tuition Rally, PAC became the umbrella organizing platform for the March 22 Rally and the Committee started to meet on a weekly basis. PAC recognizes that Queen's cannot unilaterally change the funding model for higher education; thus, one of the primary demands expressed in a statement leading up to the Rally was that Principal P. Deane lobbies for more provincial funding rather than ending the tuition freeze. While the immediate goal of the Rally was to keep making noise about graduate student worker poverty, the Committee also wanted to start building a broader platform for a longer-term campaign that should eventually encompass Ontario. As the Chair of the Committee, I reached out to academic union locals across the province, inviting them to organize support rallies in their workplaces/universities. At the time of writing this report, a week before the

Rally, we had yet to confirm that solidarity rallies would be held at McMaster and Toronto universities. CUPE 2626 from University of Ottawa had confirmed they would send members to our Rally.

Members of the Committee conducted an enormous work of contacting dozens of organizations and having conversations across campus. They wrote a statement outlining PAC demands and reflected the views of members from the January Tuition Town Hall. They designed information packages, put them into hundreds of envelopes and delivered them to grad community housing and graduate student worker offices. Further, they created and disseminated hundreds of posters to inform every member about the Rally. This took a lot of work and commitment.

The engagement of the members brought the Political Action Committee back to life, and I hope it will continue to do great work. I want to thank every member of the Committee for their thoughts, humor, and work - it was fun!

### **Bursary Administration Committee Report**

**Chair:** Prerna Subramanian (Equity Officer)

**Committee Members:** Astrid Hobill, Kaveh M (resigned member)

1. The Childcare Bursary was processed by our Staff for all terms and we saw a steady rise of applicants, averaging out to 10 members.
2. Going forward, a new calculation should address living costs of members in order to disburse the fund fairly and just manner across different income groups within and across bargaining units.
3. The Gender Affirmation Bursary was exhausted, and the need for an SGPS plan was made by many members applying for the same. The general need for this bursary is reflected in how quickly a robust line was depleted in two months of the Fall term.

## Social Justice Committee Report

**Chair:** Prerna Subramanian

**Members:** Sabrina Masud, Qazi Mustabeen Noor, Rohan Khan, Daniel Reddy, Katie Zutautas

The Social Justice Committee was re-struck for the 2022/23 term with a mandate to mobilize migrant students around issues of labour, support climate justice, land back, and other Indigenous-led initiatives, bridge the gap between art and activism, and support equity offices of other PSAC locals. Throughout the year, we have been successful in engaging with most of these issues, but we have also been dynamic in responding to real-life and real-time issues over preset agendas.

One of our successful efforts was mobilizing members for our Union Gallery collaborations and centering migrant voices. We were also concerned with making a space with Iranian students on campus who have shown us how a fight against oppression can happen locally with global characteristics of change. However, due to member capacity, the anti-racist working group and the climate justice working group were not active, but we have members working continuously in the background.

Some of our members are now actively involved in fighting against caste discrimination in Canada, and are making critical connections with anti-Hindutva and anti-Islamophobic alliances. We want to give a special shoutout to Sabrina Masud and Qazi Mustabeen Noor for their active involvement in social justice initiatives and for voicing migrant student concerns on behalf of our committee in Abolish tuition campaigns, in efforts against food insecurity, and also helping put together a list of demands that can be used in the future by the Equity Office during bargaining rounds.

These demands include:

Migrant Student Families on campus and UHIP- healthcare insecurity on campus and the expensive payout mechanism of UHIP

Food Insecure migrant students- Connecting with international students on campus and tallying their food costs per month as against their salaries, and also measuring this against their migrant setups- what kind of backups they rely on, and how the funding fails them

The juncture of sexual harassment x Racism- there have been few cases of harassment on campus that have involved racialized communities being "dealt" harshly by the campus police. How does the union work with policing and punitive structures of redressals on campus? What can we do to deter the reliance on police? What alternative systems can we put in place?

Despite these successes, we recognize that the Social Justice Committee is a dynamic one that responds to real-life and real-time issues. This affected how we mobilized members as well. Moving forward, we will continue to support migrant students and other marginalized communities on campus while also engaging in broader social justice initiatives. We will also strive to build solidarity networks with domestic students and students from the sciences and support Indigenous-led initiatives. Our goal is to create a more just and equitable campus community for all.