

Presidential Message to International Members of the Carleton Community

This message is to the international students of the Carleton University graduate community,

Jay Ramasubramanyam, President of the Graduate Students Association (GSA), and Wesley Petite, President of Canadian Union of Public Employees local 4600 (CUPE 4600), have the common goals of engaging all of our members in order to develop ambitious ideas on how to improve our campus. These Presidents would like to invite you to read the below message and think about that you can 1) benefit from the services and benefits our organizations provide and 2) take part in the critical problem-solving that is necessary to create a positive environment on campus.

Message from Wesley Petite, on behalf of CUPE 4600:

Let's be honest, despite the equally important knowledge and ambition that international students bring to our campus, international students have a tougher time than domestic students, with tuition and employment opportunities being only two examples of this. This is extremely ironic given the many other complications that come along with attending a university abroad. In order to address this ironic and unequal challenge, CUPE 4600 has worked hard to offer benefits and representation specifically tailored to the needs of international students. Among these benefits and specific services are:

- The creation of the international members caucus to discuss issues specific to these members
- The ability for international students who have Priority Teaching Assistant (TA) positions in the fall and winter semesters to be able to apply for additional summer employment on Carleton Central as Outside Priority Positions, unlike domestic students.¹
- If you have paid UHIP costs to Carleton, you can receive a reimbursement of between \$330 and \$660, depending on the number of dependents. The reimbursement form is available [here](#).
- If two equally qualified applicants with equal levels of seniority are considered for a job, the international student among them gets preference.
- Tuition Increase Assistance (TIA) obligates the employer to refund any tuition increases on your account at the end of each semester you are employed as a TA.

Despite these benefits and services, as I'm sure you know, there remains much work to be done. No small group of people alone will be able to do all this work and so success more so depends on the collective action of a large amount of people taking on different tasks. The above benefits have all been fought for at the bargaining table in order to create a more equitable and fair workplace. Please consider getting involved in our International Members Caucus when it is announced on the CUPE 4600 email digests or focused emails like this one. Also, please consider emailing vp.unit1@cupe4600.ca to get involved in our bargaining research team. These are both ways you

¹ The difference between Priority and Outside Priority Teaching Assistants is based on the offer of employment included in offer of admission to Carleton. Priority means that you are assured to be given a Teaching Assistant Position or paid an equal amount. Domestic Teaching Assistants are able to trade one of their Priority fall or winter terms for a summer term of employment, while International Teaching Assistants are able to get additional terms of employment in the summer by applying for an Outside Priority Position as outlined in Article 13 of our Collective Agreement.

can voice international employee concerns and develop ambitious proposals for the round of collective bargaining that will begin in August 2019.

Message from Jay Ramasubramanyam, on behalf of the GSA:

The Graduate Students' Association works with the objective of supporting all graduate students on campus through direct action and lobbying with the senior administration of Carleton University. However, the GSA invests special attention in ensuring that international students' interests are adequately accounted for with respect to academic policy and other allied aspects of grad student life.

Similar to CUPE 4600's vision, our intent is to advance the interests of a demographic of students which is vastly disadvantaged in comparison to domestic students. The GSA is well aware of the determination, skills, intellectual fervour and diversity that international students bring to Carleton University specifically.

However, university policies often prove to be barriers to international students' progress. From disproportionately higher tuition fees in comparison to domestic students, to the limited accessibility to grants, funding and scholarships, international students often face many severe systemic challenges, that thwarts their ability to perform well in grad school. Several international students also face issues around mental health and financial, cultural and linguistic barriers in Canada which reinforces their precarity while in grad school.

Among some of the initiatives, the GSA has been successful in lobbying for greater visibility of such issues in Carleton University, in collaboration with the Canadian Federation of Students. Most importantly, the GSA's role was instrumental in lowering tuition fees of all current international PhD students close to the domestic tuition level, thereby relieving some international students of the financial pressures they were facing. I am the co-chair of the International Graduate Student Working Group, which is a group struck in collaboration with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs to discuss issues faced by international graduate students.

We continue to work in the best interests of international graduate students by organizing cultural and social activities designed specifically to bring together a great cross-section of international students to interact in an informal setting. The accessibility to grants and scholarships for graduate students is partially mitigated by the availability of the GSA International Student Award (<http://gsacarleton.ca/international-student-award/>). However, we have been raising concerns around awards allocation for international graduate students at the Graduate Faculty Board meetings which is one of the primary academic governance meetings in the University.

We also run several committees like the Political Action Committee, Racialized Action Committee, Graduate Academic Caucus, and the International Student Committee to enable greater participation of international students and bring forward their issues and concerns. Please consider getting involved in these committees (<http://gsacarleton.ca/committees/>). Aspects discussed in these committees help the GSA better lobby for graduate students' interests on campus. We are in the process of launching a few more initiatives that would cater to the best interests of international graduate students. I am always open to ideas. If you believe that there are

areas that we should be working on, or blind spots that we are missing, please do not hesitate to contact me at pres@gsacarleton.ca

Conclusion and Call to Action:

CUPE 4600 and the Graduate Students' Association look forward to working with you in collaboration!

Due to the lack of access to the contact information of our own membership, only some of the members of the international graduate student community is able to be reached. CUPE 4600 has access to the contact information of its members and the GSA is able to sign-up members up to an email list through the hard work of outreach. Sharing these information resources for the purposes of contacting and engaging with our members is one way that our organizations work together to accomplish common goals. You can also take part in this work by sharing this information with other international members who may not have been contacted. Together, we can identify problems on our campus, develop ambitious solutions, and engage the wider community in order to implement these solutions. Action, both big and small, is necessary!