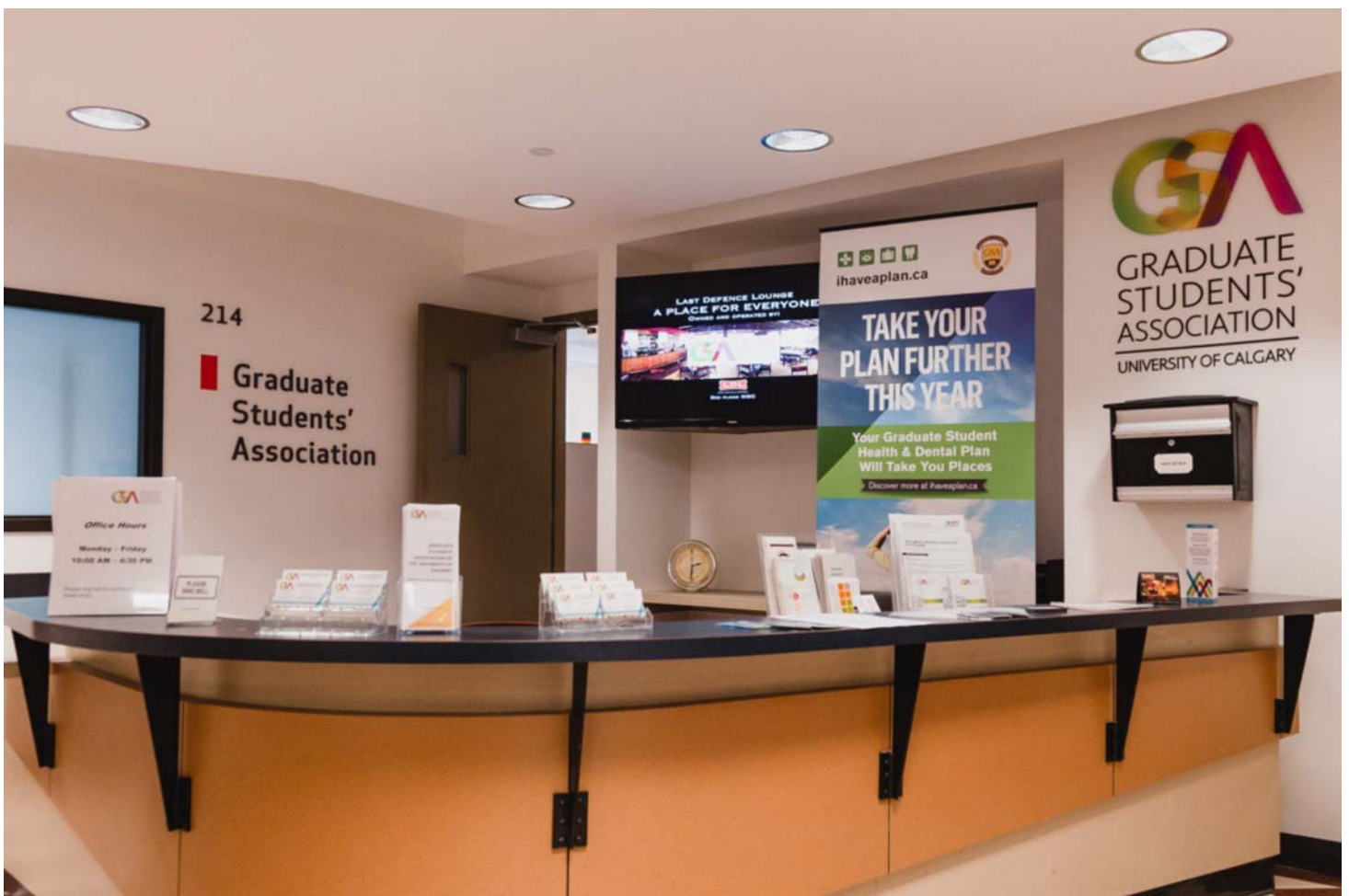



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GSA election results invalidated

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By Scott Strasser, March 28 2016 —

Due to election policy violations, the 2016 Graduate Students' Association (GSA) election has been invalidated.

The two-person race saw “minor procedural infractions” by both candidates running for vice-president external during the March 14–15 election. The infractions were discovered late in the voting period, after around 500 votes had been cast for candidates Abubaker Abdelhafiz and Xiao Yang Fang.

“Unfortunately I believed I had no choice other than to not certify the election,” said GSA Chief Returning Officer Jeremy Hexham. “I really want to emphasize that it was a simple misunderstanding of the election policies that will be clarified in future elections.”

According to Hexham, the vice-president external and vice-president academic positions will go to a byelection at next month's Graduate Representative Council, which takes place on April 26. All graduate students will be eligible to vote and run.

The other three executive positions for 2016–17 were acclaimed. Current vice-president finance and services Samantha Hossack will be next year's GSA president, Adrienne Offenbecker will be vice-president student life and Arash Afshar will be vice-president finance and services.

“We had one of the highest voter turnouts for a GSA election in years, at just under 500 students,” Hexham said. “But because the race was so close, I did not think it was just to either candidate or the graduate student body to let the results stand.”

Voter turnout in GSA elections is notoriously low. The 2015 election saw just 329 graduate students go to the polls — a turnout of about 5.7 per cent. Only 258 students voted in 2014.

“If you look across the country, voter turnout in graduate elections is relatively low,” said current GSA president Mike Webster. “Grad students tend to be very focused on their own work and many spend a lot of time in their own department, but not as much time in the community as a whole.”

Webster believes this apathy is caused by the lack of graduate students running for executive positions. Only five of 25 executive positions have been contested in the last five GSA elections.

“When you have a large number of acclaimed candidates, you don't have to vote and there's never a problem,” Webster said. “It's important we figure out over the long term what the barriers are for people who are considering running for positions so they actually run.”

The GSA represents the 6,000 graduate students at the University of Calgary. They provide services, lobby government and operate the Last Defence Lounge.

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