

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (GSA) BOARD**  
**STRATEGIC WORK PLAN: 2014-2015**

**Note:** The GSA sees this as a living document, constantly shifting directions as the provincial budget, the federal government's post-secondary education strategy, the potential opening of the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, and the U of A landscape all unfold and change.

**VISION:** The GSA envisions an engaging environment that is supportive, healthy, accessible, and inclusive, thus empowering the graduate student community to be agents of change in all endeavours, academic and otherwise, both during their time here and beyond. The GSA believes that a healthy organization is nurtured through effective relationships with various stakeholders<sup>1</sup> and constituent groups of the academy<sup>2</sup>. Nonetheless, an organization that hopes to evolve over time must be prepared to take steps at critical junctures that may or may not be endorsed by all of its stakeholders.

**MISSION:**

1. **Advocate for comprehensive, timely, and excellent supports within the University governance system and with government.** The GSA is a vigilant voice for stewardship of the graduate student experience with regard to funding, housing, and services. As graduate enrolment (and international student enrolment) increases, we believe these key infrastructure pieces should be in place *before* new graduate students register and that attention must be paid to the career opportunities and professional development of graduate students who plan to either enter the academy or pursue careers outside academia.
2. **Ensure compliance with the Collective Agreement that supports graduate students who are employed by the University.**
  - i. *We ensure that employed graduate students are fairly compensated for their work, while also ensuring that such work does not place graduate students at a disadvantage during their studies.*
  - ii. *We ensure that employed graduate students' work environments are safe, free from harassment, discrimination and bullying, and foster a culture of workplace wellness.*
  - iii. *We advocate for "sustainable funding": that, through strategic investments and reallocation of central funding, ALL graduate students who are otherwise without funding will have access to enriching graduate student employment to the benefit of the graduate student and the University.*
3. **Foster student engagement.** The GSA defines engagement as intellectual, personal and pre-professional involvements that are enriching, rewarding, milestones in maturity, and marked by learning, testing, personal development, success, and sometimes failure. The GSA believes student engagement occurs from the time a student asks for information about applying for graduate studies through the end-point of convocation. We support continuing student engagement through involvement in governance, networks anchored in residence life, professional development, networking opportunities, and opportunities for the development of "soft"/management skills, and in social settings where friendships and research collaboration can occur.
4. **Support academic endeavours of graduate students.** The GSA supports and encourages an empowering environment for graduate students to thrive in their various academic, professional programs, and research endeavours. This entails creating avenues for students to present their research to the larger academic community in and out of the U of A, ensuring a good relationship between graduate students and their supervisor(s), rewarding deserving students for excellence in academic work and research, and encouraging the continued development of professional development programs for graduate students.

---

<sup>1</sup> Stakeholders are defined in this document as individuals, groups, and offices that are directly affected by the GSA and its initiatives.

<sup>2</sup> Constituent groups of the academy are defined in this document as , faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and non-academic staff – all of which are represented on GFC – for our internal purposes within the GSA, the PDFA is also viewed as a group empowered to "communicate with the U of A on all issues of general importance to the Postdoctoral Fellow Community" (Memorandum of Understanding between the PDFA and the U of A).

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>1. REPUTATION</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>2. INTERFACE AND ADVOCACY WITH UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENT</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>3. FUNDING AND GRADUATE REFORM</b>                                      | <b>5</b> |
| <b>4. SUPPORTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS</b>                                   | <b>6</b> |
| <b>5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE</b>   | <b>7</b> |
| <b>6. SERVICES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>                            | <b>7</b> |
| <b>7. SOCIAL SPACES AND HOUSING</b>  | <b>8</b> |
| <b>8. LONG-TERM HEALTH OF THE GSA</b>                                      | <b>9</b> |

| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS   | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES   |
|---|---|
| <b>1. REPUTATION</b>  |   |
| <p>The GSA has a responsibility to ensure that the GSA maintains an <b>excellent reputation over time.</b></p> <p>The GSA aims to <b>reduce hours for Directly-Elected Officers.</b></p> <p><b>Aim for the U of A GSA to be the best managed in Canada.</b></p> | <p>To maintain a <b>culture of respect and tolerance</b> in the GSA office and in all dealings with the University community, all Directly-Elected Officers, management, and staff of the GSA will maintain a high level of <b>professionalism</b>. The GSA <b>remains committed to the process of strategic planning</b>, regular follow through on goals and tasks, and regular reporting to Council.</p> <p><b>Proactive search for talent (eg Directly-Elected Officers, committee members)</b> will be ongoing. <b>Promote in the Early Call and training program the feasibility of taking on GSA elected positions.</b> Develop strategies and supports in collaboration with outgoing and incoming Directly-Elected Officers. Continue to realign the most <b>optimal division of labour</b> between Directly-Elected Officers and management/staff so Directly-Elected Officers are well-supported in a student-led and professionally-managed environment where, over the past four years, all of the GSA Directly-Elected Officers have been successful in their academic programs while holding office.</p> <p>Work to <b>actively engage with graduate students</b> (eg through the Department Liaison Initiative (DLI) and education on the Collective Agreement (CA)).</p> <p>Continue to track the hours of Directly-Elected Officers and regularly review portfolios and responsibilities.</p> <p>Continue to move forward on 2010 recommendations of the GSA consultant, eg <b>itemize areas that need review with respect to the continuous improvement of infrastructure, and continue to meet goals for bylaw and policy review. Engage in a comprehensive review of elections bylaw and policy (including those related to GSA elections).</b></p> <p>Enhance the public face of the GSA through the utilization of social media and the GSA website.</p> |
| <b>2. INTERFACE AND ADVOCACY WITH UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENT</b>  |   |
| <p>Intensive, integrated <b>advocacy for and representation of</b> graduate student issues.</p> <p><b>Maintain relationships</b> with various stakeholders.</p>   | <p>Advocacy will require <b>strong relationships with our partner associations – SU, AASUA, PDFA, and NASA</b>. The GSA Board revived constituency meetings with these associations in 2012. It is key to reinforce these relationships and identify shared priorities in building a common vision of postsecondary education.</p> <p>Maintain relationship with <b>President, Provost and other Vice-Presidents, members of the Board of Governors, Governance, Senate, Alumni Association, service providers, and other key partners</b>. Continue to meet regularly with the <b>Provost, the Dean of Students, Deputy Provost, and the Dean of FGSR and establish regular meetings with other key partners</b>.</p>  |

| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS   | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES   |
|---|---|
| <p>Engage with University Administration and the provincial government on issues surrounding <b>the financial support of post-secondary education.</b></p> <p>Continue to work with the University on <b>education, compliance, and dispute resolution</b> associated with the CA.</p> <p><b>Work with partner provincial GSAs</b> to finalize the creation of a new, strong provincial lobbying group that, with well-developed bylaws and financial reporting structures, will remain functional and effective over time.</p> <p>Continue to assess membership in <b>external lobbying</b> organizations.</p> <p>Maintain a strong <b>provincial and federal advocacy presence.</b></p> | <p>Post-secondary education plays an important role in any prosperous society, and the Government of Alberta should be investing in post-secondary education to ensure a positive socio-economic future for the province. However, the GSA understands that the Government of Alberta budget is dependent on revenue generation, and when revenue is low, hard budgetary decisions must be made. <b>The GSA believes that the Government of Alberta needs to organize a means of providing predictable and sustainable funding that can uphold the high standard of accessible, world-class education in this province. The Government of Alberta should consider new forms of revenue generation that are reliable; both in the short-term, to ensure predictable revenue from which to establish a balanced annual budget that is not dependent on funding cuts, and in the long-term, to ensure that the Government of Alberta can continue to support high quality post-secondary education.</b></p> <p>The GSA is <b>committed to working with the Office of the Provost to educate</b> graduate coordinators and the professoriate about the CA.</p> <p><b>Advocate consistently and effectively for graduate student interests to the Government of Alberta through this new group</b> and meet with representatives from other provincial GSAs.</p> <p>Maintain observer status with CASA and participate in CASA lobbying events.</p> <p>In 2013-2014, the GSA greatly enhanced its external lobbying and advocacy presence at the provincial and national levels. The portfolio of Vice-President Student Life was changed to that of VP External to reflect this new level of advocacy. Additionally, a robust external relations line was incorporated into the 2014-2015 GSA budget and policies surrounding the approval of external relations travel expenses were established. In 2014-2015 the GSA will maintain its external presence and aim to <b>attend the Western Deans conference, various local political events, CAGS, and any other advocacy and lobbying opportunities that may arise. The GSA will also participate in GU15 (which has become an effective venue for information exchange on critical issues) and will monitor the development of the Western Canadian GSA Summit.</b></p> |

| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS  | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>3. FUNDING AND GRADUATE REFORM</b></p> <p>Engage in <b>tuition<sup>3</sup>, mandatory non-instructional fees (MNIFs), and market modifier debates</b> and advocate and engage on issues of graduate student support.</p> <p><b>Support a strong FGSR and maintain a strong graduate student voice in any proposed FGSR reforms (also sometimes referred to as graduate studies reform) and continue to work with FGSR and other groups to develop quality measures and an ambitious vision of graduate education</b> at the University of Alberta.</p> <p><b>Negotiation of the CA and lobbying for increased funding.</b></p> | <p><b>The GSA supports tuition increases directly tied to the Alberta Consumer Price Index (CPI), and opposes across-the-board graduate student tuition increases and increases to the international student tuition differential increase beyond that. The GSA opposes the introduction of new market modifiers that are not part of a clear regulatory framework to define professional masters programs, and the introduction of new MNIFs or increases to any existing MNIFs beyond Alberta CPI that do not result from an agreed upon regulatory framework.</b> In developing its position on graduate market modifiers, MNIFs, and graduate student tuition increases, the GSA Board will consult with GSA Council and the broader graduate student community.</p> <p><b>The GSA believes that there should be sustainable public funding to support excellence at the University of Alberta. To that end, we do not think that an increase to tuition and fees is a solution to the challenges this institution faces. The GSA will lobby for affordable graduate student tuition and fees.</b> Additionally, the GSA believes in the value of the education received at this institution, and understands that there are costs associated with obtaining an education that are, in part, recovered through tuition fees.</p> <p><b>Strive to make certain that any new quality measures, funding models, and graduate student management plans (GSMPs) do not disproportionately favour some faculties or departments over others in future resource allocation</b> and that graduate students are involved in reform discussions at the department, faculty, and university levels. Advocate for increased resources for FGSR and <b>collaborate to establish the best professional development programs in Canada by continuing to participate vigorously in the FGSR led Professional Development Network and Professional Development Advisory Board.</b> Advocate consistently on the necessity of professional development for graduate students.</p> <p>The GSA applauds the efforts of the FGSR Dean, Associate Deans, and staff to make sure that graduate students are treated fairly and have access to excellent services across campus. <b>We see FGSR as a key partner in the delivery of quality graduate education and just treatment of graduate students.</b> A robust FGSR – one with adequate resources to execute its mandate, where staff feel empowered and appreciated – links closely with our own organizational efficacy.</p> <p>Key members of the U of A, including the Board Chair Doug Goss, have noted that graduate students are the lifeblood of the institution. We want to see this statement translate into <b>increased funding attached to TA and RA appointments.</b> Continue to lobby for <b>increased funds for GSA Professional Development Awards and Emergency Bursaries,</b> as well as <b>increased funding for graduate students with children in the form of GSA Child Care Grants.</b></p> |

<sup>3</sup> The GSA Board will work University Administration to comply with the *Post-Secondary Learning Act Public Post-Secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation* which states that "A board shall provide to the institution's students' council each year a statement of anticipated tuition fee increases for a 4-year period, and establish with the students' council a mechanism for holding consultations to discuss increases in tuition fees and to allow for ongoing input by that council to the budget process relative to the determination of tuition fees" (Sections 3(1)(a) and (b) - Consultations). (Regulation available here: [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Regs/2006\\_273.pdf](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Regs/2006_273.pdf))

| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS   | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>4. SUPPORTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS</b></p>   |   |
| <p><b>Quality graduate student supervision should be an institutional priority.</b> Quality graduate student supervision is instrumental to graduate students' success, yet it is under-emphasized in relation to publications and teaching in FECs.</p> <p>The GSA wishes to ensure that as graduate numbers (especially the number of international graduate students) are increased, the right supports and infrastructure are in place.</p> <p><b>Continue to harness our energy in order to achieve an inclusive campus.</b></p> | <p>The GSA will <b>continue to participate vigorously</b> in any implementation of the recommendations in the recently released report of the Graduate Student Supervision Task Force, a joint initiative of the Provost, FGSR and the GSA. The GSA will establish an action plan from the recommendations contained in the supervisory report, and will engage in many different forums to discuss supervisory issues. <b>Improving supervision will involve collaboration with individual faculties, FGSR, and Administration.</b></p> <p>As stated in the report, "high quality supervision and mentorship is central to an institution committed to seeing their graduate students flourish in their careers and in the contributions they make to the public good."<sup>4</sup> Specific to this, the GSA and others will <b>pursue the recommendations in the report surrounding the provision of training and mentorship to supervisors to raise standards of supervision and mentorship</b>, tying it in to suggestions from the Renaissance Committee's report regarding rank progression.</p> <p><b>Continue to lobby both government and the University for assistance and support for international graduate students who are seeking Canadian Permanent Residence. Lobby federally and provincially for the creation of a Provincial Nominee Program stream for current international graduate students.</b></p> <p>Work to create <b>a welcoming and supportive environment for international graduate students (eg be actively engaged in all discussions surrounding International Differential Fees</b> and evaluate the possibility of offering new scholarships to cover the international differential fees for top-performing international students).</p> <p><b>Access to more scholarships, bursaries, and other funding opportunities for international graduate students (administered through FGSR) is a key priority</b> of the GSA. International graduate students face off-campus work restrictions and have to compete with domestic students for on campus jobs. Most major awards are not open to international graduate student applicants. <b>The creation of an adequate number of institutional awards, rivalling Tri-Council awards in funding levels and prestige, as well as opening some existing bursaries to international student applicants is essential.</b></p> <p>Discuss with Administration and our partner constituencies (SU, NASA, AASUA, and PDFA) ways to make the U of A an even safer space. Consistent with a progressive social vision, <b>we want to work towards a campus where all students feel encouraged to learn and participate actively in campus life.</b></p> <p><b>Work with other constituency groups towards a campus free from discrimination and bullying.</b></p> |

<sup>4</sup> Krogman, N. 2014. *The Quality of Graduate Student and Post-Doctoral Supervision at the University of Alberta*, p. 34.

| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS  | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES  |
|--|--|
|  | <p><b>Finalize plans for consistently accessible and suitable prayer and meditation space for religious groups.</b></p> <p>Lobby for improved cultural and dietary understanding among graduate students on the part of the University.</p>  |
| <p><b>5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>Continue to develop the Departmental Liaison Initiative (DLI).</b></p> <p>Continued focus on <b>orientation</b> as one of the first contacts with the University for admitted students.</p> <p><b>Ongoing student experience.</b></p> <p><b>Continue work on student groups and departmental GSAs.</b></p> | <p><b>The DLI focuses on eight key points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with the PSLA (<i>eg</i> election of a Councillor)</li> <li>• Risk assessment and reduction related to graduate student groups affiliated with the GSA</li> <li>• Education about and compliance with the CA (the GSA is committed to providing <b>information sessions and hardcopy and electronic briefings to students and departments</b>)</li> <li>• Tailoring GSA Orientations to the needs of departments</li> <li>• Representation on Faculty Councils</li> <li>• Linking functional departmental GSAs with struggling ones and providing for a department liaison</li> <li>• The “proactive search” for graduate student talent as per the Nominating Committee’s terms of reference</li> <li>• Advising departments on the process for nominating an individual for an Honorary Degree (added at the request of the Chancellor)</li> </ul> <p><b>Collaborate and proactively</b> plan fall and winter term GSA orientations for all departments, (coordinated with the Department Liaison Initiative). <b>Continue to connect/collaborate with respect to International Centre Orientations.</b></p> <p><b>Spearhead efforts to create opportunities for social interaction amongst graduate students.</b></p> <p><b>Continue to work with Graduate Program Administrators and individual departments.</b> Collaborate with Office of the Dean of Students (with which the GSA has an MOU) and Student Group Services to develop goals and strategies for Graduate Student Group support and interaction.</p> |
| <p><b>6. SERVICES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b>Mental Health:</b> continue to work with Administration, Students’ Union, the Office of the Dean of Students, and University Health and Wellness on <b>issues and initiatives related to improving mental health on campus.</b></p>  | <p><b>Participate in the Administration’s ongoing mental health initiatives.</b> The GSA applauds the recent mental health review on campus and the decision to establish a satellite office for counselling in Triffo Hall for graduate student use. The GSA will continue to work with the Dean of Students’ Office, collaborating in the implementation stage to improve mental health services at and tackle the mental health challenges that sometimes act as a barrier to graduate student success.</p>   |

| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS  | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Professional Development:</b> Most graduate students [between 60-75%] will not pursue careers in academia. In recognition of the diverse career paths of graduate students, we believe that professional development opportunities must be increased and diversified.</p> <p>Support the <b>academic and professional development</b> of graduate students.</p> <p><b>GSA services.</b></p> <p><b>Survey of the graduate student population:</b> understanding graduate student demographics is <b>fundamental to directing efforts to provide the most robust suite of services possible.</b></p> | <p>The GSA will advocate for improved professional development opportunities for graduate students (<b>working closely with FGSR, CAPs, the Office of Advancement, and the Alumni Association to develop a new mentorship program and participating vigorously in the FGSR-led Professional Development Network and Professional Development Advisory Board</b>). The GSA will continue to advocate consistently on the necessity of professional development for graduate students.</p> <p>Continue to <b>lobby for increased funds for graduate students academic activities</b> in the form of GSA Professional Development Awards.</p> <p><b>Continue to subsidize Writing Resources Centre courses and CAPS, which receive excellent reviews from graduate students. Lobby to augment services such as the courses and one-on-one support offered by the Writing Resources Centre for international students.</b></p> <p>The GSA is committed to <b>regularly reviewing/monitoring all GSA services</b> (such as the GSA Health and Dental Plan, TDMMI home and auto insurance, GSAP, and U-Pass) to ensure that students are getting the highest value possible for their money. As current agreements with service providers expire (<i>eg</i> Studentcare, TDMMI), <b>the GSA will undertake focused reviews before renewal.</b> Studentcare and the Alumni Association have both surveyed graduate students over the past year and included questions provided by the GSA, including questions about GSA services. <b>The GSA will be analysing the data that was collected and formulating a plan to move ahead.</b></p> <p><b>Such a study would have a significant and informative effect on planning for such matters as orientation, student housing, and academic supports</b> (<i>eg</i> writing and English-language supports) and non-academic supports (childcare, graduate student family supports, access to prayer space, and accommodation regarding dietary issues). The GSA believes that a University-initiated demographic study of graduate students should occur every three years.</p> |
| <p><b>7. SOCIAL SPACES AND HOUSING</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b>Advocate for quality graduate student housing,</b> including the renovation of Michener Park, and for the continued implementation of flexible and transparent residence rental contracts.</p>   | <p>Advocate for <b>accessible, affordable, and well-maintained graduate student housing</b> (this is an ongoing challenge for many graduate students in University residences) and to <b>improve housing opportunities, maintenance, and services for graduate students living in University residences.</b></p> <p><b>Work with graduate students who reside in University residences to address their concerns</b> and ensure that Administration hears their grievances and pursues resolutions promptly.</p> <p>The <b>pre-design phase for any new housing</b> is crucial to graduate students and the GSA will continue to ensure that it lobbies for affordable, accessible and quality graduate student housing during the University's planning processes.</p>  |



| STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS   | STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES  |
|---|--|
| <p>Continue discussions/negotiations for social/engagement space in the Power Plant within the framework of current MOUs and other documents related to the former GSA offices in the Power Plant and Dewey's.</p> <p>Access and use of <b>graduate student lounge in PAW.</b></p> <p>Develop a <b>business relationship with the SU</b> in running the PAW food services area.</p> | <p>Continue collaboration with the SU, F &amp; O and other potential partners (<i>eg Alumni Association</i>) for a renovated Dewey's/NPP.</p> <p>Discuss use of former GSA offices with F &amp; O and lobby for other space in the Power Plant as it becomes available (<i>eg the space used for the Tory decant</i>) to be used by graduate students and others for the purpose of collaborating, sharing ideas and meeting informally.</p> <p>Build on the success of having the University outfit the lounge by <b>investigating ways the lounge can be used for social activities.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure that the GSA maintains a no-risk stance.</b></p> |
| <p><b>8. LONG-TERM HEALTH OF THE GSA</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>Continued vigilance in maintaining excellence in the administration of the GSA.</b></p>   | <p>Work closely with the Executive Director and her management team on <b>ensuring the GSA has a viable staffing infrastructure to support both our corporate responsibilities</b> (<i>eg staff Collective Agreement, insurance, audit, budget planning, fiscal prudence</i>) <b>and the need for cross-training and succession planning.</b></p>  |