

User's Guide to the April 2017 Board SWP Progress Update Below:

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University of Alberta Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan – 2016/2017

The GSA respectfully acknowledges that it is located on Treaty 6 territory.

VISION: The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) advocates for an engaging environment that is safe, respectful, supportive, healthy, accessible, and inclusive, and that empowers graduate students to be agents of change during their time at the University of Alberta, and beyond.

MISSION: Recognizing the multi-faceted roles played by graduate students at the University of Alberta, the GSA: advocates for comprehensive, timely, and excellent supports for all graduate students from both the University and the Alberta Government; negotiates a collective agreement that equitably supports graduate students who are employed by the University; works with University administration and faculties to ensure compliance with the Collective Agreement; engages graduate students and supports their endeavours; and works to sustain the excellent reputation of the GSA.

The GSA believes that a healthy organization is nurtured through effective relationships with all stakeholders, including constituent groups of the academy.¹ Nonetheless, an organization that evolves over time must be prepared to take steps at critical junctures that may or may not be endorsed by all its stakeholders. The GSA sees this as a living document, shifting directions as needed, as the provincial, federal, and University landscape changes. It is developed by both the previous and current teams of Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs) and provides a planning document for this and future years. Our overall goal is to create a campus community where all graduate students feel encouraged to learn and are provided with reasonable supports (and accommodations, when necessary) to ensure their success.

OUR IDEAL DEFINITION, SITUATION, AND EXPERIENCE FOR ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS:

A graduate student is a junior colleague who contributes to their field of study in pursuit of an advanced degree through collaborative work with the professoriate and senior colleagues in research, teaching, administrative, and learning environments of the University. These contributions may be accomplished through: extensive coursework, for which students pay tuition; many hours of assistantships, for which students are paid; the co-creation and writing of scholarly work; the securing of academic funding; presentations, conferences, and community engagement; and capstone projects, theses, or dissertations. This multi-faceted position takes place in an environment of mutual respect and fairness to develop skills and knowledge for future careers.

¹ Stakeholders include: individuals, groups, and offices that can affect or are directly affected by, the GSA and its initiatives. Constituent groups of the academy include: faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and non-academic staff – all of which are represented on the General Faculties Council. The Postdoctoral Fellows' Association is also included as a group empowered to "communicate with the U of A on all issues of general importance to the Postdoctoral Fellow Community."

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ADVOCATE

GOAL 1: Work with the University and government to ensure graduate students receive affordable tuition, funding packages, and access to bursaries, scholarships and awards.

Post-secondary education plays an important role in a prosperous society. Graduate students' success is dependent upon access to sustainable living funding packages for the duration of their programs so they can focus on their studies and research. The GSA will advocate that, through strategic investments and reallocation of central funding, all graduate students should be offered baseline funding. The GSA will also advocate for greater financial supports, including: higher salaries for assistantships; more scholarships, awards and bursaries; and increases to the Graduate Student Support Fund (GSSF).

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Advocate for a sustainable living funding package for all thesis-based graduate students for the duration of their program that enables a reasonable standard of living, based on the cost of living in Edmonton and current tuition costs.</p>	<p>a. Meet with key stakeholders who helped develop previous graduate student funding reports to assess the current level of research and information available.</p> <p>b. Articulate, to the President, Provost, and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), the need for an internal review of graduate student funding and support, similar to the review of undergraduate student financial support which began in 2016.</p> <p>c. Discuss with the Dean of the FGSR and the Provost how to create financial packages that correspond with realistic times to completion.</p> <p>d. Meet with Deans to discuss the current types of funding available and collaborate with the Deans and the Provost to assess the gaps in funding for graduate students.</p> <p>e. Present, to the Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee, on the effect of no minimum funding on graduate students and the potential negative impacts to the University.</p> <p>f. Advocate to the Minister of Advanced Education with respect to the significant contributions of graduate students to the quality of education and research offered at comprehensive, research intensive universities, and the need for a provincial funding model that specifically recognizes graduate students and their research, and ensures quality graduate programs and sustainable living funding packages for all graduate students.</p>
<p>2. Advocate to decouple graduate student funding directly from graduate supervisors.</p>	<p>a. Create a briefing memo outlining how funding tied to a supervisor increases the power imbalance between graduate students and their supervisors.</p> <p>b. Share our concerns regarding the impact of pay discrepancy between graduate students, including the lack of transparency in the way funding is allocated to faculties and within departments.</p>
<p>3. Advocate, to the FGSR, on the need to include clear and concise contract terms in letters of offer to the University, and make these letters available to graduate students well in advance of deadlines for offers of admission.</p>	<p>a. Review the current documentation provided to new graduate students upon an offer of admission.</p> <p>b. Request that specific expectations and requirements for graduate assistantships during a program be outlined in the letter of offer.</p>

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<p>4. Negotiate for increased graduate assistantship funding in the Collective Agreement.</p>	<p>a. Educate graduate students, faculty members, and University administrators on the new Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement effective September 2016 to August 2018.</p> <p>b. Track issues and other information in order to prepare for future negotiations.</p>
<p>5. Advocate for the inclusion of international graduate students in the eligibility requirements for existing scholarships, awards, and bursaries.</p>	<p>a. Propose, to GU15, to create a white paper recommending that international graduate students have access to Tri-Council Agency funding.</p> <p>b. Collaborate with ab-GPAC (Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council) to develop a position paper outlining issues and necessary improvements for international graduate student tuition and funding in Alberta.</p>
<p>6. Advocate for assistance, support, and encouragement for all graduate students to apply for internal, provincial, and federal awards, grants, and scholarships.</p>	<p>a. Promote the FGSR and departmental workshops designed to assist graduate students with the application process.</p> <p>b. Encourage graduate students to take advantage of the FGSR searchable database of scholarships, awards, and bursaries.</p> <p>c. Work with departments to provide sufficient notice to graduate students of application internal deadlines.</p> <p>d. Advocate for transparency of scholarship allocations awarded within the University.</p>
<p>7. Advocate for new quality measures, funding models, and graduate student management plans that do not favour some faculties or departments over other faculties or departments, to create more equitable graduate experiences.</p>	<p>a. Ensure graduate students are involved in any reform discussions associated with quality measures, funding models, or graduate student enrolment management plans.</p> <p>b. Participate in committee meetings, the FGSR Council, and the General Faculties Council (GFC) regarding quality measures, funding models, and graduate student management plans.</p> <p>c. Request graduate student representation on the Graduate Enrolment and Funding Advisory Committee.</p> <p>d. Create opportunities to discuss the University's decentralized model and how it creates significant disparities in program expectations and requirements, funding options, and time to completion for graduate students.</p>
<p>8. Advocate for a tuition model that ties graduate student tuition increases to the Alberta Consumer Price Index and opposes across-the-board graduate student tuition increases.</p>	<p>a. Encourage ab-GPAC to review international graduate student tuition and develop recommendations for inclusion of international student tuition fees in the province's Tuition Fees Regulation to increase fee predictability.</p> <p>b. Maintain the GSA's past stance in opposition to across-the-board tuition increases beyond Alberta CPI for all graduate students.</p> <p>c. Advocate for a review of the current Tuition Fees Regulation.</p>
<p>9. Advocate against the introduction of new market modifiers or other fees that are not currently a part of an agreed upon regulatory framework.</p>	<p>a. Monitor all fees being implemented for graduate students to ensure they include consultation with graduate students before implementation.</p> <p>b. Ensure graduate students are being assessed fees correctly under the Mandatory Non-Instructional Fee formula.</p>

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ADVOCATE	
GOAL 2: Work to develop supportive and respectful relationships between graduate students and their supervisors.	
Graduate student success relies on quality supervision and mentoring throughout a degree program. The GSA will build on work by previous executive teams and collaborate, with the FGSR and senior University administrators, to follow through on For the Public Good, the new institutional strategic plan, and make quality graduate student supervision an institutional priority.	
Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
1. Advocate for the development of mandatory supervisor training program for both incoming graduate students and supervisors.	a. Collaborate, with the FGSR, on the implementation of recommendations from the Quality of Graduate Student Supervision Report and other similar initiatives. b. Promote a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both graduate students and supervisors to provide expectations for both groups. c. Develop a list of recommended professional development workshops for graduate students that help promote a more effective graduate student-supervisor relationship. d. Promote a restorative justice and mediation process to encourage prompt resolution of any graduate student-supervisor conflicts.
2. Advocate for the development of an accountability structure that rewards quality supervision and mentoring while creating incentives to improve poor supervision.	a. Host the annual GSA Awards night to reward deserving graduate students, faculty and staff for excellence in teaching, supervision, research, service, and leadership. b. Work with the FGSR to develop a program to track the quality of the graduate student-supervisor relationship over time. c. Collaborate, with the FGSR, to create a regular feedback process from graduate students regarding experiences with their supervisors.
3. Advocate for departments to develop a means by which graduate students can report concerns regarding their supervisors.	a. Encourage graduate students to seek assistance from the GSA with respect to supervisory concerns. b. Encourage all Deans to develop a website form for disclosure of anonymous supervisor concerns to better track the level and types of concerns over time, and discuss ways to address any systemic issues that emerge.
4. Advocate for realistic 'time to completion' rates in order for both graduate students and supervisors to develop reasonable expectations regarding the length of the degree program.	a. Develop a 'cheat sheet' for prospective graduate students that lists suggested questions to ask a potential supervisor before starting a graduate degree program. b. Collaborate, with the FGSR, on ways to mitigate systemic 'time to completion' problems. c. Collaborate, with the FGSR, to develop a survey to assess current 'time to completion' expectations of both existing and potential graduate students. d. Encourage the FGSR to develop metrics that track faculty adherence to program timing and requirements which allows them to proactively intervene if problems arise.

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	e. Discuss, with the FGSR, the development of a common program milestone form for all graduate students and supervisors, regardless of department, that automatically tracks and flags graduate students not meeting their milestones.
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ENGAGE	
GOAL 1: Develop and maintain relationships with all GSA stakeholders internal and external to the University to support graduate student success.	
Graduate students play unique and multifaceted roles in a university environment. The GSA will advocate for further resources to support graduate students by reinforcing strong relationships with key players to create a common vision of excellence for all graduate students at the University, as well as across Alberta and Canada.	
Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
1. Engage with the Students' Union (SU), the Academic Staff Association (AASUA), the Postdoctoral Fellow's Association (PDFA), and the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) to identify shared priorities and maintain strong partnerships.	a. Meet regularly with SU counterparts to discuss mutual priorities such as residences, academic governance, and mental health. b. Arrange annual meetings with all partner associations to discuss common issues and priorities.
2. Engage with the President, Provost, Deputy Provost, Vice-Presidents, Board of Governors' members, University Governance, Dean of the FGSR, Dean of Students, Senators, the Alumni Association, service providers, and other key partners to determine shared priorities and maintain effective and collaborative relationships.	a. Meet regularly with the Dean of the FGSR and the Dean of Students to discuss specific issues affecting graduate students. b. Maintain graduate student representation on the Alumni Association and the Senate. c. Arrange meetings with senior University administration, when needed, to discuss key issues for graduate students. d. Attend Board of Governors' dinners, special events, and other functions to build relationships with key stakeholders. e. Attend all meetings scheduled with representatives of the provincial government.
3. Engage with our provincial lobby group to ensure the priorities of University of Alberta graduate students are heard by the provincial government.	a. Participate in all ab-GPAC meetings to ensure the needs of University of Alberta graduate students are included in ab-GPAC activities. b. Take an active role in the ab-GPAC executive team and important working groups/committees, as needed, to support University of Alberta graduate student priorities and ensure a solid internal governance structure. c. Advocate for international PhD students to be included in the provincial nomination program to increase points if applying for permanent residency. d. Investigate attending advocacy meetings of other lobby groups in order to observe, learn, and gather information.

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<p>4. Engage with the GSAs from other comprehensive and research intensive universities in Alberta and across Canada to share information, discuss best practices, and collaborate on common issues.</p>	<p>a. Meet annually with Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from all major parties to advocate for graduate students.</p> <p>b. Attend GU15 meetings to share information, determine best practices, and maintain relationships.</p> <p>c. Sign a petition advocating for the creation of a fast-track PhD stream to accelerate application for permanent residency status by international graduate students.</p>
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ENGAGE

GOAL 2: Increase graduate student awareness of and participation with the GSA and its services.

The GSA believes engagement occurs from the time someone asks for information about the graduate student application process through to the end-point of convocation. The GSA supports continuing graduate student engagement through University governance, networks in residence and elsewhere, professional development, and in social settings, all places where friendship and research collaboration can occur. While the GSA offers fall and winter orientation sessions, many graduate students continue to remain unaware of the GSA and the services it offers; the GSA also aims to increase voter turnout. The GSA will investigate effective communication methods that will create opportunities for graduate student awareness and engagement.

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Engage all graduate students across all University of Alberta campuses through social media and the GSA newsletter more effectively.</p>	<p>a. Continue the GSA's review of its communication practices with an eye to assessing how to better reach graduate students.</p> <p>b. Post, on social media, a minimum of one (1) photo per week of a GSA activity and aim to include at least one (1) DEO.</p> <p>c. Assess different communication styles on social media to increase viewership.</p> <p>d. Develop methods to use social media to educate graduate students about services offered by the GSA – including information regarding graduate student rights and ways the GSA can assist all graduate students.</p> <p>e. Assess alternative templates for the GSA newsletter to increase readership.</p> <p>f. Complete the GSA website's transition to Sitecore 3 and the associated redesign.</p>
<p>2. Engage with graduate students through workshops about important services and University governance structures.</p>	<p>a. Discuss innovative new methods to promote awareness of the GSA among graduate students to increase participation in GSA activities and events.</p> <p>b. Develop a survey to understand the impact of labour legislation changes on graduate students.</p> <p>c. Continue to host roundtable discussions, town halls, and 101 sessions to educate graduate students about University governance and other important issues.</p> <p>d. Devise methods to increase voter turnout in the annual GSA General Election.</p>

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<p>3. Engage graduate students by promoting activities and events to increase participation.</p>	<p>a. Meet with graduate student groups and departmental GSAs to better understand how to assist their members.</p> <p>b. Meet the Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) to follow up on the 2010 Memorandum of Understanding with the University regarding the North Power Plant.</p> <p>c. Lobby for space for the exclusive use of graduate students to encourage collaboration, idea sharing, and informal meetings.</p> <p>d. Provide three (3) events throughout the academic year to support social engagement and reduce stress amongst graduate students.</p> <p>e. Discuss creating GSA branded products and prizes to incentivize graduate students to participate in contests, events, and activities.</p>
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SUPPORT

GOAL 1: Ensure all graduate students have access to sufficient resources to meet the basic necessities of life.

The GSA is a vigilant voice for the graduate student experience, including funding, housing, and services. In order for graduate students to have a positive experience at the University of Alberta, key infrastructure pieces must be in place before graduate students even register. The current unpredictable and unsustainable funding model can create situations where graduate students cannot afford safe housing and/or sufficient food. The lack of graduate student funding creates significant strain on mental health and leads to: increased drop-out rates; increased draws on Health and Wellness services; and a decreased focus on studies and research productivity. The potential for achievement can be lost as graduate students must find alternative funding sources through loans and jobs in order to support themselves and their families.

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Support the Campus Food Bank (CFB) in its mission to ensure the delivery of adequate food for students and their families.</p>	<p>a. Maintain GSA representation on the CFB Board.</p> <p>b. Continue to review the CFB's annual audited financial statements, usage statistics with respect to graduate students, and budget in accordance with the GSA's fiduciary duties concerning the use of graduate students' fees.</p>
<p>2. Support access to healthier food options on campus, including for those with dietary restrictions.</p>	<p>a. Meet with Ancillary Services to advocate for a wider variety of healthy food options on campus, including options for those with dietary restrictions.</p>
<p>3. Support the need for sustainable, affordable, and well-maintained graduate student housing to prevent homelessness and ensure a positive experience at the U of A for graduate students and their families.</p>	<p>a. Advocate for flexible and transparent residence rental contracts between the University and graduate students that use 'plain language.'</p> <p>b. Meet with potential advocates and sponsors regarding the issue of graduate student homelessness, including Chaplains, Senators, and the Alumni Association, to brainstorm potential solutions to short-term and chronic homelessness amongst graduate students.</p> <p>c. Discuss the on-going issue of mold and general unhealthy living conditions at Michener Park with senior administration and advocate to improve the quality of life for graduate students and their families.</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Collaborate with Community Social Workers to make the GSA's presence and services better known to graduate students living in residences. e. Advocate for affordable and high quality graduate residences that are easily accessible via public transit. f. Ensure graduate student representation on the Residence Life Task Force. g. Collaborate with the SU to advocate for more compassionate responses from Residence Services to ensure the needs of all students in residence are met.
<p>4. Support and assist graduate students living in residences, and their Residence Associations, to ensure students are living in safe conditions and receiving excellent services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborate with Residence Associations to survey graduate students living in residence about their key issues and concerns. b. Assist graduate students living in residence to ensure their concerns are addressed by Residence Services in a timely manner. c. Meet with Residence Associations each term to hear their concerns and help raise those issues with senior administration.

SUPPORT

GOAL 2: Strive for a positive experience that meets the needs, and furthers the development of, graduate students.

The GSA supports and encourages an empowering environment for all graduate students so they can thrive academically and professionally. The GSA supports an increase to the number and diversity of professional development opportunities being implemented for graduate students. The GSA will continue to collaborate with the FGSR to ensure graduate students are able to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for future careers. The GSA will work with stakeholders to pursue the development of a mentorship program. The GSA will also maintain its support of University services that benefit graduate students, including advocating for the ability of graduate students to present their research to the academic community inside and outside the U of A.

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Support a variety of high quality professional development (PD) and internship opportunities for graduate students in recognition of the diverse future career paths ahead of graduate students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support the professional experience leave policy being advanced by the FGSR. b. Meet with Internship and PD Directors each term to hear program updates and to discuss feedback from participants. c. Meet with stakeholders, such as the FGSR and the Career Centre, to discuss the support of entrepreneurship opportunities for graduate students. d. Develop and host two (2) PD events for graduate students. e. Participate in PD4Grads meetings to assist with the development of PD workshops and events.
<p>2. Support workshops and services that assist graduate students with academic progress and professional development opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Subsidize and support graduate student workshops, courses, and sessions offered by the Career Centre and the Student Success Centre. b. Evaluate annually the effectiveness of services subsidized by the GSA for graduate students.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Continue to promote workshops and services for graduate students through the GSA newsletter, the GSA website, and the handbook. d. Evaluate current GSA Policy for supporting graduate student groups to ensure accessibility and equity of support.
3. Support graduate students throughout the application process for internal, provincial, and federal grants, fellowships, and other opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. As noted above, discuss, with the FGSR, the current opportunities available to graduate students who are applying to scholarships, grants, and awards to ensure the FGSR's complete support throughout the application process.
4. Support graduate students financially so that they can attend local, regional, national, and international conferences to promote their work and develop new academic networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Offer GSA Academic Travel Awards to as many graduate students as GSSF funding permits. b. Compare and contrast funding for academic travel available to graduate students at other universities in preparation for collective bargaining.
5. Support the expansion of a mentorship program available to graduate students in partnership with the FGSR, the Alumni Association, the City of Edmonton, and the Government of Alberta.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Discuss current graduate student mentorship availability with the FGSR. b. Discuss new graduate student mentorship opportunities with partners such as the Alumni Association.
6. Support cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research and learning opportunities for graduate students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advocate for easier transfer of credits for graduate students between other universities and the University of Alberta. b. Investigate the possibility of obtaining a seat on the provincial Academic and Credit Transfer Committee for either the University of Alberta or ab-GPAC. c. Research departmental credit transfer policies to determine inconsistencies and areas for improvement. d. Meet with at least two (2) Deans or Department Chairs to discuss the issues of transferring credits and strategize how to overcome barriers.
7. Support opportunities for graduate students to have international research and study opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Participate in the FGSR Policy Review Committee, and other similar University committees, to promote interdisciplinary and alternative learning opportunities, including international exchanges, for graduate students. b. Meet with GoAbroad and Mitacs to discuss opportunities to promote and expand international educational experiences available to graduate students.
8. Support the need for high-quality graduate-level programs and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Participate in the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction review process which will assess the effectiveness of the current evaluation system and recommend improvements. b. Assess graduate student satisfaction levels and areas of improvement outlined in the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey. c. Participate in Campus Alberta Quality Council reviews of graduate student programs.

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SUPPORT

GOAL 3: Continue to build a safe, respectful, supportive, and appreciative learning and work environment for all graduate students that is compliant with the GSA's Collective Agreement governing graduate student assistantships.

All graduate students are entitled to a safe and respectful work environment, free from harassment, discrimination, and bullying. For graduate students with assistantships, the Collective Agreement is a legally binding document between the GSA and the Board of Governors that outlines the expectations for fair compensation and a beneficial work environment. The GSA will build upon the advances it has made to assist graduate students with Collective Agreement issues, and ensure University-wide awareness and compliance of the Collective Agreement.

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
1. Support graduate students and build upon advances made by previous GSA teams in resolving issues associated with the Collective Agreement.	a. Collect example letters of appointment from as many departments as possible in order to examine compliance with the Collective Agreement. b. Discuss the Collective Agreement in all orientation presentations by the GSA. c. Distribute a clear and concise fact sheet regarding the Collective Agreement at all GSA orientation presentations and events. d. Present, to the Board Human Resources and Compensation Committee, the types of Collective Agreement issues addressed by the GSA to demonstrate the impact of these issues on the University. e. Track issues associated with the Collective Agreement to discuss during subsequent collective bargaining with the University.
2. Support the development of partnerships with Departmental Councillors and Departmental GSAs to track systemic Collective Agreement compliance issues.	a. Be available to meet with Departmental Councillors, Departmental GSAs, and individual graduate students to better understand the range of issues and experiences across campus. b. Develop a tracking system for all issues discussed with Departmental Councillors, Departmental GSAs, and individual graduate students. c. Plan to meet with all departmental Councillors prior to the end of December 2016. d. Develop an annual meeting schedule between the GSA and Departmental Councillors for use by future GSA teams.
3. Support and advocate for graduate students who have experienced issues related to the Collective Agreement, and for those who face issues outside of the Collective Agreement.	a. Advocate, on behalf of graduate students, for the prompt resolution of ongoing and systemic issues associated with the Collective Agreement. b. Meet with any graduate student who experiences an issue associated with the Collective Agreement to develop methods to resolve the issue in a timely manner. c. Develop a tracking system of individual graduate student issues worked on by the GSA.

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	<p>d. Continue to advocate for and assist graduate students who face issues aside from those associated with the Collective Agreement and aid them in navigating University structures.</p>
<p>4. Support partnerships with the FGSR and the Office of the Provost to ensure a better understanding of the GSA's Collective Agreement within the University.</p>	<p>a. Maintain ongoing relationships with the appropriate members of the Office of the Provost. b. Review, in collaboration with the Office of the Provost, the Collective Agreement Information Sheets. c. Use social media to highlight the Collective Agreement. d. Discuss, with the FGSR and the Office of the Provost, the way information regarding the Collective Agreement is shared with incoming professors, graduate coordinators, and graduate chairs. e. Attend the Deans' Council, Graduate Program Administrators Committee, and meetings of other groups to present information about the GSA's Collective Agreement.</p>

<p>SUPPORT</p> <p>GOAL 4: Enhance supports for international graduate students.</p> <p>The University's community of international graduate students is a vital part of the overall graduate programs offered at the University of Alberta. The GSA will support, and advocate for, initiatives and programs that specifically support international graduate students in all aspects of their lives.</p>	
Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Support the GSA's partnership with University of Alberta International (UAI) and student groups who represent international graduate students.</p>	<p>a. Promote the UAI peer mentoring program via the GSA newsletter and on social media. b. Meet with UAI at least two (2) times per year to discuss issues faced by international graduate students. c. Meet with the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (International) to discuss issues faced by international graduate students. d. Meet annually with international student groups to discuss opportunities for collaboration. e. Advertise University educational support programs that can be used by international graduate students. f. Investigate if there is sufficient need to broker a service to assist international graduate students with applying for permanent residency.</p>

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SUSTAIN	
GOAL 1: Maintain the GSA's excellent reputation and culture of respect, tolerance, and professionalism.	
The GSA aims to be the best managed graduate student association in Canada, with effective and well-trained elected leadership supported by a professional and engaged management team. To be effective, the GSA needs to maintain a viable staffing infrastructure and an engaged office support team.	
Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
1. Sustain a supportive, respectful, professional, and enjoyable work environment for GSA DEOs and support the Executive Director's work to ensure a similar environment within the GSA office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ensure the use of effective communication skills to address conflict or issues as quickly as possible. b. Ensure everyone's time is respected. c. Create opportunities to show appreciation for assistance or for a job well-done. d. Work collaboratively with the Executive Director to enhance the GSA's health, stability, and reputation in all areas over time.
2. Sustain the commitment to strategic planning, regular follow-through on goals and action steps, and regular reporting to the GSA Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Update the Board Strategic Work Plan (SWP) and annual action steps with each new group of DEOs. b. Develop effective methods to demonstrate progress and success of the Board SWP action steps. c. Review and regularly update the recently-developed GSA Councillor Handbook to assist Councillors to better understand their roles and responsibilities. d. Create opportunities for all Councillors to provide input on key items presented and discussed at GSA Council in new or innovative ways. e. Develop a survey for GSA Councillors to facilitate their engagement with the GSA, and ability to represent their departments or constituents.
3. Sustain a proactive search for talent through the Early Call for Talent and Training initiative, and a commitment to provide elected officials with training and professional development opportunities relevant to their portfolios.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Effectively advertise the annual Early Call for Talent and Training program. b. Maintain an effective Nominating Committee who can work towards placing graduate student representatives on various councils and committees. c. Develop an annual transition plan to prepare incoming DEOs for their annual responsibilities. d. Review and update the annual training plan for DEOs to ensure delivery of training deemed necessary for them to effectively perform their duties. e. Discuss with the Dean of the FGSR the option of requesting academic relief for the GSA President under the professional experience leave category.
4. Sustain a regular review of GSA Bylaw and Policy to ensure good governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue with review of GSA Bylaw and Policy (eg combined version, editorial updates, officer portfolios, etc). b. Implement GSA Council-approved updates to Bylaw and Policy as needed following review. c. Communicate during transition of future teams of DEOs the necessity for on-going review.

User's Guide to the April 2017 Board SWP Progress Update Below:

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 Items highlighted in green are completed

<p>5. Sustain reasonable workloads for all DEOs by reallocating roles and responsibilities to meet the changing University environment.</p>	<p>a. Conduct, at minimum, an annual review of DEO portfolios and the division of responsibilities. b. Assign DEOs to committees in a manner that ensures the best use of talent while aiming for an equitable distribution of the overall workload.</p>

SUSTAIN

GOAL 2: Continue to offer high-quality, affordable services to all graduate students.

The GSA will continue to offer a wide variety of beneficial services that are available to all graduate students. The GSA will also continue to negotiate for affordable health, dental and transit programs for graduate students based on graduate student needs and wants.

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Sustain and develop on-campus and GSA negotiated and subsidized services to obtain the highest value possible for graduate students.</p>	<p>a. Develop opportunities to gain insight and feedback from graduate students regarding the services offered by the GSA. b. Conduct a comprehensive review of the GSA's Health and Dental Plan in order to select the plan that best meets the overall needs of graduate students. c. Develop a proposal for a drop-in child care centre on campus that can be utilized by graduate students. d. Work to ensure the U-Pass remains cost effective for graduate students. e. Lead the discussion on creation of a direct bus route between Michener Park and North Campus. f. Discuss, with other Edmonton-based universities, negotiating for a discounted U-Pass rate for spouses and dependents of students in future. g. Finalize the agreement between the GSA and the SU regarding the Physical Activity and Wellness (PAW) Centre food service area. h. Maintain relationships with our partners and sponsors of events and activities.</p>

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SUSTAIN

GOAL 3: Promote a welcoming, equitable, sustainable, and healthy campus for all members of the University community.

The GSA supports a University that values continuous learning and development and measures success, both through traditional metrics and alternative, less competitive and more collaborative, methods. The GSA supports the development of critical thinking skills, opportunities to fail without punishment, assignments that develop self-awareness of strengths, and opportunities to give back to the community. The GSA will continue to: foster a culture of inclusion and acceptance; responsibility for the use of finite resources; and support health and wellness initiatives that aim to increase work-life balance.

Strategic Objectives	2016/2017 Action Steps
<p>1. Sustain a respectful and welcoming environment for all indigenous peoples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Acknowledge we are on Treaty 6 land in all official meetings and on all official documents produced by the GSA. b. Examine the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report to determine how the GSA can implement the Calls to Action. c. Host an Elder to lead a smudging ceremony at the start of GSA Council. d. Advocate for learning environments within the University that honour indigenous approaches to living and learning. e. Collaborate with the Indigenous Council to advertise and participate in traditional events and activities to increase graduate student knowledge and understanding of indigenous cultures. f. Discuss with the Deputy Provost current strategies being implemented by the University for indigenous peoples on campus and identify areas affecting graduate students. g. Investigate whether the current infrastructure provided to indigenous undergraduate students also meets the needs of indigenous graduate students.
<p>2. Sustain working relationships with stakeholders to ensure a campus free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying for all members of the University community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify vulnerable and at-risk graduate student populations and setup meetings each term to discuss concerns and issues. b. Participate, through the sexual assault policy committee, in the development of definitions for sexual violence on campus. c. Participate in the Sexual Assault Response Implementation Committee. d. Attend the Forensic Experiential and Trauma Interview training to learn trauma-informed ways of assisting graduate students. e. Work with Ancillary Services to increase the number of gender neutral bathrooms on campus. f. Advocate for a family-friendly campus that includes an increase in the number of breastfeeding rooms on campus and a change to the policy regarding bringing children to class.

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<p>3. Sustain the development of alternative dispute resolution techniques to help address power imbalances and to nurture peace and productivity within the University environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collaborate with the FGSR, the Graduate Student Ombudsperson, and the Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights to develop a graduate student rights document. b. Train DEOs in restorative and mediation practices that can help encourage a prompt resolution of conflicts and issues. c. Encourage training for Graduate Chairs in restorative and mediation practices to help resolve conflicts within a department. d. Work to increase awareness of alternative dispute resolution techniques and practical communication skills for graduate students, administrators, and professors. e. Discuss developing alternative methods to address serious allegations about supervision issues, other than the Article 16 process, to effect change and improve graduate student experiences.
<p>4. Sustain campus-wide health and wellness initiatives to support and promote the improvement of mental health for graduate students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Organize eight (8) Coffee Breaks during the academic year to provide mental health breaks and networking opportunities for graduate students, to support flourishing mental health. b. Encourage graduate student participation in local and provincial mental health meetings, events and summits. c. Promote resources that address the stigma of mental health to change the culture of isolation and fear that can inhibit success. d. Collaborate with the University of Calgary to bring the Inquiring Minds anti-stigma mental health workshop to the University of Alberta. e. Encourage ab-GPAC to maintain pressure on the provincial government to guarantee long-term equitable funding for mental health programs. f. Obtain monthly updates from the Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) regarding the progress on the campus's new Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Space. g. Participate in committee meetings to develop a fair and equitable system for booking the Prayer and Meditation Space. h. Participate in campus-wide, on-going health and wellness initiatives. i. Advocate to maintain a psychologist in Triffo Hall for graduate students.
<p>5. Sustain leadership towards environmental sustainability and stewardship.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Evaluate GSA events to determine their environmental impact and work with the Office of Sustainability to reduce that impact. b. Limit printing of documents by encouraging the use of laptops and projectors at meetings. c. Promote the University's sustainability initiatives. d. Encourage the Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) to build net zero energy buildings to reduce the long-term environmental impact of the University.