



# The Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan 2020-2021

# Connect Support Advocate



# Our Vision and Mission

To advocate for all graduate students to the University of Alberta and all levels of government in pursuit of a safe, supportive, respectful, accessible, and inclusive community that fosters the multi-faceted roles played by graduate students.

*The GSA respectfully acknowledges that it is located on Treaty 6 territory and Métis homelands.*



## What is a Graduate Student?

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 in research, teaching, and the development of University learning environments. These contributions may be accomplished through: extensive coursework and the development of capstone projects, theses, or dissertations (in pursuit of which graduate students are charged tuition and fees); academic employment (for which graduate students are paid); the co-creation and writing of scholarly work; contribution to the securing of academic funding; and participation in the community via presentations, conferences, and community engagement. The multi-faceted role of the graduate student takes place in an environment of mutual respect and fairness aimed at developing skills and knowledge for future careers, and is one that merits appropriate remuneration for labour in service of the enhancement of the institution.

## What is the GSA Board's Strategic Work Plan?

The GSA Board's Strategic Work Plan is the document that steers and prioritizes the work and initiatives of the GSA. The GSA sees this as a living document, shifting directions as needed as the provincial, federal, and University landscapes change. It is developed annually with reference to the Strategic Work Plans of previous GSA Boards, and provides a planning document for this and future years.

It is with special regard for the incalculable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that the GSA executive team has developed the 2020-2021 Strategic Work Plan. The GSA is committed to continuing the work of supporting graduate students whose academic progress, financial situation, or physical and mental health were and continue to be affected by this pandemic.



Graduate students elect GSA leaders each February. Here are the 2020-2021 GSA Directly-Elected Officers (from left to right): Vice-President Academic, Sachiketha Reddy; Vice-President Student Services, Sridhar Parasharamatham; President, Marc Waddingham; Vice-President External, Anas Fassih; and Vice-President Labour, Umesh Nimmathi.

## The Graduate Students' Association

The GSA, as established by the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, represents graduate students at the University of Alberta and provides a wealth of services to its members to enrich the graduate student experience. As a separate corporation, it is both *a part* of the University of Alberta and *apart* from the institution. The GSA Board believes that a healthy organization is nurtured through effective relationships with all stakeholders. To sustain the organization's long-term health and protect its excellent reputation, the GSA fosters a culture of respect and professionalism among staff and graduate student leaders, engages in regular review of governance processes, is committed to transparency and accountability, and ensures an annual transition process that facilitates the ongoing training of elected graduate student leaders.



# Connect

*The GSA provides a wealth of benefits and services to its members that both enrich the graduate student experience and forge connections between graduate students.*

The GSA will:

- ◆ Continue to foster a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion among its members
- ◆ Provide guidance to graduate students and aid them in navigating University processes and structures, while advocating for greater transparency around expectations and outcomes for graduate students
- ◆ Maintain engagement in discussions about space on campus

The GSA will create opportunities for graduate student awareness of and engagement with the GSA by:

- ◆ Ensuring the GSA remains responsive, effective, and efficient by regularly reviewing services and seeking feedback from members
- ◆ Evaluating communication methods to broaden engagement with our members, including academically-employed graduate students for whom the GSA acts as union
- ◆ Offering orientation and information sessions on key issues
- ◆ Offering engagement and recognition events
- ◆ Connecting with and supporting departmental graduate student groups and other graduate student groups and networks
- ◆ Developing a new outreach framework for GSA Council members and their constituents

## Did you know?

The GSA has:

- ▶ graduate student lounges at Triffo Hall
- ▶ rooms available for booking
- ▶ several fun events per year
- ▶ two large orientations specific to graduate students (we also participate in 45-50 departmental orientations annually)
- ▶ a weekly newsletter, website, and social media profiles that highlight events and ways to get involved

The GSA will foster collaborative and positive relationships with:

- ◆ The Government of Alberta, including the Minister of Advanced Education, and the City of Edmonton
- ◆ Members of senior University administration (such as the President, the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), the Dean of Students, the Chair of the Board of Governors, and the Chancellor)
- ◆ Other campus stakeholder associations such as the Students' Union, the Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta, the Postdoctoral Fellows' Association, the Non-Academic Staff Association, and the Alumni Association



# Support

*All graduate students are entitled to a safe and respectful study and work environment characterized by positive supervisory relationships and free from harassment, discrimination, and bullying.*

*In its role as a union, the GSA champions, advances, and protects the rights of its members as workers.*

The GSA will:

- ◆ Actively participate in campus wide health and wellness (including mental wellness) initiatives, as well as work (where applicable, in concert with University units) to develop graduate-specific opportunities in this vein
- ◆ Work to optimize the experience of its members during any academic employment appointment and to ensure the rights of graduate student workers are protected
- ◆ Continue work to ensure campus-wide compliance with the provisions of the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement, as well as work with the University to provide unique support for academically-employed graduate students whose employment is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ Continue to provide financial supports to graduate students through the Graduate Student Support Fund
- ◆ Continue to support workshops and services that assist graduate students with their academic progress

## Did you know?

The GSA offers:

- ▶ GSA Emergency Bursaries
- ▶ GSA Child Care Grants
- ▶ GSA Academic Travel Grants
- ▶ GSA Graduate Student Group Grants
- ▶ GSA Recognition Awards
- ▶ GSA Health and Dental Plan

The GSA will:

- ◆ Support and collaborate with partners and stakeholders with respect to the establishment of a variety of high-quality professional development, internship, and co-operative education opportunities in recognition of the diverse future career paths ahead of graduate students
- ◆ Support the services offered by the Campus Food Bank
- ◆ Push for the ongoing review and improvement of safety and security on campus
- ◆ Support initiatives and programs aimed at environmental stewardship and sustainability



# Advocate

*A lack of stable funding and unpredictable increases in educational and other costs can cause significant strain on graduate students' health and wellness and can inhibit academic progress.*

*The GSA believes that graduate students should be provided with professional development opportunities that are essential for future career success.*

The GSA will:

- ◆ Continue the work of advocating to the provincial government, and sometimes the municipal and federal governments, to ensure that graduate students receive a level of education becoming of the University of Alberta as an internationally-recognized institution
- ◆ Continue the work of collaborating with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research during the pilot phase and initial implementation of a new student-supervisor reporting and feedback framework, as well as continue advocacy alongside the Faculty for the establishment of a supervisory college
- ◆ Continue its advocacy work with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and the Office of the Provost on providing adequate and sustained funding packages for PhD students as well as developing special administrative considerations for students whose academic progress was and continues to be hindered by COVID-19
- ◆ Advocate for increased financial supports for all graduate students (as well as greater accessibility to these supports) in the face of coming tuition increases and the adverse effects of COVID-19
- ◆ Continue to campaign for new initiatives and programs (and support existing ones) that specifically support Indigenous graduate students

## Did you know?

The GSA:

- ▶ meets regularly with the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and the Dean of Students
- ▶ is a member of the provincial advocacy group the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council
- ▶ has seats on the Board of Governors, the General Faculties Council, and their sub-committees
- ▶ works individually with students to help them

The GSA will:

- ◆ Advocate for sustainable, cost-effective, and well-maintained housing for graduate students, and support and assist graduate students living in residences, with particular regard for students displaced due to the Michener Park residence closure
- ◆ Campaign for enhanced supports and community building opportunities for graduate students who parent, and their families
- ◆ Advocate for new initiatives and programs (and support existing ones) that specifically support international graduate students
- ◆ Encourage the development and implementation of initiatives to prevent homelessness
- ◆ Advocate for high-quality graduate-level programs and courses and opportunities to provide graduate students with international research and study opportunities



# Events:

|                            |                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| GSA Fall Orientation       | Late August        |
| GSA Fall Event             | Early October      |
| GSA Winter Orientation     | Early January      |
| GSA Winter Event           | Mid February       |
| GSA General Election       | Late February      |
| GSA Volunteer Appreciation | Early March        |
| GSA Awards Night           | Late March         |
| GSA Coffee Breaks          | One Friday Monthly |

\*events subject to cancellation or change due to COVID-19 prevention measures



Come visit us at  
The Graduate Students' Association  
1-49 Triffo Hall  
University of Alberta  
T6G 2E1



780-492-2175  
gsa.frontdesk@ualberta.ca  
uab.ca/gsa