



2021-2022 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan 25 April 2022 Update to GSA Council

Each spring the GSA Directly-Elected Officers (hereafter referred to, informally, as the student executive team) work with the GSA Board to produce a Strategic Work Plan (SWP). The SWP is the document that steers and prioritizes the work and initiatives of the GSA, and is subject to revision as opportunities arise, shifting directions as needed. The SWP reflects the GSA's vision and mission to advocate for all graduate students to the University of Alberta and the Alberta Government for a safe, supportive, respectful, accessible, and inclusive community that fosters the multi-faceted roles played by graduate students.

This year's consultation initiatives were carried out in Summer 2021 and yielded a significant amount of feedback which helped shape the 2021-2022 SWP. The final document was approved by the GSA Board in late June and received by GSA Council for information at their July meeting. It can be viewed [on the GSA website](#).

A selection of ongoing work and new initiatives pursued and undertaken by the 2021-2022 student executive team (President Anas Fassih, VP Academic Kathy Haddadkar, VP External Mohd Tahsin Bin Mostafa, VP Labour Jessica Grenke, and VP Student Services Paresh Kumar), in accord with the 2021-2022 SWP, can be found below.

Earlier updates were shared with GSA Council in October and January; thus this document is the third and final installment of updates in the 2021-2022 term.

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- Engaging in repeated consultation efforts with the graduate student body throughout a tumultuous academic year resulting from the pandemic and shifting provincial mandates and University directives. Three surveys were launched between July 2021 and February 2022 to establish a frequent dialogue with graduate students and to ensure that advocacy efforts were reflective of these experiences;
 - The development of a dedicated bursary to assist graduate students with the often-untenable burden of technology requirements of graduate-level research. This work, led by the President, is still in its primary stages but a strong foundation of support has been established by our colleagues at the Office of the Registrar and at the Office of Development and Alumni Relations;
 - Supporting the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) as part of the steering committee for the Open Education Symposium (March 2022) and the Festival of Teaching and Learning (FoTL) (May 2022). The VP Academic also served as a session facilitator for the Symposium;
 - Significant advocacy on the part of the VP External in the wake of the closure of Michener Park residence in 2021 has so far yielded a recently made offer for dedicated couples' housing to be made available. A number of units at HUB will be offered to students as of Fall 2022;
 - The President has been representing the graduate student constituency to the University as it navigates the academic restructuring initiative which was implemented in Summer 2021. This advocacy was in part channelled through the work of the GFC *Ad Hoc* Committee for the Formal Review of the Consultations and Action Processes for Academic Restructuring, on which the VP Academic served. A report from this *ad hoc* body, the product of several months of work that has several significant recommendations, was shared with GFC in March 2022;
 - The following efforts pertain to the role of the GSA as the union for Academically-Employed Graduate Students (AEGSs):



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- The establishment of a service agreement with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), the result of which is a more robust union and a stronger bargaining position for Academically-Employed Graduate Students (AEGSs);
- Bargaining for the next GSA Collective Agreement in advance of the expiration of the existing agreement in August 2022. This work began as scheduled in Fall 2021 and frequent updates have been provided to AEGSs as union members;
- Following the creation of a slate of union steward roles, associated stewardship training sessions were offered in March 2022;
- An outreach initiative led by the VP Labour has also been carried out in the form of connecting with individual departments to ensure ground-level engagement and department-specific information sharing. Further efforts in this vein have been represented by “Meet the GSA Labour Relations Committee” tabling in the North Campus Quad;
- The development and launch of a novel eClass module that provides self-guided education on the GSA Collective Agreement;
- Pledging solidarity with the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) and the Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta (AASUA) during February 2022 as bargaining efforts between AASUA and the University stalled and formal mediation began. Significant efforts were also made to address graduate student concerns given the interconnected nature of graduate student and academic staff employment, and the potential for strike action or a lock out;
- The use of the GSA Health and Dental Reserve Fund (GSA HDPRF) to the amount of \$39.03 per student to help offset upcoming increases to the cost of the GSA Health and Dental Plan. The annual cost of enrolment for this plan was frozen for a period of two years as part of the previous round of negotiations with Studentcare. Since then, as a result of increasing usage, the cost of the plan has continued to grow. With the two-year freezing period ending in August 2022, the per-person fee of the plan for the 2022-2023 academic year was reported at \$564.41. Thus the GSA Board and GSA Budget and Finance Committee have opted to utilize the GSA HPDRF to help offset this increase for the duration of the 2022-2023 academic year, meaning that the existing per-person cost will see a 5% increase to \$525.38. Work to expand coverage offerings under the Plan is ongoing;
- The VP Student Services has negotiated with Edmonton Transit Services (ETS) and other regional transit services, alongside partner student associations at UAlberta, MacEwan University, NAIT, and NorQuest, to secure a partial refund of \$45 on the Winter 2022 U-Pass;
- As previously reported, the GSA Budget and Finance Committee, led by the President, conducted a review of the GSA’s investment policy to ensure it remains reflective of the organization’s goals. These priorities are a risk-averse portfolio, and one with an ethical investing caveat. In addition, the work of this body has culminated in the decision to dedicate 30% of the 2021-2022 GSA operating budget surplus to the Campus Food Bank. This decision reflects years of partnership and is made in part as a response to the rising need demonstrated by graduate students in recent years;
- Financial barriers to accessing post-secondary education continue to stand, as they have for a number of years, as a primary strategic priority for the GSA. Work motivated by this priority manifests through ongoing conversations between the President and Dr. Brooke Milne (Vice-Provost and Faculty of

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Graduate Studies and Research Dean) regarding guaranteed minimum funding packages, as well as ongoing vigorous advocacy to University administration and the provincial government for increased post-secondary funding and affordable tuition. On this latter point, the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (with whom the President and VP External work closely) released a statement in February 2022, urging the provincial government yet again to reconsider ongoing and increasing budget cuts. These efforts represent larger projects that will continue in the coming years;

- In alignment with their respective portfolios, the VP Academic, VP Student Services, and VP Labour each dedicated a notable portion of time to one-on-one meetings with graduate students;
- The University's temporary online learning period in Winter 2022 was preceded by a significant effort from the Return to Campus Safety and Logistics Committee, whose mandate is to endeavour to ensure safety and wellness for community members. The VP Student Services represented graduate students on this body;
- Following the Winter 2022 temporary online learning period, the GSA office has returned to operations in a hybrid format where staff work in office as well as remotely in order to balance public health standards with the need to support graduate students in-person;
- Virtual Game Night was hosted on 18 March, in consideration for public health guidance and raised concerns surrounding safety. Planning for future events, particularly in-person offerings, has begun in advance of the Spring/Summer term;
- Alongside our partners at Campus and Community Recreation (CCR), this year saw a focused effort to consult with graduate students to help ensure the unique needs of this group are being recognized by the CCR slate of offerings. This involved frequent meetings between the VP Student Services and CCR administration, as well as a survey for large scale consultation;
- Efforts pertaining to the mandate of the GSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (GSA EDIC) continue under the leadership of the President. Current priorities revolve around the lack of engagement with a number of specific equity-seeking demographics in our community, including graduate students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, and students who are disabled or differently-abled;
- The GSA Recognition Awards disbursed a sum of \$17,000 this year in the form of 32 individual awards to graduate students for demonstrated exemplary service, leadership, research, and teaching, 1 award for graduate student groups, among others. A small, in-person Awards Ceremony was also hosted this year in consideration for public health and safety;
- The GSA communications strategy and practices has undergone a review, particularly in relation to the GSA newsletter which saw, as a result, a formatting change in an effort to garner greater engagement. Informational videos featuring each of the student executives were also produced and launch this year, and can be found [on the GSA website](#); and
- The GSA executive team continues efforts to cultivate and sustain productive relationships with prominent members of University administration and stakeholders which remains a high priority. The student executives therefore engage in regular meetings with University President, Bill Flanagan; Provost and Vice-President (Academic), Steve Dew; Vice-Provost and FGSR Dean, Brooke Milne; Chief Strategy Officer, Catherine Swindlehurst; Dean of Students, André Costopoulos; Acting Dean of Students, Helen Vallianatos; and Acting Associate Dean of Students, Karsten Mündel, among many others.

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The student executive team will continue to work diligently in accordance with the 2021-2022 SWP until the conclusion of the 2021-2022 term on 30 April 2022. Thereafter, the proverbial baton will be passed to the 2022-2023 student executive team.