



The Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan 2021-2022

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 and the University of Alberta reside on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis. This territory is a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community. In acknowledging this traditional territory and its significance for the Indigenous peoples who lived and continue to live upon it, we recognize its longer history that reaches beyond colonization and the establishment of European colonies and recognize the GSA's ongoing collective responsibility in working with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) peoples and what that means for the work of the GSA as it aims to practice the principles of being Good Relations with FNMI peoples, Nations, communities, and lands.



Graduate students elect GSA leaders each February. Here are the 2021-2022 GSA Directly-Elected Officers (from left to right): Vice-President Student Services, Paresh Kumar; Vice-President Academic, Kathy Haddadkar; President, Anas Fassih; Vice-President Labour, Jessica Grenke; and Vice-President External, Mohd Tahsin Bin Mostafa.

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. A separate corporate entity, the GSA is a collegial organization which co-exists alongside the University of Alberta to fully empower, represent, and advocate for graduate students.

The GSA Board places utmost value on the cultivation and preservation of effective relationships with all stakeholders in order to sustain the organization's long-term health and protect its excellent reputation.

The GSA Board recognizes that it exists in a society with a long history of systemic inequities which remain embedded in the fabric of our culture and which continue to adversely affect the work and legacy of the organization. To this end, the GSA deliberately undertakes the work of engaging with these systemic inequities with the goal of deconstructing them in order to advance the spirit of equity, diversity, and inclusion within the community.

The GSA also works diligently to foster a culture of respect and professionalism among staff and graduate student leaders. Lastly, the GSA 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.





What is a Graduate Student?

A graduate student is an emerging 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 cultivation of University learning environments. These contributions are accomplished through, among others: 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; participation in the academic community via presentations, conferences, and other engagement initiatives; as well as economic contributions in the form of innovation and entrepreneurship.



The multi-faceted role of the graduate student is to take place in an environment of mutual respect and fairness—one aimed at developing skills and knowledge with lifelong benefits. This role therefore 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 in accordance with the tenets of the graduate student experience. The GSA sees this plan as a living document, shifting focus and direction as the landscape changes within the University community and beyond, often at the provincial and federal levels. It is developed annually following extensive consultation with the graduate student community and with reference to the Strategic Work Plans of previous GSA Boards, and as such provides a planning document for this and future years.



It is with continued regard for the incalculable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that the GSA executive team has developed the 2021-2022 Strategic Work Plan. The GSA is committed to continuing the work of supporting graduate students whose academic progress, financial situation, or physical and/or mental health are affected by this pandemic.



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:

- ◆ Provide guidance to graduate students who continue to face changes resulting from academic restructuring and Service Excellence Transformation projects undertaken by the University
- ◆ Continue to cultivate a culture of engagement with graduate student units in order to serve as effective advocates in discussions with the University
- ◆ Advance the mandate of the GSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee as it establishes initiatives for the organization, as well as support the University's ongoing work on equity, diversity, and inclusion

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

- ◆ Ensuring the GSA remains responsive, effective, and efficient through regular reviews of services and solicitation of feedback from members
- ◆ Evaluating and strengthening communication methods to broaden engagement with our members, including academically-employed graduate students for whom the GSA acts as union
- ◆ Offering virtual or in-person orientation and information sessions on key issues
- ◆ Offering virtual or in-person engagement and recognition events
- ◆ Working to connect with and support departmental graduate student groups and other graduate student groups

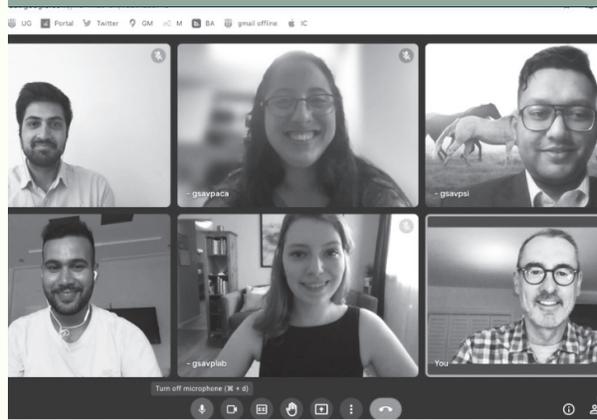
Did you know?

The GSA has:

- ▶ graduate student lounges at Triffo Hall
- ▶ rooms available for booking
- ▶ several fun events per year
- ▶ Orientation resources 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 collegial relationships with:

- ◆ The Government of Alberta, particularly the Ministry of Advanced Education, as well as the City of Edmonton and the Government of Canada where necessary
- ◆ Members of senior University administration (with particular regard for 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)
- ◆ Community groups and non-governmental organizations whose goals align with those of the GSA
- ◆ Other campus stakeholder constituency 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, as well as student groups and other campus organizations



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:

- ◆ Champion and support, in concert with applicable University units, both campus-wide and graduate-specific health and overall wellness (including mental wellness) initiatives for virtual and in-person access
- ◆ Advance, in concert with applicable University units and external stakeholders, graduate-specific professional development opportunities
- ◆ Champion and support programs and projects aimed at environmental stewardship and sustainability
- ◆ Continue to offer support to graduate students who parent, in addition and further to the recent offering of limited, short-term childcare through a corporate partnership (in collaboration with the Students' Union), the creation of a GSA space for short-term use by graduate student parents and the provision of GSA Child Care Grants
- ◆ Work to optimize the experience of its members during any academic employment appointments 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, including ongoing work on the establishment of a new stewardship network and the development of a labour fund

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:

- ◆ Continue to provide financial supports to graduate students through the Graduate Student Support Fund, as well as continuing to remain responsive to the changing needs of graduate students in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ Continue to support workshops and services that facilitate and aid graduate students with their academic success and progress
- ◆ Continue the essential work of aiding students who face food insecurity and hunger by supporting the Campus Food Bank
- ◆ Encourage the ongoing review and improvement of safety and security on campus



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 to ensure robust representation of the graduate student voice in discussions relating the University's academic restructuring and Service Excellence Transformation initiatives
- ◆ Continue the work to amplify the necessity of resources and supports that uphold mental health and wellbeing, and continuing advocacy to the provincial government and University for permanent mental health funding
- ◆ Continue to cultivate the invaluable, close relationship with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research which is crucial to the GSA's efforts to improve the graduate student experience in a number of ways. This work includes, among others, continued advocacy for the betterment of student-supervisor relationship and improved funding packages
- ◆ Continue to advocate for increased financial supports as well as greater accessibility to these supports for all graduate students in the face of coming tuition increases and the adverse effects of COVID-19
- ◆ Build upon existing relationships with Indigenous members of the University community and the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association, and work to advance the objectives of *Truth and Reconciliation* by advocating for new initiatives and uphold existing initiatives 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:

- ◆ Continue to support the sentiment of equity, diversity, and inclusion by exploring new avenues for supporting students belonging to marginalized groups, including those who identify as disabled, diversely abled, or as members of the LGBTTTQQPIANU+ community, or racialized communities, among others
- ◆ Engage in consultations concerning any proposed tuition increases (including Exceptional Tuition Increases) and ensure graduate student concerns and needs are recognized and addressed
- ◆ Continue to advocate for sustainable and cost-effective housing on- and off-campus for graduate students and graduate students with families, and support and assist graduate students living in residence



Advocate

The GSA will:

- ◆ Continue to advocate for and champion initiatives aimed at supporting graduate students who parent
- ◆ Advocate for new initiatives and programs (and support existing ones) that specifically support international graduate students
- ◆ Continue advocacy to the provincial government for dedicated immigration streams for international students
- ◆ Advance the importance of increased Tri-Council funding, dedicated immigration streams, and increased financial supports, including subsidizing loan repayment, in advocacy at the federal level through continued participation in national student association arenas
- ◆ Continue to prioritize advocacy within the University as well as to the provincial government for the preservation of high-quality graduate-level programs as befits this internationally recognized institution, with particular regard for funding packages, course offerings, and research opportunities



Events:

The GSA will offer a mixed slate of virtual and in-person events in the 2021-2022 year, dependent on pandemic restrictions; these include Fall and Winter orientation opportunities, GSA information sessions which are offered for the benefit of graduate students, and regular social events. Additionally, the GSA General Election takes place annually in February-March.



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



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