

2022-2023 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan 23 January 2023 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 2022 and yielded a significant amount of feedback which helped shape the 2022-2023 SWP. The final document was then approved by the GSA Board and received by GSA Council for information at their July meeting. It can be viewed [on the GSA website](#). As in previous years, updates are scheduled to be brought to GSA Council in October 2022, January 2023, and April 2023. This is the second of these updates. The first can be viewed [on the GSA website](#).

A selection of ongoing work and new initiatives pursued and undertaken by the 2022-2023 student executive team (President Anas Fassih, VP Academic Bishoi Aziz, VP External Janmejay Rao, VP Labour Hiren Kaklotar, and VP Student Services Monisha Vinod), in accord with the 2022-2023 SWP, can be found below.

- With significant consideration for the many changing roles across University administration, the GSA student executive team continues to place significant attention upon the work of fostering collegial and productive relationships with stakeholders in all issues and areas that are crucial to the graduate student experience at the University of Alberta. Among others, regular meetings are held with the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), the University President, the Dean of Students, the Board of Governors Chair, the Interim University Provost and the two Deputy Provosts, colleagues at UAlberta International, and the City of Edmonton;
- Extensive collaboration continues with Dr. Roger Epp, Interim Vice-Provost and Dean of FGSR, on moving forward with a proposal on institutional minimum for doctoral funding packages. This pursuit has been of high priority for the GSA, and the Office of the Provost under Dr. Verna Yiu has also been a notable supporter of this initiative. FGSR recently circulated a survey to all graduate program coordinators in December and next steps will be articulated based on this feedback;
- Further to the GSA advocacy carried out on behalf of students impacted by political conflict in Ukraine and Iran, FGSR has committed to, 1) the waiving of application fees for Iranian students, and 2) admission deferrals that maintain funding offers for adversely impacted students;
- Increasing costs of living and education continue to adversely impact graduate students:
 - Tuition remains of utmost importance to advocacy efforts advanced by the GSA and by our partners at the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC). The GSA also continues to urge the University to prioritize the needs of graduate students as they pertain to academic offerings and services, and to reducing fees, and student funding and scholarships;
 - In advocating for affordable housing for graduate students, which is an issue that grows ever more pressing, the GSA President and VP External have continued to remain in close contact with Katherine Huising (Associate Vice-President, Campus Services) and Andrew Sharman (Vice-President (Facilities and Operations)). The University is currently pursuing the possibility of a partnership with the City of Edmonton;



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- As previously indicated, the VP Academic, VP Labour, and VP Student Services have each dedicated time and effort to serving as representatives of the GSA on the respective selection committees for the three College Dean positions. This work is essential as it helps shape the future vision of the University;
- The VP Academic is currently serving as a member of the Academic Integrity Policy Working Group on a review of the policies underpinning the work of Student Conduct and Accountability, with the broad goal of decriminalizing them;
- Further collaborative work by the VP Academic relates to the pursuit of more interdisciplinary graduate program offerings;
- The team is continuing to engage the graduate student body through in-person events with the aim of advancing community building and wellness. The GSA Coffee Breaks are continuing to be held in Triffo Hall, and most recently October saw the return of the GSA Fall Social, held in Dinwoodie Lounge. The latter was a chance to bring a larger cohort of graduate students together for an evening of mingling, games, and food;
 - January also saw the return of a Winter term Welcome event in-person (the Winter Welcome Open House), for the first time since 2020.
- The GSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (GSA EDIC) is next scheduled to meet in late January 2023. Most recently, the committee was pleased to invite Dr. Lisa Purdy to join their October meeting as part of efforts out of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry to consult on their ongoing offering of a unique stream of community support and ombuds services to graduate students in that Faculty;
- The work of the University's Sexual Violence Response Coordinator culminated in a new policy suite including Student Conduct Policy and a Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy, which were approved in November 2022. The Sexual Violence Response Coordinator position was created by the University after extensive advocacy from the GSA and the SU;
- The following efforts pertain to the role of the GSA as the union for Academically-Employed Graduate Students (AEGSs): The GSA Negotiating Team (which is composed of a subset of the GSA Labour Relations Committee) was pleased to reach a tentative agreement with the University on the next Collective Agreement in October. AEGSs voted to ratify this proposal in November, and the Board of Governors voted to ratify the agreement in December, allowing the new terms to come fully into play this January;
 - The new 2022-2024 GSA Collective Agreement includes (among others): salary increases, a designated leave period for attending academic conference, a designated leave period for traditional Indigenous practices, and more detailed language on vacation provisions and religious holidays;
- During the funding period spanning 1 October 2022 to 1 January 2023, the GSA disbursed \$156,644 as Academic Travel Grants, Child Care Grants, Emergency Bursaries, and Graduate Student Group Grants. Eligibility criteria and usage of GSA grants, awards, and bursaries are being closely monitored to continue to ensure they are in alignment with the needs of graduate students;
- The VP Student Services has continued to remain in close contact with our partners at Campus Food Bank (CFB), as this campus unit has proven increasingly essential in the past number of years. The GSA previously dedicated a surplus fund package in Summer 2022, in addition to our regular annual financial contribution. Further action will hinge on upcoming reports from CFB;
- The University's continued work to centralize student services continues to warrant significant attention from the GSA and from the VP Student Services, who serves as a member of the Student Services Service Management Committee. Here the ideal outcome is to sustain, as much as possible, the tailored support graduate students receive from their academic units/programs;

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- The GSA is offering support to the Office of the Dean of Students on two fronts: firstly as part of their efforts to implement the [National Standard on Mental Health and Wellness for Post-Secondary Students](#), and secondly as part of their research project on the experience of [post-secondary student homelessness \(PSSH\)](#). The VP Student Services is dedicated to serving as representative of the graduate student voice in conversations with the Office of the Dean of Students;
- In November, the GSA President attended the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) Conference in Montreal and—along with the GSA VP External—the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) Advocacy Week in Ottawa. These events provided networking opportunities to connect with partner associations across the country, as well the chance to meet with federal government stakeholders. The GSA's priorities at the federal level include advocacy for increased Tri-Council funding and more comprehensive pathways to Permanent Residency for international students;
- The proposed restructuring to the GSA Directly-Elected Officer team was passed by GSA Council in November 2022. This change, which was brought forward in response to changes to the Alberta labour landscape and specifically the legislated responsibilities of the GSA as an organization that have manifested in the past number of years, will result in the addition of a new VP Student Life role and the evolution of the existing VP Labour role into an Associate VP Labour role. The Associate VP Labour would be elected through an electoral process parallel to the GSA General Election where Academically-Employed Graduate Students (AEGSs) serve as the pool of eligible voters; *and*
- The GSA Board is currently engaged in the process of hiring the new GSA Executive Director. The posting was circulated widely in December 2022 and interviews are expected to take place shortly. Further updates on the process will be brought to GSA Council in the President's reports.

The student executive team will continue to work diligently in accordance with the 2022-2023 SWP. The next and final update on this matter will be brought to GSA Council in April 2023.