

GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

The GSA Annual Report is designed to give GSA members—the graduate students at the University of Alberta—an idea of what we work to achieve every year. In some ways, some things don't change: the services we work to offer, for example, are constant parts of our annual work. But other elements—advocacy work or outreach—shift in response to the changing landscape of University, community, and global affairs.

This year was a year of change for all: we offered virtual Fall and Winter Orientations alongside a New Student Survival Guide. We hosted virtual events and added Brunch and Learns with experts to answer questions about the Health and Dental Plan, how to invest, and how to talk to your supervisor. Student leaders also met individually with hundreds of graduate students to advise and assist them. GSA members received health and dental insurance coverage with no increase to fees, received almost one million dollars of grants, awards, and bursaries from the GSA, and gained access to programs and services exclusive to graduate students (like the Graduate Student Assistance Program, and Reboot Your Writing sessions offered in partnership with the Academic Success Centre).

We held two referenda where you decided to continue the U-Pass and the Graduate Student Assistance Program, and—for Academically-Employed Graduate Students (AEGS)—a union vote wherein graduate student workers decided to collect a union due to grow the GSA Labour Union Fund.

Work relating to the impact of decreased funding from the province and its continued adverse effects on the University budget was an area that merited considerable attention and effort. The subsequent academic and administrative restructuring initiatives proposed by the University was worthy of numerous, extensive discussions with both the University and students. Frequent consultation efforts with graduate students on tuition fees and mandatory non-instructional fees were also of high priority. A number of programs experienced costs increases, and a small portion were proposed to receive exceptional tuition increases. Meanwhile, supporting graduate students in the most foundational relationship of their graduate academic careers—that with their supervisor—remains another high priority. Lastly, working to uphold the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion internally within the GSA and externally warrant extensive work, and are the mandate of a dedicated GSA Standing Committee which began its work this year.

Our goal is that this document will shed some light on what GSA executives—and your elected graduate student leaders—and the staff team charged with supporting their work achieved this year. We encourage you to direct any questions that arise during your reading of this document to us at gsa.frontdesk@ualberta.ca.

CREATING SOLUTIONS

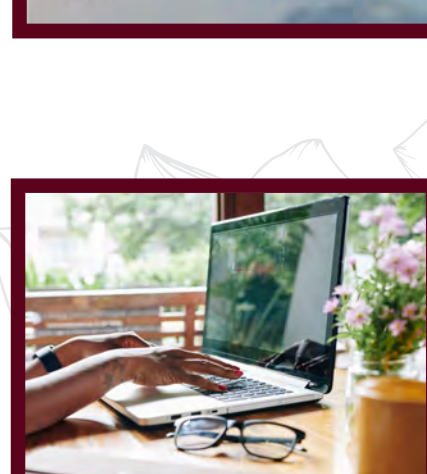
This year's elected student leaders dedicated significant time to advocating for and collaborating with University administration on the following projects:



The New GSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (GSA EDIC)

ISSUE: The GSA wished to formalize work to foster a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion, internally within the organization as well as externally within the University community.

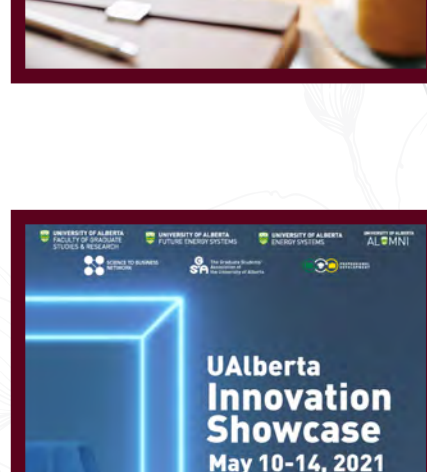
OUTCOME: Creation of the [GSA EDIC](#) in the interests of enhancing the graduate student experience and ensuring the existence of a welcoming environment and cohesive community for graduate students on campus. The committee commenced its work in May 2021.



Engagement with Academically-Employed Grad Students (AEGS)

ISSUE: The responsibility of the GSA as a union for AEGS warranted more thorough communication and consultation with its union membership.

OUTCOME: Extensive engagement via newsletters, town halls, and information sessions specifically for AEGS regarding negotiations for and ratification of the [2020-2022 Graduate Assistantship Collective Agreement](#). In addition, AEGS were provided with regular updates about their union and the recent decision to collect a union due. AEGS voted to establish a union due in April 2021 to cultivate a dedicated labour fund for the strengthening of union efforts.



Barriers to Remote Learning

ISSUE: Reliance on remote learning emphasized gaps in teaching and learning digital infrastructure.

OUTCOME: Concerns and feedback from graduate students emphasized the importance of digital infrastructure to teaching and learning in the 2020-2021 academic year and beyond. GSA advocacy priorities have shifted as a result to encompass this essential feature of teaching and learning.



Internship Opportunities and Entrepreneurship Training

ISSUE: Graduate students are highly qualified and valuable to the professional arena, and necessitate dedicated gateways to enter the job market.

OUTCOME: The GSA has renewed efforts for the creation of new and the support of existing internship and entrepreneurship opportunities. This year, this work culminated in the creation of a seat for the GSA on the University of Alberta Innovation Network (UAIN).



New Support for Students Who Parent

ISSUE: Graduate students who parent have limited access to affordable childcare.

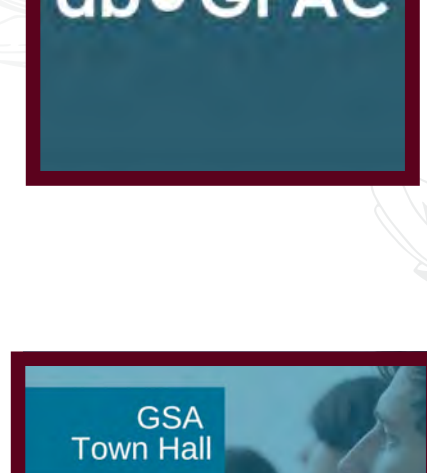
OUTCOME: The GSA, in partnership with our friends at the Students' Union, signed an agreement with [Kids & Company](#) for a pilot program aimed to improve access to off-campus childcare for students who parent.



Championing Student-Supervisor Relationships

ISSUE: Graduate students rely heavily on a constructive and collegial relationship with their supervisors for the success of their academic programs.

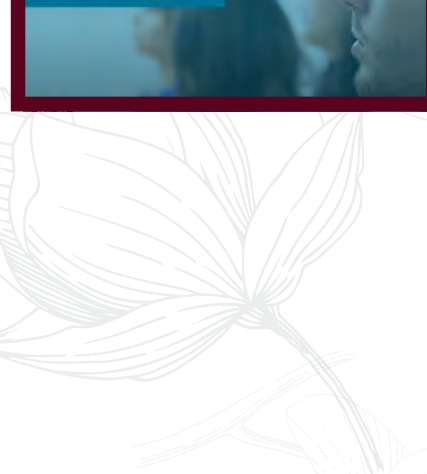
OUTCOME: The GSA has continued to prioritize the implementation of new and the sustaining of existing frameworks and tools that help ensure the success of student-supervisor relationships. This year, this advocacy and collaboration culminated in the launching of the Graduate Supervisory Excellence Initiative, introduced by our dear colleagues in the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR). We are excited to continue offering our support and input as this initiative matures towards its second stage.



Funding Cuts and Tuition Increases

ISSUE: The province's drastic cuts to post-secondary education triggered increases to tuition.

OUTCOME: As a member of the [Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council \(ab-GPAC\)](#), GSA elected student leaders worked alongside colleagues from other Alberta institutions to spotlight the immense economic and cultural value of graduate studies. [Advocacy priorities](#) of ab-GPAC call for an increase to post-secondary education funding, increased financial accessibility of post-secondary education, additional grants for the benefit of historically-vulnerable groups, and interest-free student loans.



Academic and Administrative Restructuring

ISSUE: The University advanced a strategic initiative that proposed academic and administrative restructuring.

OUTCOME: GSA elected student leaders worked to represent the graduate student voice on a number of governance and [advisory committees](#) directly involved in this [restructuring initiative](#). In order to remain engaged with student concerns and needs, the GSA hosted a number of town halls and requested feedback, in addition to engaging with graduate students through individual and small group meetings. The GSA brought concerns and feedback to University administration via the Board of Governors, as well as one-on-one meetings with high-level administrators.



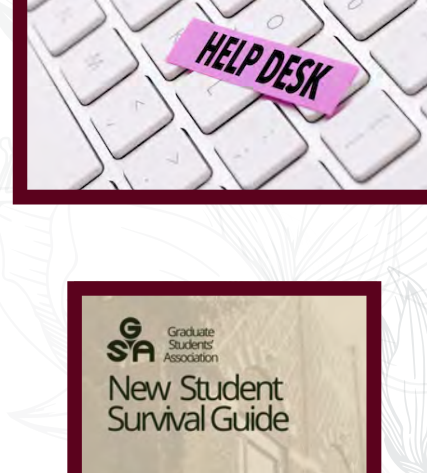
Cultivating a Stronger Union

ISSUE: The relatively recent designation of the GSA to serve as the union for AEGS leaves room for a number of avenues that could serve to strengthen the union and, in the long term, support union efforts and protect its members' interests.

OUTCOME: Following research on other unions and extensive consultation with AEGS, the GSA Labour Relations Committee (GSA LRC) recommended the establishment of a labour fund and a subsequent collection of union dues. The issue was brought to these union members via a vote, and with the majority in favour, a GSA labour fund was established to cultivate and strengthen the GSA's bargaining position.

THE NEW LANDSCAPE

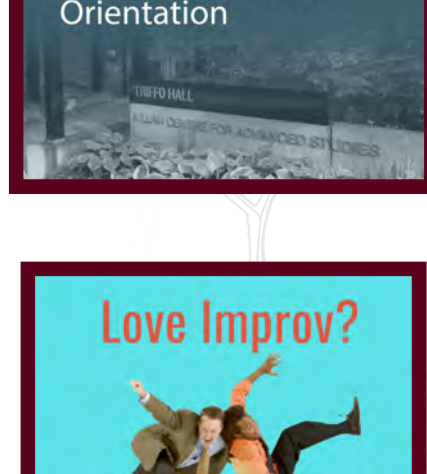
The GSA is proud to be run by and for graduate students. Whether it is through one-on-one meetings, specific service offerings, or in a broader setting, our work is defined by interacting with students. Below are just some of the ways we engage with the graduate student body.



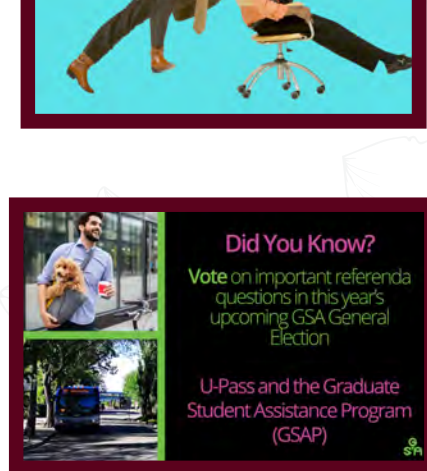
Graduate Student Orientation: Delivered virtually, this [Orientation](#) introduced new and returning graduate students to GSA work, services, and funding. It also provided information on the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and University services available to graduate students.



New Student Survival Guide: Designed for a remote-learning academic year, this [tool](#) aimed to provide new and returning graduate students with a quick guide on GSA offerings, in addition to handy (printable) agenda pages.



Brunch and Learn Series: These hour-long information sessions connected attendees with hosts from a range of units around and associated with campus. These sessions on academic relationship-building, graduate student health and dental coverage, and investing were covered in this series.



Virtual Front Desk: Another new offering this year was our [Virtual Front Desk](#), which gave graduate students the opportunity to directly communicate with a member of the GSA staff. This Front Desk helped graduate students get answers to questions about services, funding, the collective agreement, and other matters all year long.



Virtual Game Chill-Outs: Online game extravaganzas, planned to break the monotony of the week and of COVID-19. We offered door prizes and fun games to replace our in-person events.

Volunteer Appreciation Night with Rapid Fire Theatre: As part of our annual thank-you to our student governance volunteers, we hosted a virtual improv comedy show featuring Edmonton's own Rapid Fire Theatre. Many thanks to RTF for a night to remember!

GSA Planner Mail-Out: The GSA Planner is an annual favourite and this year was no different. Distribution of a small run of the Planner was carried out through mail due to campus health and safety directives.

Preserving Essential Student Services: The [U-Pass](#) program and the [Graduate Student Assistance Program \(GSAP\)](#)—each of which provide essential services to graduate students—reached the end of their respective agreements this year. Following extensive work on the part of the GSA elected student leaders to negotiate a new U-Pass agreement and to continue liaising with the University with regards to the GSAP, the question of their respective continuation was brought to graduate students in their referenda held in February 2021. Both programs were approved for continuation.

2020-2021 AT A GLANCE

1 New Dedicated Labour Union Fund Established by and for AEGS

1 Collective Agreement Negotiated and Ratified

1 General Election

2 Referenda

7 Consultation Town Halls and Surveys

50 GSA Newsletters Circulated

100 Writing Support Sessions Facilitated by the Academic Success Centre

772 Participants in the Virtual Graduate Student Orientation

1750 GSA Planners Printed
255 planners mailed out globally

\$20,000 Recognition Awards Disbursed

\$7,411 Graduate Student Group Grants Disbursed

\$417,776 Emergency Bursaries Disbursed (approx.)

\$26,650 Academic Travel Grants Disbursed

\$389,000 Child Care Grants Disbursed

Read more about the GSA's [Governance](#), [Services](#), [Funding](#), and [Collective Agreement](#).

Read more updates about Strategic Work Plan goals [here](#).

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, Innu, 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.

CONTACT US

Phone: 780-492-2175

Email: gsa.frontdesk@ualberta.ca