

The Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan 2018-2019

Foster
Support
Advocate
Connect



Our 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.



WHAT IS THE GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION?

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA), as mandated by the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, represents graduate students at the University of Alberta. The GSA, as a separate corporation, 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 excellent reputation, the GSA fosters a culture of respect and professionalism among staff and graduate student leaders, engages in regular review of governance processes, and ensures an annual transition process that facilitates the on-going education of elected graduate student leaders.

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, for which graduate students pay tuition; academic employment, for which graduate students are paid; the co-creation and writing of scholarly work; the securing of academic funding; presentations, conferences, and community engagement; and capstone projects, theses, or dissertations. This multi-faceted position takes place in an environment of mutual respect and fairness aimed at developing skills and knowledge for future careers and is one that provides 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.



Graduate students elect GSA leaders each February. Here are the 2018-2019 GSA Directly-Elected Officers (from left to right): Vice-President Academic, Masoud Aliramezani; Vice-President Student Services, Fahed Elian; President, Sasha van der Klein; Vice-President Labour, Beth Richardson; and Vice-President External, Zhihong Pan.

Our Goals

Foster a welcoming environment and an equitable, sustainable, safe, and healthy campus.

The GSA values the contributions and diversity of graduate students and fosters a culture of inclusion and acceptance. The GSA will work to sustain a respectful, supportive, and welcoming environment for all graduate students, (including Indigenous graduate students, international graduate students, and graduate students who parent, among others), and will further sustain working relationships with stakeholders to ensure an inclusive campus free from discrimination; one that offers support for graduate students in diverse circumstances and with diverse needs.

The GSA will advocate for and support:

- Initiatives and programs that specifically support Indigenous and international graduate students.
- Leadership in environmental sustainability.
- Review and improvement of safety and security on campus.
- Campus-wide health and wellness initiatives.



Support graduate students by working with the University and government to ensure affordable tuition, cost-effective housing, and food security, and to provide access to financial means to empower graduate students to complete their programs.

The GSA advocates for:

- Guaranteed, transparent and sustainable funding packages that support a reasonable standard of living for all thesis-based graduate students for the duration of their programs.
- Greater financial supports for all graduate students, including higher compensation for assistantships, increased merit based and non-merit based financial support (as well as greater accessibility to these supports), and increases to the Graduate Student Support Fund.
- A predictable tuition model that ties graduate student tuition increases (for both domestic and international graduate students) to the Alberta Consumer Price Index.
- Sustainable, affordable, and well-maintained graduate student housing (for individuals and families).
- Enhanced resources and supports for graduate students who parent, and their families.
- Implementation of initiatives to prevent homelessness, improve (mental) wellness, and enhance supports for graduate students with dependents.

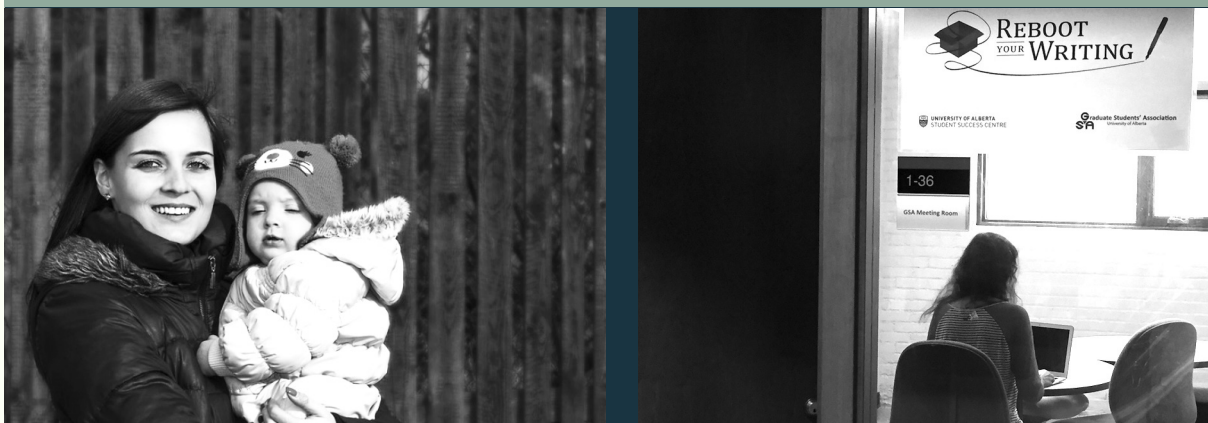
Did you know?

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
- Graduate Student Assistance Program
- Collective Agreement Advice

Graduate education plays an important role in a prosperous society. Graduate students' success is dependent upon access to sustainable and appropriately sized funding packages and predictable expenses for the duration of their programs. A lack of sustainable graduate student funding and unpredictable increases in educational costs create significant strain on graduate students' health and wellness and can lead to increased drop-out rates.

In furtherance of the goal of supporting graduate students, the GSA will continue to support the Campus Food Bank, as well as workshops and services that assist graduate students with their academic progress. Additionally, the GSA will assist graduate students living in residences, and their Residence Associations, to ensure safe living conditions and excellent services.



Advocate for a supportive learning and work environment based on respectful and professional relationships, and for compliance with the GSA's Collective Agreement (CA) governing graduate student assistantships.

Graduate student success relies on quality education and quality supervision throughout a degree program. In addition, professional development opportunities for graduate students are essential for future career success. Furthermore, all graduate students are entitled to a safe and respectful study and work environment, free from harassment, discrimination, and bullying; the GSA is dedicated to working toward this. With specific reference to academically-employed graduate students, the CA negotiated by the GSA is a legally binding document between the GSA and the University of Alberta Board of Governors that outlines expectations for fair compensation and a healthy work environment and the GSA is committed to ensuring campus-wide compliance with its provisions.

The GSA will:

- Advocate for high-quality graduate-level programs and courses and opportunities to provide graduate students with international research and study opportunities.
- Collaborate with and advocate to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and senior University administrators to make quality graduate student supervision an institutional priority (including creating an accountability structure for supervisory evaluation and establishing a means of safe disclosure and reporting of concerning supervisory behaviour).

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:

- Support and collaborate with partners and stakeholders with respect to the establishment of a variety of high-quality professional development and internship opportunities in recognition of the diverse future career paths ahead of graduate students.
- Support and advocate for graduate students with CA issues and ensure University-wide awareness of and compliance with the CA while highlighting that, as per the *Labour Relations Code*, the GSA is a “trade union for the purposes of acting as bargaining agent for the academically employed graduate students” at the University.
- Provide guidance to graduate students experiencing issues outside the scope of the CA and aid them in navigating University processes and structures.



Connect

with GSA stakeholders to support graduate student success and build connections between graduate students and the GSA.

Relationship building is key to the mission of the GSA to create a common vision of excellence in graduate education at the University, as well as across Alberta and Canada.

The GSA will reinforce strong relationships with:

- Key players of the Government of Alberta (such as the Minister of Advanced Education).
- Members of senior University Administration (such as the University's 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, University of Alberta, the Postdoctoral Fellows' Association, and the Non-Academic Staff Association).

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 and participates in 40-45 departmental orientations
- a weekly newsletter, website, and social media profiles that highlight events and ways to get involved

Relationship building between the GSA and its members is also pivotal to foster a strong basis for our mission and vision of advocacy. The GSA will create opportunities for graduate student awareness of and engagement with the GSA by:

- Exploring and utilizing effective communication methods.
- Offering orientation sessions and 101s on key issues.
- Offering engagement and celebratory events.
- Maintaining involvement in discussions concerning dedicated graduate student social space.
- Supporting and connecting with departmental graduate student groups and networks.



Events:

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



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

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

www.ualberta.ca/graduate-students-association