



2022-2023 GSA Board Strategic Work Plan 24 October 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 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 first of these updates.

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 Janmejey Rao, VP Labour Hiren Kaklotar, and VP Student Services Monisha Vinod), in accord with the 2022-2023 SWP, can be found below.

- To continue to foster collegial and productive relationships with various University stakeholders, the GSA student executive team engaged in a number of meetings this summer and into the fall to disseminate details of the 2022-2023 SWP. Among others, meetings were held with the University President, UAlberta International, the Dean of Students, the University's Chief Strategy Officer, the Board of Governors Chair, the new Interim University Provost and the two new Deputy Provosts, and the City of Edmonton. This information was also shared during regular meetings with colleagues at the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), the Students' Union (SU), and the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC);
- With respect to ongoing work with the Office of the Provost, the GSA continues advocacy for an institutional minimum on doctoral funding packages. This work has primarily taken shape through frequent meetings with Interim Provost Verna Yiu, Deputy Provost (Academic) Kathryn Todd, and Deputy Provost (Students and Enrolment) Melissa Padfield. The GSA President and VP Academic are recommending that an *ad hoc* committee be struck to carry out consultation with graduate students regarding their current experiences with funding packages;
 - Other efforts in this vein aim to secure other sources of funding for graduate students. These are proceeding through discussions with key stakeholders, and the advancement of this key strategic goal to the members of the General Faculties Council (GFC) and the associated Executive Committee (GFC EXEC), the University Senate, the Board of Governors (BoG) and the associated Board Learning, Research, and Student Experience Committee (BLRSEC);
- The increasing cost of tuition continues to remain of utmost importance for the GSA and for all graduate students. Efforts continue to encourage the provincial government to keep open its lines of communication with students, and to protect the interests of this immensely valuable segment of their constituency. At the micro level, the GSA continues to advocate to the University to better prioritize the circumstances of graduate students as part of its budgeting considerations;
- As part of their responsibilities, the GSA executives serve on search and selection committees for senior University administration and, in the coming months, the VP Academic, VP Labour, and VP Student Services will be serving as representatives of the GSA on the recently convened selection committees for the three College Dean positions;
- The President and VP Academic recently advocated to the College of Health Sciences for the creation of new interdisciplinary graduate programs and conversations surrounding this remain ongoing;



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- In an effort to remain aligned with the shifting needs of graduate students during a broadly tumultuous time, the student executive team hosted a number of town halls on the GSA Health and Dental Plan (4 between July and September) to invite feedback from students and their enrolled spouses/dependents. Discussions on the Plan's cost-versus-benefits remains ongoing;
- The team was thrilled to recently host the GSA's Fall Orientation and Information Fair. The event was offered in-person for the first time since Fall 2019. Other orientation offerings included the virtual eClass Orientation, which has grown in popularity since its inception in 2020, and in-person departmental orientation presentations, with a significant number of requests received from departments and academic units for this programming;
- Further in the vein of a return to in-person event offerings, the popular GSA Coffee Break series returned this summer to Triffo Hall. Graduate students are encouraged to "take a break" and join student executives and other peers for hot beverages and light snacks, courtesy of the GSA. Throughout September, GSA Coffee Breaks were held weekly to welcome graduate students back to campus;
- With regards to the work of the GSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (GSA EDIC):
 - The committee was recently consulted as part of efforts to revise the Individual Development Plan, part of the Professional Development requirements for all graduate students. This document is undergoing a change to bring it in alignment with institutional EDI efforts;
 - The committee helped formulate the GSA's recent statements on Iranian protests (dated 29 September 2022) and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (dated 30 September 2022), respectively;
 - Lastly, to maintain a level of efficiency and agility befitting its mandate, the GSA EDIC has shifted to regular monthly meetings;
- The Student Accessibility Assessment Project report was brought to the Council on Student Affairs (COSA; a sub-committee of the General Faculties Council). This report outlines a number of recommendations for the University to help eliminate barriers and alleviate challenges faced by members of the University community, with particular regard for the unique circumstances that have necessitated remote and hybrid learning. This report echoes feedback solicited by the GSA during each of the academic years impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic, and the VP Academic is dedicated to representing the voices of graduate students in the discussions that follow on this topic;
- The University's Sexual Violence Response Coordinator released [an audit of the University's policies with respect to sexual violence prevention](#) in July 2022. Deb Eerkes, who serves in this capacity, was welcomed to attend a meeting of the GSA Board in August where she provided members with a more in-depth update on her ongoing work and next steps. 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):
 - Negotiations continue for the next GSA Collective Agreement. This work is led by the GSA VP Labour and the GSA Negotiating Team, a subset of the GSA Labour Relations Committee (GSA LRC), and with the assistance of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (with whom the GSA has a service agreement);
 - Extensive outreach efforts have taken shape through the offering of Labour 101 sessions (most recently in June and September 2022), an outreach event in partnership with PSAC in October 2022, and directly connecting with other GSA unions in Alberta who are subject to recent and ongoing legislative developments. Members of the GSA LRC are also invited to attend the PSAC Prairies Conference in November 2022;

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- The Faculty Steward network merits continued work both in terms of recruitment for vacant steward positions and the training and mobilization of the network. A meet-and-greet event was held in August to cultivate operational solidarity and further events are in development;
- With the growing importance of the Campus Food Bank (CFB) as a service provider for students who face hunger, the President and VP Student Services are working in collaboration with the SU and Deputy Provost (Students and Enrolment) Melissa Padfield to generate further funding for this unit. Most recently the GSA dedicated over \$45,000 of its budget surplus from 2021-2022 to the CFB as a one-time grant, which complemented the GSA's ongoing financial support of this highly valuable campus unit. The CFB also joined the GSA Board for a presentation in October 2022 as well as a GSA Food Drive;
- During the funding period spanning 1 April to 1 October 2022, the GSA disbursed \$175,000 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. Lastly, funds not projected to be spent are being transferred to the University to dispense in the form of supplementary bursaries for graduate students;
- Ongoing work pertaining to affordable housing for graduate students (which was previously impacted by the closure of Michener Park family residence for graduate students and most recently by rising costs), has manifested through regular meetings between the VP External and Katherine Huising (Associate Vice-President, Campus Services) and Andrew Sharman (Vice-President (Facilities and Operations)). Possibilities for constructing new facilities are being explored, as are avenues for collaboration with the City of Edmonton;
- Further on the work aligning with the purview of the City of Edmonton: the President and VP External recently met with representatives from the City to discuss the creation of unique professional development opportunities for UAlberta graduate students;
- World Mental Health Day and Suicide Prevention Month in September were recognized through special programming from the Days of Action team. As in previous years, the GSA was proud to represent graduate students through the Days of Action planning committee, of which the VP Student Services is a member;
- The SU revisited the University's previously-held world record for the largest game of dodgeball (earned in 2012) by organizing another effort to break this record on 23 September 2022. The GSA was pleased to support an initiative that fosters community and wellness, alongside the University and the Alumni Association;
- With aims of fostering and bolstering a network with organizational counterparts across the province, GSA student executives engage in regular meetings with partners at the SU and at the University of Calgary GSA. The GSA also remains a member of ab-GPAC, representatives of which recently met with the Minister of Advanced Education to advance the current priorities of affordable housing for graduate students, enhanced professional development opportunities, the creation of new immigration streams, and financial aid;
- With intra-provincial and federal priorities at the forefront, the GSA President will be attending the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) Conference in Montreal in November 2022. The President and VP External also attended the ab-GPAC Board Retreat in July 2022 in Canmore and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) Policy and Planning Conference in Calgary in August 2022. The CASA Advocacy Week conference will take place in November 2022 in Ottawa, and will be similarly attended; *and*
- Given the 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, a restructuring of the GSA

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student executive team is being proposed and the GSA Board and various standing committees have been working on its development. The proposal represents a significant change and necessitates a high degree of detail which will be provided to GSA Council separate from this report. A broad stroke summary is as follows: under the proposal, the current role of VP Labour would be termed the “Associate VP Labour” and would be filled through a distinct electoral mechanism running in parallel to the GSA General Election, with the distinction that only members of the bargaining unit would be eligible to vote. This change would reflect the limited involvement of the VP Labour role with general GSA work and operations, and signify the unique nature of this position in focusing more decisively on labour and union operations alone. In addition, a new role of VP Student Life would be introduced to join the existing slate of Vice President roles. This proposal is being brought to GSA Council in October and November 2022.

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