



# The Graduate Students' Association Board Strategic Work Plan 2023-2024

# 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, Saukteaux, 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.*

# 2023-2024 Graduate Students' Association Executives



Graduate students elect GSA leaders each February. Here are the 2023-2024 GSA Directly-Elected Officers (from left to right): Vice-President Academic, Rija Kamran; Vice-President Student Services, Haseeb Arshad; (forward) President, Bishoi Aziz; Vice-President External, Hamid Hassani; Vice-President Labour, Muneeb Masood Raja; and Vice-President Student Life, Tiffany Kung.

## What is 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.

Concurrently, the GSA is the provincially-designated labour union for the Academically-Employed Graduate Students (AEGSs), thus bestowing it with a dual set of responsibilities and obligations.





## Who 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 course work 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 presentation, conferences, and other engagement initiatives; as well as economic contribution 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.

# Connect

The GSA is committed to:

*The GSA believes that graduate students should be provided with professional development opportunities that are essential for future career success.*

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The GSA recognizes a need for graduate students to plan for their future and look forward beyond their education. *The GSA will:*

- ◆ Work to increase awareness of professional development in both academia and industry.
- ◆ Work in partnership with the University to expand opportunities for professional development for graduate students.
- ◆ Advocate for Co-op work opportunities for domestic and International students.

## BETTER COMMUNICATION

The GSA will strive to create more opportunities for graduate student awareness and improve GSA engagement by:

- ◆ Utilizing social media to educate graduate students about GSA services and events.
- ◆ Ensuring better access to the GSA executives for graduate students and to be responsive and engaging with our members.

## Did you know?

The GSA has:

- ▶ 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

## DECREASING UNIVERSITY BUREAUCRACY

As a result of the University's restructuring, a lot of services such as the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) have become more bureaucratic and therefore, difficult to navigate. The GSA is committed to providing guidance to graduate students on how to navigate the University's redesigned and reconfigured processes and ensuring greater transparency for our students. *The GSA will:*

- ◆ Work towards making our Executives more recognized by fellow students, accessible and approachable for students to bring concerns forward.
- ◆ Work closely with University Administration to advocate for more streamlined processes to make services accessible to students.



# CONNECT

*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 is committed to:

## UNDERSTANDING A.I. TOOLS

Artificial Intelligence, or A.I., has become an integral part of our daily lives. Graduate students have been utilizing A.I tools to help them with their personal, academic, and work lives. The GSA wants to ensure that students are educated on A.I and how to effectively and ethically use them. *The GSA will:*

- ◆ Support current and future research on A.I tools and learn its role in the academic space.
- ◆ Understand and learn A.I tools and how they can be effectively and ethically used within academia.
- ◆ Advocate for clear policies that define how AI can be utilized by students in their work and maintain educational integrity.

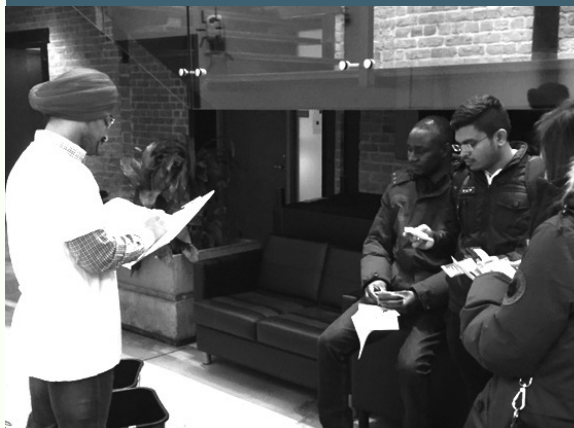
# SUPPORT

The GSA is committed to:

## STRENGTHENING INDIGENIZATION AND RECONCILIATION EFFORTS

*The GSA will continue to:*

- ◆ Advance the objectives of Truth and Reconciliation by advocating for initiatives that directly support Indigenous students.
- ◆ Work closely and support Indigenous groups and leaders such as the Indigenous Graduate Student's Association, First Peoples' House, Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE), and the Office of Indigenous Programming and Research.
- ◆ Support and participate in Indigenous events, ceremonies, education, and advocacies as welcomed and as appropriate.



# SUPPORT

*As an international graduate student, the GSA gave me an opportunity to get involved with the community, and work on my professional development and public speaking skills.*

The GSA is committed to:

## FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITIES

Pursuing a graduate or doctoral degree is stressful, prosperous, and sometimes, isolating. The GSA hosts many social events such as Coffee Breaks to help students connect with one another and help foster long lasting relationships. *The GSA will continue to:*

- ◆ Aim to host social events for graduate students.
- ◆ Work closely with departments and associations to create a wider range of social events.
- ◆ Foster a welcoming community and environment for International students and support them integrating into the graduate student life on campus.
- ◆ Connect and support marginalized groups and other networks.

## Did you know?

The GSA has:

- ▶ graduate student lounges at Triffo Hall
- ▶ rooms available for booking
- ▶ several fun events per year

## EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

We will continue to work with the GSA's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) to fulfill its mandate to ensure that the GSA reflects the principles of Equity Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and represents students who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), as disabled or diversely abled, as students who parent, as womxn, or as LGBTQPIANU+. *The GSA will continue to support:*

- ◆ Initiatives that directly support marginalized and racialized students.
- ◆ Building partnerships with various groups and providing support to marginalized and underrepresented groups.



# ADVOCATE

The GSA is committed to:

## AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

We understand that increasing tuition costs is an important issue for graduate students. *The GSA will continue to:*

- ◆ Advocate for fair tuition and broadly accessible post-secondary education at the University of Alberta, but also — in tandem with its partner associations — for the same across the province.
- ◆ Spearhead the goal of establishing an institutional minimum for doctoral-level funding packages.
- ◆ Advocate for improved Health and Dental coverage at an affordable price.

## INCREASING INTERNSHIP AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

*The GSA will continue to:*

- ◆ Advocate for Co-op work opportunities for domestic and international students.
- ◆ Strive to secure more scholarship opportunities for international students.

*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.*

## Did you know?

The GSA offers:

- ▶ Emergency Bursaries
- ▶ Child Care Grants
- ▶ Academic Travel Grants
- ▶ Graduate Student Group Grants
- ▶ Recognition Awards
- ▶ Health and Dental Plan

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Increases in rent and housing costs have caused massive strain on our graduate students due to inflation. The current offerings of official University residences are limited in terms of pricing and/or consideration for families. *The GSA will advocate for:*

- ◆ Providing strategies for reducing rent costs for campus housing.
- ◆ Providing support to graduate students who experience vulnerability in their housing situation.
- ◆ Increased support for the Campus Food Bank and continuing to work closely with them.
- ◆ Continuing to work with the Edmonton area Student Associations to advocate for affordable student housing across the city.



# ADVOCATE

*In its role as a union,  
the GSA champions,  
advances, and protects  
the rights of its  
members as workers.*

## SAFETY ON CAMPUS

Personal safety has become a rising concern among our members and we are committed to working to ensure members are and feel safe in their University experiences. *The GSA will:*

- ◆ Engage with the various bodies across campus whose focus is on safety and security in our buildings and across campus in a holistic way that accounts for different perspectives of security.
- ◆ To support the development and implementation of restorative justice practices
- ◆ Engage in conversations with Edmonton Transit regarding safety on transit and utilizing the U-Pass.

## INTERNATIONAL

We recognize the unique challenges faced by international students and will actively engage with internal and external stakeholders to advocate for their needs and provide necessary support. The GSA will continue to:

- ◆ Work collaboratively with the provincial government to address the concerns of international students and ensure support for any immigration plans.
- ◆ Strive to secure more scholarship opportunities for international 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

## LABOUR

*The GSA will continue to:*

- ◆ Increase awareness and educate students about the Collective Agreement.
- ◆ The work of bolstering its bargaining position.
- ◆ Ensure that AEGSs are protected by legislated occupational health and safety standards.
- ◆ Ensure campus-wide compliance with the provisions of the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement by connecting with graduate students as well as the institutional units who serve these students.





# Events:

The GSA will offer in-person events in the 2023-2024 year; 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.