



 The Graduate Students' Association
of the University of Alberta

Annual Report

The 2023 GSA Annual Report showcases a year of strategic growth and innovative initiatives at the University of Alberta, driven by a commitment to enrich the graduate student experience. Key achievements include the development and approval of the PhD Minimum Funding Package, the creation of a Vice President of Indigenous Relations role, and the establishment of a Growth Fund to ensure financial sustainability. The report highlights significant operational improvements, including a restructuring that led to substantial cost savings and enhanced efficiency.

As we continue to advocate for accessible education and expand professional development opportunities, the GSA leverages advanced data analysis tools to support informed advocacy and operational decisions. The 2023 report reflects our ongoing dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all graduate students.

For questions, please send an email to gsa.frontdesk@ualberta.ca

Our Team

At the heart of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) are our dedicated executives, a dynamic team of leaders committed to enhancing the graduate student experience at the University of Alberta. Each member brings a unique set of skills and a shared passion for advocacy, student welfare, and community engagement. Our team is composed of visionary individuals who are deeply involved in every facet of graduate student life. From advocating for better funding packages to fostering inclusivity and diversity, they work tirelessly to ensure that all graduate students' voices are heard and their needs are met.

A Message from Our Team

We are privileged to have served the graduate student community at UofA. This past year has been filled with both challenges and significant achievements. As we transition responsibilities to the newly elected executives, we are confident that the foundation we have built will support continued advocacy and enhancement of student life. We thank each of you for your engagement and trust in us. Your success is our priority, and together, we look forward to seeing the continued positive impact of the GSA on our community.



Bishoi Aziz

GSA President



Rija Kamran

GSA VP Academic



Hamid Hassani

GSA VP External



Tiffany Kung

GSA VP Student Life



Haseeb Arshad

GSA VP Student Services



Muneeb Masood Raja

GSA Associate VP Labour

Highlights of 2023-2024

1

PhD Minimum Funding Package

This year, we successfully moved from planning to action with our PhD Minimum Funding Package. After drafting a solid proposal and securing initial commitments, we are thrilled to announce that it was approved by the FGPS Council in April 2024. This achievement represents a significant step forward in supporting our PhD students financially.



2

New Vice-President Position at the GSA

We have established VP of Indigenous Relations role, set to begin in the 2025-2026. This important position underscores our commitment to truth and reconciliation, focusing on representing Indigenous graduate students within and beyond the university. Development of this role was a collaborative effort, involving key partners such as the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association, the Vice Provost of Indigenous Programming and Research, and Indigenous student groups.



3

Establishment of the Growth Fund

A fund established to enhance the GSA's financial stability by diversifying our revenue sources. This fund will support future investment projects, reducing our reliance on graduate student fees and university grants, and strengthening our financial independence.



4

GSA Office Restructuring

The GSA office restructure resulted in a savings of \$80,000, which will allow us to build up our Growth fund and fund the creation of the new Vice President of Indigenous Relations.



5

Peer Support Program

VP Student Services has held multiple meetings with DOS and other university departments to begin building the framework for our new Peer Support Program. He has also been meeting with the university administration about securing funding to run this program.



CONNECT

Professional Development and Advocacy Initiatives

Our Vice Presidents for External Affairs and Student Life have actively promoted co-op work opportunities through partnerships with organizations like MITACS, AIESEC, and WIL. Their advocacy extends to securing internal grants to broaden professional opportunities for graduate students.

Communications and Engagement

This year, we significantly improved our communication strategies, resulting in a growth from under 200 to over 830 survey responses in just 12 months. A restructured communications team and revamped social media strategies have increased our engagement and visibility. Continuing into 2024, we plan a comprehensive communications overhaul and rebranding effort.

Operational Transparency and Advocacy

Our Vice Presidents have been instrumental in fostering transparency and reducing bureaucracy within university administration, participating actively on over 12 committees. Our advocacy efforts have been particularly strong in opposing tuition increases and supporting the PhD Minimum Funding Package, which has now been approved.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Leveraging AI tools, the VP of Student Services has enhanced our ability to analyze survey data, leading to more precise and actionable insights. This has strengthened our advocacy efforts, allowing us to effectively present our case in various forums, including media engagements and academic conferences.

Decreasing University Bureaucracy

Through a strategic restructuring of our advocacy groups and the introduction of new grant software, we are simplifying processes for our students, making our operations more efficient and less bureaucratic.



These strategic initiatives demonstrate our commitment to improving the graduate student experience through enhanced professional development opportunities, more effective communication, and streamlined operations. We are setting a strong foundation for future growth and success.

SUPPORT

Indigenization and Reconciliation Efforts

This year, the GSA has deepened its commitment to Indigenization and reconciliation. A landmark achievement has been the collaboration between the President, VP Student Life, and the IGSA with the Vice-Provost of Indigenous Programming and Research to establish a new VP position of Indigenous Relations. Set to commence in the 2025-2026 term, this role is designed to enhance representation and service for Indigenous graduate students across university committees and beyond. Additionally, the restructuring savings have enabled us to support the IGSA's financial processes, further solidifying our commitment to these vital efforts.

Fostering Relationships and Community Engagement

Under the guidance of the VP Student Life, our association has strengthened ties with equity-deserving groups such as the IGSA and BGSA. Their active participation in the Strategic Action Plan and SEAP committees has been instrumental in ensuring that the graduate student perspective is incorporated into university-wide action plans.

The VP Academic and VP Student Life have also been pivotal in advocating for the concerns of the ISA, enhancing the graduate student experience through proactive engagement. Meanwhile, the VP External has been enhancing our relationships at both the city and provincial levels through collaborations with ab-GPAC and ESA.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiatives

The GSA has made significant strides in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through various channels. The VP Student Life has spearheaded efforts in the EDI committee and the newly formed EDI reading group, fostering a collaborative environment where equity-seeking groups can contribute to campus-wide EDI strategies.

Mental Health and Housing Stability:

The VP Student Services has championed the development of a Peer Support Program, aimed at providing comprehensive mental health support tailored to the diverse needs of our graduate community. Additionally, the VP Student Life's involvement in the Student Housing Stability Working Group has been crucial in addressing and mitigating student homelessness, ensuring the foundation for the creation of a graduate students' residence association.

These efforts collectively underscore the GSA's dedication to supporting a vibrant, inclusive, and responsive community, ensuring that all graduate students feel valued and supported throughout their academic journey.





ADVOCATE

Supporting Community Needs

The VP Student Services has been instrumental in enhancing food security on campus. This includes supporting the campus food bank, advocating for culturally inclusive food options, and finalizing key agreements like the Rutherford Pantry lease and the use of garden space for fresh produce. These efforts have directly addressed the nutritional needs of our diverse student body.

Enhancing Family-Friendly Campus Environments

Continued advocacy led to significant improvements in support for students who are parents. This includes the creation of a graduate student research internship to evaluate policies for student parents across Canada, and the establishment of family-friendly spaces such as the Rutherford Family Room.

Promoting Internships and Practical Opportunities

We have actively pursued funding for co-op programs and partnered with organizations like MITACS and AIESEC to secure internship opportunities for our students. Efforts also focused on increasing graduate co-op placements and making application processes less burdensome.

Improving Campus Infrastructure and Safety

The GSA has advocated for increased bus route frequencies to the university and the installation of multi-faith prayer spaces and gender-neutral washroom facilities. Safety initiatives have included regular meetings focused on campus security and transit safety, as well as advocating for improved access to campus facilities through enhanced pedway systems.

These advocacy efforts demonstrate our ongoing commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive, and safe educational environment for all our graduate students.

LABOUR

Over the past year, the Associate Vice President (AVP) of Labor has been instrumental in enhancing labor conditions for graduate students at the University of Alberta. Through numerous outreach efforts, including tabling events and breakfast meetings, the AVP has fostered a community well-informed about labor rights. This initiative has been supported by a strengthened partnership with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), enriching our labor strategies and advocacy.

To better represent our students in bargaining and relations, the AVP Labor introduced two pivotal roles: the Outreach Coordinator and the Chief Steward. These positions have significantly improved our negotiation capabilities and student representation. Coupled with frequent newsletters and surveys, these efforts ensure that the voices of academically employed graduate students are heard and their needs addressed effectively.

A major focus of our advocacy has been the reclassification of Graduate Research Assistantships - Funding (GRAF) as employment contracts. This initiative aims to provide better funding, enhanced benefits, and stronger protections for thesis-based graduate students, marking a significant stride towards more equitable and supportive labor conditions at the university.



Engaging with Our Graduate Community

The Graduate Students' Association is proudly led by graduate students, for graduate students. Our interactions and initiatives are tailored to meet their diverse needs, whether through personalized one-on-one meetings, targeted service offerings, or larger community events. This past year, we've implemented several new approaches and hosted numerous engagements that reflect our commitment to the graduate student body. Here are some highlights of how we connected with and supported our students during the 2022-2023 academic year.



Graduate Student Orientations: A Fresh Approach

This year, the Fall Orientation was held at Dinwoodie Lounge, and the Winter Orientation debuted at the GSA Lounge in Van Vliet, enhancing our in-person engagements. Along with our ongoing departmental orientations, these sessions effectively provided crucial information on the different GSA Services.



GSA Awards Night: A Celebration of Excellence

This year's GSA Awards Night featured significant enhancements, including a streamlined program and an upgraded venue at the prestigious Maple Leaf Room in Lister Centre. These improvements created an elegant and memorable setting to celebrate the outstanding achievements of our graduate students. Access the [full list of awardees](#) here.



GSA Socials: Refreshed and Revitalized

Our GSA social events saw some exciting updates. The Fall Social was held at Tasty House with an impressive turnout of nearly 200 students, featuring an evening of mingling, games, and great food. Adapting to the seasonal spirit and student feedback, the Winter Social was transitioned to a Spring Social for the first time, hosted at the Muttart Conservatory. This change provided a unique and refreshing backdrop that significantly enhanced the experience, making it a standout event.



GSA Town Halls: Amplifying Student Voices

This year, the GSA hosted three critical town halls to discuss key academic and financial issues. Two sessions addressed the tuition fee proposal, while another focused on the PhD Minimum Funding initiative, allowing students to voice concerns and provide feedback. These forums demonstrated our dedication to transparency and active student participation in university decisions.



GSA Event Innovations: Fostering Engagement and Well-being

This year, the GSA has been proactive in exploring new event formats to enhance student engagement and provide a reprieve from academic stress. We introduced fun and recreational activities tailored to the interests and needs of our students. A highlight was the GSA Movie Night, hosted at the Telus Auditorium. This event, organized by our newly established GSA Volunteer Team, offered students a relaxed and social atmosphere, allowing them to unwind and connect with peers outside the classroom. Become a volunteer by signing up this [form](#).

Financial Highlights

\$1.7M

The President and VP Academic have strongly advocated for at least a **\$1.7 million increase** for the international student bursary, slated to start in the 2025–2026 years.



\$80K+

The new structure streamlines operations, cuts admin work, and boosts our focus on strategy, creativity, and data. We have **over \$80,000 in savings** that will fuel growth initiatives and expand our reach.

\$420K

Child Care Grants
Disbursed



\$34K

Graduate Student Group Grants
Disbursed

\$355,388

Academic Travel Grants
Disbursed

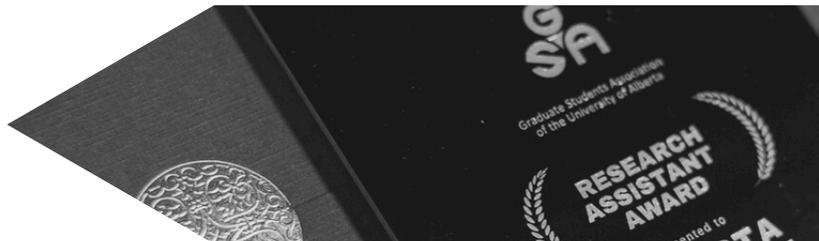


\$1.7K

Emergency Bursary Disbursed

\$22.5K

Recognition Awards
Disbursed





Get Involved with the GSA! Explore Governance, Services, Funding & Collective Agreement.

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.

CONTACT US!

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