



**Graduate
Students'
Association**
University of Alberta



June 2025

STRATEGIC WORK PLAN 2025-2026

Priorities & Actions for Graduate Students

Introduction

Where We Are Now

A moment of reflection before moving forward

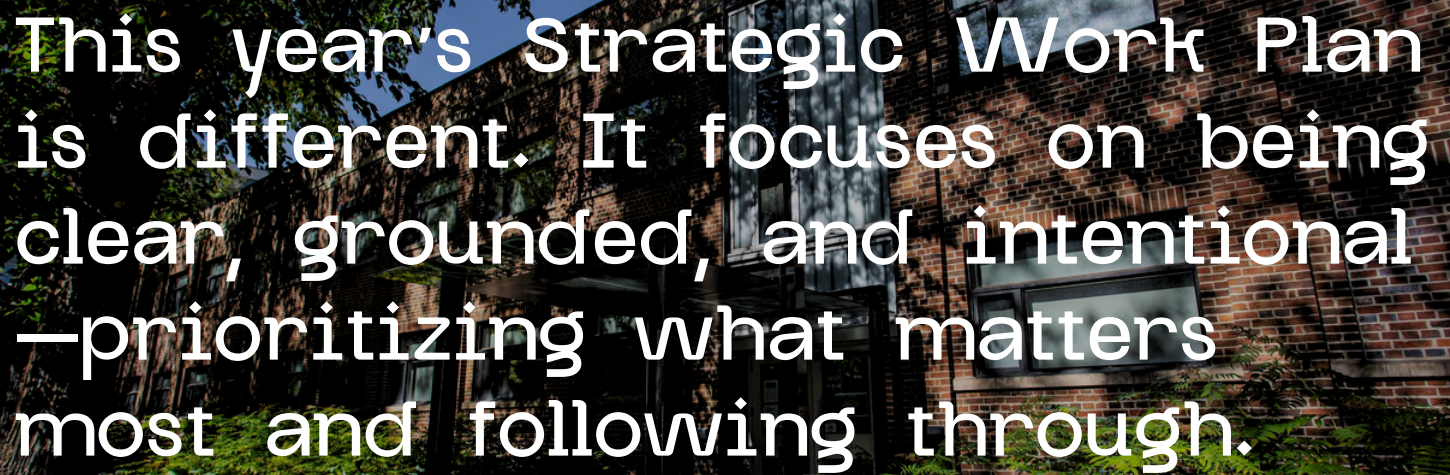
Before we talk about goals and action plans, we need to pause and ask: What's the current state of the GSA? What are students saying? What are we doing well—and what still needs work?

Over the past year, the GSA made progress in key areas. Advocacy efforts led to movement on the PhD minimum funding guarantee and continued pressure for fair tuition. Core services like the health and dental plan and student grants remained strong, while events like Social Hour and the orientations saw increased student turnout and engagement.

But let's also be honest.

While the GSA remains visible on campus, many students still find its purpose and impact unclear. Some are unsure what the GSA actually does. Others feel that while their feedback is collected, it often disappears without updates or meaningful outcomes. This disconnect is felt most strongly among course-based, international, and marginalized graduate students, who continue to feel excluded from decision-making and programming.





This year's Strategic Work Plan is different. It focuses on being clear, grounded, and intentional—prioritizing what matters most and following through.

Internally, structural challenges remain. While roles within the GSA are increasingly well-defined, collaboration across portfolios can still be limited, and momentum is often lost between teams. Feedback is gathered regularly from students, but follow-up—showing how that input translates into action—has not always been consistent. At times, internal processes and governance structures can also slow the GSA's ability to respond quickly to emerging student needs.

Despite these challenges, there is clear potential for growth. Students are calling for better communication, more inclusive programming, and a more responsive, action-driven Council. With the recent dissolution of ab-GPAC, the GSA also has a unique opportunity to lead provincial graduate student advocacy.

But these opportunities come with expectations. If the GSA continues to gather input without clear action—or if promises outpace delivery—student trust will erode. That's why this year's Strategic Work Plan is different. It doesn't aim to be everything to everyone. Instead, it focuses on being clear, grounded, and intentional—prioritizing what matters most and following through.

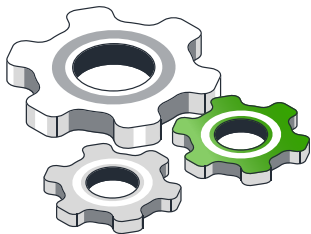
About the Strategic Work Plan



The Strategic Work Plan (SWP) is the GSA's roadmap for the year. It outlines the key priorities and goals that the elected leadership—Directly-Elected Officers (DEOs)—commit to working on during their one-year term. The SWP ensures the GSA stays focused, responsive to member needs, and accountable to the graduate student community.

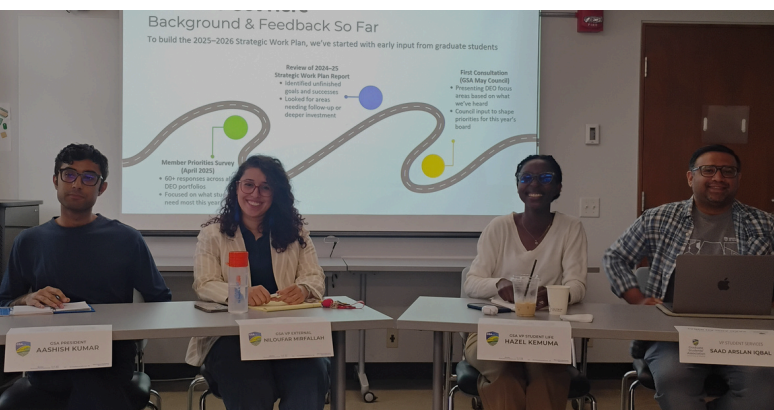
The SWP *is not a list of everything the GSA does*, but rather a set of **intentional priorities** that reflect student feedback, emerging issues, and the capacity of the current board. These priorities guide how the GSA allocates time, advocacy efforts, and internal collaboration.

How This Plan Was Built



The process began with the GSA Priorities Survey (April 4 – June 9, 2025), where students shared what they wanted the DEOs to focus on. Two consultations followed: one during the SWP Town Hall on May 27 and a Labour-focused session on June 6, allowing members to speak directly with the executive team.

Alongside these, DEOs reviewed last year's plan—identifying what was accomplished, what remained unfinished, and what priorities should carry over. Each portfolio then began shaping goals based on the themes and needs that emerged.





President

Aashish Kumar

The President is the chief spokesperson and representative of the Graduate Students' Association. They are responsible for overseeing the strategic direction of the GSA, chairing the GSA Board, representing the GSA to University administration and external stakeholders, and providing leadership and coordination across the Executive team. The President also holds final oversight on communications and media representation for the GSA, ensuring alignment with organizational goals and student interests

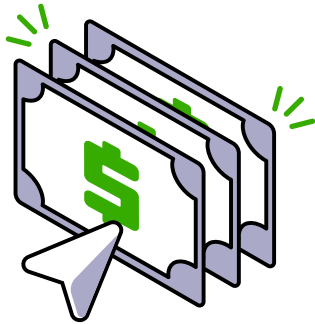
2025–2026 Strategic Priorities

Career Support & Pathways

Graduate students want stronger, more targeted support in building their careers—especially access to meaningful opportunities and clearer connections between departments, industry, and alumni.

Goals:

- Collaborate with the Career Centre to co-host at least career-focused events tailored for graduate students (per department).
- Engage department chairs across faculties to identify discipline-specific gaps and needs in graduate career support (initial round of consultations completed by October 2025).
- Collaborate with Career Services and Alumni Relations to strengthen graduate-specific programming and networking opportunities, with at least one co-delivered event or resource released.



Tuition & Affordability

Students continue to call for stable, predictable tuition and better cost-of-living measures from the University.

Goals:

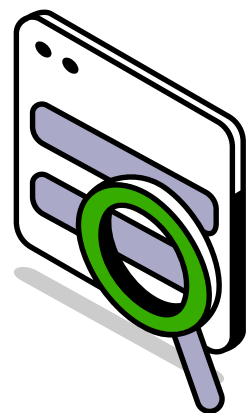
- Advocate for an increase to the Graduate Student Support Fund (GSSF) through a formal proposal that includes rationale and financial projections
- Develop a proposal for a reimbursement grant aimed at students in programs requiring board exams, licenses, or certifications as part of their training
- Ensure continuity and long-term viability of the Course-Based Master's Scholarship, building on last year's pilot and pushing for permanent implementation or funding renewal
- Coordinate GSA-wide lobbying on affordability, contributing to submissions or advocacy packages to university administration, provincial lobby, CASA, etc.
- Explore new and sustainable revenue streams for the GSA to reduce overreliance on student fees.

GSA Transparency & Coordination

Many graduate students still feel disconnected from the GSA's work and unsure of how decisions are made. This year, the focus is on making internal processes clearer and governance more efficient—starting with Council reform and improved internal alignment.

Goals:

- Lead a consultation process on GSA Council structure reform.
- Strengthen visibility of GSA operations by developing better communication for sharing major GSA decisions and advocacy wins with students.





VP Academic

Chen Okafor

The VP Academic represents graduate students in matters relating to academic policies and procedures, supervision, graduate program quality, and university governance affecting academics. They serve on several university-level committees (FGSPS, APPC, etc.) and advocate for fair, inclusive, and transparent academic practices.

2025–2026 Strategic Priorities

Improve Supervision & Academic Relationships

Supervision is central to graduate success—but many students feel powerless when issues arise.

Goals:

- Raise concerns about supervision challenges and academic grievance clarity at relevant university committees, with a focus on escalation pathways and communication gaps.

Academic Fairness & Navigation

Students need a clearer understanding of academic policies, leave options, and their rights.

Goals:

- Explore opportunities with FGPS and GSA staff to improve existing academic navigation tools, especially for students unfamiliar with policies around supervision, leaves, and progress.
- Host Q&A sessions on common pain points like extensions, leave of absence, and thesis timelines.



VP External

Niloufar Mirfallah

The VP External represents graduate students in matters beyond the university, including municipal, provincial, and federal advocacy. This role manages the GSA's relationship with CASA (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations) and coordinates lobbying efforts around student affordability, housing, transit, and immigration.

2025–2026 Strategic Priorities



Rebuild Provincial Advocacy Networks

Following the dissolution of ab-GPAC, including reconnecting with other Alberta GSAs and exploring new provincial lobbying options

Goals:

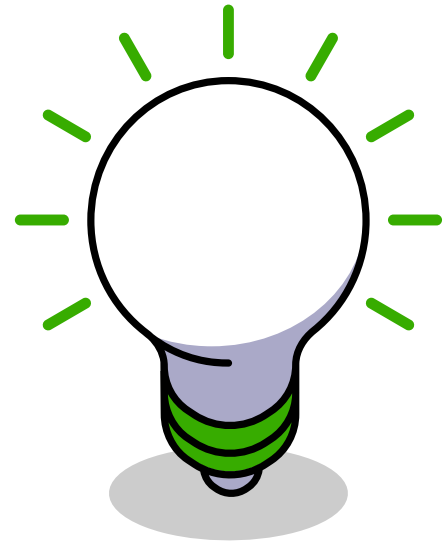
- Reconnect with at least 3 Alberta graduate student associations to explore shared priorities and interest in informal collaboration or lobbying.
- Host or attend one Alberta-wide check-in meeting with other GSAs to discuss gaps left by ab-GPAC and brainstorm alternatives.
- Map out the current provincial advocacy landscape and identify potential allies for future joint lobbying.

Represent Graduate Student Priorities through CASA

Graduate students are often underrepresented in national advocacy. Ensuring that grad-specific priorities like Tri-Council are part of the conversation.

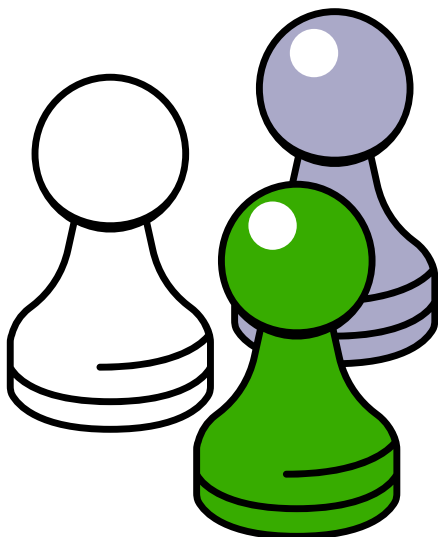
Goals:

- Draft and propose a motion or policy resolution at CASA that directly addresses a graduate-specific issue (Tri-Council funding, Postgraduate work permit reform, immigration backlog, etc.)
- Build a graduate student alliance within CASA



Build External Partnerships & Sponsorship Opportunities

To support graduate student programming and reduce reliance on student fees, the VP External will explore opportunities to collaborate with external organizations, nonprofits, and corporate sponsors.



Goals:

- Identify and reach out to at least 5 potential external partners or sponsors by Spring 2026, including organizations aligned with graduate student needs
- Develop one formal sponsorship or partnership proposal that outlines potential benefits, sponsorship tiers (if applicable), and intended student outcomes.



VP Student Life

Hazel Kemuma

The VP Student Life oversees graduate student engagement, wellness programming, community-building, and supports for equity-deserving and marginalized students. This role leads GSA events, represents student life concerns on university committees, and works to build a more inclusive and supportive graduate student experience.

2025–2026 Strategic Priorities

Expand Inclusive Community Programming

Graduate students want more spaces to connect—not just academically, but socially and culturally.

Goals:

- Pilot at least two new student life events in response to member feedback (e.g., sports-related socials, international student mixers, or family-friendly activities).
- Collaborate with campus partners (e.g., ISS, UAI, SU) to co-host at least one large-scale intercultural or social event.

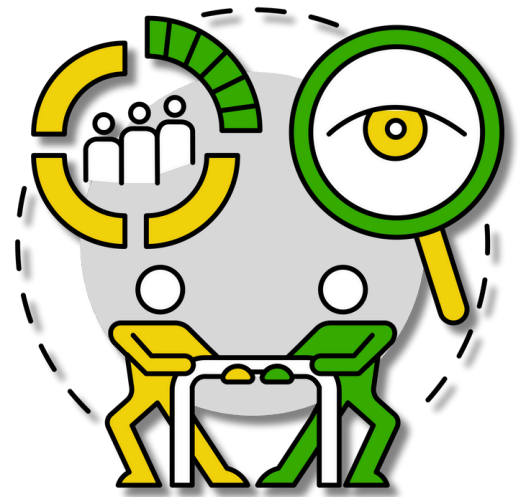


Support Equity-Deserving Communities

Graduate students come from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, yet many face barriers to inclusion and belonging on campus. The GSA is committed to supporting equity-deserving communities through partnerships, programming, and advocacy for welcoming, accessible spaces.

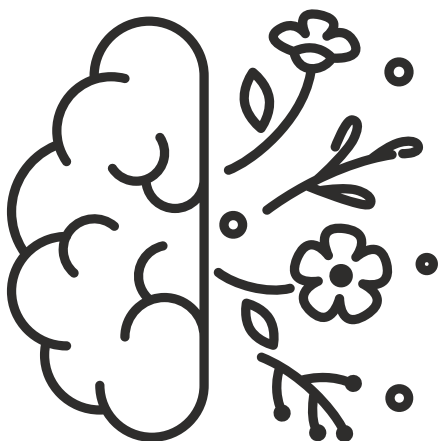
Goals:

- Coordinate with the VP IR, the GSA EDI Committee, First Peoples' House, and the Indigenous Graduate Students' Association (IGSA) to ensure that events, wellness programming, and supports are meaningfully inclusive of Indigenous students and other equity-deserving communities.
- Work with campus partners to advocate for designated space improvements (e.g., family corners, quiet rooms, prayer and reflection spaces) in high-traffic grad student buildings.



Advance Wellness & Belonging

Wellness for grads is more than mental health—it includes connection, fun, and access to low-barrier ways to relax and decompress.



Goals:

- Continue and expand low-pressure wellness programming, such as journaling groups, creative arts, or movement-based sessions (aim for 3 unique offerings)
- Collect wellness feedback through quick pulse polls at events or short digital forms



VP Student Services

Saad Arslan Iqbal

The VP Student Services advocates for graduate students on key services including the Health & Dental Plan, U-Pass, GSAP, and campus wellness supports. They oversee GSA grants, bursaries, and awards, and represent student interests on multiple committees—ranging from health and transit to food security and student life—while working closely with the Dean of Students and other campus partners.

2025–2026 Strategic Priorities

Improve Access and Awareness of GSA Services

Students continue to express confusion about how to access GSA supports or what's actually available to them.

Goals:

- Launch a “Know Your Services” campaign covering Health & Dental, GSAP, grants, U-Pass, etc.
- Host info booths or online pop-ups (Fall/Winter) with FAQs and handouts on GSA services.





Strengthen the Health & Dental Plan and Mental Health Supports

Students want better understanding of their coverage, and improved access to mental health support.

Goals:

- Run a Health & Dental Plan awareness series including social media, e-mail bulletins, and Q&A sessions with Studywell.
- Begin scoping a GSA Health & Wellness Hub concept, as a long-term project aimed at integrating service access and wellness info
- Gather user feedback on pain points with the new plan provider via survey or open form

Enhancing the Essentials

Grad students depend on core services like the Food Bank, U-Pass, and Health & Dental—but they want to see these evolve with fresh, practical upgrades that better meet their current needs.

Goals:

- Explore a new childcare funding or discount program by partnering with external providers—aiming to support student-parents beyond the existing subsidy.
- Collaborate with the Campus Food Bank on expanded initiatives like Help Your Shelf or a pilot hydroponic project to increase food access and sustainability.
- Work with partners to improve visibility of family-friendly and wellness spaces across campus, with a focus on Augustana, CSJ, and Triffo Hall.



Associate VP Labour

Nathan Lamarche

The AVP Labour advocates for academically employed graduate students (like GTAs, GAs, and GRAFs), supports collective bargaining and enforcement of the GSA's Collective Agreement, and works closely with the Labour Relations Committee (LRC) and GSA staff to protect worker rights.

2025–2026 Strategic Priorities

Finalize and Ratify the Collective Agreement

Negotiations for the renewed Collective Agreement are still ongoing, and completing this is critical.

Goals:

- Conclude negotiation meetings and draft agreement language before end of term
- Send regular updates to academically employed graduate students through appropriate labour communication channels.
- Provide a plain-language summary to all academically employed graduate students once ratified.

Promote Awareness of Worker Rights

Many grad workers are unaware of the terms of the Collective Agreement or how to navigate conflicts at work.

Goals:

- Host at least 2 info sessions (Fall & Winter) for new GTAs, GAs, and GRAFs explaining their rights.
- Publish and distribute a simplified guide to the Collective Agreement once ratified.
- Set up monthly “Labour Office Hours” for confidential worker support or questions.



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University of Alberta

Thank You!

Contact Us

1-49 Triffo Hall, University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2E1

☎ +1 780 492 2175

✉ gsa.frontdesk@ualberta.ca