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GSA Council November 24 2025 Minutes

Monday, November 24, 2025

Held hybrid in 2-100 Council Chambers

5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

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, Anishinaabe, Dene, Ojibway, Saukteaux, 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.

The GSA's confidentiality practices are outlined below and can be summarized as follows: information arising in a closed session of GSA Council or a committee, information about identifiable individuals, or information otherwise marked or indicated as confidential, needs to stay that way. Discussions that are off the record or confidential often involve personal information, information on negotiations, business information, or other information of a similar nature.

GSA ACTING SPEAKER:

Laith Khatib

CLOSED SESSION:

Discussion of matters pertaining to the business interests of the GSA will occur in Closed Session

IN ATTENDANCE:

Council-Elected Officials:

- Chief Returning Officer: Wajid Ali

GSA Executives:

- A. GSA President: Aashish Kumar
- B. VP Academic: Chen Okafor
- C. VP External: Niloufar Mir Fallah
- D. VP Indigenous Relations: Tamara Dubé
- E. VP Student Life: Hazel Kemuma
- F. VP Student Services: Saad Arslan Iqbal

Departmental Councillors:

- A. Shivani Sonkar, AFNS
- B. Séamus Rudden, Anthropology
- C. Laura Enekegho, Biochemistry
- D. Fleur Issac, Biological Sciences
- E. Gurparkash Singh, Biomedical Engineering
- F. Nissi Djangmah, BGSA
- G. Yufei Ren, Business PhD

Councillors-At-Large:

- Ashif Rahman
- Mohamadali Tofigh
- Jovi Krieger
- Julianna Durham
- Haroun Elyasir
- Anagha Devkota
- Izhan Khan

Standing Committee Chairs & Vice-Chairs:

1. Arseniy Belosokhov, NoC Chair
2. Devinder Pal Singh, ACB Chair

Guests:

- Karanjot Singh, Computing Sciences
- Bryana Rouselle, Public Health
- Colin Hamnett
- Ayrton Chilibeck, ACB Candidate
- Bishoy Zakher, GSA Speaker Candidate
- Mohammad Hamza
- Yuhui Song, ERC Candidate
- Sanaz Bohlouli, ASC Candidate
- Gihan Wijelath, ASC Candidate
- Emma Pilgrim, ACB Candidate
- Ashutosh Kharwar, ACB Candidate
- Frida Feng, ASC Candidate
- Mohamed Sabek, LRC Chief Steward

- H. Sophie Nguemo Medongoum, Campus Saint-Jean
- I. Desmond Amoah, Cell Biology
- J. Saniyya Mirza, Civil & Environmental Engineering
- K. Padgett Hiew, Communication Sciences & Disorders
- L. Ayesha Khan, Computing Sciences
- M. Rose Rafiei, Dentistry
- N. Eran Driscoll, Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
- O. Moe Fujiwara, East Asian Studies
- P. Kyle Basarab, Economics
- Q. Jerry Gan, Education
- R. Ajibola Adigun, Educational Policy Studies
- S. Bart Romanek, History, Classics & Religion
- T. Zoe Wagner, Human Ecology
- U. Benjamin Kucher, IGSA
- V. Serena Li, Laboratory Medicine & Pathology
- W. Lamia Farzin Ima, Law
- X. Vincent Yu, Library & Information Studies
- Y. Jack McKoen, Mathematical & Statistical Sciences
- Z. Adeline Piercy, Media & Technology Studies
- AA. Lillian Low, Medical Genetics
- BB. Dante Terino, Medical Microbiology & Immunology
- CC. Jeff Akhagbosu, MINT
- DD. Junjun Yao, Modern Language & Cultural Studies
- EE. Emma Heidebrecht, Neuroscience
- FF. Fedrica Williams, Nursing
- GG. Pooja Praveen Kumar, Obstetrics & Gynecology
- HH. Anastasia Roemer, Oncology
- II. Isaac Cantine, Ophthalmology
- JJ. Crystal Mulik, Paediatrics

	<p>KK. Thomas Hammond, Pharmacology LL. Ali Shalaby, Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences MM. Spencer Ahearn, Philosophy NN. Daniel Carleton, Physics OO. Mohaddeseh Pakzami, Physiology PP. Savannah Ribeiro, Political Sciences QQ. Emily Ward, Psychiatry RR. Abigail Riesen, Psychology SS. Vi Tran, Public Health TT. Varsha Kesavan, Radiology & Diagnostic Imaging Councillor UU. Cassandra Cowan, Rehabilitation Sciences VV. Shea Giesbrecht, Renewable Resources WW. Celine Beaulieu, Sociology XX. Ivan Ma, Surgery</p> <p>Alternate Departmental Councillors: YY. Anne Lois Kouassi-Djan, Campus Saint-Jean ZZ. Karla Manzanet Freyre, Cell Biology AAA. Sohrab Hejazi, Chemical & Material Engineering BBB. Souhardya Ganguli, Computing Sciences CCC. Huirui Zhang, Drama DDD. Mackenzie O'Neill, History, Classics & Religion EEE. Mahn Hei Yu, Linguistics FFF. Micah Sollid, Occupational Therapy</p>
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Time	Item #	Title	Presenter(s)
5:00	-	Land Acknowledgement	L. AlKhatib, GSA Acting Speaker
1 min	1	Approval of the Agenda for November 24, 2025 GSA Council H. Kemuma moved. D. Carleton seconded. Motion PASSED. 36 votes in favour.	L. AlKhatib, GSA Acting Speaker

1 min	2	Approval of the GSA Council Minutes of October 20, 2025 GSA Council H. Kemuma moved. D. Carleton seconded. Motion PASSED. 34 votes in favour.	L. AlKhatib, GSA Acting Speaker
2 min	3	Changes in GSA Council Membership Incoming: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Padgett Hiew, CSD ● Huirui Zhang, Drama Alternate ● Isaac Cantine, Ophthalmology ● Souhardya Ganguly, Computing Science Alternate 	L. AlKhatib, GSA Acting Speaker
2 min	4	Announcements A. L. Al Khatib, GSA Acting Speaker, thanked the Nominating Committee for their hard work in approving all the candidates for today's elections. B. Z. Patel, GSA Associate Director, noted that the Associate Vice-President Labour nominations are currently open, with the nomination form available on the GSA website. Only academically employed graduate students are eligible for the position. Nominations close on Thursday, December 4th at noon. Please direct any questions to Wajid Ali, the Chief Returning Officer (CRO), at gsacroff@ualberta.ca C. Apply for Councillor Vacancies Here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Governance Committee (2 vacancies) b. GSA Board (3 vacancies) c. GSA Nominating Committee/Board (sits on both, 1 vacancy) d. Appeals & Complaints Board (1 vacancy) 	
	5	<u>ELECTIONS</u> A. GSA Speaker - 1 vacancy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Two candidates b. Successful candidate: Daniel Carleton B. GSA Awards Selection Committee - 6 vacancies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Five candidates b. Successful candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Sanaz Bohlouli ii. Frida Feng 	A. Belosokhov, NoC Chair

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Victoria Johnston iv. Claudia Ostrowski v. Gihan Wijelath <p>C. GSA Elections & Referenda Committee - 1 vacancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One candidate b. Successful candidate: Yuhui Song <p>D. GSA Appeals & Complaints Board: General Members - 3 vacancies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Seven candidates b. Successful candidates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Precious Majekodunmi ii. Devinder Pal Singh iii. Emma Pilgrim <p>E. GSA Appeals & Complaints Board: GSA Councillor - 2 vacancies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One candidate b. Successful candidate: Shea Giesbrecht <p>F. GSA Councillor-At-Large - 1 vacancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One candidate b. Successful candidate: Andrea DeKeseredy <p>G. GSA Nominating Committee - 1 vacancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One candidate b. Successful candidate: Karanbir Singh 	L. AlKhatib, GSA Acting Speaker
	6	<p><u>PRESENTATION ITEMS</u></p> <p>A. UA Organizational Values Presentation Presenters: Logan Mardhani-Bayne (Lead, Strategic Planning and Initiatives, Office of the Provost) and Shannon Leblanc (Strategic Initiatives Officer for Human Resources, Health, Safety and Environment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L. Mardhani-Bayne and S. Leblanc explained that the development of new University of Alberta organizational values was identified as an early priority in the institution's 	

		<p>People Strategy, and that the values are intended to serve as long-term, foundational guidance alongside the university’s mission and vision. They emphasized that the values are meant to foster belonging, shape decision-making, and guide how community members interact internally and represent the university externally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They described a multi-stage consultation process beginning in January 2025, built on years of prior engagement for other major strategic plans, including the Indigenous Strategic Plan, Student Experience Action Plan, university strategic plan, and the People Strategy. The values work included an open call for input, a “What We Heard” report summarizing initial themes, a second round of consultation to test specific wording, targeted engagement sessions (including with the GSA), and synthesis by a steering committee to create a proposed value statement. • The presenters noted that consultation feedback was largely positive, with many respondents saying the values felt authentic and inspiring, though some expressed cynicism about whether values would be lived in practice. A key change added after feedback was explicit language on “shared accountability” to signal mutual responsibility across leadership, faculty, staff, and students to uphold the values. • They reported that the value statement was endorsed by GFC and will be presented to the Board for approval, with an official launch planned for early 2026. After launch, the university will support faculties, departments, and research groups in discussing how the values translate into local practice and in establishing expectations for accountability. • The presenters then reviewed the value statement, noting its anchor in Henry Marshall Tory’s foundational principle of “the uplifting of the whole people,” and outlining the university’s commitments to curiosity, community, shared accountability for a sustainable future, and the pursuit of excellence and 	
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		<p>impact. They emphasized that the statement must be read as a whole rather than as isolated words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S. Ribeiro, Political Science Councillor, asked how the values would be enforced, noting that existing policies and expectations are often not upheld. The presenters clarified that values are not policy but a decision-making lens and set of shared principles, and that part of their purpose is to allow the community to hold leadership accountable by pointing to areas where actions do or do not align with the adopted values. • D. Carleton, Physics Councillor, raised concerns about integrity and accountability in relation to poor graduate student funding, students living below the poverty line, and supervisors retaliating against students for raising academic concerns. They argued that without mechanisms to address such issues, the values remain “words on a page.” The presenters thanked them for the candor and said this feedback would be conveyed to leadership. • I. Cantine, Ophthalmology Councillor, added that accountability requires concrete examples from leadership, such as leaders demonstrating vulnerability, answering difficult questions, or acting against personal convenience, so that community members can see the values being embodied. They argued that vague statements are insufficient without visible actions. The presenters agreed that values should make accountability conversations easier and should help the community assess whether decisions align with stated commitments. • M. Sabek, LRC Chief Steward, described the severe financial and psychological strain experienced by new international students who receive confusing information about expected funding and deductions, resulting in unexpectedly low pay in their first months. They urged greater transparency and support so that students feel part of a caring community 	
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		<p>rather than isolated and overwhelmed. The presenters said they were taking detailed notes and that transparency and community support were clear takeaways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • V. Tran, Public Health Councillor, asked about evaluation plans for assessing how well the values represent the community over time, and how the values were aligned with Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation commitments. The presenters explained that evaluation will likely occur through mechanisms tied to the People Strategy, including engagement surveys and regular reporting to GFC and the Board, and suggested returning to GSA bodies to discuss progress. They noted that the values work was informed by extensive consultation, including Indigenous-focused planning processes, and that alignment with reconciliation efforts remains an important lens in the development and implementation of the values. <p>B. Tuition Presentation Presenters: Melissa Padfield (Deputy Provost Students and Enrolment, Provost & Vice-President Academic), Norma Rodenburg (Vice-Provost & Registrar), Tracy Raivio (FGPS Dean), and Bill Bedard (Director of Resource Planning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M. Padfield and team opened by explaining that this annual session is part of the university's formal tuition consultation process, which is developed each year through mutual agreement with student leaders from the GSA and Students' Union. They described the multiple touchpoints built into the process—committee meetings, visits to student councils, town halls, and targeted outreach—to ensure students can ask questions and provide meaningful feedback. The presentation then outlined what tuition pays for, emphasizing that tuition revenue can only support program delivery, including instructor salaries, teaching materials, classroom spaces, utilities, research that supports instruction, and library services. They highlighted that 5% of total tuition revenue is 	
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		<p>directed toward financial support through offset programs for both domestic and international students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They next discussed the financial pressures driving tuition increases, noting that the university is a people-based institution with most costs tied to salaries, benefits, materials, and utilities, while government funding has remained stagnant. A key theme was the significant shift in government philosophy: tuition now accounts for a larger share of instructional funding than the provincial operating grant, reversing historical ratios. Because domestic tuition increases are capped at 2%, the university faces growing revenue gaps that require cuts to balance the budget. The presenters offered examples to illustrate the scale of a \$5 million shortfall and the types of services, such as infrastructure or maintenance, that could be affected if tuition were not increased. • The university is therefore proposing a 2% increase to domestic tuition for Fall 2026 while maintaining the \$8.5 million in domestic tuition offsets. For international students, who receive guaranteed program-long rates, the proposal for Fall 2027 is a 5.5% increase for most undergraduate programs, with higher adjustments in computing science and nursing for harmonization purposes. Graduate course-based programs would see a similar 5.5% increase, while thesis-based international students would receive a 5.5% tuition reduction to bring rates closer to domestic levels and assess longer-term impacts on competitiveness and funding. • They also described the provincial mechanism for Exceptional Tuition Increases (ETIs), which can only be used to fund program enhancements—not core instructional costs—and require both student consultation and ministerial approval. Two faculties intend to pursue ETIs: Education (proposing a 50% increase for the Master of School and Clinical Child Psychology) and Nursing (proposing 75% increases for course-based and thesis-based master’s programs and 20% for 	
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		<p>the PhD), each affecting small cohorts of new domestic students. Proposed enhancements include improved student supports, accessibility initiatives, technology upgrades, professional development resources, expanded practicum opportunities, and better data collection, among others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presenters concluded by outlining ongoing work to improve communication about financial supports, noting that student feedback has led to more accessible and centralized information through orientations, syllabi, handbooks, websites, and social media. • Students raised a series of detailed questions about the proposed tuition changes, beginning with clarification on whether the 5.5% decrease for thesis-based international students applied to all students or only new entrants; the university confirmed it applies only to new international students starting in Fall 2027. • This led to broader concerns about how current students—already facing rising living costs, stagnant funding, and different fee structures—would be supported. The university responded that tuition for current international students cannot be changed because of the guaranteed program-length tuition commitment given at admission, but emphasized ongoing efforts to strengthen financial supports such as bursaries, improved minimum guaranteed funding, and better data-driven planning. • Students also questioned inequities across campus facilities, asking why departments differ so drastically in the quality and accessibility of classrooms, labs, and student spaces. The university acknowledged these long-standing gaps, attributing them partly to static provincial funding and deferred maintenance, and described ongoing prioritization work across colleges and infrastructure teams to address the most urgent inequities within limited resources. 	
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another question challenged whether Exceptional Tuition Increases (ETIs) implied that program improvements were only possible through higher tuition; administrators clarified that ETIs are just one tool and that faculties also pursue enhancements through restructuring, donor support, revised program models, and administrative cost reductions. • D. Carleton then raised serious concerns about the sustainability of graduate education, noting that current minimum funding levels fall far below the financial threshold required for international study permits, leaving many students reliant on food banks and emergency aid. The university acknowledged the hardship and explained the long, difficult process of establishing the \$25,000 minimum funding guarantee, reaffirming that this amount is only a starting point and that multiple committees are now working on raising minimum funding and reviewing thesis-based tuition as part of a holistic compensation model. • Finally, students asked for clarification about the substantial fee harmonization between undergraduate computing programs and about how the 5.5% decrease for thesis-based graduate students interacts with other tuition changes. The university explained that harmonization applies only to undergraduate programs and that thesis-based tuition is evaluated as a closed system because tuition and funding flow back and forth through assistantships and minimum funding mechanisms, meaning undergraduate revenue does not subsidize graduate decreases. • They concluded with an invitation for students to send further questions or feedback directly to M. Padfield at melissa.padfield@ualberta.ca or through the GSA, with assurances that student input continues to shape funding and policy decisions. 	
	7	<u>CLOSED SESSION</u>	D. Pal Singh,

		<p>D. Carleton moved. S. Giesbrecht seconded.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Motion PASSED.</p> <p>Council moved into Closed Session.</p> <p>S. Ribeiro moved. C. Cowan seconded.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Motion PASSED.</p> <p>Council moved into Open Session at 7:33PM.</p>	ACB Chair
30 min	8	<p><u>INFORMATION PIECES</u></p> <p>Reports:</p> <p>G. GSA President: Aashish Kumar</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> No report submitted A. Kumar congratulated Z. Patel on assuming the GSA Associate Director position. He went on to thank the GSA team and staff, who have been doing a significant amount of work this month. Cost of Living Survey: A. Kumar thanked B. Ellamil for his significant work publishing this survey. He gave an update on ETIs: the GSA's official position is against ETIs, but nursing GSA students were consulted and are for them. They do not want high ETIs (less than 75%), which has been communicated to the Ministry. An update on the IRCC: there has been a misunderstanding around IRCC regarding study permit cap exemptions. Initially, through our interactions with the IRCC Minister, we had an understanding that graduate students would be exempt from study permit caps, but after confirming with the IRCC staff, they state that graduate students are part of study permit caps, which have been significantly decreased in the approved budget. We are waiting for clearer communications, but our hope is that at least thesis-based students will be exempt from these gaps. We are working for Pedway after-hours access for course-based graduate students. A. Kumar attended the CAGS Conference with C. Okafor and the CASA Advocacy Week with N. Mir Fallah, who have both reported in further detail. He noted that the University of Calgary has officially increased their minimum funding threshold. He has repeatedly raised that for our own competitiveness as 	*See Legend

		<p>the University of Alberta, we need to increase our minimum funding thresholds, decrease tuition, and give more supports to students.</p> <p>H. Vice-President Academic: Chen Okafor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. C. Okafor attended the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies Conference in Ottawa on Nov. 4-7: this was a gathering of students, faculty and administrators across Canada to discuss and better understand the graduate student landscape. The discussion touched on the future of graduate education, the principles of graduate supervision, fostering effective graduate supervision, generative AI and social good, promoting graduate student mental wellness, key insights into graduate supervision using a dual method process and centering student experience in policy, from Grad admission to thesis submission. b. The GSA's tuition proposal statement has been sent to the university, and he will bring further suggestions to the GSA Board. c. He hosted a workshop on graduate supervision. In late January, he will be hosting a workshop on maintaining academic integrity. He encouraged attendance. d. He is working with various departments regarding guaranteeing and increasing funding for departments. This Friday he will be meeting with the Biological Sciences department admin team and hopes to meet with further departments. <p>I. Vice-President External: Niloufar Mir Fallah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. No report submitted b. She attended the CASA Advocacy Week and was unable to submit her report in time for the mailings. She will submit a report with all the details for the next Council meeting. They had around 100 meetings with various representatives at this conference, including MPs, Senators, etc. c. One of the important meetings held included one with the Ministry of Advanced Education to support the UA's and FGPS' proposal for funding the graduate student internship program. In this discussion, they emphasized providing internship opportunities for 	
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		<p>graduate students that can help translate academic experience into practical contributions.</p> <p>d. While at this conference, they submitted a summary of recommendations to various MPs and Senators. The recommendations included a grant program, the skilled labour shortage, housing, prioritizing the retention of talent in Canada by doubling the expressing Trade Program variation points, and apprenticeship advocacy. The latter was raised to ensure that Canada remains competitive by retaining top research. We specifically advocate to secure the budgets for Chart Council scholarships, adjusting for inflation and CPI, to Tri-Council grants for research. Additionally, it includes NIAC advocacy, which is specific to Indigenous students; they are asking for increased post-secondary funding for FNMI students by \$200 million per year permanently for education strategies and a \$5 million increase to existing funding for student residence housing.</p> <p>e. She and A. Kumar also recently met with the newly elected Edmonton Mayor, Andrew Knack, where they discussed their priorities of housing, affordability, transit safety and reliability, employment opportunities for graduate students, and the Leisure Access Program. We are working to set up monthly meetings with the Mayor's office.</p> <p>J. Vice-President Indigenous Relations: Tamara Dubé</p> <p>a. As submitted - T. Dubé was unwell and unable to attend</p> <p>K. Vice-President Student Life: Hazel Kemuma</p> <p>a. As submitted</p> <p>L. Vice-President Student Services: Saad Iqbal</p> <p>a. S. Iqbal encouraged Councillors to read his report for full details, but updated Council on accessibility and accommodations advocacy. He has been working with a student for a year to help them receive an electric wheelchair to more easily traverse campus through the winter. However, Alberta aids to daily living does not allow you to have a motorized one if you can push a wheelchair by your hands. Our health plan and emergency bursaries do not cover this cost (\$10,000) nor do other university awards. There have been</p>	
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		<p>internal discussions to see how we can help this student, whether that involves changing adjudication or creating a new award. S. Iqbal asked for the Council to suggest a way to increase supports for students with accessibility and accommodations.</p> <p>M. Associate Vice-President Labour: Vacant</p> <p>N. GSA Senator: Hussain Alhussainy</p> <p>a. No report submitted</p> <p>O. GSA Speaker: Vacant</p> <p>P. Chief and Deputy Returning Officers: Wajid Ali</p> <p>a. No report submitted</p> <p>Q. GSA Nominating Committee Chair: Arseniy Belosokhov</p> <p>a. As submitted</p> <p>b. He highlighted that we are still looking for Councillor-specific vacancies on our Standing Committees and strongly encouraged Council to review and consider the positions listed above. General member positions are available here.</p> <p>R. GSA Elections and Referenda Committee Chair: Elsie Osei</p> <p>a. No report submitted</p> <p>S. GSA Management</p> <p>a. As submitted</p> <p>b. Z. Patel read a historical report that drew Council's attention to key concerns about the state of the GSA, emphasizing that the graduate student population has nearly doubled over the past decade while the organization has not grown or adapted accordingly. It stated that the GSA has spent the past decade in a "perpetual crisis," with a lingering mentality that it is merely a small student club, which has prevented the development of strong institutional memory and has led to repeated, poorly informed, short-sighted decisions.</p> <p>c. The report acknowledged that some recent progress has helped stabilize the organization in the short term, but warned that without addressing deeper structural problems, this stability will eventually fail and the GSA's recurring self-destructive patterns will re-emerge. Z. Patel stressed that graduate students deserve high-quality services and advocacy, which requires the GSA to shift its focus away from internal</p>	
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		<p>dysfunction and toward the needs of the students it serves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. He identified unclear lines of authority as one of the GSA's most persistent issues, noting that presidents and vice presidents often take on operational tasks outside their mandate, which undermines staff roles, leads to unworkable environments, contributes to high staff turnover, and results in broad inefficiency. He added that executive members have historically defended their own areas of responsibility and divided the organization into personal spheres, preventing the cooperation needed for effective advocacy and forcing Council to intervene in situations it should not need to manage. e. It argued that although Council technically has the authority under the PSLA to micromanage or react directly to issues, it should avoid doing so, as this role is unhealthy and inconsistent with how senior bodies like the Board of Governors operate. He emphasized that Council's responsibility is to ensure its delegated committees are performing their duties and to act as a final stage of discussion—not to override delegated structures by taking on work meant for committees. f. He clarified that the report they read from was written a decade ago by a previous Speaker, but found it strikingly relevant to the GSA's current situation. g. He highlighted that Council has the authority to create bylaws but has delegated much of that authority to standing committees, and that bypassing these structures—either by bringing business directly to Council or by Council intervening itself—creates inefficiency and undermines proper governance. h. Looking ahead to 2026, he urged Council to be mindful of its mandate and role within the GSA's overall structure, stressing that while the organization is not necessarily in crisis, these issues can seriously threaten its functioning if left unaddressed. i. Z. Patel concluded by expressing optimism that, despite the difficulties of the past year, there is a positive future for the GSA if everyone works together in the best interests of the students they represent. 	
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	9	<p><u>ACTION ITEMS:</u></p> <p>A. GSA Council Standing Orders</p> <p>Z. Patel offered to defer this motion due to time constraints. Motion to DEFER THIS ACTION ITEM TO THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETING. S. Ribeiro moved. A. Kumar seconded.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Motion PASSED TO DEFER.</p> <p>B. GSA GC-Recommended Bylaw Additions, Section A (First Reading)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Outline of Issue b. Bylaw Additions, Section A <p>A. Kumar moved. H. Kemuma seconded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A. Kumar summarized that these bylaw additions are part of our Bylaw & Policy document guiding principles that inform that bylaws supersede policy. Bylaws require two readings by Council to ensure majority approval. These governance guidelines protect the sanctity of the organization. The suggested additions cement these principles and the hierarchical structure of our governance processes. • D. Carleton asked for clarification between BYLs 2.3 and 2.4. A. Kumar clarified that the aim of these bylaws is to clarify the precedence of bylaw over policy and that if there are any inconsistencies, the Governance Committee will review and realign them. It was noted that these two bylaws may be repetitive. • A. Belosokhov noted that policy redundancy is implemented to ensure complete clarity. • A. Belosokhov asked if the GC is working on any policies to resolve a situation where policy is contradicting another policy. A. Kumar confirmed that we have scheduled meetings to discuss such solutions. • S. Ribeiro suggested reordering BYL.2.5 to 2.3 and renumbering from there for preferential order. It was agreed and noted that clerical changes do not require a vote. • A. Adigun raised that contradictions in bylaw and policy are often only noticed when they are operationalized. He noted that Governance Committee is always working to ensure 	<p>Z. Patel, GSA AD</p> <p>A. Kumar, GSA President</p>
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		<p>optimal bylaws and policies, and encouraged Councillors to raise any potential contradictions to GC to deal with.</p> <p>Motion PASSED.</p> <p>C. GSA ERC- and GC-Recommended Policy Addition, Section I</p> <p>a. Outline of Issue</p> <p>b. ERC- and GC-Recommended Policy Addition, Section I</p> <p>A. Kumar moved. H. Kemuma seconded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Kumar noted that the motion was raised by the ERC and GC clarified some language regarding the motion before approval. S. Iqbal asked for clarification on how long the disqualification lasts. Z. Patel clarified that the disqualification only lasts for one election cycle. S. Iqbal asserted that the wording is still confusing and can be interpreted differently. <p>Motion to DEFER THIS ACTION ITEM TO THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETING due to lack of time.</p> <p>S. Giesbrecht moved. A. Kumar seconded.</p> <p>Motion PASSED TO DEFER.</p>	
5 min	10	<p>Question Period</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Written Questions (May be submitted to the GSA Speaker before 4:00 PM on the day of the meeting) Oral Questions 	
	11	Adjournment 8:03PM	

GSA Awards Selection Committee Nominations

GSA NOMINATING COMMITTEE (GSA NoC)

GSA AWARDS SELECTION COMMITTEE (GSA ASC) (THREE (3) POSITIONS FOR GSA MEMBERS): THREE (3) NOMINEES

Information regarding the vacancies for GSA members was advertised in the GSA Newsletters of November 14, 21 and 28, with a deadline of December 5 2025 at 12:00 PM (noon). Four (4) nominations were received and three (3) were NoC-approved.

The GSA ASC is responsible for “selecting the recipients of the GSA Council approved GSA Recognition Awards” (GSA Bylaw and Policy, Section O.POL.5.1).

There will be an electronic vote held from Friday, December 12 at 12:00PM (noon) to Monday, December 15 at 12:00PM (noon).

Please cast your vote [HERE](#).

Nominees for this position are listed in reverse alphabetical order by last name. ‘None of the Candidates’ will also be considered a nominee.

1. Luis Oblitas (Civil & Environmental Engineering)
2. Alan Han (Nursing)
3. Ayrton Chilibeck (Computing Science)

Current GSA ASC membership can be found [here](#).

Jurisdiction:

GSA Bylaw and GSA Policy, Section O: Elections, GSA Recognition Awards, Standing Committees, GSA Awards Selection Committee, Section O.POL.3.3

The GSA ASC is composed of “a minimum of seven (7) and up to eleven (11) GSA members elected by GSA Council as voting members. The GSA Awards Selection Committee (GSA ASC) Chair, in consultation with the GSA ASC Vice-Chair and the Chair of the GSA Nominating Committee, can decide to increase the number of GSA members on the GSA ASC.”

GSA Bylaw and Policy, Section E: Nominating, GSA Policy, Nominating, Section E.POL.3.1.a

“The GSA NoC provides GSA Council with the names of nominees to fill vacancies on GSA Standing Committees, ad hoc committees, and subcommittees, unless otherwise noted. All vacancies will be advertised at least twice in advance of the nomination deadline noted in the advertisement.”

The names and biographies received for the nominee are **BELOW**. The biographies and resumes are presented as **received** (i.e. not edited).

NOMINATIONS FOR THE GSA AWARDS SELECTION COMMITTEE (GSA ASC)

- Luis Oblitas (Civil & Environmental Engineering)

Statement of Interest
<p>I would like to serve on the GSA Awards Selection Committee to help recognize graduate students who demonstrate excellence in research, leadership, and community impact.</p> <p>I value the importance of acknowledging student achievements and see this as an opportunity to give back to the academic community while contributing to a fair and thoughtful selection process.</p>
Bio
<p>I volunteered on the Marketing Committee for the Student Conference of Structural Engineering, where I helped promote events and engage participants through effective communication strategies.</p> <p>I am a graduate student in engineering with experience in research, project evaluation, and academic collaboration. My background has strengthened my analytical, organizational, and communication skills; qualities that will help me assess applications objectively and contribute effectively to the committee's work.</p>

- Alan Han (Nursing)

Statement of Interest
<p>As a new Masters student, I recently started volunteering with the GSA on its events team under Hazel and learned about the existence of the GSA standing committees. I have always had an interest in volunteering and giving back to my community, and thus I was extremely interested in getting more involved on the GSA and learning more about what the GSA does. I would love the opportunity to begin my journey volunteering with the GSA on this committee!</p>
Bio
<p>Currently, I am the President elect of the Nursing Graduate Students' Association where I am revamping our current practices to be a better voice for students and improve our events. I previously represented my cohort as the Second Year After-Degree Student Rep where I single handedly hosted student mixers, blood drives, grad info presentations, and the annual graduation banquet. I also was the president of both the TeamUP Science student group/non-profit and the Canadian Blood Services Youth Committee; where I hosted events for hundreds of disadvantaged inner city youth in Edmonton and recruited over 700 blood and stem cell donors respectively. I believe I have a plethora of volunteer experience that will allow me to be a valuable member on your committee.</p> <p>Before my nursing after-degree, I completed a BSc double majoring in Biological Sciences and Psychology. Throughout my 7 years at the UofA, I have always been a strong member of my community, being involved with the WOW program, student groups, and more recently in multiple research programs. I believe that</p>

through my rich background both academically and in volunteerism, I have a solid foundation from which to fairly and responsibly support the Awards Selection Committee in making the most suitable recommendations for awards recipients this year.

- Ayrton Chilibeck (Computing Science)

Statement of Interest

I would like to serve on this committee in order to experience student governance and begin working with the elected representatives of my generation. It is a plus to be able to recognize the excellent work of graduate students around the university as well!

Bio

Currently volunteering on: Turing Society (CSGSA)

I do not have much volunteer experience coming into this role, which is something I want to change going forward.

During my high school I was the concert master of the Red Deer Royals, though to count that as volunteering might be a misnomer since I was paying to do so.

I had the opportunity from my time in the public healthcare system to see the lesser known side of service to communities. I was an IT technician, so not directly involved with patient care, but present nonetheless. I learned a great deal about what struggles people on the sides of the elected body, the public service and the public each face to get proper treatment.

This is a student body, so I don't believe the divide will be as stark, but I think my experience taught me how nuanced _every_ issue is. There are no simple solutions, likewise in choosing award recipients I can't imagine there is only one worthy candidate. From that perspective I would exercise my discretion, patience and communication skills to make the best choice given the available data.

Thank you for your consideration.

VP Academic Report

**2025-2026 Vice-President Academic
Report to GSA Council for December 2025**

To: GSA Council
From: Chen Okafor
Date: December 10 th , 2025

2025-2026 GSA VP Academic Meetings Attended (Chen Okafor)

Please find below a list of meetings I attended between November 20th to December 10th (not inclusive of weekly GSA Board meetings). The meetings were accurate at the time of printing.

Date	Meeting
November 20 th	Graduate Tuition Town Hall
November 21 st	VP Academic Walk-In Hours
November 28 th	Zoom Debrief: Presentation on Academic Governance
November 28 th	VP Academic Walk-In Hours
November 28 th	University Research Advisory Committee
November 28 th	Meeting to Discuss Funding for the Biological Sciences Department
December 1 st	GSA/IST Monthly Meeting
December 1 st	GSA FGPS Caucus
December 1 st	Digital Learning Environment Committee
December 1 st	GFC Executive Subcommittee on Governance and Procedural Oversight
December 1 st	GMeet: Graduate Student Peer Support (GSPS) Program Working Group
December 2 nd	Meeting with Kate Peters from University Governance
December 3 rd	GPS/GSA Monthly Meeting
December 3 rd	FGPS Council
December 4 th	GFC Programs Committee
December 5 th	VP Academic Walk-In Hours
December 5 th	Meeting to Discuss Supervision
December 8 th	Meeting to Discuss VP Academic Role
December 8 th	GFC Executive Committee
December 9 th	Advisory Working Group on International Student Thesis-Based Tuition Strategy
December 9 th	Meeting: Chancellor & GSA Executives
December 9 th	GSA Board Connection

Dear Council Colleagues,

It's almost the end of the semester! I hope your tests and final exams are going well. As we wrap up the year, I am finalizing my tuition proposal plan which I will be presenting to the GSA board on December 17th. I have consulted with several students already and I am using the feedback to make changes. My goal is to get this proposal in the hands of the university, whether in my term or the next. If you would like to learn more about what it is that I am proposing around tuition or have suggestions on how to make tuition more affordable for students please do not hesitate to reach out.

Though we may be nearing the year's end, I am still busy with meetings as I try to close things out for the semester. My most pertinent meetings attended related to graduate students are listed and elaborated upon below.

Graduate Tuition Town Hall (November 20th, 2025)

The GSA hosted a townhall with special guests Tracy Raivio (Vice Provost and Dean of GPS), Norma Rodenburg (Vice-Provost & Registrar) and Kathleen Brough (Chief of Staff, Provost and Vice-President Academic) who spoke about upcoming tuition rates for graduate students. Graduate students both in person and online attended and asked questions with the opportunity for follow-ups.

Zoom Debrief: Presentation on Academic Governance (November 28th, 2025)

Cheryl Foy (Canadian governance expert) did a recap of her pre-GFC (General Faculties Council) presentation on academic governance. Currently there is a GFC committee (CAG) that is looking at whether or not the size of the GFC should be reduced, which may end up affecting the number of graduate student representatives on the body.

Meeting to Discuss Funding for the Biological Sciences Department (November 28th, 2025)

I met with the BGSA (Biological Graduate Students' Association), the Associate Dean of the Department of Biological Sciences, Dr. Colleen St. Clair, and the Chair of the Dept. of Biological Sciences, Dr. Ted Allison, to talk about funding for graduate students in that department. One of the key points we touched on was moving the Department of Biological Sciences from a step 1 to a step 3 on the collective agreement pay scale. This may be something that our new AVP Labour can advocate for.

GSA FGPS Caucus (December 1st, 2025)

In this FGPS Council Pre-Meeting we talked about the expected report on graduate supervision from FGPS, recent IRCC changes, the exceptional tuition increases (ETIs) that are coming for certain programs and a host of other concerns related to FGPS Council.

GMeet: Graduate Student Peer Support (GSPS) Program Working Group (December 1st, 2025)

Currently we are discussing whether or not to restructure the GSPS program to drop-in sessions as well as regular intakes in order to attract more students. There will be a GSPS booth at the GSA Orientation on January 6th, 2026.

Meeting with Kate Peters from University Governance (December 2nd, 2025)

Kate Peters and I met to talk about the Committee on Academic Governance's (CAG's) work. CAG is a GFC committee tasked with looking at the size and composition of the GFC in order to maximize effectiveness.

GPS/GSA Monthly Meeting (December 3rd, 2025)

GSA and GPS discussed the new awards retention policy that has been instituted by the Faculty of Dentistry and Medicine. We also talked about minimum funding, the cost-of-living survey that was released by the GSA and the GSIP (Graduate Student Internship Program) advocacy being championed by President Aashish Kumar.

FGPS Council (December 3rd, 2025)

Dr. Sujata Persad (Associate Dean, FGPS) delivered a short presentation on the upcoming graduate supervision report that will be released soon. There were also recent IRCC announcements shared such as the fourteen-day turnaround for study permit application adjudications for PhD students, and the study permit cap removal for thesis based international students.

GFC Programs Committee (December 4th, 2025)

In this meeting I came to learn that the University is submitting a response to the Mintz Report on Post-Secondary Institution Funding. There are also several graduate certificate programs in the works, such as the Graduate Certificate in AI and Health, the Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Law Engagement, the Graduate Certificate in Policy Leadership and the Graduate Certificate in Business Administration.

GFC Executive Committee (December 8th, 2025)

During this meeting we discussed the work of CAG (Committee on Academic Governance) so far and the recommendations that will be brought to the GFC early next year regarding how to maximize the GFC's effectiveness.

Thanks for allowing me to deliver this report. Please reach out at gsa.vpacademic@ualberta.ca with any questions, comments or suggestions you may have.

Sincerely,
Chen Okafor
VP Academic (2025-26)

VP External Report

**2025-2026 Vice-President External
Report to GSA Council for December 2025**

To: GSA Council
From: Niloufar Mirfallah
Date: December 10, 2025

2025-2026 GSA VP External Meetings Attended (Niloufar)

Please find below a list of meetings I attended (not inclusive of weekly GSA Board meetings). The meetings were accurate at the time of printing.

Date	Meeting
Oct 16	Meet & Grill, CSJ event
Oct 16	Graduate Career Accelerator
Oct 17	AUGSA - Alberta Grad Advo Group
Oct 17	GSA Social Hour: Grad Mixer with UofA Alumni
Oct 20	CASA GAC Meeting
Oct 20	GSA Pre-Council
Oct 20	GSA Council
Oct 21	UofA GSA x Odd Bunch
Oct 22	Pre-Advoweeek Check-in
Oct 22	GSAB Meeting
Oct 23	CASA Lobby Meeting 101 Training
Oct 24	CASA Mock Meetings
Oct 27	Meeting with Tracy Raivio
Oct 28	AUGSA – Alberta Graduate Advocacy Group
Oct 29	Advisory Working Group on International Student Thesis-Based Tuition (TBT)
Oct 29	Oilers, Oil Kings and Graduate Student Association
Oct 29	Healing Circle #2
Oct 30	GAC Leadership Meeting
Oct 30	ESA Post Election Meeting
Oct 31	Associations Meeting, response to Bill 2
Oct 31	GSAB Meeting
Nov 5	Meeting with UAGSA re: GSIP
Nov 6	Career Committee Meeting 3 + Mocktails Mixology Event
Nov 10	CASA GAC Meeting

Nov 10	CASA FPC Consultation Session 1
Nov 12	UA GSA/Office of Major-Elect Andrew Knack - In-Person
Nov 15-21	CASA-Advocacy Week
Nov 24	GSA Pre-Council
Nov 24	GSA Council
Nov 25	Student Leader Expert Panel Engagement Session (virtual)
Nov 25	CoE & ESA: Student Housing Survey
Nov 26	GSAB meeting
Nov 27	Minister's Discussion with Student Leaders (UASU and GSA)
Nov 27	Wasiimah x Niloufar Touchbase
Nov 28	GSA Awards 101 - Hybrid
Dec 1	CASA GAC Meeting
Dec 2	President's Holiday Reception
Dec 4	Housing Partnership Discussion
Dec 5	Student Deal Opportunity for UofA Students - Osmow's
Dec 5	GSA/SU Monthly Board Liaison Chat
Dec 10	GSAB meeting

Meet & Grill, CSJ event

We were invited by Campus Saint-Jean to visit their campus and participate in their Meet & Grill event. During this visit, we had the opportunity to engage with students, listen to their concerns, and discuss the potential for organizing future GSA events at CSJ.

AUGSA – Alberta Grad Advo Group

On October 17, we began forming our own unofficial provincial advocacy group with the participation of graduate student associations from Athabasca University, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and the University of Alberta. During this meeting, the President of Athabasca University chaired the discussion, and we collectively decided that our quorum will consist of one representative from each institution.

The group discussed current challenges and weaknesses of abGPAC and explored ways to strengthen graduate advocacy in the province, including the possibility of hiring a part-time Executive Director to support long-term advocacy efforts. All members agreed that we should continue working together as an unofficial group for the next few months, after which we can re-evaluate whether to formalize the organization.

We also received information from Athabasca University's Executive Director regarding the progress and concerns with abGPAC, along with recommendations on how to manage the remaining transition. At present, the University of Alberta's legal team is working on the formal wrap-up of abGPAC, and our GSA Executive Director is leading this process instead of the VP External.

Finally, we selected a name for our unofficial provincial advocacy coalition: Alberta Graduate Advocacy Group (AGAG).

Grad Mixer with UofA Alumni

This event was one of the GSA's most successful initiatives in connecting graduate students with alumni.

The turnout was high, and participants appreciated the opportunity to network, receive career advice, and build professional relationships.

As VP External, I supported this event by securing sponsorship from Hi Finance, who contributed \$1,000 to help cover event costs. We also welcomed several important guests, including Chancellor Nizar Somji, President Bill Flanagan and members of the University Senate. They interacted with students throughout the event and took time to listen to student experiences and priorities.

Members of the Alumni Council were also in attendance and expressed strong support for fostering ongoing student–alumni engagement. Feedback from graduate students was overwhelmingly positive, noting that the event was both enjoyable and valuable for their professional development.

CASA GAC Meeting

We received a request from CASA's Federal Policy Committee (FPC) to arrange a joint mid-term consultation with members of the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC). The purpose of this consultation was to gather graduate student input on three federal policy files under development at the time: the skilled labour shortage, food security, and accessibility.

UofA GSA x Odd Bunch

The goal of this meeting was to explore potential collaboration with Odd Bunch for upcoming GSA events. Our VP Student Services invited the Campus Food Bank to join the meeting and help establish a connection between them and Odd Bunch, as Odd Bunch could potentially serve as a food supplier for the Food Bank, creating opportunities for collaboration between both organizations. Discussions are still ongoing, and no final decision has been made regarding the partnership.

CASA Lobby Meeting 101 Training AND CASA Mock Meetings

During these sessions, the CASA team prepared us for the upcoming lobby meetings scheduled for Advocacy Week in Ottawa.

Meeting with Tracy Raivio

I met with Tracy Raivio, Vice-Provost and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (FGPS), to follow up on concerns regarding international students who are still waiting for their visas. Some students have missed the opportunity to join the University of Alberta due to long processing delays. Dr. Raivio emphasized that the best support FGPS can offer at this time is on a case-by-case basis. She recommended that affected students contact their departmental graduate coordinators, who can then refer them to FGPS for individual support.

Another key topic in our discussion was the Graduate Student Internship Program (GSIP). I highlighted GSIP as one of the GSA's provincial advocacy priorities, and Dr. Raivio confirmed that FGPS is aligned with and supportive of advancing this initiative.

AUGSA – Alberta Graduate Advocacy Group

During this meeting, we discussed potential provincial advocacy activities, such as a coordinated advocacy week or a shared campaign. These conversations are still ongoing and no decisions have been finalized. We also agreed that, for the next meeting, each university will bring forward its top three provincial priorities to help shape our collective advocacy strategy.

Advisory Working Group on International Student Thesis-Based Tuition (TBT)

In this meeting, hosted by Dean Ravina from FGPS, we participated in a consultation regarding thesis-based tuition for international students. Several potential tuition models were presented, along with their respective pros and cons. This discussion focused on gathering feedback to inform future considerations.

Oilers, Oil Kings and Graduate Student Association

In this meeting, we discussed potential collaboration with the Edmonton Oilers and the Edmonton Oil Kings for upcoming GSA events. The discussion included possibilities such as ticket or prize sponsorships, as well as exploring opportunities to host joint events that connect student recreation with professional development. This could include workshops or networking opportunities linked to the operations behind sports organizations. Negotiations are still ongoing and no final agreement has been reached.

Healing Circle 2

All DEOs and IGSA participated in a session with Dr. Florence Glanfield, where we discussed our expectations of one another and explored ways to strengthen the relationship between IGSA and the GSA. The session provided an opportunity for open dialogue, mutual understanding, and building a more collaborative approach to supporting Indigenous graduate students.

GAC Leadership Meeting

As Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC), together with the Vice-Chair, we met with CASA's Executive Director to discuss how to ensure productive progress within GAC. The meeting focused on receiving guidance on strengthening the committee's work, improving coordination, and setting clear expectations moving forward.

ESA Post-Election Meeting

In this meeting, we discussed the ETS Transit Survey, which runs from November 10 to December 5. The survey has already received 600 responses in the first week. We emphasized the importance of maintaining this momentum to ensure strong representation from post-secondary students in the remaining weeks.

Meeting with UAGSA re: GSIP

As VP External, alongside the President of the GSA, I met with members of the Ministry of Advanced Education to endorse the University of Alberta's proposal for funding the Graduate Student Internship Program (GSIP). In this discussion, we emphasized that GSIP provides paid, research-informed internship opportunities for graduate students across disciplines, helping translate academic expertise into practical contributions for industry, government, and non-profit sectors in Alberta.

We highlighted that expanding GSIP aligns with recommendations from the provincial Mintz Panel, which called for targeted, outcomes-driven funding to support research talent and innovation. We also underscored GSIP's role in retaining highly trained graduates in Alberta's workforce. The Ministry asked for additional input and indicated they will follow up on this proposal.

Career Committee Meeting 3 + Mocktails Mixology Event

This event provided a valuable opportunity to collaborate with the UAlberta Alumni team, who shared information about the support and resources available to students after graduation through the Alumni Council. During the event, I was also able to build new connections that may support future GSA initiatives aimed at strengthening student–industry relationships and career development opportunities.

CASA GAC Meeting

In this meeting, we continued detailed discussions on our strategic work plan. Four key priorities were emphasized:

- ensuring that graduate student perspectives are fully embedded across CASA's policy and advocacy work, including policy development and advocacy campaigns,
- advocating for improved graduate student funding, such as Canada Graduate Research Grants and expanded funding opportunities for course-based students,

- increasing awareness among CASA members, their students, policymakers, and the public about the unique challenges graduate students face through targeted communications and outreach, and
- elevating the voices of international graduate students by advocating on issues such as visa processing delays, access to permanent residency pathways, and culturally competent mental health supports.

UA GSA / Office of Mayor-Elect Andrew Knack – In-Person

We met with staff from the Office of the Mayor-Elect Andrew Knack as a follow-up to our outreach. During this meeting, we presented key municipal priorities affecting graduate students, including housing and affordability, transit safety and reliability, economic participation through employment opportunities, and access to recreation supports such as the Leisure Access Program. We highlighted the contributions of more than 8,000 graduate students to Edmonton's research, innovation, and local economy, while also outlining the challenges they face. The discussion was constructive, and we are working toward securing an in-person meeting with Mayor-Elect Knack in the coming months.

CASA-Advocacy Week

During Advocacy Week, CASA's priorities for the lobby meetings were as follows:

1) Close the Socio-Economic Post-Secondary Access Gap

CASA emphasized that post-secondary education must be financially accessible to low- and middle-income students, especially those who face disproportionate barriers such as students with disabilities, Indigenous students, rural students, and those with low parental income. Rising costs of housing, food, and tuition are limiting access and pushing many students into poverty, preventing qualified Canadians from pursuing higher education. Current federal student assistance programs are capped at \$4,200 per year for grants and \$300 per week for loans—amounts that no longer reflect the cost of living and are only renewed annually, creating uncertainty for students. Increasing and stabilizing these supports is essential to maintain equity and access.

CASA Policy Recommendation

CASA calls on the government to permanently renew the program at maximums of **\$5,000 in grants annually** and **\$360 per week standard for student financial aid**, and **proportionately increase the separate limits for students with disabilities and students with dependents**.

2) Address the Skilled Labour Shortage

CASA stressed the need to expand apprenticeship opportunities to help address Canada's skilled labour shortage, especially as the country prepares for a major housing buildout. Although apprenticeships are essential for training workers in high-demand trades, completion rates remain low and many students cannot find employer sponsors. CASA pointed out that federally funded infrastructure and housing projects should directly support workforce development by requiring employers to hire apprentices. A mandatory apprenticeship requirement would create thousands of training spots without additional government spending, while helping meet housing and infrastructure goals.

CASA Policy Recommendation

CASA calls on the federal government to implement a regulatory requirement that **at least 10% of hours worked on federally funded infrastructure and housing projects be completed by registered apprentices**, with available exceptions for remote and Northern communities and for workplaces unsuitable for apprentices.

3) Ensure Global Research Competitiveness

CASA emphasized the need to protect and strengthen Canada's ability to retain top research talent. Graduate students are a fundamental part of Canada's innovation ecosystem, leading high-impact research that contributes to productivity, industry development, and national economic growth. Budget 2024 marked a historic investment by increasing Tri-Council graduate scholarship amounts for the first time in over 15 years, raising Master's funding to \$27,000 and PhD funding to \$40,000, as well as adding more awards. These changes helped lift many research-based graduate students above the poverty line. However, without yearly adjustments for inflation, the value of these scholarships will erode, putting these gains at risk and potentially driving talent out of Canada. To maintain Canada's competitiveness, funding must retain its real value over time.

CASA Policy Recommendation

CASA therefore calls on the federal government to incorporate adjustments for **CPI to the Tri-Council Agency graduate student funding programs** to maintain competitiveness for quality talent.

4) Deliver a Canada Student Housing Strategy

CASA highlighted that students are among the most affected by Canada's housing crisis, facing high rents, low vacancy rates, and limited rental protections—often paying more for housing than tuition. Nearly three-quarters of students spend 30% or more of their income on rent, and student rental costs are on average 25% higher than those of other Canadian households. High housing costs can also force students to delay or abandon their studies and place pressure on local housing markets.

To address these issues, CASA advocated for a federal student housing strategy within the Build Canada Homes program. This strategy would use federal investment to support the construction of student residences and expand non-profit and co-operative student housing, increasing affordable supply while reducing pressure on surrounding communities. The proposal includes a mix of grants and zero-interest loans that would encourage post-secondary institutions and non-profit partners to co-invest in student housing, enabling over 15,000 new affordable student beds.

CASA Policy Recommendation

CASA calls on the federal government to deliver a **Canada Student Housing Strategy through Build Canada Homes, comprising \$1 billion in grants and loans for residences and non-profit student housing.**

5) Maximize Retention of Talent by Prioritizing Canadian Education

CASA emphasized that Canada should prioritize permanent residency pathways for applicants who have already been educated and trained in Canada. With the federal government reducing permanent residency intake targets, selection must focus on candidates with the strongest evidence of long-term economic integration. Research shows that immigrants with Canadian post-secondary credentials consistently outperform foreign-trained immigrants in employment earnings and tax contributions over time. Currently, Canadian education only accounts for a small portion of Express Entry points (about 2.5% of the total score). Increasing the point value would not increase immigration numbers, but would ensure that limited spots go to candidates most likely to succeed in Canada's workforce.

CASA Policy Recommendation

CASA calls on the government of Canada to increase the maximum under this program to **60 points for a three or more year Canadian post-secondary credential, or 30 points for a one or two year Canadian post-secondary credential.**

Indigenous Students

Advocated to:

- Increase post-secondary student funding to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis education strategies by \$200 million per year, permanently.
- Dedicate \$35 million of the existing housing funding under Build Canada Homes toward the construction of student residences by post-secondary institutions.

Report and Reflections on CASA Advocacy Week

During CASA Advocacy Week in Ottawa, CASA coordinated over 100 lobbying meetings with Members of Parliament, Senators, and national stakeholders to advocate for federal student priorities. Before entering these meetings, CASA held a full-day training session to prepare delegates for the week ahead. As Vice-President External and the primary delegate representing the University of Alberta Graduate Students' Association (GSA), I was assigned to meetings with U15 Canada, as well as Senator MacAdam, Senator Farah Mohamed, and staff from Senator Yusuf's office. U15 Canada expressed strong interest in strengthening research scholarships, while the Senators showed alignment with recommendations related to apprenticeships and student housing. I also met with CAUT (Canadian Association of University Teachers) and Evidence for Democracy (E4D), where we discussed strategies to advocate for research funding and updates on their aligned priorities. In addition, I attended a meeting with MP Ziad Aboultaif (Conservative).

These discussions highlighted the importance of strong graduate representation within national advocacy. Graduate students advocated actively for our priorities throughout the week. For example, the President of the GSA at the University of Calgary was able to speak on behalf of international graduate students at a meeting with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), demonstrating how impactful it is when graduate-specific voices are present in key conversations.

At the same time, there were concerns regarding the visibility and prioritization of graduate student voices. Despite serving as Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC), I was not included in several meetings that were especially relevant to graduate students, including those involving MPs and ministers directly connected to research funding and innovation portfolios, meetings where graduate advocacy could have had a strong impact.

After observing inconsistent representation and limited accountability regarding GAC involvement, I communicated my concerns to CASA leadership. Following reflection, I decided to step down from my role as Chair of the GAC. I will continue as a voting member to stay engaged and keep pushing forward for graduate students, while allowing me to focus more on provincial and municipal advocacy, where I can have a more direct role in advancing graduate priorities.

Student Leader Expert Panel Engagement Session (virtual)

Deputy Minister's Presentation – Overview of the Expert Panel

The DM explained the purpose of the presentation:

- provide background on how the panel was established;
- describe the process used to gather information;
- walk through the key recommendations; and invite feedback and questions from student leaders.

The DM highlighted that:

- Public funding is mostly based on past decisions which makes long-term planning challenging.
- The system is under pressure from rapid enrolment growth, particularly domestically.
- Recent federal policies on international students poses a challenge for institutions to raise revenue.

These issues led the Panel to recommend a new funding model to increase transparency and predictability and better support Alberta's post-secondary system.

Expert Panel Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – New Funding Model

The DM outlined the Panel's proposed funding model with three components:

1. Enrolment-Based Funding with programs that would be organized into clusters, based on program cost, labour-market demand, government priority, and student return on investment. Government would subsidize seats in higher-priority/higher-cost clusters at a higher rate than those in lower-cost/lower-demand clusters.
2. Performance-Based Funding intended to reward excellence in teaching and student experience, research, and community impact
3. Base Operating Funding to cover staffing and administration, facilities and infrastructure, IT and student services, and other core operating costs.

Recommendation 2 – Targeted, Time-Limited Funding

The DM reported that the Panel recommended separate, targeted, time-limited funding for three areas:

- attracting top research talent
- supporting innovation and technology development
- providing incentives and support for institutional collaboration

Recommendation 3 – Apprenticeship & Skills Trades

The DM emphasized the Panel's recognition of the importance of trades and apprenticeship:

- Apprenticeship should remain a priority for provincial funding.
- Base grants should reflect the higher overhead associated with many trades programs.
- Program performance and outcomes should be evaluated and rewarded.
- Apprenticeship funding should reflect actual program costs, and with early commitments to help institutions plan.

Recommendation 4 – Capital, IT & Deferred Maintenance

The DM summarized recommendations on capital and IT:

- Major IT replacements and new IT systems should be funded via dedicated capital/IT envelopes, not simply absorbed into operating grants.

- Funding for deferred maintenance should be allocated on a three-year basis to allow longer-term planning, while acknowledging that adjustments may be required in years two and three.

Recommendation 5 – Tuition Model

The DM highlighted that the Panel heard strong concerns from students about affordability and tuition stability.

Panel recommendation:

- Replace the annual 2% cap with a program-based model where:
 - Institutions could increase tuition by more than 2% for incoming first-year students, up to a maximum set by government, linked to the program cluster.
 - After the first year, any tuition increases for that student would be capped at 2% per year for the duration of their program.

Intended outcomes:

- provide institutions with additional flexibility to address rising costs
- offer students predictability across the life of their program

Recommendation 6 – Student Financial Aid

The DM noted the Panel’s recommendation that the government should increase non-repayable student assistance (e.g., grants) to reduce reliance on student loans and overall student debt.

Recommendations 7–11 – Autonomy, Red Tape, Approvals, Neutrality

The DM reviewed the remaining recommendations:

- Recommendation 7 (International Students):
 - advocate with other provinces to the federal government on international student regulations.
 - promote Alberta’s PSIs internationally to mitigate reputational impacts of recent federal policy changes.
- Recommendation 8 (Institutional Autonomy):
 - recognize that public PSIs are part of the province’s financial statements, reflecting government’s oversight (board appointments, deficits approval, etc.).
 - review current rules to find where giving institutions more autonomy could help them be more sustainable and efficient, particularly in revenue generation and cutting costs.
- Recommendation 9 (Red Tape & Administrative Burden):
 - reduce the number and frequency of reporting requirements from Advanced Education and other ministries.
- Recommendation 10 (New Program Approvals):
 - streamline and accelerate approval processes, especially for programs aligned with high labour-market demand.
- Recommendation 11 (Institutional Neutrality & Freedom of Expression):
 - ensure all public PSIs recommit to institutional neutrality and uphold The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Alberta Human Rights Act and freedom of expression and intellectual diversity.

QA part: The student leader asked whether exceptional tuition increases (ETIs) would continue under the new tuition framework and, if so, whether the process would change. The Deputy Minister responded that this is still undecided. The Expert Panel did not specifically address ETIs, so the ministry must determine whether ETIs are still needed and how they would fit within any new tuition caps or program clusters. This remains an open design question awaiting final decisions on the new model.

CoE & ESA: Student Housing Survey

Edmonton surveyed 1,573 post-secondary students (Aug–Oct 2025) to understand their housing challenges, satisfaction, and needs. Students came from all major institutions, with U of A forming the largest group.

The survey explored where students live, how satisfied they are, and what barriers they face, including affordability issues, housing scams, and trade-offs like long commutes or unsafe living conditions.

Discussion groups with international, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, student parents, and students with disabilities revealed deeper challenges and highlighted gaps in safety, affordability, and accessible housing information.

Students proposed five key solutions:

1. a verified housing/landlord platform,
2. student roommate-matching services,
3. landlord education (especially regarding international students),
4. a centralized housing information hub, and
5. short-term or transitional housing options.

Next steps include meeting with institutions, drafting a student housing needs report, and incorporating these findings into the Edmonton Housing Needs Assessment. I also suggested that they present our GSA Cost of Living Survey to City Council, since we had 1,026 graduate students from the University of Alberta participate, which would give the City a clearer understanding of graduate student housing needs.

Minister's Discussion with Student Leaders (UASU and GSA)

We met with The Honourable Myles McDougall, Alberta's Minister of Advanced Education, during his first official visit to the University of Alberta. In this short time, we shared some of our priorities, including the need for increased operational funding, stronger supports for graduate students, and expanded internship pathways such as the Graduate Student Internship Program (GSIP).

The GSA also reached out to the Minister's office to express concerns about Exceptional Tuition Increases (ETIs) and their impact on students and the post-secondary system.

Key points raised:

- ETIs conflict with the government's shift away from traditional EDI frameworks, since many proposals use ETI revenue for EDI hiring and supports.
- ETIs are being used to fund classroom technology and infrastructure, which should be covered by government funding (as recommended by the Mintz Panel), not permanently downloaded onto small groups of students.
- ETIs affect very small cohorts while creating high administrative burden and concentrated affordability pressure.
- Allowing ETIs based on inflation arguments would undermine the 2% tuition cap and create system-wide pressure for large increases.
- Comparisons to the University of Calgary are misleading because UCalgary provides significantly higher graduate funding and has not pursued ETIs.
- In thesis-based programs, higher tuition does not improve program quality and instead reduces student support and competitiveness, particularly for international students.

GSA recommendation to the Minister:

- A temporary pause on ETIs until policy alignment (especially on EDI and infrastructure funding) is clarified; or
- Strict limits on ETIs, ensuring they provide direct and measurable benefit to the students paying them; and
- Directing institutions to follow the Mintz Panel, using government capital funding—not student tuition—to cover technology and infrastructure costs.

Wasiimah x Niloufar Touchbase

In this meeting, I met with the Executive Director of CASA and discussed several concerns in my role as VP External and former Chair of the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC). We talked about the importance of accountability during CASA's Advocacy Week and ensuring that graduate student priorities are clearly represented throughout the process.

GSA Awards 101

In this meeting, the committee met to get to know one another, and I introduced all of the awards offered by the GSA, including the new Indigenous Award added this year. We also discussed the training process for adjudication and reviewed the expected workload for the upcoming cycle.

CASA GAC Meeting

In this meeting, we discussed our expectations for Advocacy Week and emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum afterward. We specifically requested that once Advocacy Week concludes, CASA continue the outreach by arranging follow-up meetings between the GAC and any interested MPs, Senators, or stakeholders to ensure they have dedicated time to hear graduate student priorities.

GSA/SU Monthly Board Liaison Chat

In this meeting with the VP External of the Students' Union, we discussed potential collaboration on the LAP initiative planned for January. I also raised our concerns regarding CASA in my capacity as a Board Director, ensuring alignment and shared understanding between both student associations.

VP Indigenous Relations Report

**2025-2026 Vice-President Indigenous Relations
Report to GSA Council for December 2025**

To: GSA Council
From: Tamara Dubé
Date: December 10, 2025

Dear Council Colleagues,

As we head into the break, I want to extend my warmest wishes to all graduate students at the University of Alberta. While this term has brought its challenges, we did successfully launch two new Indigenous awards, which have already been receiving nominations, and I'm looking forward to getting important work underway at our January Council meeting. For now, I hope you're able to rest, recharge, and take care of yourselves as you study, research, write, and contribute in all the incredible ways you do. Wishing you a peaceful, restorative holiday season, and I look forward to continuing our work together in the new year.

Warmest wishes for the holiday season,
Tamara Dubé (Vice President Indigenous Relations 2025-26)

VP Student Services Report

**2025-2026 VP Student Services
Report to GSA Council for the November 2025 Meeting**

To: GSA Council
From: Saad A. Iqbal
Date: December 12, 2025

2024-2025 GSA VP Student Services Meetings Attended by Saad A. Iqbal
Below is a list of meetings I attended from November 21, 2025, to December 12, 2025 (excluding weekly GSA Board meetings). The

meetings were accurate at the time of printing.

Date	Meeting
November 21	World Hello Day Event (Rutherford Library)
November 25	Health & Dental Plan Discussion (Internal)
November 26	GSA/Studywell Weekly Updates
November 26	GSA Social Hour (World Hello Day)
November 27	GSA Know Your Services Tabling (ETLC)
November 28	GSA Awards 101
December 2	Health & Dental Plan Survey Discussion (Internal)
December 2	GSA/SSE Accessibility & Accommodations Office (H&D Plan Improvements)
December 3	GSA/Studywell Weekly Updates
December 4	GSA/BFC/Auditor Meeting (Internal)
December 4	Health & Dental Plan Town Hall (Online)
December 5	Student Group Mental Health Network Meeting
December 5	CFB Co-Chairs and ED Meeting
December 8	Student Parent Working Group Meeting
December 8	CFB Board Generative Discussion Meeting
December 9	Kevin/Saad Meeting
December 9	GSA Executives and the Chancellor Meeting
December 9	GSA Board Connection with SSE and FGPS
December 10	GSA/Studywell Weekly Updates

December 10	GSA/SSE Accessibility & Accommodations Office/FGPS (H&D Plan Improvements)
December 11	GSA Health & Dental Plan Discussion with graduate students (confidential)
December 12	GSA Awards 101 Info Session

Dear Members of the GSA Council,

I hope you're all doing well in your academic, professional, and personal pursuits. Below are the details of the meetings I have attended between November 21, 2025 and December 12, 2025:

Engagement Events

During this reporting period, a highlight of my engagement events was participating in the World Hello Day programming. The VPSL, Hazel, VPA, Chen, and I volunteered our time at the World Hello Day event at Rutherford Library. It was a well-attended event with fun activities and opportunities to talk about the importance of making connections on campus and the positive impact of staying in touch with peers and campus community members. Following the WHD programming, the GSA partnered with the Days of Action, CCR, and ASSET to organize the GSA social hour based on the WHD theme. This was also a well-attended event, allowing graduate students the opportunity to connect with student leaders and peers across campus over mocktails, snacks, drawing, and social activities planned for the day. Over the years, the GSA's involvement in the Days of Action Programming has been a valuable experience, and we will continue to support all activities organized by the Wellness Supports.

GSA Health & Plan

Regarding the GSA H&D Plan, I have held several discussions, both internally and externally, to understand its scope better and gather feedback from graduate students. In addition to addressing concerns with Studywell, we have also held meetings with the FGPS and the Accessibility & Accommodations offices to streamline the daily processes related to the plan. Studywell continues to hold joint meetings with us to improve processes and address the areas for improvement identified by students, the GSA, university offices, and Studywell.

To provide graduate students with an opportunity to ask questions and share their feedback with the GSA and Studywell, we also held a Hybrid Town Hall this month. The town hall was attended by several members, where they had the opportunity to ask questions for clarification and share their experiences. To gain better insights for the GSA, we have also recently launched the GSA H&D Plan Survey. The survey aims to gain a detailed understanding of which areas members view positively and which need improvement. We have received a good number of responses and are continuing to monitor them.

While the survey remains open for responses, I would request all Councilors to kindly share the survey [LINK](#) with their constituents and encourage them to complete it. The survey analysis will significantly

help the GSA prioritize areas for improvement and make better, more informed decisions about the plan's coverage.

GSA Recognition Awards

As Vice Chair of the Awards and Selection Committee, I have been assisting VPE Niloufar with the GSA Awards 101 info sessions and other award adjudication discussions. The Grants Coordinator organized the info sessions. Niloufar and I have also discussed some suggestions for the Awards Selection Committee to consider for next year's adjudication process.

Applications for the GSA Recognition Awards opened on December 1 and will close on January 11, 2026. This is the [LINK](#) to apply for these awards. There are seven categories in which applicants can apply. While most categories are for graduate students, some awards are also adjudicated to academic and non-academic staff, and one is for a graduate student group. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the VPIR, Tamara, who worked on reinstating the *Indigenous Student Graduate Award* and piloting a new non-monetary *Reconciliation in Action Award* for UofA staff or faculty (these awards have different nomination and adjudication processes, whose details are shared on the website).

Meeting with Kevin Friese

Kevin and I discussed regular focus items for the GSA and the SSE. The Graduate Student Peer Support Program has finally launched, and clients have already begun using the network. Over time, we aim to improve engagement among graduate students in the program. We also talked about the Graduate Student Mental Health Photo Contest. Details of the contest will be shared soon. The SSE is considering creating a '*Recovery on Campus Coordinator*' position, potentially starting in February next year. The SSE is also working on creating a network for students' mental health needs based on the navigation networks and models of sexual and gender-based violence. I will share more updates in the subsequent sessions.

Meeting with the Chancellor

A few members of the Executive Board also met with our Chancellor, Nizar Somji, this month. We discussed various areas of focus for the GSA and exchanged thoughts on how to improve learning and professional opportunities for graduate students. One of the key topics was advocacy concerning the funding cuts to the six affiliated day care centers. With the funding cut set for next year, the Chancellor has expressed interest in finding better solutions to address the financial shortfall. More details about this will be discussed at the start of the new year.

Best Regards,

Saad Arslan Iqbal

GSA VP Student Services (2025-26)

Please email me at gsavpsse@ualberta.ca if you have any questions, concerns, suggestions, or feedback related to my portfolio or the initiatives.

GSA Management Report

**GSA Management
Report to GSA Council for December 2025 Reports**

To: GSA Council
From: Eric Derksen
Date: December 2025

Council Management Report
December 10, 2025

Dear Council:

The staff and management are encouraged by the response of GSA members to apply for open positions on Council and on Standing Committees. Elections have filled many vacancies - only the Deputy Returning Officer and remaining ASC vacancies are yet to be organized.

By the time you read this the AVPL By-Election will be complete and preparations for the General Election in February are underway. The Discover Governance series has been booked to encourage nominations and inform candidates regarding role responsibilities through January, with ERC volunteers to sign up to spread awareness.

The Health and Dental Plan Survey was finalized and was released in the December 1 newsletter. The Engagement & Events Feedback Survey is being finalized and is also scheduled for release before the end of the year. GSA Recognition Awards nominations and applications are now open, with full details available on the GSA website. The Cost of Living Survey results have been published. Winter Warm Up planning is being finalized. The Info Fair is scheduled on Jan 6, from 10 am to 3 pm at University Commons Atrium.

The GSA management is assessing options to host our own email domain. More information will be presented to the Board and Council in the new year. This will give GSA sovereignty over the domain, email and storage platform it will engage. While we are thankful for the use of the University of Alberta domain and storage, the GSA has run into storage challenges, and in addition to increasing this capacity, should retain control and ownership of its own domain, email accounts, lists and carefully monitor usage. GSA is developing an independent IT Policy to which all users of GSA domains will adhere. This IT policy is prepared with reference to similar on-campus groups. The movement to an independent and self-controlled platform falls in line with other campus groups.

The GSA is also developing, in conjunction with a larger operating policy framework, including but not limited to the IT policy, a Human Resources Manual. This manual makes reference to the Code of Conduct currently being developed and the latter is in for legal review. The Human Resources Manual will also be submitted for third party review and will guide Human Resourcing.

The GSA prepared and advanced the EFT remittance to the IGSA for the reallocation of the unpaid VPIR stipend. Our apologies for the time this took to resolve but we are thankful we could partner with IGSA in support of FNMI students.

Management continues to encourage DEO's to focus on SWP initiatives, engagements, and upcoming plans. The Board should also develop the practice of advocating for the other DEO's. This happens by being informed of their SWP initiatives, and by each DEO bringing to the Board communications, surveys, and issues that are refined and evaluated by the board as a whole. Our concern is that, while the Board should be one voice, it is often a disparate group of differing and often dissenting voices within itself. This is not at all the tone or function of a board.

Board and Council meetings should contain robust, and at times oppositional but professional conversations, but when the Board or Council votes on an issue, it is to be owned by the whole Board and Council and members should refrain from using any disagreements for a political motive. We may hold views that are not aligned; they may even be opposite views (on the Board and Council), but we are never adversaries. I encourage us to disabuse ourselves of seeing each other in an adversarial light. We are all committed to respect and professionalism.

The desire for effective and efficient Council function, procedures and operations are motivating management to consider necessary (proposed) changes and adaptations to facilitate improvements. This includes present procedures, policy and by-law considerations, and meeting management that adheres to good policy governance, effective reporting, standing committee reporting to the council, and due process.

Within 2 weeks of starting this role in September, GSA had only one person (the ED) in management. It is very evident that the two subsequent hires to the management team have been and are stellar and through the strength and balance, the skills and expertise they bring, they strengthen the GSA as a whole. I also recognize the excellent staff that serve on the administration team. They bring positivity, wisdom, and skill to their role and the GSA should be extremely grateful for them.

Finally, as a management team we are grateful for your service to the GSA. We all serve the membership of the GSA and our PSLA mandate. In these two purposes we find sufficient reason to lay aside personal and political motives and agendas to come together for the common good, each one bringing their own skills, perspective and even personalities. So thank you for your contributions.

From the GSA staff and management, the best of the holidays to you, and if you celebrate it, a very Merry Christmas. Have a very good 2026!

Sincerely,

Eric Derksen
Executive Director