

GSA Strategic Plan 2012-13 For Circulation (Dec 2012)(received by GSA Council on October 15, 2012; minor editorial amendments made by the GSA Board on October 24, 2012 and November 28, 2012 (this addition was further reviewed by the GSA Board on December 19, 2012))

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (GSA) STRATEGIC WORK PLAN: 2012-13

Note: The GSA sees this as a living document, constantly shifting directions as the U of A landscape unfolds and changes.

VISION: The GSA envisions an engaging environment that is supportive, healthy, accessible, and inclusive, thus empowering the graduate student community to be agents of change in all endeavours, academic and otherwise, both during their time here and beyond.

MISSION (working draft):

1. **Advocate for comprehensive, timely, and excellent supports within the university governance system and with government.** The GSA is a vigilant voice for stewardship of the graduate student experience with regard to funding, housing, and services. As graduate enrollment increases, we believe these key infrastructure pieces should be in place *before* new graduate students register and that attention must be paid to the career opportunities and professional development of graduate students.
2. **Negotiate a fair collective agreement that supports graduate students who are employed by the University.**
 - i. *We ensure that employed graduate students are fairly compensated for their work, while also ensuring that such work does not place graduate students at a disadvantage during their studies.*
 - ii. *We ensure that employed graduate students' work environments are safe, free from harassment, discrimination and bullying, and foster a culture of workplace wellness.*
 - iii. *We advocate for "sustainable funding": that through strategic investments and reallocation of central funding, ALL graduate students who are otherwise without funding will have access to enriching graduate student employment to the benefit of the graduate student and the University.*
3. **Foster student engagement.** The GSA believes student engagement occurs from the time a student asks for information about applying for graduate studies through the end-point of convocation. We support continuing student engagement through involvement in governance, networks anchored in residence life, professional development and soft skills opportunities, and in social settings where friendships and research collaboration can occur.
4. **Support academic endeavours of graduate students.** The GSA supports and encourages an empowering environment for graduate students to thrive in their various academic and research endeavours. This entails creating avenues for students to present their research to the larger academic community in and out of the U of A, ensuring a good relationship between graduate students and their supervisor(s), and rewarding deserving students for excellence in academic work and research.

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Strategic Initiative/Focus and Link with PSLA or CIP (which incorporates Dare to Deliver 2011-15)

STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP	APPROACHES/STRATEGIES
1. INTERFACE WITH UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE	
<p>Intensive, integrated advocacy for and representation of graduate student issues.</p>	<p>Develop messages; deliver consistently and professionally.</p> <p>Maintain relationship with President, Provost’s Office and other Vice-Presidents, Board, Governance, Senate, Alumni Association, service providers, and other key partners.</p> <p>Approach Governance, committee chairs, Council on Student Affairs (COSA) to discuss issues the GSA would like to include in GFC committees’ work plans, including day care.</p> <p>Evaluate the GSA’s services for international graduate students in light of the University’s goal of having “an international graduate enrolment target of 30%....” CIP Intro, 1.2.</p> <p>Work with other associations on items of mutual interest.</p>
2. REPUTATION	
<p>The GSA has a responsibility to ensure that the GSA maintains an excellent reputation over time.</p>	<p>Maintain a culture of respect and tolerance in the GSA office and in all dealings with the University community.</p> <p>All Elected Officials, Management, and Staff of the GSA will maintain a high level of professionalism.</p> <p>Review our progress as part of yearly strategic planning. Commit to the process of strategic planning, regular follow through on the goals and tasks, and regular reporting to Council.</p> <p>Proactive search for talent (e.g. Elected Officials, committee members) will be ongoing.</p>
STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP	APPROACHES/STRATEGIES

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PSLA or CIP	
3. TUITION: Responsibility linked to PSLA	
Prepare for tuition debate.	<p>Arrange internal meetings to craft GSA position, including the GSA's view on sustainability.</p> <p>Maintain a relationship with the Students' Union with regard to tuition.</p>
4. NEGOTIATIONS AND RELATED ISSUES: Responsibility linked to PSLA	
<p>Discuss with the Provost's Office the related issues that were identified during 2010-11 negotiations, including education and compliance re Collective Agreement (CA); dispute resolution; graduate student completion time (see CA 9.3.2); graduate student funding globally; structural issues that lead to excessive use of resources (perhaps to be discussed by the Graduate Funding Task Force); international students; various wordings that need to be refined.</p>	<p>Arrange internal meetings to craft GSA position and then meet with Provost's Office.</p> <p>Discuss with LRC and Negotiating Committee prior to negotiations with the University. LRC will act as a "think tank" for Collective Agreement negotiations.</p> <p>Pilot a Labour Liaison/Departmental Liaison program.</p>
5. WORKLOADS OF GSA ELECTED OFFICIALS – The GSA regards this as a risk; i.e. reluctance to run for office because of academic workloads and/or non-support from supervisors. In order for graduate students to participate in collegial governance as elected officials, some flexibility is needed with regard to their academic workloads. Support and understanding of supervisors is also needed.	
A. Negotiate direct relief from academic work during elected terms, e.g. one-year leave, and require that a thesis-based elected official is not responsible to her/his supervisor, but rather only to the Dean of FGSR (clock stops once you are elected).	<p>Develop strategies and supports in collaboration with outgoing and incoming elected officials.</p> <p>Develop and review a proposal on Recognition and Relief for GSA Elected Officials.</p>

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<p>B. Enhance attractiveness of taking on GSA elected positions.</p>	<p>Early call for nominations and training program.</p> <p>Optimal division of labour between elected officials and management/staff so elected officials are well-supported.</p>
<p>6. INCREASED NUMBERS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS: CIP Strategy 1.4 – note that the increased number of graduate students reverberates throughout each chapter of the CIP, e.g. the 3.1 table in the budget chapter</p>	
<p>Partner with Administration to advance the goal of the CIP, Access Strategy 1.4, to differentially “recruit and increase graduate student enrolment” until a 1:3 ratio of graduate to undergraduate students is reached.</p> <p>NOTE ALSO ACCESS STRATEGY 16.5 – “Reallocation of existing FLEs to graduate programs.”</p> <p>Seek more information about the \$3M funding “envelope” request related to international students (CIP ref 8.2 Resource Implications: Access “Enriched Student Experience” and table titled “International Student Proportion.”</p>	<p>Continue to press for infrastructure to be in place prior to admission of an increasing number of graduate students.</p> <p>Work to ensure that attention is paid to the career opportunities open to graduate students and to issues of professional development.</p> <p>Work continuously to identify gaps in infrastructure and opportunities to improve.</p> <p>The GSA has read in CIP how FLEs will be reallocated and wishes to ensure that as grad numbers are increased, the right supports are in place (e.g. writing and language supports, especially for international students).</p> <p>The GSA believes that insufficient supports are in place for international graduate students. Top two supports needed are: the courses and one-on-one support offered by the Writing Resources Centre; and cultural and dietary understanding on the part of the receiving institution (the U of A).</p>

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7. GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING TASK FORCE	
The CIP (Exec Summary 1.5, Access Strategy 2.3, Access Goal 3 and Chapter 8) identifies graduate student funding as a key issue.	The GSA will participate vigorously in the ongoing Graduate Student Funding Task Force.
8. GRADUATE STUDENT SUPERVISION TASK FORCE	
Strong, healthy supervisory relationships advance the CIP goal of attracting and retaining top graduate students.	<p>The GSA will participate vigorously in the new Graduate Student Supervision Task Force (GSS), a joint initiative of the Provost, FGSR and the GSA.</p> <p>The GSA will raise with GSS some of the problems we are aware of with regard to supervisory relationships. We will also ask that Student Ombudservice (SOS) share their views about supervisory relationships with the Task Force as it is the SOS that deals with these matters directly.</p> <p>Continue discussions with Administration about the labour-related issues brought to the GSA, especially those that concern supervisory relationships and compliance with the Collective Agreement. We wish to note that a number of departments are in non-compliance with the CA. We believe that Administration should take the lead here, not the GSA.</p> <p>Continue conversations with FGSR about facilitated access to the associate deans when students come to our front desk in immediate crisis mode. Without immediate access, our recourse is to involve our lawyers – not our first choice.</p> <p>The GSA notes that while undergraduate teaching is rated through the standardized USRI, there is no standardized method for graduate students to meaningfully provide feedback on supervisory relationships/learning.</p>

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STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP	APPROACHES/STRATEGIES
9. STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
<p>THE GSA WOULD LIKE TO NOTE THAT HEALTHY/PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES, ARE KEY TO THIS GOAL.</p> <p>We note that in CIP 5.4 Access Plan, it is stated that “between 2004-05 and 2009-10, we increased graduate student enrollment by 34%.”</p> <p>CIP Access Strategy 1.5: scholarship funds, orientation, mentoring for grad advisors, counselling and ombuds support, “appealing” housing, professional development.</p> <p>The GSA defines “engagement” and “experiences” as follows:</p> <p>Engagement: intellectual, personal and pre-professional involvements that are enriching, rewarding, milestones in maturity, and marked by learning, testing, personal development, success, and sometimes failure.</p> <p>Experience: Did I feel welcomed from day one? What are my lodgings like? Are there healthy and culturally appropriate food options on campus? Is my office adequate? Is my supervisor supportive and knowledgeable about the Collective Agreement? Am I succeeding in my program and academic employment? Have I made friends? Do I know where to go for help?</p>	

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<p>9A. Continued focus on orientation as one of the first contacts with the University for admitted students.</p>	<p>Continue to ensure hard funding from the Dean of Students for fall and winter (“universal”) orientation, and for departmental orientations, continues.</p> <p>Collaborate and proactively plan Orientations for all Departments, not just those who ask.</p> <p>Work with GSA service providers to have videos prepared to deliver at departmental orientations (group insurance and the Health and Dental plan).</p> <p>Try again to have One Card and U-Pass registration right at the point of orientation so that graduate students do not have to wait in line with thousands of undergraduates.</p> <p>Explore ways to connect with new aboriginal graduate students.</p> <p>Continue to connect/collaborate with International Centre Orientations.</p> <p>Continue distribution of \$25K from Provost to foster academically-related student group activities.</p> <p>Continue to work with University Administration, Students’ Union, and University Health and Wellness on issues and initiatives related to improving mental health on campus.</p>

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<p>9B. Ramp up work on student groups and departmental GSAs. (Review begun in November 2010).</p>	<p>Continue to work with GPAC and individual departments.</p> <p>Collaborate with Office of the Dean of Students and Student Group Services to develop goals and strategies for Graduate Student Group support and interaction.</p>
<p>9C. Rationalize services offered to graduate students.</p> <p>CIP Access Goal 2.1: “reorganize student services to maximize support for students on campus.”</p>	<p>Review FGSR’s handout listing all services.</p> <p>Assess services for PGMEs.</p> <p>Participate in the Administration’s ongoing mental health review.</p> <p>Meet with Provost, FGSR Dean and Dean of Students to gain better understanding of the review process.</p>

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<p>STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP</p>	<p>APPROACHES/STRATEGIES</p>
<p>9D. Lobby for increased support for Writing Resources at the Academic Support/Student Success Centre in relation to specific needs of graduate students (e.g. grant writing, thesis writing). Also see Access Goal 10: support programs to increase retention and completion rates. CIP ACCESS STRATEGY 10.2: states, “continue to support Student Services and the Writing Centres,” but does not mention the one writing centre that grad students have rated highly -- Writing Resources. Note that Access Strategy 10.2 refers back to Access Goal 2, but Access Goal 2 also does not mention the Writing Centre located in ASC. We applaud the statement in Access Goal 2 that services should be based on “students’ needs and wants.” HERE WE ARE EXPRESSING GRADUATE STUDENTS’ NEEDS AND WANTS.</p>	<p>Increased support for this Centre is one of the GSA’s top priorities. From our review of the Centre, the GSA feels that there should be two permanent full-time positions with at least a 1FTE devoted to graduate student support.</p>

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<p>E. Lobby for increased support for CAPS in relation to specific needs of graduate students (especially jobs).</p>	
<p>F. Continue answering questions from undergraduates who come to our office for advice about graduate studies.</p>	
<p>STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP</p>	<p>APPROACHES/STRATEGIES</p>
<p>10. ATTRIBUTES AND COMPETENCIES: CIP Access Strategy 5.5 Skills, attributes, attitudes, values, and competencies</p>	
<p>The GSA knows that some 60% of the grad student population will work in industry. The GSA will keep a watchful eye on how the University proceeds in defining attributes and competencies related to graduate students.</p>	<p>Recognizing that the majority of graduate students will not enter academe, the GSA will explore collaboration with external groups to develop linkages and improve communication between students and industry.</p>
<p>11. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: CIP Access Goal 6: Ensure a high level of teaching quality</p>	
<p>Access Strategy 6.1: Professional development for all instructors through CTL and FGSR.</p> <p>Access Strategy 6.2 Recognize teaching.</p> <p>Access Strategy 6.3 Assessments and Grading Practices.</p>	<p>AEGS/PDG funding is important for graduate students.</p> <p>Letting grad students know about PD opportunities is now coordinated with FGSR.</p> <p>Support and recognize the contribution of graduate student teaching to the learning environment on campus.</p>

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<p>12. LEARNING SPACES: CIP Access Goal 7 is “to ensure the development and maintenance of quality formal and informal learning space.” Space of many kinds, as described in the introduction to the Plan, is key for graduate students. Note CIP table 9.5.3</p>	
<p>A. Negotiate for student engagement space in the Power Plant in accord with the provisions in the 2010 MOU between the GSA and the University.</p>	<p>Ensure in all localized F&O planning processes, high quality graduate student office space is included.</p> <p>Turn Dewey’s into “quality space.”</p> <p>Lobby for decant, in-fill, and other space, as available, for use by graduate students and others for the purposes of collaboration, sharing ideas and meeting informally.</p> <p>Continue work on PAW and on fit-out of graduate student space.</p> <p>Lobby for increased office space for graduate students.</p> <p>Ask Administration for their plans regarding daycare. We note that daycare is referred to several times in the capital plan chapter of the CIP. A demographic study of graduate student daycare needs is necessary. At the GSA, we continually see the daycare needs of graduate students who apply for Child Care Subsidies.</p>
<p>B. Ask to be actively included in any</p>	

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<p>discussion about pre-design where graduate students may be affected (ref Cap Plan chapter, 6.3.4).</p>	
<p>STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP</p>	<p>APPROACHES/STRATEGIES</p>
<p>13. GRADUATE STUDENT HOUSING: CIP has various references including Access Strategy 7.2, 6.5.2 (table)</p>	
<p>A. Michener Park requires attention. Ref CIP Table 6.2 “Highest Preservation Priorities.”</p> <p>B. Stay informed about the 500-700 spaces planned for graduate students on 89th avenue: ref same table as above, “Student Housing – East Campus Village.”</p> <p>C. Status of amenities building in ECV?</p> <p>D. Continue to lobby for accessible graduate student housing.</p>	<p>Ensure Administration knows we’ve had complaints.</p> <p>We would like to note that the 89th avenue development was intensively fast-tracked. We appreciated the earliest possible notice that this project was going ahead, but it was very limiting in terms of our input into design.</p> <p>Research original plan.</p>

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14. UNIT REVIEWS: CIP Access Strategy 5.1 addresses unit review	
Prepare well in advance for unit reviews.	The GSA requests that the Provost advise us about the timetable for these reviews so that we can provide informal input on the process.
STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP	APPROACHES/STRATEGIES
15. UNIT REVIEWS: CIP Access Strategy 5.1 addresses unit review	
Understanding graduate student demographics is fundamental to lobbying.	<p>In moving forward with a large number of CIP goals, the GSA believes that a demographic study of graduate students should occur in 2012-2013 and subsequently every three years.</p> <p>Such a study would have a significant and informative effect on planning for such matters as orientation, student housing, and academic supports (<i>e.g.</i> writing and English-language supports) and non-academic supports (daycare; grad student family supports, and accommodation regarding dietary issues).</p> <p>Practicalities include: how can the University plan grad student housing without knowing who has/intends to have family responsibilities over a 6-year PhD? Or who has dietary/budgetary restrictions that mean grad students need their own kitchen in order to cook for themselves?</p>
16. INTERNAL/EFFECTIVE GSA	

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<p>Aim for the U of A GSA to be the best managed in Canada.</p>	<p>Proceed with 2010 recommendations of consultant, <i>e.g.</i> continue to rebuild infrastructure, review all bylaw, policy, committees, and processes.</p>
<p>17. INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS</p>	
	<p>Evaluate the GSA’s services for international graduate students in light of the University’s goal of having “an international graduate enrolment target of 30%....” CIP Intro, 1.2.</p> <p>As per section 6 above, the GSA believes that insufficient supports are in place for international graduate students. Top two supports needed are: the courses and one-on-one support offered by the Writing Resources Centre; and cultural and dietary understanding on the part of the receiving institution (the U of A).</p>
<p>STRATEGIC GOALS/FOCUS and Link with PSLA or CIP</p>	<p>APPROACHES/STRATEGIES</p>
<p>18. ADVOCACY</p>	
<p>A. Work with the Alberta Graduate Council (AGC) to strengthen its infrastructure and governance. Continue participation and support.</p> <p>B. Of the national and regional student organizations, focus on participation in GG13/GU15 and the Western Canadian GSA Summit.</p> <p>C. Investigate membership in external</p>	<p>Meet with AGC representatives.</p> <p>Try to attend Western Deans conference in 2013.</p> <p>Attend CAGS.</p> <p>Consider requesting information from groups such as CASA and CFS and investigate the possibility of inviting</p>

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lobbying organizations.	representatives to speak to the GSA Board and possibly Council.
D. Work with departmental GSAs on key strategic issues for graduate students	Coordinate with departmental GSAs and develop strong working relationships.

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