

## UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (GSA) BOARD STRATEGIC WORK PLAN: 2013-14

**Note:** The GSA sees this as a living document, constantly shifting directions as the provincial budget, opening of the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, and the U of A landscape all unfold and change.

**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:

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. **Ensure compliance with the 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 defines engagement as intellectual, personal and pre-professional involvements that are enriching, rewarding, milestones in maturity, and marked by learning, testing, personal development, success, and sometimes failure. 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 opportunities for the development of "soft"/management skills, 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, professional programs, 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 GOALS/FOCUS (links to CIP to be inserted when approved)	STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES
<b>1. REPUTATION</b>	
<p>The GSA has a responsibility to ensure that the GSA maintains an <b>excellent reputation over time</b>.</p> <p>The GSA aims to <b>reduce hours for directly elected officials</b>.</p> <p><b>Aim for the U of A GSA to be the best managed in Canada.</b></p>	<p>To maintain a <b>culture of respect and tolerance</b> in the GSA office and in all dealings with the University community, all elected officials, management, and staff of the GSA will maintain a high level of <b>professionalism</b>. The GSA will <b>commit to the process of strategic planning</b>, regular follow through on goals and tasks, and regular reporting to Council.</p> <p><b>Proactive search for talent (eg elected officials, committee members)</b> will be ongoing. <b>Promote in the Early Call and training program the feasibility of taking on GSA elected positions</b>. Develop strategies and supports in collaboration with outgoing and incoming elected officials. Continue to realign the most <b>optimal division of labour</b> between elected officials and management/staff so elected officials are well-supported in a student-led and professionally-managed environment where, over the past three years, all of the GSA directly-elected officers have been successful in their academic programs while holding office.</p> <p>Negotiate a <b>no cost, special registration status</b> for all GSA directly-elected officers.</p> <p>Continue to move forward on 2010 recommendations of the GSA consultant, <i>eg itemize areas that need review with respect to rebuilding the infrastructure, and set goals for bylaw and policy review</i>.</p>
<b>2. INTERFACE AND ADVOCACY WITH UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENT</b>	
<p>Intensive, integrated <b>advocacy for and representation of</b> graduate student issues.</p> <p><b>Maintain relationships</b> with various stakeholders.</p> <p>Engage with University Administration and the provincial government on issues surrounding <b>the CIP, the provincial budget, the</b></p>	<p>Advocacy will require strong relationships with our partner associations – SU, AASUA, PDFA, and NASA. The GSA Board revived constituency meetings with these associations in 2012. It is key to reinforce these relationships and identify shared priorities in building a common vision of postsecondary education in light of the 2013 provincial budget and opening of the <i>Post-Secondary Learning Act</i>.</p> <p>Maintain relationship with <b>President, Provost’s Office and other Vice-Presidents, members of the Board of Governors, Governance, Senate, Alumni Association, service providers, and other key partners</b>. Continue to meet regularly with the <b>Acting Provost, the Dean of Students, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President (Academic), Vice-President (University Relations), and the Dean of FGSR and establish regular meetings with the Vice-Provost (Academic Programs and Instruction) and other key partners</b>.</p> <p>The GSA will <b>advocate vigorously</b> for graduate students on these issues, <b>not just during the current budget cycle but long-term</b>.</p>

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<p>mandate/"expectation" letters or MOU between the University and government, and on all issues related to the opening of the <i>Post-Secondary Learning Act</i>.</p> <p>Continue discussion of the few remaining <b>Parking Lot issues</b>.</p> <p>Continue to work with the University on <b>education, compliance, and dispute resolution</b> re Collective Agreement (CA).</p> <p><b>Work with the Alberta Graduate Council (AGC)</b> to strengthen its infrastructure and governance. Continue participation and support.</p> <p>Continue to assess membership in <b>external lobbying organizations</b>.</p>	<p>Education on the CA is one of main points of the <b>Department Liaison Initiative</b>.</p> <p><b>Advocate consistently and effectively for graduate student interests to the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Graduate Council (AGC)</b> and meet with AGC representatives. Some further reforms are necessary at AGC, but it is the voice of graduate students in Alberta to the provincial government; therefore, the 2013-2014 GSA Board must participate actively.</p> <p>Aim to <b>attend Western Deans conference in 2014, attend CAGS, and monitor and participate in GU15 and the Western Canadian GSA Summit</b>. Assess membership in CASA following on President Bernier's attendance at the 2013 CASA AGM.</p>
<p><b>3. FUNDING AND U OF A REORGANIZATIONS</b></p>	
<p>Prepare for <b>tuition and market modifiers debates</b> and advocate and engage on issues of graduate student support.</p> <p>Maintain a <b>strong graduate student voice in the proposed FGSR reform</b> and continue to <b>work with FGSR to develop fair quality measures and an ambitious vision of graduate education</b> at the</p>	<p><b>The GSA believes that there should be sustainable public funding to support excellence at the University of Alberta. To that end, we do not think that an increase to tuition and fees is a solution to the challenges this institution faces following the release of the provincial budget. The GSA will lobby for affordable graduate student tuition and fees.</b> To this end, we believe that any graduate market modifier or other graduate student tuition increases must result from extensive dialogue and proper consultation with the GSA and AGC. In developing its position on future graduate market modifiers or other graduate student tuition increases, the GSA Board will consult with GSA Council and the broader graduate student community. The GSA will continue to <b>participate vigorously in the Graduate Student Tuition and Funding Data Committee and similar bodies.</b></p> <p>Strive to <b>make certain that new quality measures and graduate student management plans (GSMPs) do not disproportionately favour some faculties or departments over others in future resource allocation</b> and that graduate students are involved in reform discussions at the department, faculty, and university levels. Advocate for increased resources for FGSR and <b>collaborate to establish the best professional development programs in Canada.</b></p>

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University of Alberta.	The GSA applauds the efforts of the FGSR Dean, Associate Deans, and staff to make sure that graduate students are treated fairly and have access to excellent services across campus. <b>We see FGSR as a key partner in the delivery of quality graduate education and just treatment of graduate students.</b> A robust FGSR – one with adequate resources to execute its mandate, where staff feel empowered and appreciated – links closely with our own organizational efficacy.
<b>4. SUPPORTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS</b>	
<p><b>Quality graduate student supervision should be an institutional priority.</b> Quality graduate student supervision is key to graduate student success, yet it is under-emphasized in relation to publications and teaching in FECs.</p> <p>The GSA wishes to ensure that as graduate numbers are increased, the right supports and infrastructure are in place.</p> <p><b>A campus free from discrimination and bullying.</b></p>	<p>The GSA will <b>continue to support and participate vigorously</b> in the Graduate Student Supervision Task Force, a joint initiative of the Provost, FGSR and the GSA. We will engage with other forums through which to discuss supervisory issues, and will <b>explore ways to reward faculty members for exceptional performance as supervisors.</b></p> <p><b>Lobby for counselling services and support for international graduate students who are seeking Canadian Permanent Residence.</b> Work to create a fairer playing field and more welcoming environment for international students (<i>eg advocate for a new relocation bursary for graduate students from developing countries to offset initial moving expenses and evaluate the possibility of waiving international differential fees</i> or offering new scholarships to cover the international differential fees for top-performing international students).</p> <p>Discuss with Administration and our partner constituencies (SU, NASA, AASUA, and PDFA) ways to make the U of A an even safer space. Consistent with a progressive social vision, <b>we want to work towards a campus where students of all sexual orientations, gender identities, convictions, and lifestyle choices feel encouraged to learn and participate actively in campus life.</b></p> <p><b>Lobby for improved cultural and dietary understanding among graduate students on the part of the University and consistently accessible and suitable prayer space for religious groups.</b></p> <p>Work with our partner constituencies and Administration to develop definitions and policies surrounding academic bullying.</p>

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<p align="center"><b>5. STUDENT EXPERIENCE</b></p>	
<p><b>Pilot a Department Liaison Initiative (DLI).</b></p> <p>Continued focus on <b>orientation</b> as one of the first contacts with the University for admitted students.</p> <p><b>Ramp up work on student groups and departmental GSAs.</b></p>	<p><b>The DLI will focus on eight key points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with the PSLA (<i>eg</i> election of a Councillor)</li> <li>• Risk assessment and reduction related to graduate student groups affiliated with the GSA</li> <li>• Education about and compliance with the CA</li> <li>• Orientation needs of departments</li> <li>• Representation on Faculty Councils</li> <li>• Linking functional departmental GSAs with struggling ones and providing for a department liaison</li> <li>• The “proactive search” for graduate student talent as per the Nominating Committee’s terms of reference</li> <li>• Advising departments on the process for nominating an individual for an Honorary Degree (added at the request of the Chancellor)</li> </ul> <p><b>Collaborate and proactively</b> plan Orientations for all departments, not just those who ask (coordinate with the Department Liaison Initiative). <b>Continue to connect/collaborate with respect to International Centre Orientations. Aim to have One Card and U-Pass registration right at the point of orientation.</b></p> <p>Continue distribution of \$20K from Provost <b>to foster academically-related student group activities (this funding will be available in 2013-14 and possibly 2014-15).</b></p> <p><b>Continue to work with GPAC and individual departments.</b> Collaborate with Office of the Dean of Students (with which the GSA has an MOU) and Student Group Services to develop goals and strategies for Graduate Student Group support and interaction.</p>
<p align="center"><b>6. SERVICES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b></p>	
<p><b>Mental Health:</b> continue to work with Administration, Students’ Union, the Provost’s Fellow on Mental Health, and University Health and Wellness on <b>issues and initiatives related to improving mental health on campus.</b></p> <p><b>Child Care:</b> At the GSA, we continually see the child care needs of graduate students who apply for Child Care Grants.</p>	<p><b>Participate in the Administration’s ongoing mental health review.</b> The GSA applauds this effort and will continue to work with the Dean of Students’ Office, collaborating in the implementation stage to improve mental health services at and tackle the mental health challenges that sometimes act as a barrier to graduate student success.</p> <p>Continue to <b>lobby for increased funds for graduate students with children</b> in the form of GSA Child Care Grants.</p>

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<p><b>Professional Development:</b> Most graduate students [between 60-75%] will not pursue careers in academia and we believe that professional development opportunities must be increased and diversified.</p> <p>Support the <b>academic and professional development</b> of graduate students.</p> <p><b>Survey Regarding Services:</b> understanding graduate student demographics is <b>fundamental to directing efforts toward the most robust suite of services possible.</b></p>	<p>The GSA will advocate for improved professional development opportunities for graduate students (<b>working closely with FGSR, CAPs, the Office of Advancement, and the Alumni Association to develop a new mentorship program</b>).</p> <p><b>Continue to subsidize Writing Resources Centre courses and CAPS, which receive excellent reviews from graduate students. Lobby to augment services such as the courses and one-on-one support offered by the Writing Resources Centre for international students.</b></p> <p><b>Such a study would have a significant and informative effect on planning for such matters as orientation, student housing, and academic supports</b> (eg writing and English-language supports) and non-academic supports (childcare, graduate student family supports, and accommodation regarding dietary issues). The GSA believes that a demographic study of graduate students should occur in 2013-2014 and subsequently every three years.</p>
<p><b>7. SOCIAL SPACES AND HOUSING</b></p>	
<p><b>Advocate for quality graduate student housing,</b> including the renovation of Michener Park, and for more flexible and transparent residence rental contracts.</p> <p>Continue discussions/negotiations for social/engagement space in the Power Plant within the framework of current MOUs and other documents related to the former GSA offices in the Power Plant and Deweys.</p>	<p>Advocate for <b>accessible and well-maintained graduate student housing</b> (this is an ongoing challenge for graduate students and one of particular concern to Michener Park Residents) and to <b>improve housing opportunities and maintenance.</b> Continue to monitor the quality of the 89<sup>th</sup> Avenue project. <b>Work with graduate students who reside in University residences to address their concerns</b> and ensure that Administration hears their grievances and pursues resolutions promptly. The <b>pre-design phase for any new housing</b> is crucial to graduate students and the GSA will continue to ensure that it lobbies for accessible and quality graduate student housing during the University's planning processes.</p> <p>Continue collaboration with the SU, F and O and other potential partners (eg Alumni Association) for a renovated Dewey's.</p> <p>Discuss use of former GSA offices with F and O.</p> <p>Lobby for other space in the Power Plant as it becomes available (eg the space used for the Tory decant) to be used by graduate students and others for the purpose of collaborating, sharing ideas and meeting informally in a licensed area.</p>