



Graduate Students' Association Annual Report 2019-2020

In our first GSA Annual Report, we wanted to give you—GSA members, the graduate students at the University of Alberta—an idea of what we work to achieve every year. In some ways, some things don't change: the services we work to offer, for example, are constant parts of our annual work. But other elements—the advocacy work, the outreach—shift in response to the changing landscape of University, community, and global affairs.

This year, we stayed the course: GSA members received health and dental insurance coverage (and coverage was enhanced), received almost one million dollars of grants, awards, and bursaries from the GSA, gained access to programs and services exclusive to graduate students (like the Graduate Student Assistance Program, and Reboot Your Writing sessions offered in partnership with the Academic Success Centre). We hosted hundreds of students at our Fall and Winter Orientation events, our Fall and Winter Social Events, and our monthly Coffee Breaks. Student leaders also met individually with hundreds of graduate students to advise and assist them.

The provincial budget, and its subsequent impact on the University budget, was an area that merited considerable attention and hundreds of hours of meetings. Supporting graduate students in the most foundational relationship of their graduate academic careers, that with their supervisor, was another priority. As was working to empower the Indigenous graduate student community.

We also worked to support graduate students in the face of unexpected and tragic global events: the flight PS 752 crash in January, and the COVID-19 pandemic in March and onwards.

Our goal is that this document will shed some light on what GSA executives—your elected graduate student leaders—and the staff team charged with supporting their work worked to achieve this year. We hope you will direct any questions that arise during your reading of this document to us via email at gsa.frontdesk@ualberta.ca.

CREATING SOLUTIONS

This year's student leaders dedicated significant time to advocating for and collaborating with University administration on the following projects:

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

ISSUE: With the physical distancing measures implemented across Canada and within the University itself, graduate students continue to experience significant disruptions to their lives and academic programs.

OUTCOME: While continuing its standard operations remotely, the GSA has responded to rising graduate student financial needs by allotting an additional approximately \$200,000 to GSA Emergency Bursaries and participating in a number of discussions with University administration that have resulted in a Spring/Summer 2020 term, and the U-Pass fee for the Spring 2020 term. We have also continued our financial support of the Campus Food Bank, which totalled \$15,000 this year, with an increase of over 30%. The GSA has also worked with Dr. André Costopoulos, Dean of Students, and the administrators of the Graduate Student Assistance Program to ensure that remote access to supports remains available. We remain committed to continuing our federal and provincial advocacy (both independently and in collaboration with other graduate student associations across Canada and advocacy bodies) with respect to securing additional financial supports for graduate students and discussing issues related to tuition costs with University administration.

Improving Student-Supervisor Relations for Graduate Students

ISSUE: Some graduate students experience challenges in their relationships with their supervisors.

OUTCOME: The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), led by Dean Brooke Milne, is piloting two new projects in Fall 2020/Winter 2021: A Student-Supervisor Guideline and a Student Program Report Form to establish productive, communicative relationships between graduate students and supervisors, and to establish oversight of graduate student academic progress.

Graduate Student Tuition

ISSUE: Significant changes to provincial and University budgets lent uncertainty to tuition fee increases in the upcoming years.

OUTCOME: In 2020-2021, graduate students across the province will see significant tuition fee increases, often up to the maximum 7% allowed by government. Initial discussions at the U of A proposed a 7% increase across the board. While continuing domestic course-based students will see this 7% increase, advocacy spearheaded by GSA student leaders to the University President, the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), and the Board of Governors has resulted in some concessions. Thus, continuing domestic thesis-based students will see a rebate bringing their tuition increase to 2.67% and tuition rates for continuing international course-based and thesis-based students were set previously at 4% and 2.67% (after application of the same rebate provided for continuing domestic thesis-based students), respectively. The University will set aside 15% of domestic tuition increases for financial support for domestic graduate students, while financial support for international students remains at 7.55% of all tuition revenue.

Supporting Indigenous Graduate Students

ISSUE: The Indigenous Graduate Students Association (IGSA) sought permanent meeting space. In addition, the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) program, available in many Universities across Canada was unavailable at the U of A.

OUTCOME: Through extensive advocacy, support, and campaigning and with the support of Andrew Sharman, Vice-President (Facilities and Operations), the IGSA, has been awarded temporary space in HUB until permanent space can be found. In addition, a pilot phase of the SAGE program was initiated in January 2020, after extensive consultation with the IGSA and Dr. Florence Gianfield, Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research)

SERVICES AND OUTREACH

The GSA provides graduate students with [social events](#), our [Fall and Winter Orientation events](#), a new Halloween event for parents and children, and [Graduate Collective Tea Time](#) (in collaboration with the Alumni Association and the Community Social Work Team), and departmental orientations.

Students can become involved with the GSA as a [GSA Councillor](#) or [Directly-Elected Officer](#) and are able to sit on a number of [GSA standing committees](#) (including the GSA Board), and [GSA Council](#).

The GSA is also a member of the [Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council \(ab-GPAC\)](#), our provincial advocacy body that lobbies the provincial government, including the [Minister of Advanced Education, Demetrios Nicolaides](#). The GSA also interacts with other provincial and sometimes federal political bodies in order to campaign for specific goals. For example, this year much work done at the provincial and federal levels has focused on the development of an immigration stream tailored to international students whose research and expertise benefit the local economy.

This year, GSA communications increased. [Three new videos](#) about the GSA and a labour-specific newsletter were produced (on the GSA is the union of academically-employed graduate students). The GSA began advertising on SUTV screens across campus. These new communication platforms were added to our existing communication platforms (social media, weekly e-newsletter, planners, and website).

The GSA has advocated for support for students affected by the Michener Park closure, most of whom are international students and/or students who parent. This past year has seen the establishment of a new committee—the Michener Park Transition Advisory Committee (MPTAC)—to connect Michener Park residents with [community and University resources](#).



The GSA with Minister of Advanced Education, Demetrios Nicolaides



GSA Directly-Elected Officers



GSA Orientation



Green and Gold Day



Memorial for the Victims of Flight PS752



GSA Coffee Breaks and FGSR Film Fridays



Days of Action World Mental Health



GSA Halloween Event



Michener Park Residents Association BBQ



Alumni Awards



Green and Gold Day



Pride Parade



GSA Orientation



New GSA services include a new [GSA Parents Room](#) in Triffo Hall—a private lounge for those needing to care for/feed infants and children. With the help of FGSR, we have brand-new furniture in the Triffo Hall main entrance lounge area for grad students to enjoy, as well as in room 1-13, which will now accommodate up to 12 people and can be booked, along with other spaces in Triffo, as a [meeting space](#).

To support the students impacted by the PS 752 tragedy, the GSA President attended a memorial along with University President, David Turpin; Edmonton Mayor, Don Iveson; Alberta Premier, Jason Kenney; Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau; and thousands of community members. GSA DEOs also attended other memorials, gave support to students, discussed ongoing academic and financial support for the victims, and disbursed GSA Emergency Bursaries to those in need. A memorial plaque has been designed and will be displayed in the GSA lounge at the main entrance of Triffo Hall.

For academically-employed graduate students the [2018-2020 Collective Agreement](#) was ratified in October 2019 and the negotiation process for the next Collective Agreement has begun. This year, the GSA has retained legal counsel specializing in labour law and union matters for assistance in negotiations.

Extensive advocacy work was done this past year towards developing mandatory health and safety training for employment supervisors (including those supervising graduate students) on campus. In addition, consultations have taken place with key stakeholders on the implementation of standards relating to psychological health and safety legislation, under which the University is expected to operate as of 1 July 2020.

AT A GLANCE

1 Charter of Student Rights Adopted (SU initiative, collaboration from GSA)

1 Health and Dental Agreement Signed

1 Collective Agreement for Academically-Employed Graduate Students Negotiated

50 GSA Newsletters Circulated

55 GSA Departmental Presentations Given

100 Writing Support Sessions Hosted

300 Attendees at Social Events

400 Attendees at Orientation Events

3500 GSA Planners Distributed

\$17,000 Recognition Awards Disbursed

\$25,000 Graduate Student Group Grants Disbursed

\$200,000 Emergency Bursaries Disbursed (approx.)

\$420,000 Academic Travel Grants Disbursed

\$430,000 Child Care Grants Disbursed

Read more about the GSA's [Governance](#), [Services](#), [Funding](#), and [Collective Agreement](#).

Read more updates about Strategic Work Plan goals [here](#).

The GSA respectfully acknowledges that we, along with the University of Alberta, are situated on Treaty 6 territory: traditional lands of First Nations and Métis people.