

## ITEM FOR INFORMATION

**Committee Name:** Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee, University Council

**Date:** June 11, 2026

**Presented by:** Eric Lamb, Chair, Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee

**Subject: College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies 2025-2026 Annual Report**

### SUMMARY

At its May 21, 2026, meeting, RSAW members received the annual report from Debby Burshtyn, Dean, College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS). The report highlighted a year of strategic advancement in graduate education, research excellence, and student support amid a changing policy and funding landscape. Central to the college's efforts was enhancing student success and institutional impact through innovation and investment. Notably, the launch of the CGPS Awards HUB streamlined funding access and administration, contributing to over \$4 million in Tri-Agency funding secured by graduate students, alongside major recognitions such as Vanier Scholarships and Governor General's Gold Medals.

Key priorities include equity, access, and mentorship, with updated admissions policies enabling more flexible and holistic applicant evaluation and expanded supports such as individualized accommodations for students and enhanced mentorship programming for faculty and graduate supervisors. Efforts to strengthen inclusion are also reflected in significant gains in Indigenous student engagement, including a 22% increase in Indigenous enrolment.

In addition, CGPS worked to advance interdisciplinary research and innovation through new awards, expanded programming, and high-impact events such as the Interdisciplinary Symposium and TEDx participation.

Despite several achievements, enrolment trends reveal emerging challenges, including a 3% overall decline driven by reduced international student numbers linked to federal policy constraints, though domestic and Indigenous enrolment rose. In response, CGPS intensified recruitment efforts and introduced new academic programs while maintaining a focus on service improvement, operational efficiency, and financial sustainability. Overall, the report presents an adaptive approach to strengthening graduate education at USask through inclusive practices, targeted investment, and continued innovation.

### ATTACHMENTS

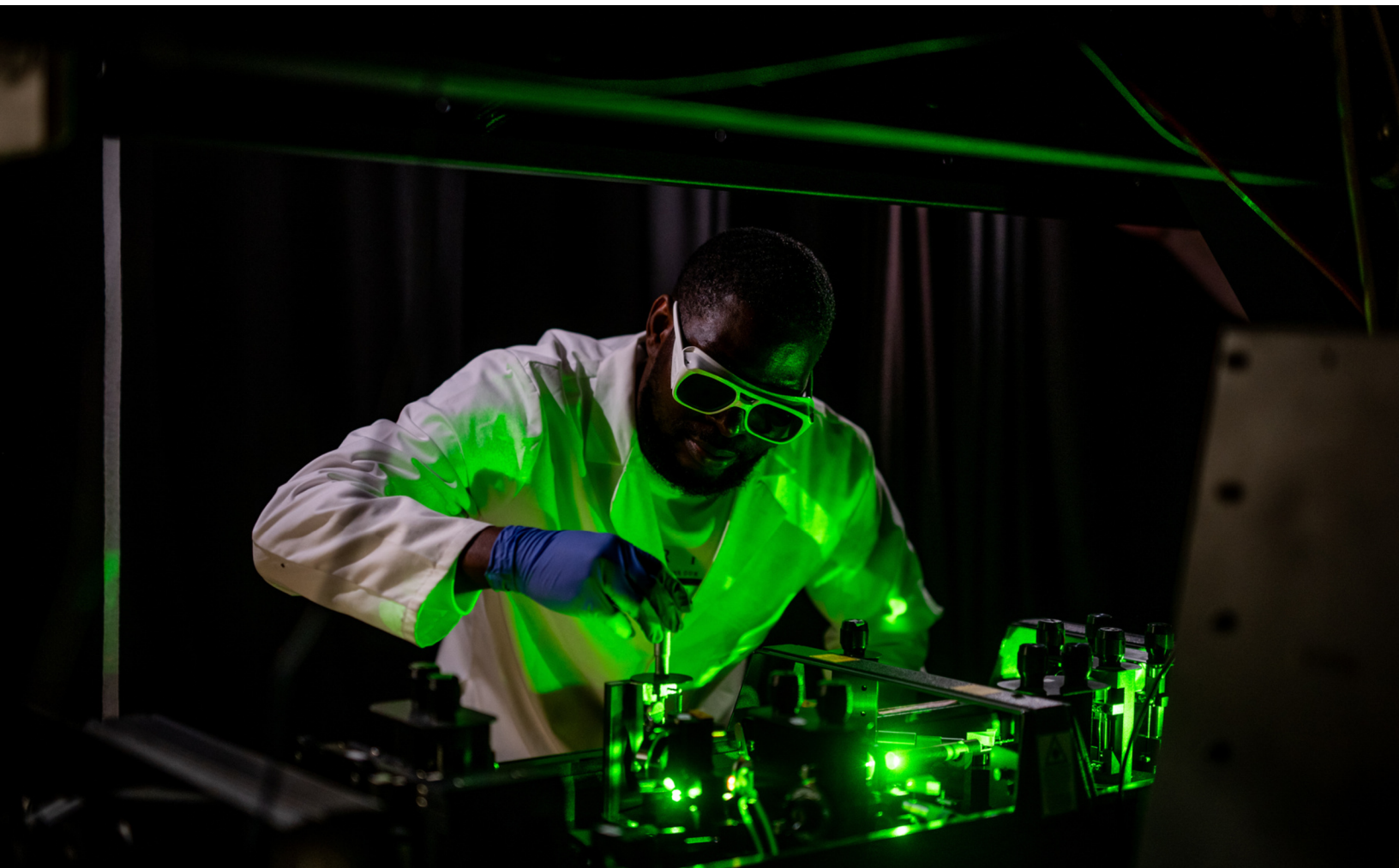
1. 2025-2026 Annual Report- College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies



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and Postdoctoral Studies

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# Annual Report 2025-26

Date: May 21, 2026



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

BE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS



# Message from the Dean



Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are central to the University of Saskatchewan’s research mission, advancing discovery, innovation, creative scholarship, and professional training. Their contributions strengthen the university’s impact across disciplines and prepare future researchers and professionals to address complex challenges.

Over the past year, graduate education has continued to evolve within a landscape shaped by policy shifts, global uncertainty, and rapid technological change. As I began my second term as Dean, I remained committed to providing responsive leadership during a period of both pressure and opportunity, with a continued focus on supporting graduate student success.

This report highlights key developments, student accomplishments, and the collective efforts of faculty and staff to sustain a strong, inclusive, and forward-looking graduate community. I am grateful for the dedication, resilience, and collaboration that continue to define graduate education at USask.

Sincerely,

Dr. Debby Burshtyn  
Dean, College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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# Recognizing and Funding Excellence

One of the most significant milestones in 2025 was the launch of the long-anticipated **CGPS Awards HUB**, a centralized graduate application and awarding platform. The HUB streamlines funding searches, applications, and adjudication, improving efficiency for students while simplifying reference requests and application reviews for faculty.

In total, graduate students received over \$4 million in Tri-Agency funding in the 2025-26 year.

In January, CGPS held its 2nd annual **Celebrating U reception** to honour recipients of Tri-Agency and CGPS awards and welcomed a full house in recognition of academic excellence. The names of major scholarship recipients are curated on the [CGPS website](#).

In 2025, three outstanding PhD students were awarded **Vanier Scholarships** in the final year of the program – Arianna Gibson (SSHRC), Jeremy Irvine (NSERC) and Jinnath Rehana Ritu (NSERC).

	CIHR	NSERC	SSHRC
Master's	21	33	40
Doctoral	3	28	40
Vanier	1	5	3

*Active students receiving Tri-Agency Funding 2025-26*

Each year, CGPS selects two **Governor General's Gold Medals** are awarded to PhD recipients, one at Fall Convocation and one at Spring Convocation. At Fall 2025 Convocation, Dr. Geneveave Barbo received the medal for her research on immersive virtual reality simulations designed to better prepare nursing students to support migrants facing mental health challenges. The Spring 2026 recipient was embargoed at the time of this report.

The first wave of the federally funded **Canada Impact+ Research Training Awards program** launched in December 2025, to recruit PhD and postdoctoral trainees to Canadian institutions from abroad into eight research priority areas. USask was allocated 6 postdoctoral and 13 doctoral awards in total. Wave 1 generated strong interest from USask faculty, enabling awards to be offered across most priority areas, subject to limited allocations. Wave 2 awards will be allocated in June 2026, with a targeted focus on priority areas that were underrepresented in the first wave.

The Government of Saskatchewan offers two scholarships to support graduate and postgraduate students pursuing research and demonstrating leadership in their fields. In 2025-26, Thulani Hewavithana was the recipient of the **Lieutenant Governor Scholarship** and Ethan Landry (PhD) was the recipient of the **Lieutenant Governor Indigenous Scholarship**.

Starting in 2026-27, the Ministry of Advanced Education has announced additional funding, including two additional Saskatchewan Lieutenant Governor Scholarships, doubling the number of recipients moving forward.

CGPS continues to provide financial support for the **GSA–CGPS Need-Based Bursary program**, offered twice annually, and remains committed to supporting the GSA executive in delivering this important initiative.



Arianna Gibson, Vanier Recipient (SSHRC)



Jeremy Irvine, Vanier Recipient (NSERC)



Jinnath Rehana Ritu, Vanier Recipient (NSERC)



Dr. Geneveave Barbo, Governor General Gold Medallist

During Indigenous Achievement Week, doctoral student Dessa Gottfriedson (Interdisciplinary Studies, Le7 te Melámen cohort) was presented with an **Indigenous Achievement Award for Leadership** in recognition of her advocacy for equitable access to education in her community.

In October 2025, CGPS received news that the request to the Strategic Finance Committee for additional institutional funds to support graduate students was approved. We are grateful for a multi-year commitment that will result in over **\$1.3 million in new funding for graduate students** by 2028/2029, raising the minimum stipend for doctoral students to \$25,000 per year for four years in participating programs.

## POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS

During **National Postdoctoral Appreciation Week** (September 2025), CGPS hosted a series of events recognizing the contributions of postdoctoral scholars at USask and supporting their professional development. Programming included a virtual academic career webinar, the Annual Postdoc Reception, and a new postdoc onboarding session, offering opportunities for learning, connection, and community building.

The **2025 Misiwéskamik International Postdoctoral Fellowship** recipient Dr. Fernanda Mascarenhas (PhD) is investigating how mitochondrial dysfunction contributes to the development and progression of Alzheimer's disease, led by supervisors Dr. Ana Paula Mendes Silva and Dr. Tyler Wenzel.

The **Living Skies Postdoctoral Fellowship** program launched a new call to provide funding opportunities for transdisciplinary research supported by USask faculty and external mentors in the Signature Areas of Water, Health & Wellness, Indigenous Peoples, One Health, and Agriculture.

In 2025, Dr. Crystal Giesbrecht (PhD) received the prestigious **Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship**. Giesbrecht's work investigates types of intimate partner violence and personality traits of perpetrators in efforts to improve responses and develop more tailored approaches to case management.

CGPS introduced **Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence Awards** in 2026, to celebrate excellence in research, scholarly and artistic work by postdocs at USask, recognizing their critical role in advancing the University's mission. These awards mark an important step in strengthening institutional recognition of postdoctoral excellence at USask, and the selected awardees will be formally announced at a later date.



Dr. Fernanda Mascarenhas,  
Misiwéskamik Scholar



Dessa Gottfriedson,  
Indigenous Achievement  
Award, Leadership



Dr. Crystal Giesbrecht,  
Banting Postdoctoral  
Scholar

## Professional Development for Postdocs

To support postdocs with career exploration both within and beyond academia, CGPS' PD portfolio offered a range of targeted professional development opportunities for postdoctoral scholars. These sessions helped build skills in leadership, networking, and research, and assisted in preparation for academic industry and public sector roles.



## Equity, Access and Mentorship

CGPS continues to support graduate students, faculty and programs to achieve academic excellence by creating flexible pathways and student centric policies and support mechanisms.

In response to changes in the graduate education landscape, CGPS conducted a review of admissions policies. Following consultation, revisions were approved by CGPS Faculty Council in Spring 2025. The updates are intended to provide greater flexibility for admission committees when assessing applicants. While holistic reviews are now strongly encouraged, they are not mandatory.

Key policy updates include:

- **Graduate Certificates:** Established clear minimum admission requirements for graduate-level certificates, aligned closely with master's level entrance standards and formally documented in both the CGPS Policy Manual and the University Catalogue.
- **Graduate Certificate Laddering:** Introduced a new policy confirming that laddering from a certificate to a master's program is permitted at the academic unit's discretion. The policy outlines how certificate course credit may be applied for a master's degree and clarifies requirements related to GPS 960, tuition and fees.
- **PGD, Master's and PhD Admissions:** Revised entrance requirements by removing the 'honours' designation or four-year bachelor's degrees and clarifying that admission GPA is calculated using the most recent graded credit units (equivalent to the final two years of full-time study) at the time of application.

To support implementation, CGPS also developed a companion [Best Practices in Graduate Admissions Guide](#) to assist units.



*Students, supervisors, and other members of the USask community attend the annual Celebrating U event*



*Graduate student researchers captured at the Sask Cancer Agency as part of the photoshoot for graduate recruitment efforts*



*CGPS staff volunteer at the 2026 USask 3MT Finals*

To support student success, in collaboration with Access and Equity Services, graduate chairs, and supervisors, CGPS developed **individualized accommodation plans** for 22 master's and doctoral students in 2025–26 to support progress on non-coursework degree requirements. In addition, more than 300 graduate students received **course-based accommodations**. Associate Dean Jaswant Singh also supported more than 15 graduate students in navigating complex academic situations, including Required to Discontinue recommendations, supervisor-student conflicts, and academic appeals.

Professional development and engagement activities for graduate faculty continued throughout the year. In October 2025, Jae Morgans and Jaswant Singh delivered conflict-engagement training for graduate chairs.

The 2024-25 recipient of **Distinguished Graduate Mentor Award** was Dr. Janet Hill (PhD) from the Western College of Veterinary Medicine.

In recognition of outstanding service and support to graduate students at USask, Amy Hassett (M.Ed, Ed.D) from the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy was awarded the 2024-25 **Clement Employee Service Award**.

In November 2025, CGPS Graduate Mentorship Award recipients Dawn Wallin and Julia Boughner led a **Best Practices in Graduate Student Supervision workshop**, sharing mentorship strategies with early-career faculty. The April 2026 Graduate Chair Forum featured Dr. Wendy James, who provided an overview of the new Course Assessment policy and procedures scheduled for implementation in September 2027.

New policies around thesis and dissertation requirements were drafted to align with current and emerging needs of students and to provide clear guidance for students, supervisors, and advisory committee members and include a requirement to **declare use of generative AI tools** in preparation of the documents is expected to be passed at the May 28<sup>th</sup> CGPS Faculty Council meeting for fall implementation.

Much appreciation to members of the Council, CGPS Graduate Academic Affairs Committee, the Graduate Programs Committee and the Associate Deans Grad group for their input.

# Interdisciplinary Studies

The Interdisciplinary Studies (InterD) program gratefully acknowledges Dr. Steven Rayan, who completed his term as Director and Graduate Chair of CGPS Interdisciplinary Studies on July 1, 2025. Dr. Monica Popa Sârghie assumed the role, continuing to advance initiatives that celebrate and strengthen interdisciplinary research.



Dr. Monica Popa Sârghie, Director of Interdisciplinary Studies

New initiatives include the **InterD Supervisor Award**, which recognizes USask faculty for excellence in supervising graduate students in the Interdisciplinary Studies program, and the **InterD Advisor Award** - honoring members of students' advisory committees who demonstrate exceptional commitment, valuable guidance, and dedicated efforts to strengthen interdisciplinary graduate research. Based on students' nominations and adjudicated by the InterD committee, this year's awards were presented to Dr. Lori Bradford and Dr. Cynthia R. Wallace (InterD Supervisor Award), Dr. Ibrionke Odumosu-Ayanu and Dr. Simonne Horwitz (InterD Advisor Award).

The newly established **InterD Publication Award** provides financial support to InterD students for research publications in peer-reviewed journals that require publication fees.



2025-26 marked the inaugural year of the InterD Supervisor Award and the InterD Advisor Award



InterD students, supervisors and advisors attending the InterD Annual Symposium

The CGPS InterD program special events, embedded within the seminar requirements, included the **Interdisciplinary Studies Keynote Lecture** of Dr. Maureen G. Reed (UNESCO Chair in Biocultural diversity, sustainability, reconciliation, and renewal) entitled "Learning together, working together: A journey in transdisciplinary sustainability research".

The signature **W[InterD]ialogues** event featured Dr. Nora Dominguez, President Emeritus of the International Mentoring Association and director of the Mentoring Institute at the University of New Mexico, in an interactive dialogue focused on mentorship and developmental networks for graduate student success.

This series of events, open to the entire USask community, culminated in the **InterD Annual Symposium**, where eight interdisciplinary graduate research teams from diverse disciplines addressed today's pressing challenges for a better tomorrow in Saskatchewan, Canada and worldwide



*Cousins workshop participants at red willow basket weaving workshop, led by Traditional Knowledge Keeper Lyndon J. Linklater*

## Indigenization and Decolonization

CGPS remains committed to fostering **an Indigenous graduate student community** that nurtures belonging and success and harnessing the richness of diverse viewpoints and wisdom.

In efforts to assist Indigenous students in building community, CGPS regularly hosts **Cousins Workshops** with a 'busy hands' model that encourages students to make connections through cultural and artistic activities.

2025/26 workshops included:

- Red willow basket weaving
- Sun printing in the College of Law Medicine Garden
- Virtual/in-person beading sessions
- Ribbon skirt/shirt sewing workshop
- Tufting workshop

Other Cousins meet-ups included virtual, and in-person work jams, a family movie night, sharing circles, information sessions, Turkey Bingo and more.

In 2025/26, the **Indigenous Graduate Leadership Circle** welcomed its second cohort, led by Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator Aurora Wolfe to amplify and center Indigenous student voices.

In October 2025, CGPS hosted a panel discussion with UBC Indigenous scholars Drs. Margaret Kovach, Shawn Wilson, Monty Montgomery, and PhD candidate Lindsay DuPré focused on **creating meaningful space for Indigenous graduate students**. The session also invited USask Indigenous graduate students to share their experiences as part of a study examining Indigenous graduate student support programs at Western Canadian universities.

This year, CGPS continued its **Holiday Hamper** program, providing pantry staples and sweet treats to over 20 Indigenous graduate students and their families.

According to preliminary 2025-26 data, Indigenous graduate student enrolment is up 22%, with incoming students increasing across programs.

Full details on past and ongoing Indigenization and Decolonization efforts at CGPS will be found in the 2026 ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan report.



# Professional Development



*InterD student and composer Paul Suchan debuts a composition inspired by climate change at TEDxUniversityofSaskatchewan 2026.*



*3MT 2026 finalists and judges*



*The Graduate Mentorship Program celebrated 19 successful students in the first cohort of the program*

Graduate studies explored the edges at [TEDxUniversityofSaskatchewan 2026](#), with five graduate students taking the stage to deliver ground-breaking talks.

**Falling Walls Lab Edmonton**, part of an international research communication competition showcasing breakthrough ideas, featured strong USask representation in August 2025 with one graduate student and one postdoctoral scholar advancing to the finals.

This year's [USask 3MT competition](#) featured preparatory workshops and one-on-one finalist coaching. Participation was broader than ever, with new academic units represented in the preliminary round and 12 finalists competing in April. Congratulations to Biology PhD student Cassidy Waldrep, who earned first place, and went on to compete at the Western Regional Finals at the University of Regina.

The **Graduate Mentorship Program**, launched in May 2025, successfully completed its inaugural cohort with 19 PhD students matched with mentors from academia, industry, government, and entrepreneurship. Strong student demand has led to the program's expansion to include master's students in its second cohort.

The CGPS **Professional Skills Suite (ProSkills)** delivered nine in-class sessions, equipping 125 graduate students with key competencies in areas such as communication, leadership, and career planning. Two additional modules are in development, alongside efforts to expand faculty engagement with professional development programming.

CGPS delivered a range of centralized **professional development (LevelUP) workshops**, engaging nearly 150 graduate students through virtual and in-person sessions. While most workshops, particularly those focused on career preparation, were well attended. The Cultural Adjustment Series for international students (developed to replace GPS 981) was discontinued due to consistently low participation.

## Professional Development (continued)

Through partnerships with the Library and Gwenna Moss Centre, CGPS supported graduate student development in research ethics, teaching, and professional skills, with more than 1,100 students completing the GPS 960 Ethics course and strong participation across teaching and certificate programs. These collaborations also contributed to broader research impact and teaching excellence, including ongoing engagement with the Undergraduate Research Journal and multiple professional development offerings.

In partnership with Edwards School of Business, CGPS PD Specialist Kenisha Blair facilitated the professional coaching of 12 graduate students by professionals who participated in the school's Executive Coaching Program.

The **Dean's Support Fund sponsorship program** that funds student-led conferences and initiatives sponsored 11 events, engaging several thousand graduate students supporting conference organizing skill development and hands-on experience.

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## Programming, Enrolment and Recruitment

### PROGRAMMING

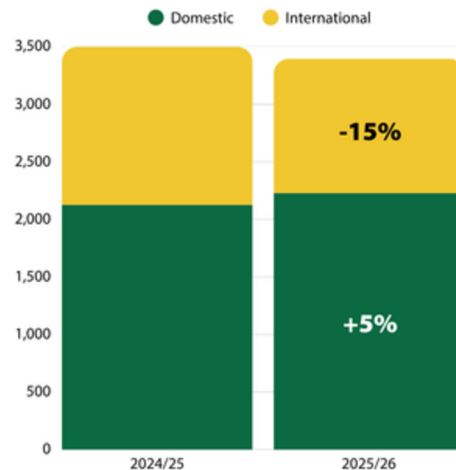
New in programming, University Council approved the Master of Science in Periodontology, the Graduate Certificate in Large Animal Veterinary Specialty Internship and the Graduate Certificate in Improvement Science. The application cycle for the Master of Occupational Therapy and Master of Speech-Language Pathology programs opened for the Fall 2026 intake with very strong application numbers (237 and 142 respectively). CGPS approved two new special case admission programs, two cotutelle doctoral programs, and three cotutelle doctoral notices of intent.

### ENROLMENT

Preliminary 2025–26 data (as of April 19, 2026) show a 3% decline in overall graduate enrolment, driven by a 15% decrease in international students, likely a consequence of federal Provincial Attestation Letter (PAL) requirements and low study permit approval rates. Domestic (+5%) and self-declared Indigenous (+22%) enrolment increased over the same period.

As of January 1, 2026, the federal government **removed the PAL requirement** for international master's and PhD students, though it remains in place for most graduate certificate and Visiting Research Students.

For full details on last year's enrolment, see the [2024-25 Graduate Student and Postdoc Scholar Report](#).



### RECRUITMENT

CGPS continues to collaborate with Student Recruitment, Student Marketing and Communications, and Digital Strategy to strengthen a coordinated graduate recruitment strategy, including a series of Lunch & Learn sessions to engage programs and align efforts.

Last May, CGPS organized a photoshoot highlighting several units across campus to create a library of grad-specific brand assets. These assets supported the creation of a [grad viewbook](#) that serves as a recruitment tool for prospective students.

In the coming year, CGPS will continue developing agreements with external scholarship agencies and advancing their implementation.

## CONTINUOUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

As part of ongoing efforts to enhance service to students and stakeholders, CGPS staff received training in the BIFF communication model at the annual staff retreat, facilitated by Jae Morgans.

In 2025–26, CGPS introduced monthly Graduate Administrator Forums to share policy updates, provide guidance, and address questions. The sessions saw strong attendance and engagement, and continuation of this format is being considered for the future.



*CGPS is proud to celebrate the growth and development of our team. The results of the **2025 Employee Engagement Survey** demonstrated a promising increase in overall engagement, reflecting the college's commitment to staff and students.*

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The CGPS resource allocation for operations for 2026-27 will be reduced by 0.7% and the reduced international application pressure creates significant budgetary constraints. To match rising costs, effective Fall 2025, graduate program application fees increased \$5 for domestic applicants and \$25 for international applicants. This marked the first application fee increase since Spring 2020 and positions CGPS competitively among western U15 institutions while supporting efficient application processing.

A new fee of \$20/term to defer the delivery of professional development programming for graduate students was approved and will begin to be charged in Fall 2026.

As part of fiscal sustainability measures, a valued team member position will not be replaced. Lori Lisitza served as Executive Officer for over eight years, building strong relationships and leading numerous initiatives to streamline operations; her contributions will be greatly missed, and we wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

# THANK YOU TO 2025-26 COMMITTEE & COUNCIL MEMBERS!

CGPS extends its gratitude to the many individuals who served on committees this past year. Without your dedication and service, the delivery of countless awards and initiatives would not be possible.

## A special thanks to the following outgoing members:

### Awards & Scholarship Committee

Ajay Dalai, Chemical & Biological Engineering  
Bishnu Acharya, Chemical & Biological Engineering  
Gupreet Aulakh, Small Animal Clinical Sciences

### Graduate Academic Affairs Committee

Elizabeth Quinlan, Sociology

### Graduate Programs Committee

Ann Martin, English  
Maud Ferrari, Veterinary Biomedical Sciences

### Interdisciplinary Committee

Pammla Petrucka, Nursing

### Nominations Committee

Valery Chirkov, Psychology and Health Studies

### Postdoctoral Advisory Committee

Andrey Freywald, Pathology  
Jonathan Norton, Surgery

### CGPS Faculty Council

Andrei Smolyakov, Physics and Engineering Physics  
Christian Willenborg, Plant Sciences  
Maruti Uppalapati, Pathology  
Pierre-Francois Noppen, Philosophy  
Randy Kutcher, Plant Sciences  
Shafiz Alam, Chemical & Biological Engineering

## We'd also like to thank the following graduate students and postdocs who've served on committees this year:

Palash Roy, GSA President (CGPS Faculty Council, Executive and Coordinating Committee)  
Lindsay Carlson (Awards and Scholarships)  
Laila Valila (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Mandela Alema (CGPS Faculty Council, Graduate Programs Committee, Graduate Academic Affairs Committee)  
Ghazal Mousavian (Interdisciplinary Committee)  
Cody Koloski (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Dean Shameess (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Gabriela Sieminska-Jauck (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Jeremy Irvine (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Mike Scott (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Yesu Ramya Kandregula (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Keigan Lloyd (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Samantha Carly (CGPS Faculty Council)  
Tamanna Jahan (CGPS Faculty Council, Postdoctoral Advisory Committee)  
Mohammad Miah (CGPS Faculty Council, Postdoctoral Advisory Committee)  
Yang Lin (Postdoctoral Advisory Committee)

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