



## University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students' Association Report to Senate

**November 2023**

Dear Senate Members,

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) welcomes all the members of the University Senate. Since the April 2023 senate meeting, the GSA has organized many important events and participated in many advocacies works. In this report, the GSA leadership team of 2023-2024 includes their list of advocacy and priority works for the senator's review. The GSA leadership team also had a list of services they planned to start, and new events scheduled to be organized in the remainder of their term in office. The GSA team firmly believes that successfully implementing further initiatives and advocacy works would positively change graduate students' experience and help them focus their invaluable time on producing outstanding scholarly and artistic works, which ultimately will help boost the University of Saskatchewan's national, regional, and global reputations. The GSA looks forward to working with Professor Peter Stoicheff and his leadership team in advancing the University of Saskatchewan's goals of producing the type of graduates the world needs. The GSA sincerely hopes that respected senate members will support the GSA's advocacy works wholeheartedly and give invaluable feedback to help the GSA successfully implement all new initiatives listed in this report.

### **GSA Advocacy Priorities for the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year:**

- I. To advocate for a minimum guaranteed funding for all thesis-based graduate students not less than the equivalent of Saskatchewan's minimum wage salary.

- II. To advocate ensuring a university-wide minimum guaranteed scholarship/stipend for thesis-based graduate students for a duration compatible with the median degree completion time of the University of Saskatchewan graduates.
- III. Advocacy for the introduction of a universal “Parental Leave Bursary” for graduate students like other U15 universities. For example, the University of Waterloo offers an eight-month Parental Leave Bursary (including adoption) to eligible graduate students. Details can be found [HERE](#).
- IV. Advocacy for the introduction of walk-in clinic service at the student wellness center.
- V. Advocacy for the introduction of part-time study opportunities coupled with part-time tuition fee options for part-time students.
- VI. Advocacy for the removal of international tuition differential for master's students.
- VII. Advocacy for a seat on the University of Saskatchewan Board of Governors.
- VIII. Expanding the anti-racism and anti-oppression training beyond top-level university leaders, especially for faculty members, managers, and directors of different university services.
- IX. Advocacy for broader and faster adoption of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles across the university.

## **Support for the Post-Secondary Tuition-free Education National Campaign**

### **1. National Day of Action (November 8, 2023)**

On November 8, 2023, students from post-secondary institutions across Canada will march for the National Day of Action campaign under the leadership of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), demanding Free and Accessible Post Secondary Education. The campaign aims to urge the Government of Canada to prioritize accessible education for all. The GSA strongly supports the movement and is collaborating with the CFS to organize a march here at the University of Saskatchewan.

# **GSA's Planned New Events and Service Expansion during 2023-2024**

## **1. Establish a Childcare Centre:**

Many graduate students need help finding a childcare center for their kids, compromising their research and scholarly work time and taking an extraordinarily long time to complete their degrees. The GSA has initiated establishing a childcare center to help graduate students find affordable childcare space for their kids. The successful establishment of the proposed childcare center will help many graduate parents spend their invaluable time on scholarly and artistic works, reducing their graduation timeline. Further, the proposed initiative could improve the mental well-being of graduate parents struggling to find a childcare spot for their kids.

## **2. Start a GSA Endowment Fund:**

The GSA has no revenue source apart from the annual graduate students' fees (\$77.8/year/student) and a small amount of money from the GSA Commons space rental. The GSA is empathetic to graduate students struggling to manage the skyrocketing cost of living and tuition fees. Thus, the GSA is exploring opportunities to expand its revenue streams so that it can help offset various annual service fee increases. The GSA is currently working to start an Endowment fund. The GSA firmly believes that if successful, the proposed initiative will help the GSA provide subsidized services and an increased number of bursaries to graduate students.

## **3. Expansion of Vision Care Services:**

The GSA aims to expand its vision care service coverages from 2024-2025, motivated by the success of the health and dental care coverage expansion starting from Fall 2023.

## **4. Pop Talk/ Elevated Speech Competition:**

The GSA plans to start a new research presentation competition called the Pop Talk/ Elevated Speech Competition. This competition aims to help graduate students share their research in less than one minute in a situation like a family reunion, a dinner party, a bar, conspiracy theorist, or teenagers at a science fair. The 2023 competition will occur on November 30, 2023.

## **5. Starting a New Flagship Research Communication Workshop:**

The GSA plans to begin a new annual professional development workshop for graduate students called "The Art of Research Communication." This workshop aims to introduce graduate students to research communication skills beyond journal publications, conference talks, and poster presentations. A preliminary list of the workshop topics is included below.

- i. Infographic/Visual Storytelling/ Video Documentaries
- ii. Oral storytelling narrative of Indigenous Culture
- iii. Writing plain language summary of a journal abstract
- iv. Writing a rebuttal
- v. Podcasting/Public Talk
- vi. Communicating research via blog pieces
- vii. Shaping public policy via newspaper op-eds
- viii. Sharing research through social media

## **GSA-led Services Improvement and Past Events**

### **1. Health and Dental Care Coverage Expansion for the 2023-2024**

The GSA has expanded the health and dental care coverage for all graduate students starting in Fall 2023. Under the new coverage plan, all graduate students can receive a \$40 reimbursement per paramedical practitioner visit from the earlier \$20 (100% increment). The GSA also enhanced the dental care annual maximum coverage to \$1000 from \$750 (25% coverage expansion). GSA also improved the dental care yearly coverage to \$ 1,000 (25% coverage expansion) during 2023-2024 from \$750 during 2022-2023. The GSA also negotiated a two-year insurance premium freeze deal with the insurance company. Details about the GSA Health and Dental Plan can be found [HERE](#).

### **2. More GSA-CGPS Need-Based Bursaries for the 2023-2024**

The GSA-CGPS Need-Based Bursaries were established to provide emergency financial assistance to those graduate students who are ineligible for other awards, are in financial need, and

no longer receive funding as part of their program. Graduate students are going through unprecedented financial hardship because of rapid tuition fee hikes and record-breaking inflation rates. The GSA will provide 110 GSA-CGPS Need-Based Bursaries during the 2023-2024 GSA Fiscal year. Each bursary is worth \$1000. Of the 110 bursaries, 70 bursaries will be awarded from GSA's funding. The College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) agreed to sponsor 40 bursaries. The GSA is currently accepting applications for the 2023 Fall Term GSA-CGPS need-based bursaries and hopes to distribute 46 bursaries each of \$1000. Details about the GSA-CGPS Need-Based Bursaries can be found [HERE](#).

On average, the GSA could only offer bursaries to approximately 15~20 % of the total applicants each semester because of limited financial capacity. The GSA is committed to increasing the number of bursaries to help graduate students in dire financial need. The GSA wants to thank the CGPS for its continuing financial support for the need-based bursary and for advocating to the CGPS to match funding equivalent to GSA's contribution during the 2024-2025 academic year.

### **3. GSA's Financial Contribution Towards USSU Operated Foodbank**

The GSA is pleased to inform the senate members that the GSA donated \$6,000 to the USSU-operated Food Bank for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The GSA hopes to continue this financial support in the future, provided that graduate students can access the USSU-operated Foodbank.

### **4. GSA Fall'23 Orientation Program:**

The GSA organized an in-person Fall orientation at the GSA Commons on September 7, 2023. This year, the GSA distributed custom-designed polo shirts among the graduate students. The design of the Polo shirt was selected through a student design competition. The GSA invited guests from different departments of the University of Saskatchewan. The guests were as follows:

- Guest Speaker: Dr. Debby Burshtyn, Dean, College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Kacia Whilby, Events and Communications Specialist, USASK Career Services
- Angie Gerrard, Liaison librarian for psychology and political studies
- Susan Bens, Academic Integrity Strategist, Teaching and Learning Enhancement
- Mirjana Mandaric, Senior International Education Officer, Regulated International Student Immigration Advisor (RISIA), ISSAC

- Robyn Paches, Program Manager, Student care
- Jesse Todd, Regional Representative, North Saskatchewan Region, PSAC



Picture: GSA distributed custom-designed polo shirts among graduate students



Picture: Pictures from the Fall 2023 orientation event.

## Graduate Student Opportunities to Participate in GSA's Governing Process

### 1. Academic Councils, Campus Club, and Social Groups Membership

The GSA encourages graduate students of all departments to participate in its governance by becoming GSA Councilors. The GSA Council consists of representatives from Academic Councils, each of which generally represents students from a department or a college. The GSA also supports various campus clubs and social groups by providing direct financial assistance and sharing GSA Commons space free to organize their events, provided that academic councils, student groups, and campus clubs must register every academic year to receive GSA benefits. More details about the GSA Council can be found on the GSA website ([HERE](#)).

### 2. GSA Standing Committees Membership

The GSA standing committees play a significant role in organizing GSA events and regular activities. There are eight standing committees, each comprising regular student members, academic council members, and at least one elected GSA executive. More information about the GSA Standing Committees and Terms of Reference for each committee can be found [HERE](#).

Regards,

Mostofa Kamal, President  
Ramin Mohammadi, VP Finance and Operations  
Sristy Sumana Nath, VP Academic and Student Affairs  
Kayla Benoit, Vice President of Indigenous Engagement  
Abbas Fazel Anvari-Yazdi, Vice-President External Affairs

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*We acknowledge that I live and work on Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.*