



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN – GRADUATE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
2024 -2025 Annual REPORT

Introduction

On behalf of the 2024-2025 Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Executive Body and Staff, I extend warm greetings to all members. The 2024-2025 GSA Executive Team comprises the following dedicated individuals:

- David Ohene-Amoako – President
- Lindsay Carlson – Vice President, Finance and Operations
- Nickson Joseph – Vice President, Academic and Student Affairs
- Reza Golpayegani – Vice President, External
- Jenniver Amarualik-Yaremko – Vice President, Indigenous Engagement

This executive team has achieved significant milestones despite the challenges encountered throughout our tenure. Though we come from diverse backgrounds, but we remain united by a shared vision: to foster an inclusive and supportive GSA where every student's voice is heard.

This report highlights our collective journey celebrating our successes, reflecting on the obstacles we have overcome, and providing actionable recommendations to strengthen the GSA for future leaders.

Student Orientations

The GSA organized two major student orientations during the academic year, one in the Fall and one in the Winter. The Fall Orientation, held on September 11, 2024, was among the most well-attended events of the year, welcoming over 160 students throughout the day. The event created a meaningful impact, as students had the opportunity to engage with guest speakers and receive direct responses to their questions and concerns. Unfortunately, the Winter Orientation had to be cancelled due to severe weather conditions. Despite this setback, the success of the Fall event highlights the importance of such gatherings in fostering student engagement and community building.

Blanket Initiative

The GSA created a blanket as a part of the USask Blanket Project, with the help of volunteers. The material for the blankets, as well as the ways in which they were made, honour Residential School survivors. In acknowledging the difficult truths surrounding the experiences of children in residential schools. Our Vice President Indigenous Engagement ensured that the GSA played a visible and respectful role in the Day of Celebration. Through this involvement, we reaffirmed our commitment to reconciliation, cultural awareness, and community engagement.

Bursary Distribution

With the support of the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS), the GSA successfully distributed \$110,000 bursaries directed towards students in need. Prior to our tenure, students receiving bursaries needed to pick up a physical cheque from our office, which many students expressed dissatisfaction about. We collaborated with CGPS to distribute bursary funds directly to student accounts, a process which allows students to get the funds more quickly, and also saves GSA thousands of dollars in bookkeeping expenses associated with T4A filing.

Student Support Initiatives (Clothing & Bread)

Under the leadership of the GSA President and the support of Lecia Ellis of Admissions and partner Fray Ellis, the GSA launched several support initiatives aimed at easing the financial burden on graduate students and fostering a sense of community. These included the distribution of free warm clothing during the winter months, as well as children's clothing for graduate students with families and members of the wider community. Additionally, a weekly "Free Bread Friday" initiative was introduced, providing fresh bread to students at no cost. Although the bread distribution has been temporarily paused, efforts are underway to revive the program. Altogether, these initiatives positively impacted the lives of over 200 graduate students, offering both practical assistance and a sense of belonging during challenging times.

Childcare/Daycare Facility

The childcare facility initiative was introduced by the GSA President and supported by the Vice President Indigenous Engagement. It began through consultations with key individuals, as advised, and has made significant progress by gaining support from administrators across the University. The GSA Council has approved the establishment of a dedicated committee to ensure the continuity and advancement of this initiative.

While identifying a suitable location remains a challenge, efforts are ongoing, and we remain optimistic about positive developments soon. This initiative, originally launched by the previous administration, has been carried forward with the shared hope that future leadership will continue to champion and realize this important vision.

OneDrive Storage Capacity

Recently, the OneDrive storage capacity for USask students was reduced. Under the leadership of the Vice President Finance and Operations, the matter was formally presented at the President's Executive Committee (PEC), emphasizing the critical need for adequate storage to support graduate students' academic and research activities. As a result of this advocacy, the storage capacity of 1TB was successfully restored for graduate students, ensuring that student researchers continue to have the necessary digital resources to support their work.

Committee Participation and Student Advocacy

During this period, the GSA actively participated in numerous University Committees (e.g., University Council, Awards and Scholarships Committee, Planning and Priorities Committee, BRT Nutana Stakeholder Committee, Fee Review Committee, etc) and convocation ceremonies, ensuring that graduate student perspectives were effectively communicated and aligned with institutional structures. Throughout our tenure, we remained accessible to students. Some approached us in confidence to discuss personal concerns, while others were referred to the appropriate offices for further support and resolution.

Raising of the Métis Flag on Indigenous Veterans Day

The GSA was able to participate in organizing a Métis flag-raising event on November 8, in honour of Indigenous Veterans Day. The weather was not entirely friendly, but the event was successful regardless, and the flag stayed up in Nobel Plaza for quite a while. Contara Bueckert sang a beautiful rendition of the Métis Anthem. The GSA would like to thank Elder Norm Fleury as well as the Office of the Vice Provost of Indigenous Engagement for ensuring the event ran smoothly and providing resources as needed.

Black History Month

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) actively participated in the 2025 Black History Month celebrations, contributing meaningfully from the official opening to the closing events. The GSA President, David Ohene-Amoako represented the association on several planning and organizing committees to ensure the success of the month-long observance. Through this engagement, the GSA played a vital role in shaping inclusive and impactful programming. One of the notable highlights of the month was the GSA's instrumental involvement in the premiere of the UBUNTU film, which celebrated themes of unity, resilience, and cultural identity. In addition to this, the GSA contributed to various other activities that honoured the legacy and achievements of Black communities in Canada and beyond. The association remains committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the university community and looks forward to continued collaboration in future cultural initiatives.

Holiday Hangout

In collaboration with the Student Wellness Centre and International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC), the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) successfully organized a Holiday Hangout in December 2024 for graduate students who remained in Saskatoon over the fall break. The event was held across three days December 27, 28, and 30 and aimed to provide a space for relaxation, connection, and community-building for students and their families who did not travel during the holiday season. The initiative brought together over 150 graduate students, offering a warm and inclusive atmosphere filled with games, food, and well-focused activities. It served as an opportunity for international and domestic students to celebrate the season together, combat isolation, and foster mental well-being during the cold months. This collaborative event reflects the GSA's commitment to supporting the social and emotional needs of graduate students beyond the classroom.

Tax Information Session

The VP Finance and Operations collaborated with USSU to host a Tax Information Session at GSA during the month of March. Dr. Devan Mescall presented a wide variety of helpful information to more than 50 attendees, then spent nearly 90 minutes answering individual questions over pizza.

GSA Awards Gala 2025

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Gala Night spearheaded by VP External was successfully held on Saturday, April 12, 2025, at Marquis Hall on the University of Saskatchewan campus. The event witnessed an impressive turnout of over 200 participants, including GSA members, faculty and staff, award recipients, and their families. The evening was a celebration of excellence and community, highlighted by the recognition of ten outstanding individuals for their remarkable contributions. The event was a memorable and resounding success.

Elevator Pitch Competition

The VP Finance and VP Student and Academic Affairs hosted an Elevator Pitch Competition to give students a chance to present their research and win cash prizes. We had 26 students register for the event, and we distributed \$350 in cash prizes to the winners.

Career Readiness Event

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) is pleased to announce its collaboration with Career Services to organize a Career Readiness Event specifically tailored for graduate students. This initiative aims to equip master's and PhD students with practical tools and knowledge to enhance their transition into the workforce. The event will focus on employer expectations, industry insights, and career planning strategies, all designed to prepare graduate students for a competitive job market. By addressing the unique challenges faced by graduate students in securing meaningful employment, this collaboration seeks to improve employment outcomes and support career success beyond academia.

Completion of 2022–2023 Audit

The Vice President Finance and Operations worked closely with GSA's contracted auditor and bookkeeper to complete the fiscal year 2023 audit, covering the period from May 1, 2022, to April 30, 2023. This was only possible thanks to the hiring of a new bookkeeping firm, who assisted us in catching up with outstanding bookkeeping left uncompleted after the abrupt departure of the previous firm. To improve efficiency of our bookkeeping and auditing going forward, we transitioned from a paper-based ledger system and outdated Quickbooks platform to a digital ledger system and Quickbooks Online. These changes we believe will increase efficiency and enhance transparency and accessibility within GSA's financial operations. The fiscal year 2024 audit is also nearly completed, an important step toward getting GSA's financials up-to-date.

Operations Management

GSA was without an Office Manager for approximately 6 months, which presented notable challenges in maintaining day-to-day operations. Despite this gap, the executive team and GSA's part-time student staff demonstrated resilience and commitment by working collaboratively to maintain the association's activities and services. We are pleased to announce the appointment of Brenna Maxwell as our new Operations Manager. Her addition to the team marks a positive step forward in restoring operational stability and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the GSA office.

GSA Standing Committees

The GSA's standing committees including the Budget and Finance Committee, Bursary Selection Committee, Governance Committee, Awards Committee, Election and Referendum Committee, Code of Ethics Committee, and Sustainability Committee have all contributed significantly to the progress and effective functioning of the association. Each committee played its role in upholding the GSA's mandate and supporting student needs throughout the year. Currently, the Election and Referendum Committee remains active, overseeing the electoral processes to ensure transparency and accountability within the organization.

Social Media and Branding Initiatives

Under the leadership of Vice President External, GSA successfully regained access to all GSA social media accounts including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), and LinkedIn which had previously been inaccessible to the former administration. These platforms were revitalized, optimized for functionality, and made more accessible to enhance student engagement. Additionally, we continued the tradition of producing the GSA Daily Planner

Handbook and branded T-shirts for the academic year. These materials were completed on schedule and distributed during the Graduate Student Orientation. The GSA also recently underwent a logo redesign to present a refreshed visual identity that offers a more authentic and direct representation of the Association. This new logo has been in use for a couple of months and is now recognized as the official logo of the GSA. The updated design reflects the evolving values and vision of the Association, while also strengthening its brand presence across platforms and communications.

Establishment of the Leadership Circle

Under the leadership of V.P Academic and Student Affairs, the GSA has established a Leadership Circle aimed at ensuring the continuity and successful completion of projects. This initiative was introduced to address the recurring issue of projects being left unfinished as new executives introduce additional initiatives. The Leadership Circle fosters collaboration, shared responsibility, and sustained engagement among all members involved in project implementation. It serves as a strategic framework to keep ongoing initiatives on track and to uphold the long-term vision and goals of the GSA.

National Representation at CFS Events

The GSA actively participated in Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) events held in Regina and Ottawa, representing the University of Saskatchewan at the provincial and national level. These engagements provided opportunities to discuss pressing issues affecting students across the country and to contribute to decision-making processes that support and advocate for the interests of member universities. Through these travels, the GSA strengthened its voice within the broader student movement and reinforced its commitment to national collaboration and student advocacy.

CFS Visit to USASK briefing

The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) operates through three main pillars: Campaigns, Services, and Research & Government Relations to advocate for the rights and well-being of students across Canada. Its major campaigns include “Fight the Fees,” “Education for All,” “Fairness for International Students,” and “No Means No,” all aimed at promoting equity, accessibility, and safety in post-secondary education. These initiatives focus on addressing systemic challenges and pushing for key policy reforms to improve the student experience nationwide. CFS also offers a range of services, including campaign and event support, free sexual health products, ISIC discounts, leadership training, and tax filing assistance. It organizes national conferences and caucus meetings to empower student voices. In government relations, CFS advocates on key issues such as housing, mental health, and international student support, while engaging with various student constituency groups. The National Graduate Caucus has notably championed increased funding for graduate students. Officers in attendance at a recent CFS visit included Mary Ojewole, Jawad Chowdhury, and Rukky Erifeta.

Reflections on the 2024–2025 GSA Executive Term

While we take pride in the many successes achieved during our 2024–2025 leadership year, we acknowledge areas that could have been improved. The transition and training for incoming executives did not proceed as planned, resulting in a steep learning curve that impacted on the early stages of our work. Additionally, we assumed office without an approved budget, which delayed the commencement of key initiatives. The prolonged

absence of an office manager further stretched our capacity, placing significant demands on the executive team. Despite these challenges, we advocated successfully for a variety of initiatives, hosted successful events, and worked to find new ways to support our graduate student community. We are proud of our contributions and optimistic that these efforts will continue to benefit graduate students and future GSA leadership.

Appreciation

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the dedicated staff of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA), the President's Executive Committee (PEC) led by President Peter Stoicheff, and the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) under the leadership of Dean Dr. Debby Burshtyn and her exceptional team. Your unwavering support has been instrumental to the success we are proud to celebrate today.

We also acknowledge the contributions of our predecessors, with special appreciation to Abbas Fazel Anvari Yazdi, former VP External, for his unwavering dedication and collaboration throughout our tenure. To the GSA Council members, committee members, volunteers, sponsors, and partners, thank you for your continued commitment and service. Together, you have shaped the GSA into a vibrant and supportive community for graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan.

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thank you all for choosing to serve.

Graduate Student Association (GSA)
Executives
University of Saskatchewan