

# GSA Annual Report

Report of the President

Rifat Zahan

April 19, 2022



Graduate Students' Association  
University of Saskatchewan

# The GSA Executives 2021-2022



Left to Right

Vice President External Affairs - Devin Cherneski

President - Rifat Zahan

Vice President Academic and Student Affairs - Mostofa Kamal

Vice President Finance and Operations - Ehsan Moradi

## GSA Office Manager 2021-2022



Candace Suessmilch

*The hard work and the continual support of the Office Manager on our day-to-day activities made sure the smooth operations of the GSA.*

## President's Message



It is my pleasure to bring this annual report to you on behalf of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) to its council members, board of directors, general members, and our stakeholders at the University of Saskatchewan and beyond.

This has been one of the most challenging and productive years for the association in recent memory despite the effect of pandemic. The GSA Executives started their tenure with some clear visions, missions, along with GSA's existing mandates to support and advocate for over 4600 graduate students.

The Executives continued their advocacy for having graduate student representation at the Board of Governors throughout the year. By the end of our tenure, we requested that once the 'Saskatchewan Act' reopens, the university should reopen the 'University Act', which will open the avenue for GSA to represent graduate students at the Board of Governors. As of today, University of Saskatchewan is the only U15 university in Canada, which does not have graduate student representation at the Board of Governors.

We worked towards increasing awareness on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). GSA is now a part of the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression (ARAO) Committee. Throughout the year, GSA learned about this committee and provided feedback when needed. GSA also



requested University Residence to provide EDI training to its employees to serve students from diversified backgrounds and provide them safe and secured space while living in the university residence. The GSA released a statement on anti-racism following the tragedy that took place in London, Ontario.

GSA also worked for marginalized populations and therefore, was able to advocate and change policies with the University Residence to provide more flexibility towards students, who are parents, graduating students, international students, students in financial needs, etc. GSA also requested senior administration to provide affordable parking services to the student community.

We have provided more need-based bursaries than the past years and the Budget Committee made a recommendation to use more money from GSA to provide need-based bursaries to a wider number of marginalized students. Since the financial crisis has been identified as the one of the important reasons for deteriorating students' mental health, GSA constantly looked for ways to improve funding opportunities for students. For that, GSA has requested the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) to provide paid parental leave to graduate students.

The GSA has made a significant contribution to the national student movement organized by Graduate Student Society of Canada, an Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) to advocate for financial support, mental health support, address housing crisis, catered support for Indigenous students and international students at the national-level.

One of the advocacies GSA did was removal of the international differential fee for graduate students, so that the international students pay the same tuition fees as the domestic students. As a result, the university decided to remove the international differential fees of the PhD students. GSA is still advocating for their international Masters students to pay the same tuition fees as the domestic students enrolled in the Masters program.

GSA organized workshops to enhance academic, professional, and leadership skills of the graduate students. We organized Yoga Philosophy sessions, workshops on Academic Integrity, Honesty, and Misconduct, information sessions on Scholarships, Tax, and so on.

We were able to organize both the Fall and Winter orientation virtually and distributed 1000 swag bags to both new and returning graduate students. We also organized the Holiday Hangout where we provided about 400 lunch and dinner boxes to our graduate students. After the long closure of GSA Commons due to the pandemic, we hosted the 3MT competition in person. We are also going to organize a semi-formal award ceremony at GSA Commons to celebrate the success of our outstanding graduate students and faculty members.

This report is a highlight of GSA activities and initiatives that took place in this past year. I am grateful to our graduate students, council members, standing committee members, volunteers, GSA executives, council chair, office manager, university senior leaders, and stakeholders for helping us with various initiatives and services.

As my tenure ends and I leave this position, I am feeling a bit emptiness in my heart, as the GSA role kept me tremendously busy with many non-academic works in the last one year. Nevertheless, I learned many important aspects about student needs, leadership, team management, and overcoming challenges against all odds. I also was able to make some very good friends while working at the GSA. I am leaving this position with the peace of mind that every day during my tenure, I thought about our students' needs, prioritized their well-being, maintained transparency of my work, and was happy to solve any challenging situation for the betterment of this organization. It was a true privilege and honour that the graduate students had trust in me and elected me during the election last year as their student leader and gave me the opportunity to serve them from my Presidential role. If there were any success or improvements at GSA, those were team efforts, and everyone associated with GSA helped to make our work successful. If there were any unintentional mistakes from any of the executives or staff members, I expect our student body and stakeholders to accept our sincere apology.

I truly believe that the next executive team will advance GSA's mandate, its goals, and mission with their dedicated hard work.

Signing Off,  
Rifat Zahan

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# GSA Governance

With the efforts of the GSA executives, with cooperation and feedback from the GSA Council, the GSA made sure to function as an internally strong organization that has made adequate room for consultation, reporting financial information, and encouraging more participation in decision making.

## Governing Documents

Throughout the 2021-2022 fiscal year, GSA made sure to follow the governing documents (i.e., constitutions, bylaws, policies) to add transparency and accountability to all the responsible parties at GSA. The Governance Committee worked hard to revisit the governing documents to propose amendments based on the past years' experience of graduate students, council members, and executive members.

## Meetings

Meetings at the GSA have ensured its smooth functioning and progress on its various internal processes. For GSA executive meetings, all minutes have been posted online in a timely manner. All substantive agreements have been documented in the minutes including but not limited to representation at various committees, approval for funding for all GSA events, conferences and initiatives for social clubs and items for information. GSA Council meeting minutes were uploaded and updated on the website in a timely fashion, as well. You may find these minutes on the GSA website.

## GSA By-Elections

During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, many GSA executive positions, as well as, Chair, Vice-Chair positions remained empty at different intervals. The GSA Election and Referendum Committee members worked hard to fill-in the empty executive positions. Me, as being the President, made sure to call for nomination for the selection of Council Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Every effort was made to make sure that GSA is functioning from its various roles and transparency was given the utmost priority to the council members and graduate students following the GSA governing documents.

## GSA Finances

With the hard work of our VP Finance and Operations, as well as the Office Manager, it was made sure that financial transparency and safety has been maintained. Regular accounting and bookkeeping have been taken care of.



<b>2021-2022 Operating Budget</b>		257,500.00 CAD
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>Service Fees</b>
236,500.00 CAD	40,870.00 CAD	1.14 M CAD

The operating budget is dependent on three main sources of income:

- Membership fees,
- Commons rentals and
- Fundraising efforts.

The GSA also collects, on behalf of the membership, the Health and Dental fee and the UPASS fee (service fees) prior to remitting to Studentcare and Saskatoon Transit, respectively.

## GSA Fees

Thanks to the efforts of the GSA VP Finance and Operations and the suggestions of the rest of the executives, the GSA Executive has transparently operated the GSA finances and looked for every opportunity to incur savings with student dollars in the operations of the GSA. The GSA is proud to announce as a result that the GSA fee shall not be increasing in the coming year, except for the Saskatoon Transit fee and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) fees. The fees currently will be as follows:

### **The 2021-2022 membership and services fees (in CAD)**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Fees</b>
Full-time membership fee	37.06
Part-time membership fee	18.53
Full-time CFS fee	6.44
Part-time CFS fee	6.22
Saskatoon Transit fee	115.38
Health Plan fee	222.51

Dental Plan fee	236.52
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**The 2022-2023 membership and services fees (in CAD)**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Fees</b>
Full-time membership fee	37.06
Part-time membership fee	18.53
Full-time CFS fee	6.61
Part-time CFS fee	3.30
Saskatoon Transit fee	119.65
Health Plan fee	222.51
Dental Plan fee	236.52

## Fundraising Efforts

The Executives make every effort to fundraise so as to provide further support to the Needs-based bursaries, the Graduate Student Research Conference, the Three Minute Thesis Competition, the Annual Awards Gala, and Holiday Hangout. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021-2022 Annual Awards Gala has been cancelled, but a small semi-formal Awards Ceremony has been organized.

# GSA Council

Academic Councils act as mini associations within the GSA and are made up of students from one or more departments. Each Academic council elects representatives to attend GSA Council meetings and General meetings. GSA Council members are an essential part of GSA's decision-making process, and the council meetings act as a platform to communicate between graduate students, GSA executives, stakeholders, etc. We are grateful to the following council members from their respective council units:

<b>Councilor</b>	<b>Department/College</b>
Rachel Carey Megan Wasden	Animal & Poultry Science
Angela Burant Bailey Pelletier	Archeology & Anthropology
Amy Carruthers Michelle Ross	Agricultural & Resource Economics / College of Agriculture & Bioresources
Jory Litt-Jukes Mercy Harris	Biology / College of Arts & Science
Iyanu Kumayon Srikant Singh	Chemistry / College of Arts & Science
Kundanika Mukherjee Arshdeep Jagait	Anatomy, Physiology & Pharmacology
Maddie Stewart Rachel Harris	Biochemistry, Microbiology & Immunology
Amanda Gannon Emilia Gillies	Community Health & Epidemiology
Elyse Proulx-Cullen Fabrice N. Njotu	Health Sciences
Fidelia Orji Keyhan Najaflian Pujitha Macha	Computer Science
Justin Triesli Tonye Jack	Mechanical Engineering
Simin Keykhosravi	Electrical & Computer Engineering

Sandhya Chandran	
Shahab Minaei Khaled Zoroufchi benis	Chemical Engineering
Ninu Kallingal Mohandas	Biological Engineering
Abbas Fazal Tochukwu Ezechukwu	Biomedical Engineering
Fatima Abed Al Sater Behdad Saed	Civil, Geological and Environmental Engineering
Dara Gerbrandt Challen Gladman Amanda Burrows	English
Nichole-Lynn Stoll Irin Sourbry	Geography and Planning Graduate Council
Fati Zahra Mubarek Mubarak Shehreen Fatima	School of Public Policy
Natasha Boyes Mostat Kelly Corrine Hall	College of Kinesiology
Kimberlee Dube Nicholas Simonson	Physics & Engineering Physics
Jennifer Chami Asiyah Suchak	College of Pharmacy & Nutrition
Michael Tweten Devin Wittow	School of Rehabilitation Sciences
Sandesh Neupane Adam Carter	Plant Sciences
Tatiana Corello Jaclyn Porter Rory Wheat	School of Environment & Sustainability
Samin Shirzadi Richa Tikoo Barsa Saha Jasmin Ogren	School of Public Health
Kayla Arisman	Sociology

Ayla Zehtab-Jadid Shayla Batty Iyesogie Iyiewuare Grace Rath Kamal Abu-Hena	
Amy Jimmo Eric Neil	Soil Science
Jensen Cherewyk Hannah Mahoney	Toxicology
Jennifer Abi Younes Jade Sands Christopher Zinck	Western College of Veterinary Medicine



## GSA Ratified Social Clubs

The GSA supports social and academic groups to improve graduate students' University experience and to allow them to meet new friends with similar interests. GSA was pleased to support many of the initiatives and events organized by the ratified social clubs. This year, the GSA would like to thank the following social groups and their executive members for their continual dedication to the graduate students:

<b>Social Clubs</b>	<b>Executive Members</b>
Bangladeshi Students' Association	Md Huzzatul Islam Khan Mustaq Ahmad Taymura Zulfikar Debasish Chakroborti Sahrima Jannat Ooishwee Mohammed Thamidur Rashid Ananya Kowshal
Let's Talk Science	Anne Brigitte Lim Alivia Mukherjee
Nepalese Students' Association	Binamra Adhikari Shandesh Bhattarai Abinash Subedi Nitesh Chhetri Subash Chapagain Prakhyat Khati Ayush Basnet
Tox on Tap	Jensen Cherewyk Hannah Mahoney Maira Peixoto Mendes Emily Kennedy Hamzat Fajana Bright Boamah

# Graduate Student Representation

The GSA made sure that graduate students are being represented and heard in different important committees within the university and outside of the university. Graduate student representatives and GSA Executives made sure to attend these meetings and bring forward the concerns and needs of the graduate students.

## University Committees

<b>Name of the Committee</b>	<b>Name of Representative(s)</b>
<b>President's Executive Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski
<b>University Senate</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>University Council</b>	Mostofa Kamal; (Rifat Zahan to send report and present report, cannot vote)
<b>Academic Programs Committee</b>	Mostofa Kamal
<b>Teaching, Learning and Academic Resource Committee</b>	Mostofa Kamal
<b>Planning and Priorities Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>Scholarships and Awards Committee</b>	Ehsan Moradi
<b>Governance Committee</b>	Devin Cherneski
<b>Images of Research Judging Panel</b>	Rifat Zahan Devin Cherneski

## College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) Committees

<b>CGPS Faculty Council</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski Naz Zarreen Oishie Uliana Morozovskaia
<b>CGPS Graduate and Postdoctoral Council</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski Naz Zarreen Oishie Uliana Morozovskaia
<b>CGPS Executive Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>CGPS Awards Committee</b>	Ehsan Moradi
<b>CGPS Graduate Programs Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>CGPS Graduate Academic Affairs Committee</b>	Mostofa Kamal
<b>CGPS Equity and International Committee</b>	Devin Cherneski
<b>CGPS Interdisciplinary Committee</b>	Devin Cherneski
<b>CGPS Earned D. Litt / D. Sc. Committee</b>	Ehsan Moradi
<b>CGPS Distinguished Graduate Mentor Award Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan

## University and External Committees

<b>Name of the Committee</b>	<b>Name of Representative(s)</b>
<b>Fee Review Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>University Relations Search committee</b>	Adejumo Gbenga

<b>BRT Nutana Stakeholder Committee (City of Saskatoon – Saskatoon Transit)</b>	Ehsan Moradi
<b>Copyright Advisory Committee</b>	Mostofa Kamal
<b>Co-Curricular Records Advisory Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>Recreation and Athletics Advisory Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>Faith Leadership Council</b>	Devin Cherneski
<b>Student Sustainability Coalition</b>	Mostafa Kamal
<b>Student Forum</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Chrneski
<b>Financial Appeals Review Committee</b>	Grad student appointed by the exec
<b>Parking and Transportation Advisory Committee</b>	Ehsan Moradi
<b>Provost's Advisory Committee on Gender and Sexual Diversity</b>	Mostofa Kamal
<b>Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)</b>	Devin Cherneski
<b>U15 Graduate Students' Society</b>	Devin Cherneski Rifat Zahan (Alternate)
<b>Publicly Engaged Scholarship Team Award</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>New and Distinguished Researcher Award Selection Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression</b>	Rifat Zahan
<b>Mistatimōk Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan

## GSA Standing Committees

Name of GSA Standing Committee	Name of Representative(s)
<b>Budget and Finance Committee</b>	Ehsan Moradi Rifat Zahan Zahra Mubarak Soheila Ahmadi Sristy Sumana Nath Ozra Mohammadi Sourabh Kumar
<b>Bursary Selection Committee</b>	Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Iyanu Kumayon Shahab Minaei Khaled B Zoroufchi Cody Malone Melissa Onwuliri Ozra Mohammadi Joshua Shitta
<b>Governance Committee</b>	Rifat Zahan Mostofa Kamal Sadia Afrin Lema Elyse Proulx-Cullen Eronmwon Joyce Iroque Nabeela Kanwal Ankita Srivastava
<b>Awards Selection Committee</b>	Devin Cherneski Rifat Zahan Khaled Zoroufchi Benis Sourabh Kumar Pezhman Zolfaghari Didani Sristy Sumana Nath Leonie Bettin Ozra Mohammadi
<b>Sustainability Committee</b>	Devin Cherneski Shahab Minaei Khaled B Zoroufchi Xingyu Zhou Ahmad Reza Salehi Sukhwinder Singh Anupriya Senthilkumaran



<b>Diversity Committee</b>	Devin Cherneski Richa Tikoo Rita Idowu Martyne Farris Anupriya Senthilkumaran Josie Conacher
<b>Elections and Referenda Committee</b>	Sadia Afrin Lema Khaled Zoroufchi Benis Shamse Tasnim Cynthia Fabrice Njotu John Malyk Rosemary Martinez Daniel Nyarko-Afriyie Nabeela Kanwal
<b>Code of Ethics and Discipline Committee</b>	Sadia Afrin Lema Keyhan Najafian Shamse Tasnim Cynthia Gurinder Dhanju Sourabh Kumar Nabeela Kanwal Sristy Sumana Nath

## GSA Meetings

<b>Name of the Meeting</b>	<b>Name of Representative(s)</b>
<b>GSA Council Meetings (Monthly)</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski
<b>GSA Executive Meetings (Bi-Weekly)</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski

<b>GSA Board of Directors' Meeting</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski
<b>GSA Events</b>	Rifat Zahan Ehsan Moradi Mostofa Kamal Devin Cherneski

# GSA Services

## U-Pass

Amidst the global pandemic of COVID-19, the GSA advocated for opt-out options from U-Pass service for remote, online and distance-based students. Since the reopening of the university from the Winter 2022 term, Saskatoon Transit did not provide flexible opt-out options for students who were registered in remote classes. Although many students use the benefits of discounted student bus pass services for their everyday commute to school, work, and getting around the city, concerns were received from general members and council members for the limited services provided by Saskatoon Transit. GSA made the effort to speak to the Saskatoon Transit to strongly advocate for the graduate students to have the flexible option of opt-out and improving the bus service. The Saskatoon Transit proposed some more meetings in the coming Spring/Summer term for the renegotiation of the contract that was signed in 2013. Recommendation to the incoming executives has been written down in internal policy documents for the renegotiation and improvement of the services provided by Saskatoon Transit.

## International Student Identity Card (ISIC)

The GSA in collaboration with the Canadian Federation of Students provided the ISIC (International Student Identity Card) during the 2021-2022 fiscal year, even though campus and GSA Commons were closed due to the pandemic. Students had the option to obtain both virtual and plastic cards to enjoy discounted services all around the world.

## Health and Dental Plan

The GSA has worked collaboratively with our health and dental insurance broker, Studentcare, to convey feedback on our membership needs for the plan. Studentcare has been very supportive of our concerns and have regularly made efforts to virtually meet the GSA executives to discuss the plan, its outcomes and report on claims made periodically. The GSA is in a good place with this partnership and is delighted to provide a very competitive health and dental plan for our members.

## GSA Commons

The GSA takes pride in providing a welcoming space on campus for students to come and relax, study, attend and organize events. Due to the pandemic, the GSA Commons was closed, but the option was left open for event organizations as long as the health guidelines and building fire code permits. After the pandemic restrictions were lifted, the VP Academic

and Student Affairs organized the 3MT competition at GSA Commons in April. This is the first in-person event that GSA organized since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. GSA is also organizing a small award ceremony at GSA Commons. Recommendations will be provided to the next executive committee to reopen GSA Commons for regular business and day-to-day activities.

## GSA Bursaries

The GSA successfully distributed need-based bursaries to eligible graduate students throughout the year. The GSA was able to obtain 32,000 CAD from CGPS to match funding with another 32,000 CAD from GSA to help support 64 graduate students in need of financial support during their studies.

## GSA Handbook

Like other years, the GSA approached the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) once again this year to publish the graduate student handbook given their convenience and cost. This year, the GSA managed some coupons from the sponsorships that would be helpful for students to claim discounts at various businesses in Saskatoon. The GSA contacted over 30 organizations for advertisements and were successful in bringing 12 advertisements with total profit of \$1995.00. The handbook has been proven to be very useful to our members and was a popular giveaway during the Fall Orientation 2021, where we distributed 500 handbooks. The GSA also gave away 100 generic handbooks provided by CFS to graduate students during the Winter Orientation 2022.

## Communications

During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the GSA operated its work and regular business online due to the pandemic. Therefore, GSA heavily relied on virtual communication platforms to make sure that students are staying connected with GSA and getting regular updates that they need.

## Social Media

GSA Social media platforms have been regularly updated by the VP External Affairs, the President, and Office Manager with important updates relating to GSA services, events, deadlines, as well as, updates relevant to graduate students coming from other stakeholders or university community. For the first time, this fiscal year, the GSA opened a LinkedIn page and have been maintaining it to make sure that the members enjoy the updates of professional events and services along with other social media updates.

## Newsletters

The GSA released newsletters every month to make sure that all graduate students receive important updates and deadlines in their inbox directly. The GSA was able to successfully organize events, called for elections, and delivered important updates because of the monthly newsletters.

## PAWS Communications

Efforts were also made to publish important event details or updates to all university community members through the PAWS communications. The GSA hopes the PAWS communications will continue to benefit our members and involve more students in the activities of the GSA.

# GSA Events

## GSA Orientation (Fall 2021 and Winter 2022)

The GSA fall and winter orientation events were organized virtually, where students met their GSA executives, Office Manager, and Studentcare members. Graduate students were introduced with the GSA goals, missions, visions, governance, services, etc.

The GSA Executives also decided to provide swag bags to all incoming and returning graduate students in both the fall and winter terms. A total of 1000 swag bags were distributed in both the orientation events.



## GSA Holiday Hangout

The GSA was able to successfully organize the holiday hangout during the holiday break amidst the pandemic and freezing cold nearing to -47 degree Celsius. GSA provided about 400 lunch and dinner boxes to graduate students as a small token of peer support and care. GSA is very grateful to the dedicated hard-working volunteers and the sponsors, who made the event possible. This event was well-appreciated by the graduate students and university community.



## Graduate Student Research Conference

The GSA was proud to present the Annual Graduate Student Research Conference (GSRC) in March 2022. The GSRC intends to bring together graduate students from a wide range of research fields to be part of this opportunity. Graduate students share their knowledge and expertise in different research topics. We encouraged all graduate students to submit an abstract and participate. We welcomed submissions from the Humanities, Environment, Health, and Technology this year.



## 3-Minute Thesis Competition

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) of the University of Saskatchewan organized the three-minute thesis (3MT) competition 2022 on April 1, 2022. Since not all graduate students have returned to the university campus yet, the 2022 3MT event occurred in hybrid mode. Students presented their research either in person at the GSA commons or via zoom. The GSA video team recorded all presentations for evaluation and publication on its various social networking platforms.

Although 52 students had registered initially, 41 students finally presented their work on presentation day. Among the 41 presenters, 26 gave their talk at the GSA commons, while 15 students delivered via zoom.

The GSA is pleased to announce that the highest number of graduate students participated in the University of Saskatchewan's 3MT history this year. The GSA managed to recruit 18 volunteers, including professors, post-doctoral fellows, and science outreach experts, to evaluate the 3MT presentations from different universities across Canada and the US.





The winners of 3MT competition for the 2021-2022 year are:

- **First Prize:** Antonia Powell
- **Second Prize:** Gaurav Malik
- **Third Prize:** Tumpa Rani Sarker
- **Honourable Mention Prize:** Kaylie Kryss

The University of Saskatchewan 3MT competition winners will attend the western regional final competition at Winnipeg on May 5, 2022.

## GSA Awards Ceremony

The GSA organized a semi-formal awards ceremony (unlike Annual Awards Gala) to celebrate the success of the graduate students and faculty members. Although there are many more well-deserving recipients of such awards, GSA is honoured to recognize the recipients of this year's award winners within our capacity. Such an opportunity inspires us and makes us proud of our university community.



GSA Awards were presented in the following categories:

- Advising Excellence Award - Dr. Jane Alcorn

- Excellence in Community Service Award - Mahesh Rachamalla
- Mark Kroecker Exceptional Student Leadership Award - Shahab Minaei
- Professional Excellence Award - Zoher Rafid-Hamed
- Research Excellence in Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, Law, or Education Award - Emma Chen
- Research Excellence in STEM: Saikat Mondal



## GSA Sustainability Photo-Voice Contest

The GSA sustainability committee organized a photo-voice competition to promote environmental, social, economic and well-being sustainability issues related to graduate students. The winners of 2021-2022 are:

- **Photo accompanied by 50-100 words story:** Andrea Gonzalez
- **Slogan (10-15 words):** Kacia Whilby
- **2-minute video or 200-word essay:** Bernd Steiger

The winners were awarded on the GSA Awards Ceremony.

## GSA Tax Sessions

Before the pandemic, the GSA used to organize an in-person tax clinic for the graduate students of the University of Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, it was impossible to schedule an in-person tax clinic for graduate students to submit their 2019 and 2020 tax returns.

Considering the graduate students' difficulties in the last two years, the GSA organized two virtual tax clinics (March 18 and 22, 2022): one for graduate students with no dependents and another for graduate students with dependents.

During the virtual session, the VP of Academic and Student Affairs provided hands-on demonstrations of tax returns submission using the popular UFILE tax software that enabled students to submit their taxes free of cost.

The graduate students highly appreciated the two virtual tax clinics.

## GSA Workshops

GSA organized workshops to enhance academic, professional, and leadership skills of the graduate students. We organized Yoga and Health (Yoga Philosophy) sessions, workshops on Academic Integrity, Honesty, and Misconduct, information sessions on Scholarships.



## Black History Month

Along with the university, the GSA successfully celebrated the Black History Month by honouring the accomplishments made by the graduate students and faculty members coming from the Black Community. The GSA interviewed outstanding graduate students and published the interviews on the University Library website under the leadership of the VP External Affairs. The GSA is requesting the university to seek department-level

percentage of graduate students from Black Community for future improvement in diversity.

## International Mother Language Day

In 1999, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared February 21 as the International Mother Language Day. This day is observed to protect languages used by people around the world. There are a lot of endangered and extinct languages worldwide, including in Canada. Also, there are fewer Indigenous languages, and some are even at the risk of declining further. This year, GSA released a statement to honour this day and also was invited to give a speech at the event of International Mother Language Day, organized by Bangladeshi Community Association of Saskatchewan. The GSA would like to request the University of Saskatchewan to consider this day to be celebrated from upcoming years for a practice of multilingualism, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism.

# Advocacy, Campaign, and Initiatives

## Celebrating the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

September 30, 2021 was marked as the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour the lost children and Survivors of residential schools, their families and communities. The GSA observed the day with the Nation and released statements on the discovery of burial sites of the lost children in Canada. The GSA worked with the Wanuskewin Community to provide volunteers to facilitate the celebration of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, 2021.

## Solidarity for Ukrainian Students

GSA is aware of the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, and many Ukrainian international students studying on our campus are facing difficulties. With the Canadian Federation of Students, GSA requests that the University of Saskatchewan provide support and services to students who need to receive:

- Immediate access to mental health resources without any delay in wait times. GSA also requests that where possible, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed counselling should be provided in English, Ukrainian, Russian, and/or other Eastern and Central European languages.
- Access to proper culturally relevant spiritual counselling where desired.
- Academic accommodation on compassionate grounds for students impacted by the invasion of Ukraine.
- Assistance to those who need support for their immigration status and tuition.

## Student-Supervisor Agreement

The Graduate Students' Association continued its effort to promote the student-supervisor agreement and encourage both new and continuing students to have a student-supervisor agreement in place at the beginning of their academic journey. The GSA also collaborated with the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association to organize events dedicated to the improvement of the student-supervisor relationship during the fall 2021 term. GSA looks forward to working with graduate students and the university community to support a harmonious journey during their academic endeavour.

## Fund Towards Travel Scholarships

During the pandemic, even though many conferences and scientific meetings were held online, some were in-person, GSA still made sure that its eligible graduate students are receiving travel awards to attend such scientific conferences and meetings. This fund was administered through the International Students and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC).

## Service Enhancement from Consumer Service Division

The Graduate Students' Association initiated regular conversations with the Consumer Service Division. Special attention was out on the University Residence and Parking Services.

## Improvements in University Residence Services

The GSA Executives have strongly advocated for graduate students living in the university residence, as we were receiving many concerns and complaints from these student groups for many years. The GSA Executives had many interactions at different levels of the university leadership team to address such concerns and provided constructive criticism and feedback, so that the services are enhanced at university residences.

Following such level of advocacy and discussions, the GSA received some updates from the University Residence Office:

- Removal of early termination fee for graduate students, who finish their degree any time during their contract and the students will have the option to finish their contract by staying in the university residence even if the student graduated earlier than the contract finish date.
- To address more inclusiveness, students who become new parents will have the option to move to the kids-friendly residence without paying transfer fee and can continue to pay their rent according to the original contract until the end of the contract period. After the contract period ends, the students may choose to continue staying in the kids-friendly building with a new contract of that particular building or may choose to move out of the residence.
- Students will also receive double the amount of Residence Cash Card (RCC) credit they used to receive with the option to rollover of the unused amount until the end of their contract with the university residence.

## Parking Services

The GSA initiated the conversation with the Parking Services to make sure that the graduate students parking on campus and around university residence has more affordable



and secured parking services. After some constructive meetings, the GSA was able to have a positive communication with the Parking Services Office. From May 2022, the students living in university residence should be able to park their vehicles for free in the U-lot parking. This will free up space on Cumberland Ave, which will be a sustainable parking option for others on campus or in the city.

## Tuition Consultation Working Group

During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the GSA worked together with the tuition consultation working group which consisted of the university senior leaders, and student leaders. Based on the council members' and graduate students' concerns, and executive members' feedback, GSA provided constructive criticism and feedback for the tuition consultation process. Along with other important suggestions, GSA suggested enhancement in the tuition predictability for all students.

## Fight Against Tuition Hike

When the university is reopening following the global pandemic, the graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan are seeing hikes in their tuition, even though not all the students have recovered from the financial, mental, and emotional stress of the pandemic yet. Specially, increasing standard thesis-based Masters tuition fees for international students is not really feasible at this post-pandemic time.

The tuition increase projection presented by College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS) translates to a 21.55% more tuition fees for students to pay during 2023-2024 academic year compared to 2020-2021 academic year. On the other hand, international students enrolled in the standard priced Masters program will see 8.6%, 26%, 48.83%, 56.27% more tuition fees during 2021-2022, 22-23, and 23-24 academic year compared to 2020-2021 academic year.

The university's decision to approach the U15 standard in terms of tuition fees is not realistic given the fact that there exists variation in terms of student experiences, funding packages, and financial support in other U15 universities. Canada's economy is heavily benefitted from the innovation of the research work conducted by international graduate students, as low tuition rate, and good funding package attracts more international students in this country. With the proposed tuition increase in the next few years, the GSA is afraid that the province of Saskatchewan will be behind other U15 universities in terms of innovation and socio-economic development.

The GSA strongly supports this freezing of tuition once a student starts their academic program when scholarship/stipend does not increase the same way tuition rate increases in the following years.

## Inquiry on Degree Delay

The GSA Executives worked closely with the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies to inquire into the delay in degree programs. The Executives brought forward this issue in many different standing committees of the university and senior leaders. Unlike, many other U15 universities in Canada, the graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan takes longer than usual to finish their degrees (median: over 6 years for PhD students and over 3 years for Masters students), which adds financial stress in students' lives, education becomes more expensive, and students are delaying in many important life-decisions, including, but not limited to, joining workforce to contribute to the economy, having children (who are the future of this country), buying houses, etc. GSA is advocating that the degree should be completed within a reasonable amount of time (4 years for PhD and 2 years for thesis-based Masters program), except for those students, who have academic accommodations.

## Increase the Amount and Duration of the Minimum Guaranteed Funding

The minimum guaranteed funding that students receive in this university does not reflect the median time needed to finish their degrees. For example, doctoral students take over six years to finish a PhD. However, the minimum guaranteed funding that they receive in their first year is usually around for three years. There is no option for graduate students to study part-time and work full-time to support the skyrocketing education costs. Therefore, GSA is requesting minimum guaranteed funding for PhD students to be at least four years, for thesis-based Masters students to be at least three years (if the median time needed for Masters students is still 3 years).

The amount of minimum guaranteed funding that students receive is way below the minimum wage salary a person makes in the province of Saskatchewan. Since the students have to pay high tuition from this limited funding, the money left in their hand to live in Saskatchewan is not enough. Many graduate student supervisors do not prefer their students to work while studying as that significantly impacts students' quality of research. Therefore, the GSA requested the university to increase the amount of minimum guaranteed funding in a way that goes above the minimum wage salary a person can make in the province of Saskatchewan.



## National Lobby Week (by Canadian Federation of Students)



The GSA was able to attend the National Lobby Week organized by Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) to address students' concerns and requests at the federal level. The GSA representatives met Members of Parliaments (MPs) from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and British Columbia to speak about affordability of education (tuition, living cost, debts), mental health support, parental benefits, etc. Some MPs promised to investigate these matters and present the items to their caucus, parliament, standing committees, and in their many critic roles.

## Parental Benefits

The GSA requested the Federal MPs and the University to consider providing parental benefits to graduate students while they are on parental leave during their study period. Some U15 universities provide such benefits to their graduate students. The examples of such U15 universities were brought forward both to the MPs, as well as university senior leaders to consider. Specially, since the University of Saskatchewan is among the U15 universities in Canada, therefore, efforts should be made to consider such benefits for graduate students, who contribute to the Canadian economy following their graduation.

## Post-COVID Recovery Plans from GSA

### GSA Membership Fees

Even though the GSA membership fees increase almost every year (with some exceptional year), which helps GSA to operate its functions, services to graduate students. The Executives this year decided not to increase the GSA membership fees to allow students to

recover from the after-effect of COVID-19 pandemic, as the pandemic impacted financial situations negatively for many students.

### GSA Health and Dental Plan Services and Fees

The Studentcare suggested a fee increase in the GSA Health and Dental Plan from the upcoming academic year of 2022-2023. The GSA Executives decided not to put extra burden on the graduate students, as they are still recovering from the pandemic effect. Therefore, the GSA Executives have decided to use GSA's own fund to cover this extra cost for the continuation of the services provided by the GSA Health and Dental Plan. The Executives are still having discussions about service enhancement with Studentcare, so that students receive more coverage and better services with extensive members in the Studentcare network. Because of the low intake of the 'Empower Me' program by the graduate students, the executives decided to discontinue this service from the 2022-2023 policy year.

### GSA Need-Based Bursaries for Marginalized Population

The VP Finance and operations suggested that GSA contribute to the GSA bursary by 40,000 CAD from the reserve fund that is accumulated from past years' remaining budget. He mentioned that now that we are in the post COVID recovery it could help at least 40 students to keep their research advances. He continued that this motion should go to the budget committee after the executives' recommendation and then to the AGM, so the next executive team will be able to use the extra money to support more students in a financial crisis, and special consideration should be given to the marginalized population.

## Challenges Faced and Further Recommendations

The GSA Executives, Chair, and Vice-Chair are the key people of the daily operations and management of the GSA and receive honoraria for their dedicated hard work out of students' fees, still consider this job as voluntary. While the membership is generally sympathetic to the fact that the Executives, Chair, and Vice-Chair are also graduate students like the general members managing between their studies, research, teaching, personal and professional lives, etc. it is also reasonable for general graduate students to have very high expectations from their Executives, Chair, and Vice-Chair. Regrettably, issues surrounding missed meetings and deadlines, lack of engagement and commitment, misunderstandings did arise from time to time during this fiscal year.

Some recommendations and amendments were made by the Governance Committee to make sure that GSA has clear guidelines on member expectations, specially from Executives, Chair, and Vice-Chair. Efforts were also made by the Governance Committee to make available more detailed information on member expectations so that only dedicated volunteers come forward to serve as GSA Executives, Chair, and Vice-Chair knowing about the possible time commitment. Executive, Chair, and Vice-Chair training and expectations must be enhanced going forward to better serve the membership.