

VP Academic and Student Affairs Annual Report October 2021-April 2022



Graduate Students' Association

University of Saskatchewan

April 11, 2022

1. Introduction

According to the GSA bylaws, the duties of the Vice-President of Academic and Student Affairs shall

include, but are not limited to:

2.4.1.1. Shall sit on University Council;

2.4.1.2. Act as a liaison within the University community relating to graduate student issues;

2.4.1.3. Organize a program of social events for the enhancement of the graduate student experience;

- 2.4.1.4. Organize the Three Minute Thesis Competition and the Graduate Student Research Conference;
- 2.4.1.5. *Organize academic workshops of interest to graduate students;*
- 2.4.1.6. Coordinate with the University in its efforts to orient incoming graduate students;
- 2.4.1.7. Advocate for resources that would improve the academic experience of graduate students at the University; and,
- 2.4.1.8. Advocate for graduate students in all matters relating to their University experience, as applicable.

1. Organizing GSA’s regular annual events
a. Three-minute thesis (3MT) competition 2022

The VP of Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for organizing the Three Minutes Thesis Competition (3MT). 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 recorded all presentations for evaluation and publication on its various social networking mediums. Although 52 students had registered initially, 41 students finally presented their work on presentation day. Among the 42 presenters, 26 gave their talk at the GSA commons, while 15 students delivered via zoom. In 2022, 52 students registered to participate but on the day of the event, 41 student's presented their thesis work. It is to be noted that the number of graduate students who participated in 2022 is the highest in the University of Saskatchewan's 3MT history. The GSA also recruits the highest number of judges in the University of Saskatchewan's 3MT history, including professors, post-doctoral fellows, and science outreach experts, to evaluate the 3MT presentations from different universities across Canada and US. The judges are as follows:

Table: List of 3MT Judges for 2022

Index	First Name	Last Name	Position	University
1	Mark	Ferguson	Communication Specialist	GIWS, University of Saskatchewan

2	Julie	Petrin	Post. Doc	University of Saskatchewan
3	Linzi	Williamson	Post. Doc	University of Saskatchewan
4	Antonio	Facciuolo	Post. Doc	University of Saskatchewan
5	Sarah	Krasniuk	Post. Doc	University of Saskatchewan
6	Pooja	Choudhary	Post. Doc	University of Saskatchewan
7	Katie	Ovens	Post. Doc	McGill University
8	Mahfuzer	Rahman	Assistant Professor	University of Montevalo in Alabama, USA
9	Mostafizur	Rahman	Assistant Professor	The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), USA
10	Farhad	Maleki	Post. Doc	McGill University
11	Andrea	Kraj	Assistant Professor	University of Saskatchewan
12	Mohammad	Alam	Post. Doc	University of Victoria
13	Abdus	Sabur	Post. Doc	University of Waterloo
14	Megan	Evans	Communication Specialist	SENS, University of Saskatchewan
15	Yunus	Babuni	Post. Doc	Dalhousie University
16	Hasan	Ahmed	Research Scientist	GIFS, University of Saskatchewan
17	Ceren	Eyiguler	Post. Doc	University of Saskatchewan
18	Lenaic	Couedel	Professor of Physics and Engineering Physics	University of Saskatchewan
19	Palash	Sanyal	Communication Specialist	GIWS, University of Saskatchewan

The GSA hopes to announce the winners' names by 3rd week of April. The University of Saskatchewan 3MT competition winners will attend the western region final at Winnipeg on May 5, 2022.

b. The hand-on virtual tax clinic

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 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 enables students to submit their taxes free of cost. The graduate students highly appreciated the two virtual tax clinics.

c. Winter Orientation Event

The VP of Academic and Student Affairs is responsible for organizing the Fall and Winter orientation. Because of the COVID crisis, the GSA organized the winter orientation virtually. When the University finally started in-person class, the GSA organized a Swag Bags distribution event, and approximately 400 swag bags were distributed among graduate students. The GSA executives also delivered Swag Bags to all McEwan Park residence buildings following the Curbside Pickup events at the GSA commons.

d. Holiday Hangout 2021

The VP of Academic and Student Affairs coordinated the GSA organized Holiday Hangout event on December 27 and 28, 2021, where 400 graduates were served lunch and dinner mills along with other GSA executives and volunteers.

2. List of Advocacy Activities

a. Increased minimum guaranteed funding for increased academic years

Unfortunately, at the University of Saskatchewan, on average, a Ph.D. student requires close to 7 years. A master's degree requires close 4 years degree to complete the degree, which is significantly higher than the U15 average degree completion timeline. In the year 2020, only three students completed their Ph.D. degrees in three years. Even though less than 1% of students completed their Ph.D. degree in three years, most of the departments at the University of Saskatchewan offer 3-year guaranteed funding for Ph.D. students. In 2020, only three students completed their Ph.D. within three years (approximately 1% of the total completed Ph.D. students). The same is true for MSc students. Despite the three and half years of completion time, MSc students are funded for two years. Thus, since joining the GSA in October 2021, I have constantly

advocated for increasing the duration of thesis-based program students' guaranteed funding and increasing the value of the minimum guaranteed funding. Further, I advocated for taking necessary steps to decrease degree completion time for the University of Saskatchewan graduate students.

b. Opposing Tuition fees increase and International Tuition Differential Increase

During my whole tenure, I strongly opposed the University of Saskatchewan's decision to increase tuition fees significantly for the next four years and increase the tuition fees for international students by approximately 40% over four years.

c. Implementing Student-friendly Parking Policies

The VP of Academic and Student Affairs has accompanied the GSA president at all meetings with the Parking manager since November 2021 and strongly advocated for student-friendly parking policies. I am pleased to inform the council members that the GSA has convinced the parking authority to implement parking policies that will benefit the graduate students enormously, including free-of-cost parking opportunities for graduate students living in the McEown Park residence building.

d. Service Improvement and Increase at Graduate Residence Facilities

The VP of Academic and Student Affairs has accompanied the GSA president at all meetings with the residence manager since November 2021 and strongly advocated for service increase and service improvement, and proposed existing housing policy changes to better serve graduate students. The advocacy works include but are not limited to the followings:

1. Multiple rental payment notifications to avoid penalties due to missed rental payment
2. Allowing students to complete their rental agreement after completing their degree
3. Introducing an auto-withdrawal option for the tenant
4. Removing Rom Offer Acceptance Fees (ROAF) every year for the existing tenant
5. Free of cost transfer of new parents from residence with no kids to residence with kids.

e. Health and Dental Coverage Extension

The GSA executives advocated bringing more service providers under the student care networks. Other GSA executives and I consulted with the student care representative to discuss the possibility of increasing the existing health and dental coverage. Unfortunately, our committee could not increase existing ranges because of a sudden increase in the health and dental coverage premium.

3. The VP of Academic and Student Affairs attended the following list of monthly and event-based meetings.

- I. President's Executive Council (PEC)/ with Student Leaders
- II. CGPS Council Meeting
- III. University Council Meeting
- IV. Graduate Program Committee
- V. Academic Program Committee
- VI. Graduate Academic Affairs Committee
- VII. Teaching, Learning, and Academic Resources Committee
- VIII. Meeting with CGPS Associate Dean Ryan Walker
- IX. Covid Management (PRT) Committee
- X. Academic & Student Life Technology Committee
- XI. GSA Executives Meeting
- XII. University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association
- XIII. GSA Bursary Committee
- XIV. Monthly meeting: GSA Executives/Vice-Provost, TLSE
- XV. Graduate Students of Canada Monthly Meeting
- XVI. GSA-USSU Executive Committee
- XVII. GSA Governance Committee
- XVIII. Arts and Science Dean Search Committee Meeting
- XIX. Vice-Provost Teaching, Learning, Student Experience Search Committee
- XX. RTD Appeal Hearing Board Meeting
- XXI. CGPS Annual Awards Committee