



Graduate Students' Association
University of Saskatchewan

GSA Annual Report 2021-2022

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Vice President External Affairs

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It was a privilege to work for the GSA, and I am proud that I have completed my tenure as VP of External Affairs; starting back in October of 2021, I won a close race by-election. It was also a great pleasure and honour to represent our GSA locally and nationally (local 101-Usask). I started my term during another wave of the pandemic, as duties were challenged by not being able to have in-person meetings, but technology helped along the way. No doubt, there were enormous responsibilities, but with the experience and leadership of our executive team, I felt comfortable the job would be accomplished 100% satisfactorily. Our team worked in solidarity toward the goals of our graduate students and the GSA mandate. Although we had some different views on specific policies, all in all, everything was done in coordination with our GSA Usask values. The GSA Executive team (2021-22) made my experience worthwhile and rewarding. Here are some brief achievements and highlights up to April 2022. I hope you enjoy reading them.

1. GSA Executive meetings

The meetings I attended with the executive were usually virtually, although we had a couple of personal sessions at the end of the term. Throughout the year, we discussed different initiatives, policies, the impact of hybrid graduate students, innovation, and special events, to name a few. Meetings were always engaging and lengthy, with many innovative ideas from our executive team. I also teamed up with the GSA President and GSA Office Manager to approve and post social media requests throughout the university and other stakeholders.

2. University Committees

I was representing our graduate students in several committees. I had the opportunity to advocate for our graduate students on each committee. I ensured that the new policies and bylaws were not

affecting students. We worked for all graduate students' interests and brought their concerns and perspectives forward. Most of the committee work was completed virtually online.

3. Fall & Winter Orientations

The GSA executives and I collaborated to organize the fall 2021 and Winter 2022 orientations through online and in-person events. We hosted incoming graduate students and successfully conducted curbside pickup of swag bags for postgraduate students. We had a thriving Holiday Hangout in which we got to see many smiling graduate students attend the GSA Building to pick up hot food and say hello to our volunteers (during frigid cold weather, I might add). This type of commitment from the GSA and volunteers is priceless, and that is why I committed my time as an executive.

4. Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)

The Canadian Federation of Students is a bilingual national union of over a half-million students. It provides students with a practical and united voice at the provincial and federal levels. I kept myself engaged with all the CFS activities (late October onward) during my term with the overall goal of working in solidarity for every graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan.

I also focused on CFS's activities and initiatives for all graduate students and their concerns during the school year and pandemic. I discussed the concerns expressed by students regarding irregularities with fees, tuition, and other vital costs and problems. I attended the annual general meeting of CFS, representing local 101 Usask GSA and its sub-body National Graduate Caucus (NGC). There were a lot of issues and discussions with delegates from the U-15 universities throughout Canada. Things discussed included challenges faced during the school year, the covid-

19 pandemic, and different strategies to improve graduate student concerns. Other events I attended had the Lobby week (February 22-25) while meeting with one of our Saskatchewan Members of Parliament to discuss various graduate topics. I wish you all the best in continuing these important initiatives for the next VP External.

5. Health Chats events

Yoga and Health Online (Yoga Philosophy - Fall-term)

We offered Yoga through zoom. This meditation class was shown in the fall and ended in December 2021. Through our social media, we encouraged graduate students to participate in this guided meditation exercise to relax and de-stress each week. Approximately five or six participants were attending the sessions.

6. Black History Month

The Usask Black History Month (BHM) was a huge success overall. In February, interviews and video profiles were developed with engaged graduate students telling their incredible stories to the university during February. Thank you to all the volunteers, GSA, executive, and graduate students who committed time and effort. The GSA is looking forward to bigger things in 2023, collaborating with the Usask library and other university leaders and stakeholders.

BHM website: can be found at [Black History Month - University Library | University of Saskatchewan \(usask.ca\)](https://www.usask.ca/black-history-month/).

7. 2022 GSA Annual Awards

The GSA Annual Awards are intended to celebrate graduate students and honour faculty that have generously supported postgraduate students in research and scholarly and artistic pursuits. The awarded graduate students will motivate and serve as valuable role models for the entire graduate

student community on campus. The Annual Awards ceremony has replaced the GALA for 2021 as we will be having a small gathering on Wednesday, April 13th. The following candidates were recipients of the awards:

1. Advising Excellence: **Dr. Jane Alcorn**
2. Excellence in Community Service: **Mahesh Rachamalla**
3. Mark Kroeker Exceptional Student Leadership Award: **Shahab Minaei**
4. Professional Excellence: **Zoher Rafid-Hamed**
5. Research Excellence in Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, Law or Education: **Emma Chen**
6. Research Excellence in Indigenous Studies: **N/A**
7. Research Excellence in Interdisciplinary Studies: **N/A**
8. Research Excellence in STEM: **Saikat Mondal**

Closing remarks:

During my term as VP of External Affairs, I had the opportunity to meet great people at the GSA, take on leadership, and work with our graduate students. All in all, it was a very positive experience. I want to thank the following GSA executive members who made things happen during my term President Zahan, VP of Finance and Operations Moradi, and VP of Academic and Student Affairs Kamal. A special thanks to our GSA office manager Candace, present Council Chair Sadia, past executive member Naheada, volunteer Reggie, and others who helped me during my successful term with the GSA.