



University of Saskatchewan- Graduate Students' Association

Council Meeting

Thursday, June 19, 2025; 17:00-19:00

Meeting Location: Online (ZOOM)

AGENDA

*The GSA operates on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis Nation. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of our gathering place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.*

|   | ITEM   | ACTION      | PAGE  |
|---|--|-------------|-------|
| 1 | Call to order  |             |       |
| 2 | Approval of agenda   | Decision    |       |
| 3 | Motion to receive GSA Annual general meeting minutes for April 2025  | Action      | 1-14  |
| 4 | Motion to receive GSA executive meeting minutes<br>➤ April 9 and 29  | Action      | 14-16 |
| 5 | Motion to call for self-nominations for VP Indigenous and Engagement   | Information |       |
| 6 | Introduction of New GSA Executives   | Information |       |
| 7 | GSA executive reports<br>a. Vice President Finance and Operation<br>b. Vice President Academic and Student Affairs<br>c. Vice President External Affairs | Information | 17-23 |
| 8 | Adjournment  |             |       |



### **Annual General meeting**

**University of Saskatchewan-Graduate Students' Association (GSA)**

Wednesday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025; 17:00-20:00

Meeting Location: Hybrid (Online & Zoom)

***"As Council gathers, we acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of our gathering place and reaffirm our relationship with one another."***

**Graduate Students' Association**

*Attendance: See appendix A*

**Chair: Shaily Tandekar**

**Recording Secretary: Arman Heydari**

- **Call to Order**

Shaily Tandekar called the meeting to order at 5:21 PM. A land acknowledgment was given, recognizing Treaty 6 territory and the Métis homeland. Shaily welcomed all attendees and introduced the meeting format.

- **Rules and Regulation**

Shaily outlined the procedures based on Robert's Rules of Order. Voting protocols were explained for both in-person and online attendees. Each speaker was allotted 3 minutes. Respect and decorum were emphasized, and participants were reminded to keep their video on when speaking online.

- **Agenda: Approval of Agenda**

Shaily asked if there were any amendments to the circulated agenda. None were raised.

**Mover:** Luke

**Second:** Lindsay

**Yes:** 16

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

- **Agenda: Motion to Receive GSA Council Meeting Minutes**

**GSA Council Meeting Minutes for March 26th**

Motion to receive the minutes was made.

**Mover:** David

**Second:** Luke

**Yes:** 20

**No:** 0

**Abstention: 0**  
**Motion carried.**

- **Agenda: Approval of Bursary Selection Committee Meeting**

**GSA meetings held on December 18, 2024; February 13, 2025; and March 24, 2025**

Motion to receive all three meeting minutes together was proposed.

**Mover:** Luke

**Seconded:** Reza

**Yes:** 17

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 1

**Motion carried.**

- **Agenda: GSA Awards GALA report**

Reza (VP External) presented the financial and operational report on the GSA Gala:

- Total budget surplus: \$5,800.
- Awardees were paid \$1,000 each (except for one advising excellence award).
- Marquis Hall rental: \$17,500 (main cost).
- Additional expenses: awards gifts, photography, event logistics, and AV setup.
- Due to higher interest, the event was moved from the Exeter Room to the larger Gary Room.

No major questions were raised. The report was accepted.

- **Agenda: GSA 2024-25 budget actuals**

Presented by VP Finance, Lindsay:

- Cuts in underutilized lines: banking, postage, handbook.
- Removed winter orientation.
- Proposed reduction in gala spending due to increased sponsor funding.
- Slight increases in insurance and Zoom technology.
- Net \$20,000 surplus despite lower revenue.

**Discussions included:**

- Office and staff budget breakdown (Manager: ~\$60,000; Coordinator allocation reduced).
- Handbook retention: due to excess unused print copies, a move toward useful branded materials (e.g., pens or backpacks) was discussed. But a student named Jason disagreed and wanted to keep the budget.

**Motion: Keep the Handbook budget at \$2,500 for 2025-26.**

**Mover:** Jason

**Second:** Lindsay

**Yes:** 11

**No:** 10

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

- Cultural funding: diversity initiatives and special event lines can support Indigenous events; no specific allocation required.
- Elevator pitch vs. conference: renaming budget line to "Elevator Pitch or Conference" was proposed.
- A proposal was raised to increase funding for a potential conference given past interest and CGPS contributions.

**Motion: Increase the conference budget line from \$500 to \$2,000.**

**Mover:** Jen

**Second:** David

**Yes:** 17

**No:** 1

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

- Discussion on legal expense budget adequacy.

**Motion to approve the proposed budget for 2025-26 as amended was made.**

**Mover:** Lindsay

**Second:** Jen

**Yes:** 18

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

- **Agenda: Motion to Amend GSA Bylaws**

#### *Amendment 01*

Approved revision of Bylaw 5.5.1 and removal of 5.5.2. Executives now receive 13 equal monthly payments, including for the transition month of May with conditions.

**Mover:** Lindsay

**Seconders:** Luke

**Yes:** 15

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 02*

Establishment of the GSA Leadership Circle as an advisory body composed of current and past executives.

**Mover:** Nickson

**Seconders:** Jennifer

**Yes:** 16

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 03*

VP Indigenous Engagement candidates must be verified under the deybawin | taapwaywin | tapwewin policy.

**Mover:** Jennifer

**Seconders:** David

**Yes:** 13

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 04*

Expanded duties for the VP Indigenous Engagement and coordination with the Vice Provost Indigenous Engagement.

**Mover:** Lindsay

**Seconders:** Jennifer

**Yes:** 19

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 05*

Removal of \$25 cash deposit requirement from election nomination process.

**Mover:** Lindsay

**Seconders:** David

**Yes:** 20

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 06*

Council Chair to provide structured orientation and meeting experience for Vice Chair.

**Mover:** David

**Seconders:** Reza

**Yes:** 17

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 07*

Expanded definition of "Third Party" in election campaigning.

**Mover:** David

**Seconders:** Lindsay

**Yes:** 16

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 08*

Clarification that a "Representative" is a regular graduate student.

**Mover:** Lindsay

**Seconders:** Luke

**Yes:** 16

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**



#### *Amendment 09*

Representative nomination procedures and campaigning conduct outlined.

**Status:** Tabled for future meeting.

#### *Amendment 10*

Proposal to require at least five (5) nominators for a candidate, instead of one.

**Rationale:** Enhances legitimacy and support of candidacy.

**Status:** Tabled for future meeting.

#### *Amendment 11*

Proposed change to allow volunteer experience (confirmed by executives) to qualify a student for the role of President.

**Rationale:** Recognizes substantial non-formal contributions.

**Mover:** David

**Second:** Amanda

**Yes:** 15

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

#### *Amendment 12*

Correction of bylaw reference and clarification that “Executive nominee (except President)” is preferred to have associative or volunteer experience.

**Rationale:** Fix misprint and clarify requirement.

**Status:** Tabled for future meeting.

#### *Amendment 13*

Corrects a misprinted bylaw reference by updating clause 4.8.6.1.2 to point to the correct section (Bylaws 4.8.3.4.5 – 4.8.3.4.7) instead of the incorrect 4.13 reference.

**Mover:** David

**Second:** Lindsay

**Yes:** 10

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

- **Agenda: GSA Executives' Annual Report Questions & Answers**

Each Executive referenced their annual reports. Highlights:

- Reza (VP External) emphasized success of gala and sponsor funding.
- Lindsay (VP Finance) shared insights on bookkeeping delays and technology upgrades.
- Nickson (VP Academic & Student Affairs) highlighted structural reforms and equity concerns.
- Jen (VP Indigenous Engagement) detailed event initiatives and verification policies.

**Member discussions included:**

- The GSA Handbook's usefulness and environmentally conscious alternatives.
- Increasing engagement in events and promoting inclusivity.
- Cultural funding support and clarity around budget line flexibility.
- Proposals for pre-election vetting and structured debates to improve leadership selection.
- The need for a long-term strategic plan to align budget and executive actions.

- **Agenda: Election results & Introduction to new Executives**

The election results were announced. Incoming Executives were introduced. Candidates in attendance were invited to the stage for acknowledgment.

- **Agenda: Announcement of By-elections for President and VP Indigenous & Engagement**

Shaily announced that by-elections for the vacant President and VP Indigenous Engagement positions will take place in May (exact date TBD).

- **Announcement of Election for Vice-chair**

Applications for Council Vice-Chair were opened. The election will be held at the next Council meeting in June.

- **Agenda: Other Businesses**

Motion made to appoint David as Interim President until the conclusion of by-elections.

**Mover:** Reza

**Seconded:** Palash

**Yes:** 13

**No:** 0

**Abstention:** 0

**Motion carried.**

- **Agenda: Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40



## Appendix A

| Academic Council  | Name of Councilors and (alternates)   | Oct<br>2024 | Nov<br>2024 | Dec<br>2024 | Jan<br>2025 | Mar<br>5,<br>2025 | Mar<br>26,<br>2025 | Apr<br>2025 |
|---|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Biology Graduate Student Association  | Portia Mohrbutter<br>Ayicia Nabigon (Alternate)   | P           | P           | P           | P           | P                 | P                  | P           |
| Chemistry Course Council  | Marco Justino<br>Loza Taghavi (Alternate)<br>Ozra   | P           | A           | P           | A           | A                 | A                  |             |
| College of Medicine Graduate Students Society – Biochemistry, microbiology & Immunology | Andy Kim - Councilor<br>Shirley Yu - Councilor<br>Samiul Chowdhury - Councilor<br>Sara Dalkilic - Councilor<br>Rylan Bahrey (Alternate)<br>Adrielle Souza (Alternate) | P           | P           | P           | P           | P                 | P                  | P           |
| Computer Science Graduate Council (CSGC)  | Thulani Hewavithana<br>Norah Ridley<br>Mary Fidelma Ndupu<br>Mumtahina Ahmed (Alternate)  | P           | P           | P           | P           | P                 | P                  | P           |

|  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Engineering Graduate<br>Community Council (EGCC)<br>– Biological                           | Sumana Majumder<br>Emmanuel Ezechinyelu (Alternate) | A | P | P | A | P | P | P |
| Engineering Graduate<br>Community Council (EGCC)<br>– Biomedical                           | Danyil Dmytriiev<br>Bashu Gautam (Alternate)        | P | P | P | P | P | P | P |
| Engineering Graduate<br>Community Council (EGCC)<br>– Chemical                             | Parvaneh Koranian<br>Sara Nath (Alternate)          | A | A | P | A | A | P |   |
| Engineering Graduate<br>Community Council (EGCC)<br>– Civil, Geological &<br>Environmental | Anukul Basnet<br>Bashu Gautam (Alternate)           | P | P | P | P | P | P |   |
| Engineering Graduate<br>Community Council (EGCC)<br>– Electrical & Computer                | Deepa Upadhyaya Subedi<br>Bashu Gautam (Alternate)  | A | P | P | A | P | P | P |
| Engineering Graduate<br>Community Council (EGCC)<br>– Mechanical                           | Kiranbir Kaur<br>Faizan Ansari (Alternate)          | A | A | P | A | P | P |   |
| English Course Council   | Lydie Hua<br>Gwen Rose (Alternate)                  | P | P | P | P | P | P | P |
| Geography & Planning<br>Graduate Council   | Emily Ireland<br>Prakash Sapkota (Alternate)        | A | A | A | P | P | P |   |
| Kinesiology Graduate<br>Student Council  | Matthew Chapelski<br>Karissa Johnson (Alternate)    | P | P | P | P | P | A |   |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nursing Graduate Student Association (NGSA) | Jordan Sherstobitoff<br>Ewurabena Sacky-Forson<br>Hayen Chei Luri (Alternate)<br>Stella Aluko (Alternate)<br>Kristen Witter (Alternate) | P | P | P | P | P | P |   |
| Plant Science                               | Luke Dojack   | P | P | P | P | P | P | P |
| Physical Therapy Student Society (PTSS)     | Patrick Janzen-Brown<br>Taya Stang (Alternate)  | P | A | A | P | A | P |   |
| SENSSA                                      | Jethro Opara<br>Chelsea Ohenewaa Nyarko (Alternate)   | P | P | P | P | A | A |   |
| School of Public Health (SPHSA)             | Wasim Al-Khanati<br>Omar Bardouh<br>Theresa Agbeyei<br>Isfar Chowdhry (Alternate)   | A | P | P | P | P | P |   |
| Sociology GSA                               | Meaghan Boily<br>Leah PHouseman (Alternate)   | P | P | P | P | P | P | P |
| Soil Science Graduate Student Association   | Andrea Cline  | P | P | P | P | P | P |   |

|  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Kelsey Acton<br>Chloe Canning (Alternate)<br>Levi Lundell |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Animal and Poultry<br>Science GSA  | Megan Dubois<br>Gus Halibert (Alternate)                  | P | A | P | P | P | P | P |
| Toxicology Graduate<br>Student Association<br>(TGSA) Academic<br>Councilor | Chantel De Lange<br>Summer Selinger (Alternate)           | A | P | P | A | A | A |   |
| History Graduate Student<br>Association                                    | Kiegan Lloyd<br>Catlin M. Woloschuk                       | P | A | A | P | A | P |   |
| Physics & Engineering<br>Physics (PEGASUS)                                 | Jeisson A. Vanegas Carranza<br>Nicholas Simonson          | P | A | P | P | P | P | P |
| Johnson Shoyama<br>Graduate School of Public<br>Policy Student Association | Harjot Tur-harjot<br>Bazal Khalid (Alternate)             | A | A | A | A | A | A |   |

| Executive member                      | Name of executive member   | Oct 2024 | Nov 2024 | Dec 2024 | Jan 2025 | Mar 5, 2025 | Mar 26, 2025 | April 2025 |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Exec. President                       | David Ohene-Amoako         | P        | P        | P        | P        | P           | P            | P          |
| Exec. VP Finance and Operations       | Lindsay Carlson            | P        | P        | P        | P        | P           | P            | P          |
| Exec. VP Academic and Student Affairs | Nickson Joseph             | P        | P        | P        | P        | P           | P            | P          |
| Exec. VP External Affairs             | Reza Golpayegani           | P        | P        | P        | P        | P           | P            | P          |
| Exec. VP Indigenous Engagement        | Jennifer Amarualik-Yaremko | P        | P        | P        | A        | P           | A            | P          |

**GSA Executives Meeting in April 2025**  
**April 9th (3:30 PM to 5:30 PM)**  
**April 28th (4 PM to 6 PM)**

**Attendance:** David Ohene-Amoako, Lindsay Carlson, Nickson Joseph, Jennifer Amarualik-Yaremko, Reza Golpayegani.

**Regrets:** None

**All executives approved all of these actions.**

**President:**

1. Briefed the executive board on GSA Elections 2025.
2. Raised the question of having an interim president while GSA by-elections are ongoing, including the idea of allowing anyone at the AGM to self nominate. The other executives thought having an inexperienced person as the “acting president” would not be useful to incoming execs, would require a great deal of paperwork/logistics, and could create

confusion. The VP Finance suggested that the existing president should serve as “acting president” since he would be required to participate in the transition process during the month of May anyway. Ultimately, the executives decided this is a question for the election committee.

3. Discussed the AGM 2025 and the bylaw amendments.
4. Proposed to compensate VP Finance and VP Indigenous Affairs for covering the operational manager responsibilities (managing gsa.admn email, scheduling coordinators to cover GSA Commons Hours, payroll, and other day-to-day operations) for the duration that GSA did not have an operational manager (~6 months). The VP Finance and VP Indigenous asked to be excluded from any conversations/decisions after the initial suggestion was made, but VP Finance provided a breakdown of how much of Office Staff Salary budget was remaining for the current fiscal year (~\$5,000). **(Approved)**

#### **VP Finance:**

1. Event funding request from SPHSA for a grad student/faculty mixer at Louis’ Loft. **(Approved)**
2. Event funding request from BGSA for a cross-country ski trip to Elk Ridge. **(Approved)**
3. Discussed remitting additional academic council funds following approval of the amendment to the funding policy (increasing from \$3 to \$6 per student and increasing max funding allowable from \$500 to \$750). Stated that she would process payments before end of fiscal year.
4. Informed the Executives of her plan to propose a bylaw amendment at the AGM requiring outgoing executives to assist with the transition during the month of May, noting that the current executive monthly stipend would be split into 13 monthly increments to account for this, rather than 12. Therefore, the final month of executive pay would be contingent upon participation in the transition process.
5. Informed the Executive Board that the previous GSA Chair received an additional paycheck in the month of March due to miscommunication between herself and the bookkeeper, and failure of previous office manager to set up payroll for previous Vice-Chair (now current Chair). The Executive Board decided to request that the previous Chair return the funds of his own volition. **(Approved)**
6. Discussed a situation with a coordinator who was allowed to work on the website outside of regular office hours by previous OM, but reported an unexpectedly high number of hours for April. A policy implemented by VP Finance in October to avoid this exact situation requires VP Finance and OM approval of any “remote” hours prior to their completion. No hours were submitted for approval in April but 14.5 hours were reported,

mostly associated with the election. The Executives decided to pay the coordinator for some of the hours despite not requesting approval because the work was already done, but did not agree to pay the full reported hours as 1) some of the work should have been done during regularly scheduled GSA Commons work hours, and 2) no verification that tasks took as long as reported could be provided. **(Approved)**

7. Informed the other executives that she feels it is unnecessary for coordinators to do additional/remote work anymore now that an OM is hired, and stated that this will no longer be allowed. Also, informed executives that the new OM is now in charge of scheduling coordinators for commons shifts, and informed everyone that the proposed budget allows for ~13.5 coordinator work hours per week for the next academic year.
8. Suggested that it may be useful to get feedback from Council on what went well this year, and what could be improved in future years by incoming executives.

#### **VP Academic and Student Affairs:**

1. Discussed handover to the new group of executives.
2. Asked whether others would like to write thank you cards to administrators who we appreciated during our tenure.

#### **VP Indigenous Engagement:**

1. An update was provided regarding efforts to recruit a new Vice President of Indigenous Engagement for the next term. The discussion highlighted a lack of significant interest at this time.

#### **VP External:**

1. Moved to approve the March 2025 executives' meeting minutes. **(Approved)**
2. Discussed the operational plan and staff assignment for the GALA day.
3. Informed the executive board that the Gala report with all financial details of incomes and expenditures will be presented at AGM 2025.
4. Discussed purchasing a cloud storage for maintaining GSA files instead of email attachments. VP Finance reported that some file-storage already exists for GSA (Jade) but has been underutilized because it is difficult to access. VP Finance suggested a Sharepoint. No final decisions were made, but all agreed the next group of executives should pursue a better solution.



Dear GSA Councilors,

Thank you for electing me to a second term as a GSA Executive. I ran again because I sincerely believe that GSA would benefit from continuity of leadership during this period of flux, and I want to ensure significant progress we made in 2024-2025 is maintained. Please find an update on my May activities as the Vice-President Finance and Operations.

1) Announcement of Spring/Summer Term GSA-CGPS Need-Based Bursary

The online application for the spring-summer term need based bursary is now open. It will close on June 25 and results will be announced on July 17. Approximately 1/3 of the 110 bursaries will be awarded. I would like to thank the members of the Bursary Selection Committee for their service this year. Vincent Maranda, Meherun, Jessica Sharpe, Sara Dalkilic, Mary-fidelma Chioma Ndupu, Portia Mohrbutter and Nickson Joseph have been selfless with their dedication and generous with their time in improving the selection rubric and adjudicating three rounds of awards.

2) Full transition to digital invoicing

Beginning at the start of the new fiscal year (May 1, 2025), GSA transitioned to a fully digital invoicing system through QuickBooks Online (QBO). I programmed standardized line items (e.g., Commons Rental Non-Ratified Group Hourly Rate), which will reduce human error in data entry and calculations. Customers can also request a copy of the original invoice at any in the near or distant future. This will also improve the transparency and efficiency of our bookkeeping, as payments will be immediately linked to each invoice.

3) GSA Storage Shed and BBQs

In mid-May, the facilities team contacted GSA's Operations Manager inquiring as to whether the BBQ grills in the shed near the Commons building belonged to GSA (after cutting off our lock). They informed us that they would be tearing the shed down later in the day, and that we needed to remove GSA property immediately. Due to fire and safety issues, they will not permit us to store the grills indoors and keep the propane tanks chained near the building outdoors. They also will not permit us to purchase another small outbuilding or storage box for these items because "they are trying to reduce areas of campus prone to break-ins" (the previous shed was never broken into). They presented us with no other viable solutions for how/where to keep the grills, and suggested that we get rid of them and contact Marquis catering whenever food services are

needed. I know having access to grills to host inexpensive summer and fall BBQ parties is a service valued by the graduate community, but unfortunately at this time I do not have any suggestions on how to retain this service beyond summer 2025, but I am open to suggestions from council.

#### VP Finance Meetings Attended

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 4/30/2025 | Annual General Meeting                        |
| 4/30/2025 | Executive Transition Meeting                  |
| 5/6/2025  | Studentcare Plan Introduction Meeting         |
| 5/8/2025  | Operations Manager/Bookkeeper Meeting         |
| 5/14/2025 | Planning & Priorities Committee Meeting       |
| 5/21/2025 | Auditor Meeting                               |
| 6/2/2025  | Executive Onboarding Meeting                  |
| 6/5/2025  | Canadian Federation of Students Intro Meeting |
| 6/11/2025 | GSA President/VP Finance Meeting              |
| 6/17/2025 | Student Finance Meeting                       |

Graduate Students' Association

As always, please feel free to contact me with questions or concerns.

Regards,

Lindsay G. Carlson (she/her)

VP Finance and Operations, Graduate Students' Association (GSA)

PhD Candidate, Department of Biology University of Saskatchewan

Reort by VP Academic and Student Affairs

### **1.1 Introduction and appreciation**

I would like to express my profound gratitude to all council members and executives for representing graduate students' community, providing academic, professional, and social activities and services to graduate student as well as promoting awareness of issues relevant to graduate students' community.

My name is Mandela Alema. I am a second year PhD student at the Department of Soil Science. As a Soil Scientist, I study the Impact of integrating forages, with or without grazing, into diversified crop rotations on crop yield and soil health in the Canadian Prairies.

## **1.2 Goal and objective for the office**

I strongly believe that the goals and policies of any should be guided by the roles/duties of the same. On that note, I would like to highlight my goals and visions for the office of the Vice President Student and Academic Affairs which are underpinned by the roles/duties of the office.

- To actively advocate for issues relating to academic policies, funding opportunities, mental health support, and improved student services through stakeholder engagements, grad student groups collaborations and strategic communication channels (digital platforms including social media, newsletters, and forums/structured town halls)
- To revitalize academic and social events, including orientations, workshops, conferences, and career development workshops to strengthen connections among graduate students across disciplines — bridging disciplines, sparking collaboration, and turning your graduate journey into a connected, enriching experience.
- Champion equity and tailored support for international students, students with disabilities, and underrepresented groups—while addressing the distinct needs of all graduate students to ensure no voice is left unheard.

I am confident that achieving and realizing these goals and vision for the role of VP Student and Academic Affairs will require strong collaboration and a shared commitment to teamwork. Hence let's all work together to build a better grad experience together.

## **2.0 Update May activities as the Vice President Academic and Student Affairs.**

### **2.1 ALUMO Graduate Stakeholder Meeting Montreal**

The VP Academic and Student Affairs and VP External Affairs represented the GSA at the Graduate Stakeholder Meeting held at the Studentcare Office (1200 McGill College Av – Floor 22) in Montreal on Wednesday, May 21, 2025. The meeting focused on three areas:

Session 1: Insurance Trends: The Graduate Landscape

- **Graduate Student Needs & Plan Structure:** Graduate students rely on group insurance plans as the most affordable and inclusive option for health coverage. Unlike individual plans – which can cost five times more and exclude pre-existing conditions– group plans are designed to meet the unique needs of graduate students, including extended academic timelines and higher mental health demands. Studentcare works closely with graduate student associations (GSAs) nationwide to tailor benefits, ensuring comprehensive support for this demographic. By pooling resources across 100+ institutions, these plans provide stability and accessibility for over one million students.
- **Prescription Drug Trends:** Prescription drugs are the largest cost driver in student health plans, accounting for 45–65% of claims. High-cost medications like Ozempic (\$900/month), Vyvanse (ADHD treatment), and PrEP (HIV prevention) significantly impact plan budgets. To manage expenses, Studentcare promotes generic alternatives, co-pay structures, and pharmacy price comparisons. A new initiative now offers 100% coverage for prescriptions in 95% of plans, eliminating out-of-pocket costs for most students. These measures aim to balance affordability with essential coverage.
- **Mental Health Support:** Mental health claims have surged, with drugs like antidepressants and ADHD medications seeing a 108% increase in costs over five years. Barriers such as stigma, financial strain, and limited awareness persist, but solutions are emerging. Studentcare’s Conversation program provides free, barrier-free counselling (4–8 sessions per issue), addressing 45% of causes related to anxiety. This pooled service model has saved students over \$659,700 in counselling fees, demonstrating the value of proactive, low-cost mental health resources.
- **Legislative Updates (Bill C-64):** The new Pharmacare Act, passed in October 2024, will expand coverage for diabetes medications and contraceptives nationwide. Provinces like Manitoba, PEI, and BC are already rolling out benefits, but uncertainty remains about how this will affect existing student plans. Studentcare is actively engaging policymakers to advocate for graduate students, ensuring supplemental coverage isn’t compromised. Institutions must monitor updates to adapt plans accordingly and safeguard student access to critical medications.
- **Equity & Innovation:** Studentcare is advancing equity through initiatives like Gender Affirmation Care, which now offers a \$50,000 lifetime maximum—covering procedures, travel, and trans-friendly provider networks. Additional programs target Indigenous healthcare gaps and ADHD-specific benefits. These innovations reflect a commitment to addressing systemic disparities and evolving student needs. By prioritizing inclusivity and collaboration with student associations, Studentcare sets a benchmark for responsive, sustainable health coverage in higher education.

Participants were introduced to the Alumo Brand and how the rebranding came together – the rebranding process (the what, how and why?). Essentially, Alumo stands for “*igniting student potential*”. The rationale for the rebranding was based on the fact that brand “Studentcare” was contained that there was a need for an all-inclusive brand hence the brand “Alumo”. New initiatives of Alumo include the Student Impact Fund – a grant designed to support student led projects on the university campuses.

### Session 3: Operations Overview & Office Tour

Participants were given an overview of the operations of the Studentcare Office. Participants also had the opportunity to tour the Studentcare office facility as well meet and interact with heads of operations and staff.

The meeting ended with a Working Groups Activity where participants brainstormed on major constraints/barriers grad students face, gaps and areas to bridge and support them. It was an opportunity for Alumo to hear from participants. Key issues that emerged included but not limited to: (1) High cost of living, housing and tuition fees, inadequate childcare support and access to daycares, food insecurity, transportation challenges and low stipend/incomes. Some recommended solutions included enhanced bursaries, awards, scholarships, emergency funds, increase in stipends, co-living spaces, support resources, subsidized housing, U-pass extension to spring/summer terms, subsidized meals, sustainability funding, food banks, free lunch drives and food hampers.

### **2.2 Update on Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) meeting**

The President (immediate past), VP Academic and Student Affairs and VP External Affairs had the opportunity to meet with Rukky Erifeta (the regional lead, Saskatchewan, Canadian Federation of Students) and at large executives and Director of Membership Relations via Zoom on Friday, 6th June. During this meeting participants were given an overview of the services CFS offers as well as student-focused campaigns and advocacy strategies they champion: government relations, education and equity campaigns, events, training, research, student union support and mobilization. Among the services highlighted included health and dental plans, sexual health products, free student discount card, ethical and sustainably produced products, digital service, handbooks and day planners and free tax filing. VP Academic and Student Affairs, Mandela Alema thanked the CFS team for the great work they are doing and asked why graduate students (Masters and PhDs) who meet English proficiency requirements by the university and are instructed in English or French by our esteemed Canadian institutions are required to meet CELPIP requirements and charged the CFS to launch a coordinated effort to oppose this policy, leveraging collective action. The CFS teams acknowledged the concern raised and indicated that they will forward it to the lead in charge of campaign/advocacy.

Regards,

Mandela Alema

Dear Council Members,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the graduate student community for entrusting me with the role of Vice President External Affairs for the 2025–2026 term. I am honored to represent our diverse and dynamic graduate population and am committed to building strategic relationships and amplifying graduate student voices at local, provincial, and national levels. I look forward to working collaboratively with the executive team and council to advocate for the needs and aspirations of graduate students across disciplines.

Alumo Graduate Stakeholder Meeting – Montreal, May 21, 2025

I had the opportunity to attend the Alumo (formerly Studentcare) Graduate Stakeholder Meeting in Montreal alongside VP Academic and Student Affairs. The meeting provided valuable insights into graduate health and dental plans, operational strategies, and ongoing equity initiatives. The four sessions were:

#### **Session 1: Insurance Trends: The Graduate Landscape**

This session outlined current healthcare priorities for graduate students. Studentcare emphasized the importance of group insurance plans tailored to graduate students' needs, including coverage for mental health and chronic conditions. Key topics included rising prescription costs, mental health service usage trends, and legislative updates such as the federal Pharmacare Act (Bill C- 64).

#### **Session 2: Introduction to the Alumo Brand**

This session introduced the rebranding of Studentcare to “Alumo,” reflecting a broader mission to “ignite student potential.” A notable new initiative is the Student Impact Fund, aimed at supporting grassroots student-led projects on campuses across Canada.

#### **Session 3: Operations Overview and Office Tour**

We were given a guided tour of Alumo's head office and introduced to key team members. The operational overview showcased how Alumo works directly with student associations to improve service delivery and equity-focused programs (e.g., Gender Affirmation Care, Indigenous health initiatives).

#### **Session 4: Working Groups Activity**

This collaborative session invited participants to identify barriers and propose solutions to common graduate student issues. Discussions addressed housing affordability, food insecurity, childcare access, and mental health issues.

Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) Meeting – June 6, 2025

Along with the President and VP Academic, I met with representatives from the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), including Saskatchewan regional lead Rukky Erifeta and other executives. The meeting highlighted national advocacy campaigns on affordability, equity, and access. Mandela Alema, the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, expressed gratitude to the CFS team for their exceptional work. She inquired as to why graduate students (Masters and PhDs) who satisfy the university's English proficiency requirement and are instructed in English or French by our esteemed Canadian institutions are obligated to meet the CELPIP requirement. Alema challenged the CFS to initiate a coordinated effort to challenge this policy, utilizing collective action. The CFS teams have acknowledged the concern that has been expressed and have stated that they will forward it to the lead responsible for campaign/advocacy.

May has been a month of impactful engagement with national student advocacy bodies. These meetings have laid a strong foundation for strategic partnerships and have informed our understanding of evolving student needs. I am excited to continue building on this momentum, ensuring the GSA's voice is heard in shaping student services and policy.

Regards,

Biraj Saha Aronya (he/him)

VP External Affairs, Graduate Students' Association (GSA)

PhD Student, Department of Computer Science, University of Saskatchewan

Graduate Students' Association