



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

GSA ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

**Mery Mendoza
2019-2020 President
Graduate Students' Association**

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1. President's message

On behalf of the Graduate Students' Association Executive, it has been a pleasure to represent and serve the graduate student body during the 2019-2020 fiscal year. The Executive, with utmost respect for its members, looked forward to working with all of you to address your many concerns over the year. In this annual report, I provide a brief overview of the overall GSA services and the main work the Executive undertook in terms of advocating for improving the graduate students' experience during the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Additionally, it is our goal to end the year by letting our graduate student body know how much we appreciated them. While this pandemic has caused us to distance ourselves from you physically, we have never abandoned the responsibilities you have entrusted us with. We will always be here for you, and we will continue to advocate for you and for the resources and tools that will enhance your graduate student experience.

I am very grateful for having an engaged GSA Council and Standing Committee Members. Your participation and enthusiasm each meeting was, and will always be, crucial for the guidance and direction of the GSA. I am also expressing my gratitude and infinite thanks to the Council Chair, Reggie Nyamekye, and the Recording Secretary, Osai Clarke. Your professionalism and leadership in each of the meetings was admirable and outstanding. Thank you for joining the GSA team.

I would like to thank Naheda Sahtout for her impressive engagement with the GSA, acting as an adviser behind the scenes throughout the year. Her support made a positive difference in the overall activities of the GSA. I would like to thank the Office Manager, Candace Suessmilch, and Office Coordinators, Dana Ramsay, Megan Solberg, Mario Gonzalez, Viktoria Hinz, and Olatunji Olabiyi for their dedication and support in the GSA Commons on a daily basis.

Finally, I would like to extend gratitude to my Executive team; Mohammad Wajih Alam (VP Finance and Operations), Alejandra Fonseca (VP Student Affairs) and Chiamaka Ezekwesili (VP External). The commitment they put in each task was astounding. Each of them brought specific strengths to the team, and I am truly privileged to have had the opportunity to work with them.

I wish each and every one of you the very best in your academic and professional pursuits.

Mery Mendoza

2019-2020 President,

Graduate Students' Association, University of Saskatchewan

2019-2020 GSA Executive Committee



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President
gsa.pres@usask.ca



Mohammad Wajih Alam
Vice-President Finance and Operations
gsa.fin@usask.ca



Alejandra Fonseca
Vice-President Student Affairs
gsa.sa@usask.ca



Chiamaka Ezekwesili
Vice-President External
gsa.external@usask.ca

2019-2020 GSA Office Staff



2019-2020 GSA Office Coordinators

Dana Ramsay

Megan Solberg

Viktoria Hinz

Mario Gonzalez

Olatunji Olabiyi

The invaluable support and dedication of our GSA Staff and coordinators ensures the day-to-day operations of the GSA Commons.

2. Introduction to the Graduate Student's Association (GSA)

2.1 Graduate Students' Association

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) is a not-for-profit organization that represents over 4300 graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan. The GSA provides professional, academic, and social activities and services, and promotes awareness of issues relevant to graduate students. All graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan are members of the GSA and thus have the right to vote in elections, referenda and at general meetings. The general membership is the highest decision-making body of the GSA.

The mission of the Graduate Students' Association is to:

- ✓ *Be the recognized representative body of its members to the University administration, its faculty, and the external community;*
- ✓ *Ensure its members have access to quality services that support their academic success;*
- ✓ *Advocate for the unique needs and concerns of its members; and,*
- ✓ *Build a cohesive community among its members.*

2.2 Membership

There are three classes of membership for the Association: Regular Members, Associate Members and Honorary Lifetime Members.

An individual is a **Regular Member** if they are a graduate student registered in the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

Postdoctoral fellows or graduate students of the Saskatoon Theological Union are eligible to become **Associate Members** if they are registered with the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

An **Honorary Lifetime Member** shall be awarded by a majority at the Annual General Meeting with the position being purely symbolic with no rights or privileges.

In the 2019-2020 academic year:

- ✓ There was more than 4300 graduate student members;
- ✓ At least 45 Associate Members paid Association dues in the fall and winter terms to access the Health and Dental Plan or the UPASS.

2.3 Finances

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.

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 and also for the Annual Awards Gala. Because of the COVID-19 world pandemic, the 2019-2020 Annual gala has been cancelled and the donation from our sponsors were then returned.

2019-2020 Operating Budget CAD 258,750.00		
Membership Fees	Fundraising	Service Fees
CAD 227 K	CAD 40 K*	CAD 1.5 M

*Due to the covid-19, many of our events, including the Annual Gala was cancelled and fundraised monies were returned to our sponsors.

2.4 Membership fees and Services fees

The 2019-2020 membership and services fees:

Full-time Membership fee	CAD 37.06 / term
Part-time Membership fee	CAD 18.53 / term
Full-time CFS fee	CAD 6.30 / term
Part-time CFS fee	CAD 3.15 / term
Saskatoon Transit fee	CAD 111.87 / term
Health Plan fee	CAD 222.51 / year
Dental Plan fee	CAD 236.52 / year

The 2020-2021 membership and services fees:

Full-time Membership fee	CAD 37.06 / term
Part-time Membership fee	CAD 18.53 / term
Full-time CFS fee	CAD 6.35 / term
Part-time CFS fee	CAD 3.18 / term
Saskatoon Transit fee	CAD 114.16 / term
Health Plan fee	CAD 222.51 / year
Dental Plan fee	CAD 236.52 / year

2.5 Expenses

The GSA is committed to financial transparency and offers members the opportunity to request a detailed operating statement and monthly ledger at any point throughout the fiscal year.

The revenues collected go towards the following expenditures;

- ✓ Graduate student support services;
- ✓ Executive honoraria and staff salaries;

- ✓ Financial, legal and bookkeeping fees;
- ✓ Office supplies and Commons operations;
- ✓ Major events and initiatives;
- ✓ Academic Council and Social Club funding;
- ✓ Executive operations, and;
- ✓ Operating costs.

Under the guidance of the Vice-President Finance and Operations, the Executives ensure that the Budget is spent according to the approved Budget amounts. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that events are cost-effective and self-sustainable.

3. 2019-2020 Outcomes

There were perhaps four major themes that the Executive wanted to pursue throughout the 2019-2020 fiscal year:

- ✓ **Student-Supervisory Support; and checklist resource for graduate students**
- ✓ **Request for representation on the University Board of Governors**
- ✓ **Fight against tuition fees**

3.1 Student-Supervisory Support

In keeping with the progress of previous Executive Committees, and knowing that the student-supervisory relationship is fundamental to the success of graduate students, the 2019-2020 Executive focused heavily promoting the use of the Student-Supervisor Agreement across Colleges and Schools. This document was promoted in several meetings, including orientation events. Furthermore, in the monthly meetings with the Associate Dean of CGPS, we open discussions to start the development of the Graduate Handbook. Standard models from other universities were obtained and it can be used as a guide for the developing of the Graduate Handbook from the CGPS perspective. With these tools in place, the new Executive will have the opportunity to expand the first draft of this document.

3.1.1 Resource checklist

A Resource Checklist, found in the appendix 1 and on the GSA website, was created. This is a new document that was developed in order to assist all new graduate students coming to your college/department/school. This document draws attention to specific benefits and resources that each new grad student should be made aware of and due to some of the inherent deadlines and timelines; preferably in their very first week of attendance. The new GSA executive will be distributing this critical information to the colleges and schools as well as in orientation events to new graduate students so they can familiarize themselves and acclimate to the University as well as bring broader awareness to those services and benefits that may be available to them.

3.2 Request for representation on the University Board of Governors

The previous Executive team paved a forward moving path to graduate student participation on the University Board of Governors, one that was built on a strong network of support on and off campus. The 2019-2020 executive, continued to rise this concern in several meetings. Additionally, we sent a letter to the Minister of Advanced Education requesting that necessary actions be taken to amend Clause 42 of the University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995, to allow for better representation of graduate students on the University Of Saskatchewan Board Of Governors. We believe that the requested amendment is important and supports the University's mission and matches the shift in the University toward becoming a research-intensive university.

However, this petition was unsuccessful and was suggested, again, to request this change directly through the University Secretary's Office to the Board. Future executives can continue to advocate for increased representation within the University's governance structure.

3.3 Fight against tuition fees

With the support of many graduate students and faculty, the Executive communicated to the campus leaders, the graduate students' discomfort and rejection of the five year tuition proposal in different meetings, including University council meeting, Dean's council meeting, meeting with the provost team, and several others.

Furthermore, the GSA sent a package to the Board of governors requesting the complete rejection of this proposal until proper consultation is done. Materials provided in support of this letter included a Statement from the Graduate Students' Association, Letters of support from graduate student Councillors, a petition created by the Graduate Students' Association, more than 1300 signatories to the petition including Masters students, PhD candidates, Faculty, Staff, Undergraduate students, Visiting Researchers, Postdoctoral Fellows, Alumni, prospective graduate students and other members of the campus community, over 200 comments from petition signatories rejecting the tuition proposal. We look forward to have a positive response to our petition.

Additionally, because of the COVID-19, the GSA executive is working on advocating for an overall extension of all graduate programs for as long as the university is closed and for the time the pandemic remains, extension of funding support (stipends, scholarships, etc.) for the time the program is extended, tuition and other fee adjustments, etc. The next GSA executive can continue working towards advocating for an accessible and affordable education for all graduate students.

4. University and Senate - Graduate student representation

Graduate student participation on College level and University level committees is an important step towards engaging our members in the decision-making processes of the institution. Those students who participate on these committees have showcased professionalism, been excellent role models and have advocated for the needs of graduate students to the best of their abilities.

Presidents Executive Committee	Mery Mendoza Alejandra Fonseca Mohamad Wajih Alam Chiamaka Ezekwesili
University Senate	Mery Mendoza
University Council	Alejandra Fonseca
Academic Programs Committee	Chiamaka Ezekwesili
Teaching, Learning and Academic Resource Committee	Reggie Nyamekye
Planning and Priorities Committee	Mery Mendoza
Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam
Scholarships and Awards Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam

Governance Committee	Naheda Sahtout
CGPS Faculty Council	Mery Mendoza Alejandra Fonseca Mohamad Wajih Alam Chiamaka Ezekwesili Naheda Sahtout Reggie Nyamekye Britanie Thomas
CGPS Graduate and Postdoctoral Council	Mery Mendoza Alejandra Fonseca Mohamad Wajih Alam Chiamaka Ezekwesili Naheda Sahtout Reggie Nyamekye Britanie Thomas
CGPS Executive Committee	Mery Mendoza
CGPS Awards Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam
CGPS Graduate Programs Committee	Mery Mendoza
CGPS Graduate Academic Affairs Committee	Alejandra Fonseca
CGPS Equity and International Committee	Chiamaka Ezekwesili
CGPS Interdisciplinary Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam
CGPS Earned D. Litt / D. Sc. Committee	Chiamaka Ezekwesili
Fee Review Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam
Copyright Advisory Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam
Co-Curricular Records Advisory Committee	Mery Mendoza
Recreation and Athletics Advisory Committee	Mery Mendoza
Faith Leadership Council	Chiamaka Ezekwesili and Alejandra Fonseca
Student Forum Executive	Chiamaka Ezekwesili / Alejandra Fonseca
Student Forum	Chiamaka Ezekwesili Alejandra Fonseca Shashank Shekhar Kumar
Facilities Planning Working Group – University Library Transformation Project	Alejandra Fonseca
Steering Committee – University Library Transformation Project	Alejandra Fonseca
Alumni Legacy Project – Steering Committee	Mery Mendoza
Financial Appeals Review Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam Mery Mendoza
Parking and Transportation Advisory Committee	Alejandra Fonseca
Provost’s Advisory Committee on Gender and Sexual Diversity	Chiamaka Ezekwesili

President's Circle Advisory committee	Mostafa Kamal
Information Systems Steering Committee	Mery Mendoza
Academic and Student Life Technology Committee	Alejandra Fonseca
Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Nutana Stakeholder Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam
Review Committee for Dean of Western College of Veterinary Medicine	Breanne Murray
Search for Associate Dean, Research and Faculty Relation for Edwards School of Business	Alexander Mueller
Arts and Science College Planning Advisory Committee	Osai Clarke
College of Education Search Committee for an Associate Dean, Research and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Committee	Kenisha Blair-Walcott
2020 Teaching Awards nominations for the Provost's Awards and the Sylvia Wallace Award	Mery Mendoza
Student sustainability coalition	Mostafa Kamal
Search committee Executive Director, School of Environment and sustainability	Mostafa Kamal
Review committee Dean, University Library	Kerry Marshall
Review committee Dean, College of Kinesiology	Natalie Houser
Review committee Dean, College of Law	Ekeolisa Chukwunonso
Search committee Dean, College of Nursing	Mary Ellen Jean Walker
Search Committee for the Dean CGPS	Naheda Sahtout
NRA / DRA Awards Selection Committee	Naheda Sahtout

5. GSA Council - Graduate student representation

With 25 Academic Councils, engagement during Council meetings has been remarkable, with graduate students raising concerns, seeking clarification and openly discussing controversial topics. Council's input has directed the Executives towards establishing new supports and bringing forth concerns to senior administration.

Currently, the composition of the active GSA Committees are:

Committees	Membership
Budget and Finance Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam (Vice-President Finance and Operations) Emerita Mendoza (President) Rifat Zahan (Council member) Muhammad Aminul Islam (Council member) Nishit Gandhi (Regular/general member) Kinsuk Sarker (Regular/general member)
Bursary Selection Committee	Mohamad Wajih Alam (Vice-President Finance and Operations) Alejandra Fonseca (Vice-President Student Affairs) Doug Fansher (Council member) Rebecca Smith (Council member)
Governance Committee	Mery Mendoza (President) Alejandra Fonseca (Vice-President Student Affairs) Reggie Nyamekye (Council Chair) Naheda Sahtout (Council member) Rifat Zahan (Regular/general member) Phillip A. Radetzki (Regular/general member) Priya Goundar (Regular/general member)
Awards Selection Committee	Chiamaka Ezekwesili (Vice-President External) Natalia Zakharchuk (Regular/general member) Hadi Ramin (Regular/general member) Kathy Wang (Regular/general member)

Sustainability Committee	Chiamaka Ezekwesili, Vice-President External Kimberlee Dube (Council member) Mostofa Kamal (Council member) Khaled Zoroufchi Benis (Regular/general member) Irin Soubry (Regular/general member) Jismol Jose (Regular/general member) Hadi Ramin (Regular/general member) Anupam Das (Regular/general member)
Diversity Committee	Chiamaka Ezekwesili(Vice-President External) Kathy Wang (Regular/general member) Zaki Hasan (Regular/general member) Sukanya Pati (Regular/general member) Pearl Masa (Regular/general member)
Elections and Referenda Committee	Reggie Nyamekye (Council chair) Asanka Godakanda (Council member) Mostofa Kamal (Council member) Aisha Sajid (Council member) Nataliia Zakharchuk (Regular/general member) Ka-Sheena Minott (Regular/general member) Kaidan Xu(Regular/general member)
Event Organizing Committee	Alejandra Fonseca (Vice-President Student Affairs) Britanie Thomas (Regular/general member) Swapnil Srivastava (Regular/general member)

6. Services

The GSA continues with its long standing tradition of providing supports and services to graduate students. These include;

- ✓ UPASS
- ✓ Health Plan
- ✓ Dental Plan
- ✓ Needs-based bursaries
- ✓ International Student Identity Card
- ✓ Notary Services
- ✓ Tax Clinic
- ✓ Funds towards the Travel Scholarships
- ✓ Funds towards the Crisis-Aid Program

We work hard to ensure that our graduate students have an academic environment that encourages success, provides supports and paves the path towards a superior University experience.

7. Main Activities throughout the year

The Executives worked around the following major areas;

- ✓ Creating a welcoming environment for graduate students;
- ✓ Mental health support and promotion for graduate students;
- ✓ Providing professional development and networking opportunities for graduate students; others

In order to improve the graduate student experience, the GSA executive has organized several different events throughout the year. New and returning graduate students were welcomed at the fall (September 5, 2019) and winter (January 16, 2020) orientations, organized under the guidance of the Vice-President Student Affairs. Graduate students were introduced to the services offered by the GSA and the University and were given the opportunity to network. GSA executives

also participated in College/School level orientations providing information about the GSA services and opportunities offered.

Under the guidance of the Vice-President Student Affairs, student concerns were well represented at the College and University level. The Vice-President Student Affairs played a remarkable role in advocating and assisting graduate students on and off campus. Under the guidance and leadership of the Vice-President Student Affairs; several events were organized, including the Graduate Research Conference held February 13-14, 2020, which was organized for graduate students to showcase their communication and presentation skills. Moreover, because of the current global pandemic, the 3MT Competition, held on March 27, 2020 was moved to an online platform. The winner of the 3MT will be communicated within the month.

Under the guidance of the Vice-President Finance and Operations, Needs-based bursaries were administered in all three terms. More than 280 applications were reviewed by the GSA Bursary Selections Committee. A total of 56 bursaries, of CAD 1000 each, were awarded to graduate students. New and creative ways to support our graduate students were considered in this time of uncertainty. With regards to the GSA Tax-Clinic, because of the global pandemic, the Vice-President Finance and Operations created a YouTube video, as a tutorial to assist graduate students in filing their 2019 taxes. All GSA

Mental health and well-being were key areas of focus of the GSA executive and under the guidance of the Vice-President External, efforts were made to ensure several different opportunities were available that outlined our dedication to upholding these principles. On March 4, 2020, the Diversity Committee organized an event promoting environmental and sustainable ways of living. The VP External managed a number of Co-recreational teams throughout the fiscal year. The Guppies participated in Soccer, Futsal and Basketball, among others. These teams saw a number of graduate students become involved in physical activity without the need for competition. Moreover, a series of Health Chats were also hosted in the GSA Commons. These included Zumba classes.

Unfortunately, we were not able to host the Annual Gala and many other events due to the current situation and as the global COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, the GSA is putting measures in place to ensure we continue to serve and support our graduate students. Overall, the GSA executive continue open to discuss concerns, ideas/initiatives that graduate students, faculty member and the campus community may have. We look forward to continue working with all of you for the betterment of our graduate students.

It is our hope that we will continue to work together to develop tools and resources that would shape our graduate programs and ensure that our faculty and our graduate students are well supported for success.

Appendix 1:

INCOMING GRADUATE STUDENT RESOURCE CHECKLIST

This document is intended to bring awareness of resources available to new graduate students, and to assist faculty members recruiting such individuals to the University of Saskatchewan.

Aboriginal Student Centre (ASC): A welcoming place to make friends and access support through personal, social, cultural, and academic programs and services. Staffs support the academic and personal success of Indigenous students.

<https://students.usask.ca/aboriginal/#Culture>

Access and Equity Services (AES): This is guided by Saskatchewan's Human Rights legislation and accommodates individuals requiring accommodations during their program based on disability, religion, family status, and gender identity.

students.usask.ca/health/centres/access-equity-services.php

College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS): Graduate students should visit the website and be aware of the policies and procedures associated with their program.

cgps.usask.ca/

Graduate Students' Association (GSA): Represents all graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan and provides professional, academic, and social activities and services, and promotes awareness of issues relevant to graduate students.

gsa.usask.ca/

GSA Health & Dental Plan: Graduate students can register in this plan to get extended health and dental coverage.

studentcare.ca/rte/en/UniversityofSaskatchewangraduatestudentsGSA_Home

Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning (GMCTL): Provides a variety of programming, workshops, non-credit courses and resources for graduate students who are new to teaching or who already have some experience but want to learn more.

<https://teaching.usask.ca/events/graduate-teaching.php>

Housing and Child Care: Information about on campus and off campus housing and childcare.

students.usask.ca/essentials/housing.php#Offcampussupport

Information Technology Service Catalogue: This describes the core IT services to University of Saskatchewan faculty, staff, and students in support of their academic and administrative activities.

<https://servicecatalogue.usask.ca/it/index.php>

International Student and Study Abroad Centre (ISSAC): Provides arrival, transition, cultural support, information about study abroad, awards and travel safety, and intercultural programming and is a central support unit for all students, faculty and staff.

students.usask.ca/international/index.php

Physical Activity Complex (PAC): Offers a fit center, access to personal training, sport, recreational activities, and more.

rec.usask.ca/

Saskatchewan Health Card: All new Saskatchewan residents (domestic students from another province/territory, international students and returning Canadians) must register themselves and their dependents for a Saskatchewan Health Card to receive health benefits.

skhealthcard.health.gov.sk.ca/

Student Central: Provides students with assistance on finances, registration, academic life, and more.

students.usask.ca/student-central.php

Student Employment and Career Centre (SECC): Offers support to students with regards to all aspects of career and job search.

<https://students.usask.ca/jobs/centres/secc.php#Services>

Student Learning Services: Offers support to students learning and development of academic skills.

<https://library.usask.ca/studentlearning/>

Student Wellness Centre: Offers urgent and non-urgent physical and mental health care to students, their spouses and children through counselling, doctor and nurse appointments, mental health assessment, nutritional counselling, and more.

students.usask.ca/health/centres/wellness-centre.php

Student Supervisor Agreement: Graduate students should print this document and discuss it with their supervisor/professor.

students.usask.ca/documents/graduate/student-supervisor-agreement.pdf

University Library: Offers workshops, grad help, student learning services, and more.

library.usask.ca/