

# 2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT

**GSA**  
GRADUATE  
STUDENTS'  
ASSOCIATION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY





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# The GSA is the official voice of UCalgary graduate students.

We support your success during and after your academic endeavours through responsive programs and initiatives.



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



The past year presented many challenges. From major impacts to the campus community brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic to challenges in home countries, graduate students at the University of Calgary were pushed to their limits. Although many of these challenges are enduring, the resiliency of our community built up of our members, volunteers, GSA staff and executive team never wavered. Though the year brought unprecedented challenges it also brought out unprecedented ingenuity and adaptability. We learned how to do things differently which oftentimes led to more efficient and effective processes and service delivery.

It was certainly a unique year for the GSA as it was the first time the team operated completely remote for the duration of the year. All GSA programs and services were successfully delivered to our members virtually as we quickly pivoted to providing our events online with paint nights, game nights, yoga, dance, strength training, and other activities that connected students to each other from the comfort of their homes. Our discounted ticket program continued to serve graduate students great discounted tickets to the Calgary Zoo, West Edmonton Mall, the Royal Tyrrell Museum, Sunshine Ski Village and so much more! We were even able to go virtual for many of our regular events.

Considering the unique challenges faced by graduate students during the year, we were proud to once again provide our students with additional support through our Empower Me program, a mental health support service that was available 24/7, 365 days a year. We saw great strides in the

development of our new awards website which will provide students with a user-friendly experience allowing them to easily access and apply for GSA Awards starting in Summer 2021. The GSA also developed a standing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee to support our community and began building better practices within our everyday GSA operations to ensure we are well-equipped to support the diverse group of members the GSA represents.

The GSA's focus on student advocacy continued throughout the year and saw numerous wins including securing affordable transit options for graduate students amidst the temporary cancellation of the UPass, improvement to residence building maintenance, improved internet service, and reducing the residence and student service fee increase. We successfully had fees waived to University services inactive during the COVID-19 pandemic and received an increase in promised funding for the Tuition Reinvestment Bursary. The GSA worked with other graduate student organizations to fight against egregious proposals during the Alberta 2030 Systems Review consultation process. Through advocating for the renewal of dedicated mental health funding for all post-secondary institutions in Alberta, we received a three-year renewed mental health grant near 2020 levels, along with a number of other advocacy achievements and progress which is detailed in this report.

The GSA's success this year could not have been achieved without our incredible graduate student volunteers serving as leaders and members of our committees

and subcommittees. These dedicated individuals helped the GSA deliver for our members and I can not thank them enough for their courage and strength to lead during such trying times. I want to thank my fellow Board of Directors, Alex, Christine, Mary, and Kabita for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. Balancing your academic programs and GSA responsibilities is no small feat and you all found your stride, delivering huge in your GSA role as well as continuing with your studies. I am so proud of what we have been able to accomplish together, and I am so grateful to have had each and everyone of you contribute to the decisions made over the past year. Last but definitely not least, I must thank our wonderful GSA staff. These individuals have kept the organization moving and supported us in our roles throughout the year. The GSA would not exist without the hard work and dedication of our staff team and I am forever grateful for their hard work, understanding and flexibility as we navigated this year together. The past year was certainly not one where we could continue on as we had in the past and the staff team was always coming up with new innovative ideas to face challenges with a problem-solving mentality.

I am honoured to have served as the 2020-2021 GSA President and have been grateful of the unwavering student support that I have received over the past year. I eagerly await the future challenges as I am grateful to once again serve as the President for 2021-2022, representing the most dedicated, passionate, and resilient graduate student body.

Yours truly,  
Tanille Shandro  
GSA President  
2020-21 and 2021-22

# The GSA represents:

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# 6,994

## graduate students

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## 4,650

Master's Students

## 1,700

PhD Students and Candidates

## 644

Certificate and Diploma  
Students

## 1,300

**Academically Employed  
Graduate Students**

(Graduate Teaching Assistants,  
Graduate Research Assistant,s  
Graduate Non-Teaching  
Assistants)

\*Enrollment data are provided by the Faculty of Graduate Studies, as of August 31, 2021

# 2020-21 GSA Stats

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**231**

volunteers in 12  
Committees and  
subcommittees

**\$435K**

distributed to  
support graduate  
students financially

**72**

active student  
groups

**15%**

of graduate  
student population  
attended GSA  
events

**493**

DGA and GSG  
events

**3K**

students served by  
the GSA Health and  
Dental Plan

**3,6K**

survey responses

**190K**

website views

# 2020-21 Board of Directors



**Tanille  
Shandro**  
President



**Alex  
Paquette**  
VP Academic



**Mary  
Zhang**  
VP Student Life



**Christine  
Cao**  
VP External



**Kabita  
Baral**  
VP Finance and  
Services

## 2019-2022 Strategic Plan

### Vision

To be recognized as the leader in graduate student advocacy and service delivery by our members, stakeholders, and external organizations across Canada.

### Mission

The GSA serves all UCalgary graduate students through responsive programs and initiatives to support their success during and after their academic endeavours.

### Focuses

Student Advocacy  
Service Delivery  
Communication  
Organizational Sustainability

## 2020-21 Executive Board Legacy Plaque





# Executive Board 2020-2021

From left to right:

Mary Zhang, Alex Paquette, Tanille Shandro,  
Christine Cao, Kabita Baral

We may be the only board that can say we never worked in the office, reduced commute to milliseconds, never ate together at the LDL, had multiple offices coast to coast, and only saw the lower halves of one another a few times but that didn't stop us from becoming an unstoppable team and accomplishing countless achievements. "

Executive Board 2020-21

"Three days after I was elected President, we shut the GSA office doors and sent everyone home. This is not the legacy I planned on leaving behind but with the world's best staff, executive board and volunteers we were able to fill this year with major successes and support each other through incredibly challenging times. I am so proud of everything the GSA accomplished as we became more collaborative, stronger advocates, leaders in the online student life space, developed stronger supports for students and developed an EDI framework. I will be forever grateful and honoured that the graduate student body chose me to represent and lead them.  
Thank you all."

Tanille Shandro, President

"There are no words to describe how amazing this journey has been. If I have learned anything from this position, it is that actions speak louder than words and no job is ever done alone. These positions will test you in many ways, but it is important you remember who you are fighting for."

Alex Paquette, Vice President Academic

"It's a bit of a cliché to call this year unprecedented, but there's also no other way to describe what happened. A global pandemic was just the cherry on top for a year filled with non-stop advocacy action, but I'm glad that I had the amazing GSA team by my side through it all. I'm grateful for the challenges I faced, experiences I gained, and the friends I made along the way. My effort invested, time spent, and organ lost was all worth it, if it meant that I served my fellow graduate students well this year. "

Christine Cao, Vice President External

"I am so grateful for this opportunity and the support from the GSA board and staff over the year. I couldn't have gone so far without them. This rewarding experience helped me gain valuable skills and meet so many passionate and absolutely amazing graduate students. I am proud that we provided numerous online events for our graduate students during the pandemic and kept our students connected no matter where they are in the world! "

Mary Zhang, Vice President Student Life

"Going from "no idea about finances" to "Oooooooh I loveee Finances!", serving as VPFS was quite an experience! Very proud to have successfully revamped the GSA H&D fee structure, actually reduce H&D fees & present budgets at the GRC with the confidence that I know what each budget line mean! You do revamp your vocabulary quite a bit as an exec of the GSA: I now use the words "spicy" & "interesting" in contexts that neither involve food, nor anything interesting (Thanks Dru, Ed & Tanille!). Building friendships across the GSA team & watching breakfasts float around in the Zoom screens are some 'magics' you rarely witness in real world! "

Kabita Baral, Vice President Finance & Services

# Staff

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## Danielle Abbott

### Executive Director

With the GSA since 2014  
[danielle.decoste@ucalgary.ca](mailto:danielle.decoste@ucalgary.ca)  
Oversees all aspects of the GSA's operations and services, provides guidance and leadership to the GSA and the LDL, and acts in an advisory capacity to the GSA Board of Directors



## Daniella Ikurusi

### Finance and Operations Manager

With the GSA since 2015  
[daniella.ikurusi@ucalgary.ca](mailto:daniella.ikurusi@ucalgary.ca)  
Oversees the Last Defence Lounge (LDL) and manages the GSA finances and operations



## Lina Girgis

### Human Resources Manager

With the GSA since 2010  
[lgirgis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:lgirgis@ucalgary.ca)  
Oversees the GSA's human resources, Volunteer Recruitment Program, Collective Agreement, and the Health and Dental Plan



## Thao Nguyen

### Marketing and Communications Manager

With the GSA since 2016  
[thao.nguyen1@ucalgary.ca](mailto:thao.nguyen1@ucalgary.ca)  
Manages the marketing and communication effort for the GSA and the LDL



## Crystal Ellis

### Governance and Services Coordinator

With the GSA since 2017  
[governance.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:governance.gsa@ucalgary.ca)  
Manages the GSA's DGA/ GSG Program, Quality Money Program, Awards/Bursaries/ Grants, and provides operational support to the GSA Board of



## Nancy Wanye

### Research and Advocacy Analyst

With the GSA since 2019  
[nancy.wanye@ucalgary.ca](mailto:nancy.wanye@ucalgary.ca)  
Supports the GSA's strategic goal of engaging in meaningful consultation, research, and policy development to the University and all levels of government on behalf of GSA members.

*\*Special thanks to Michael Brown, Miha Alam, and Christine Cao for covering Nancy's maternity leave*



## Megan Sawchuk

### Events Coordinator

With the GSA from 2019 to May 2021  
Managed GSA events and discounted ticket program



## Shannon Jakel

### Event Coordinator

With the GSA since 2021  
[events.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:events.gsa@ucalgary.ca)  
Manages GSA events and discounted ticket program



## Rachel Duchesne

### Executive Assistant

With the GSA since 2018  
[ask.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ask.gsa@ucalgary.ca)  
Supports the GSA Executives, and provides support to the GSA Health and Dental Plan



## Jaime Garcia

### Administrative Assistant

With the GSA since 2021  
[admin.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:admin.gsa@ucalgary.ca)  
Manages the GSA front desk, provides guidance and support to the GSA members, staff, Board of Directors, and performs administrative tasks

# Committee & Subcommittee Volunteers

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## Governance Committee

Laura Flinkfelt (Chair), Raghu Bhaskar (Vice-Chair), Aimee Bowden, Kayla Dias, Kate Godfrey, Tazia Khushboo, Mohak Manir, Andreas Murphy, Maedeh Pahlevaninezhad, Sam Pollock, Tina Sarkar, Karthikeyan Sridharan, Akhil Valupadasu

## Awards Committee

Michelle Love (Chair), Haydee Galloso (Vice Chair), Breni Sharma (Vice Chair), Mohammad Raihan, Motahharez Moravvej Hamedani, Stephanie Hladik, Agnei Marcano Pina, Tina Abedi Yarandy, Elnaz Erfanian, Shrushti Shah, Shangnong HU, Allyson King, Hossein Karimi, Amir Varamesh, Shefali Rai, Abdullah Sarhan, Jacob Lamb, Thilina Jayawardana, Sanaz Daneshmandjahromi, Kelsey Pennanen, Masume Akbari, Tazia Khushboo, Kaitlyn Dillabough, Tina Sarkar, Chioma Melifonwu, Mohsen Hassani, Hammam Orabi, Robert Akema, Liam Connors, Kristi-Mari Fedorko-Bartos, Samira Hamed, Jameson Dundas, Sujoy Subroto, Victoria Pasyk, Omid Asayesh, Maria Laura Sosa Ponce, Taleeta Fisher, Maryam Taherinezhad, Affan Siddiq, Viraji Bandara, Azadeh Karevan, Maedeh Pahlevaninezhad, Mojtaba Farahnak Langroudi, Lauren Seabrook, Yashpal Pankajbhai Gajjar, Akhil Valupadasu, Leah Mercier, Natalie Scime, Olayinka Oladosu, Halley Silversides, Deepak Patel, Spencer Loewen, Jacob Varghese, Anna Marrello, Ayoola Ademola

## Academic Support Committee

Martine Dennie (Chair), Suzie Lee (Co-Vice Chair), Dusan Nikolic (Co-Vice Chair), Sabrina Buharideen, Ashifa Hudani, Mohsen Hassani, Adil Arshad, Mahyar Nakhaei, Harrison Campbell, Raj Lakhan, Amir Varamesh, Abdullah Sarhan, Prasoon Kumar Shandilya, Kelsey Pennanen, Dasha Guliak, Tina Sarkar, Filip Rakic, Courtney Miller.

## Finance Committee

Emily Macphail (Chair), Kabita Baral (Vice-Chair), Tanille Shandro (GSA President; ex officio; non-voting, unless VPFS absent), Daniella Ikurusi (GSA Director of Finance and Operations; non-voting), Danielle Abbott (GSA Executive Director; ex officio; non-voting), Akhil Valupadasu, Andrew Kemle, Anton Vykhodtsev, Jacob Varghese, Kayla Dias, Ogbeide Iria

## Sustainability Committee

Feyisetan Adebayo (Chair), Evangeline Eldridge (Vice Chair), Mohak Hemantbhai Maniar, Hussein Bello, Sangwook (Micky) Ahn, Bharanedharan Govindaradjane, Basil Jose, Abdul Haider, Toranj Telmadarreie, Becky Okoroman, Michelle Fournie

## Labour Relations Committee

Keira Gunn (Chair), Jacob Lamb, Masume Akbari, Brittany Lindsay, Emily MacPhail, Julia Daun, Jenise Finlay, Anna Niedzwiecka, Russell Copley

## Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee

Cassidy Da Silva, Jennifer John, Selina Robson, Andrew Kemle, Evangelina Natynczyk, Karina Hincapie, Tanille Shandro; and GSA Staff: Thao Nguyen, Lina Girgis, Danielle Abbott, Megan Sawchuk

## Student Events and Engagement Committee

Anthonia Anowai (Chair) and Catalina Barboza Solis (Vice Chair), Megan Sawchuk (GSA Staff)

## Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee

Heather Shepherd (Chair), Daniela Arciniegas Murillo (Vice Chair), Ainsley Smith, Colton Unger, Valerie Brunskill, Leah Chadwick, Emma Gillesse, Mark Patrick Pankow, Colin MacKenzie, Danae Laut, Lauren McMillan, Maria Vasquez Mosquera, Jahanara Rajwani, Julia Daun, Ali Shariat-Panahi

## Gender and Sexuality Alliance Subcommittee

Robyn Paul (Chair), Colleen Peterson (Vice Chair), Sangwook Ahn, Rebecca Frederick, Pedrom Nasiri, Katherine Biegel, Jiazhi Wu, Jamie Anderson, Dalaney Duchek, Danielle Lefebvre, Cong Luo, Cecilia Mary Porter, Robert Clifton, Kaylee Rich, Katie Vanderkolk, Cassidy Da Silva

## Events Subcommittee

Kayla Dias (Chair), Masume Akbari (Vice Chair), Zahra Bagheriashena, Milad Nourizadeh, Valerie Brunskill, Mohak Hemantbhai Maniar, Hossein Karimi, Caroline Luszawski, Shahnas Najimudeen, Ana Perez Contreras, Shrushti Shah, Mohsen Hassani, Lixin Yang, Maryam Taherinezhad, Ahmad Cheema

## Newcomers and International Students Subcommittee

Nemy Shah (Chair), Arshia Hosseini (Vice Chair), Anastasia Gushchina, Shrushti Shah, Zahra Bagheriashena, Mohamed Tarek Ahmed, Hadi Saboori Jooybari, Nishi Patel, Mohammad Raihan Simrat Verma, Omid Asayesh, Lisa Suessenbach, Garrett Beatty

## Community Engagement Subcommittee

Noah Cooke, Mohsen Hassini, Caitlin Woods, Agnei Marcano Pina, Maryam Al-Khannaq, Tina Abedi Yarandy, Jameson Dundas

# Improving Student Representation and Advocacy

The GSA engages in meaningful consultation, research, and policy development in order to relentlessly advocate for the changing needs of UCalgary graduate students to the university and all levels of government.



# Advocacy Wins

## At the University:

### 40% Discount on Transit Booklet Passes

After the UPass was cancelled in Spring 2020, the GSA advocated for, and succeeded in obtaining, affordable transit options for graduate students. We obtained a 40% discount on transit booklet passes, and advocated for graduate students to pursue the Fair Entry Program with the City of Calgary, where students can receive discounted monthly passes based on their income level.

### Improvement to Building Maintenance & Lower Residence Fee in Varsity Courts in Varsity Courts

The GSA focused on improving the quality of life for graduate students with families at Varsity Courts. With the help of the Residence Consultation Committee, we successfully advocated for improvement to building maintenance and improved internet service. We also lowered the residence fee increase from 5% to 3%.

### Graduate Student Voice at the Senate

For the first time in the Senate's history, graduate students obtained a voice at the highest level of the Senate through the Student Engagement Committee.

### Fee Increase Froze during the Pandemic Minimum Funding Discussion Furthered

This year, the GSA focused on advocating for quality of life improvements during the annual tuition discussion. We successfully froze fee increases to services inactive during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we received an increase in promised funding for the Tuition Reinvestment Bursary, and significantly furthered the discussion in increasing minimum funding for all thesis-based graduate students to \$24,000/year.

### Engagement in UCalgary's Growth Through Focus

The GSA was committed and engaged with the consultation process for Growth Through Focus. We ensured the graduate voice was heard with the Growth Through Focus team through a dedicated Graduate Student Townhall and many feedback sessions.

### Removal of Campus Recreation and Athletics Fee + Proctoring Software

This year, our graduate students' health and safety was on the forefront of our minds as we advocate for institutional changes. Our COVID-19 advocacy wins includes the successful removal of Campus Recreation and Athletics Fee, the removal of invasive online proctoring software, and supporting the implementation of CR/F for graduate courses taken during COVID-19.

## At the Municipal Level:

### Strengthened Municipal Government Connections

The GSA increased our connections with the municipal government through dedicated UPass advocacy with the City of Calgary Councillors, Calgary Transit, and Mayor Nenshi. We also strengthened the advocacy network with student organizations across Calgary with the Calgary Student Alliance.



## At the University: For Academically Employed Graduate Students

The Labour Relations Committee (LRC), chaired by the GSA's Associate VP Labour, administers the labour relations of the GSA and our academically employed graduate student members. This includes but is not limited to negotiating the Collective Agreement, handling disputes with employers, and advocating for a high standard of graduate student employment. The LRC exists to represent and support Academically Employed Graduate Students (AEGS) at the University of Calgary through education and advocacy.

### Increase Awareness of the Collective Agreement

In the 2020-21 academic year, the committee continued its efforts to educate and empower employed graduate students while planning long-term strategies for its operations. The number of Lunch & Learns hosted increased to 20 from 10 the previous year and a social media plan has been developed to better reach members. Throughout the year, the committee has worked closely with student groups to advocate against workplace imbalances in their departments. The committee has also undertaken extensive research about the possibilities for AEGS representation following changes to the Post-Secondary Learning Act in 2022.

### Administer Graduate Assistantship Contracts

In the 2020-2021 school year, the University of Calgary departments provided over 3,500 Graduate Teaching, Non-Teaching and Research Assistantship positions.

Compliance for Graduate Teaching, Non-Teaching and Research contracts have reached a high of 95%. This was made possible by ongoing communication between the Labour Relations Committee, the GSA, the University HR department, and all the departments in the University.

### Partnership with the Public Service Alliance of Canada

The GSA enters into a partnership with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) in August 2021 to better serve UCalgary Academically Employed Graduate Students at no extra cost to receive the following services from PSAC:

- access to PSAC's labour professionals
- a professional PSAC negotiator to coordinate and support next year's collective bargaining
- access to legal services related to arbitration proceedings and representation for members in other tribunal or court proceedings
- Union Education workshops and Union Local Development activities tailored to the needs of our members
- assistance in developing a union stewardship program throughout campus
- access to PSAC's National Strike Fund



Public Service Alliance of Canada  
Alliance de la Fonction publique du Canada

## At the Provincial Level:

### Alberta 2030 Systems Review Consultation

Alberta 2030 Systems Review Consultation: The provincial priority this year is for the GSA to provide the graduate student voice for the Alberta 2030 Systems Review. Together with other graduate student organizations across Alberta, the GSA fought hard against the more egregious proposals suggested throughout the consultation process, to ensure the graduate students of Alberta will continue to be well served by the post-secondary system.

### Mental Health Funding Renewal

Throughout this year, the GSA advocated for the renewal of dedicated mental health funding for all post-secondary institutions in Alberta. In the 2021 provincial budget, we received a three-year renewed mental health grant at almost the same level as 2020.

### Campus Sexual Violence Consultation

The Department of Advanced Education is conducting a review of Campus Sexual Violence policies across institutions in Alberta. Using the success from improving the University of Calgary's Campus Sexual Violence policy, the GSA provided valuable graduate student perspective to the provincial policy review.

### Strengthening abGPAC Connections

The Alberta Graduate Student Provincial Advocacy Council continues to play a pivotal role in student advocacy in Alberta. This year, abGPAC significantly increased the number of MLAs reached during Advocacy Week, and consequently expanded the advocacy network. abGPAC also formed stronger connections with other student advocacy organizations across Alberta, presenting a unified student voice in front of the Provincial Government.

**The GSA is a member of the Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) that advocates to the provincial government on behalf of Alberta's graduate students.**

*About ab-GPAC: The Alberta Graduate Provincial Advocacy Council (ab-GPAC) is an inclusive, student-led, non-partisan organization that advocates to public, private and plural organizations on behalf almost 16,000 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Non-STEM graduate students. Its vision and mission is to enable the highest-quality post-secondary graduate education experience for our cohort to position them as the future global leaders to improve society.*

**ab ● GPAC**

## At the Federal Level:

### CASA's #CloseTheGaps Campaign

The GSA and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations launched the largest online advocacy campaign in CASA's history. Graduate students at the University of Calgary shared many of their concerns from mental health to international students. All of the anecdotes will be taken to Parliament Hill in Ottawa to be shared with the Federal Government.

### U15 Graduate Student Alliance

The GSA was invited to the first alliance of Graduate Student Associations / Societies from the U15s across Canada. This was an important first step in presenting a unified graduate student voice directly to the Federal Government.

### Graduate Student Input in the 2021 Federal Budget

Graduate student asks were recognized in the Federal Budget 2021 through significant investment to CIHR and SSHRC, as well as increased opportunities in graduate work integrated learning through MITACS. The Federal Government also promised dedicated mental health funding, grants for indigenous students, and expanded rural broadband access. All of these asks were made by CASA to the Federal Government on behalf of graduate students.

### Support to International Students

International students had a difficult year entering and staying in Canada due to COVID-19. The GSA advocated to the Federal Government to allow new graduate students to enter Canada throughout the summer of 2020, and this ask was granted in October of 2020. We have also been continuously asking for a dedicated Permanent Residency pathway for graduate students, and a new PR pathway was made available to recent grads in May 2021.

**The GSA is a member of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) that advocates to the federal government on behalf of post secondary institution students across Canada.**

*About CASA: CASA is a national voice for Canada's post-secondary students. Established in 1995, CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit student organization composed of student associations from across Canada. We represent undergraduate, graduate and polytechnic associations. At its core, CASA advocates on behalf of post-secondary students to the federal government. When Canada's leaders make decisions affecting our post-*



CASA | ACAE

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations  
Alliance canadienne des associations étudiantes



My Gap To Close Is

## Mental Health Funding



Christine Cao  
University of Calgary

I am worried that without adequate mental health funding to post-secondary institutions, we will see even more of us unable to complete our degrees. Mental health is just as important as physical health, especially during this isolating pandemic, and we need these funding to build important safety networks for students.

 **CloseTheGaps**  
closethegaps.ca

My Gap To Close Is

## Supports for International Students



Mary Zhang  
University of Calgary

As an international student, I have faced many difficulties studying abroad, one of them being my graduate student study permit limiting me from accepting internship during my study. As an individual who would like contribute to Canada's future, I feel disadvantaged from my peers. I was not able to have the industry experience that I could have to prepare me for my future career.

 **CloseTheGaps**  
closethegaps.ca

My Gap To Close Is

## Supports for International Students



Alex Paquette  
University of Calgary

It can be difficult as an international student to get work experience in Canada. I believe that we need to provide more opportunities for international students to get internships and make sure the proper supports are in place for them to succeed in the internships they get.

 **CloseTheGaps**  
closethegaps.ca

My Gap To Close Is

## Access to Technology



Tanille Shandro  
University of Calgary

The global pandemic has shifted much of the graduate student learning and working environment online, highlighting the need for proper access to technology. Financial supports to have proper technology to be successful as well as reliable internet access are student needs that must be addressed to ensure that students are able to meet their goals.

 **CloseTheGaps**  
closethegaps.ca

My Gap To Close Is

## Supports for International Students



Kabita Baral  
University of Calgary

In addition to being exposed to new culture and environment, International students have to worry about jobs post-graduation. Internship and co-op opportunities for international students is limited to non-existent. It is imperative to ensure that international students have those opportunities like domestic students so that they can succeed in their career path.

 **CloseTheGaps**  
closethegaps.ca

# #CloseTheGaps Campaign

[closethegaps.ca](https://closethegaps.ca)

# Improving Student Engagement and Services

The GSA is committed to maximizing the impact of our services with the available resources through collaboration and consultation to support the successes of all UCalgary graduate students.

**231**  
volunteers

**72**  
student  
groups

**493**  
events

**12**  
committees  
& subcommittees

## Volunteer Opportunities

In the 2020-21 academic year and as of June 14, 2021:

**47** graduate students have joined the Volunteer Recruitment Program;

**107** graduate students returning to the program from previous years;

**45** volunteer opportunities to GSA members.

[gsa.ucalgary.ca/volunteer](https://gsa.ucalgary.ca/volunteer)

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## Student Groups

During the 2019-20 academic year, the GSA had:

**51** active DGAs;

**21** active GSGs;

**369** events were held by the DGAs; and

**124** events were held by GSGs.

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## Leadership Opportunities through Committees and Subcommittees

The GSA provides various leadership opportunities for graduate students through our Committees and Subcommittees:

- Governance Committee
- Labour Relations Committee
- Awards Committee
- Academic Support Committee
- Student Experience Standing Committee
  - Events Subcommittee
  - Mental Health & Wellness Subcommittee
  - GSA Gender & Sexuality Alliance Subcommittee
  - Newcomers & International Students Subcommittee
  - Community Engagement Subcommittee
- External Working Group
- Finance Standing Committee
- Sustainability Committee

[gsa.ucalgary.ca/gsacommittees](https://gsa.ucalgary.ca/gsacommittees)

**\$435K**  
distributed for  
various financial  
supports

**15%**  
of graduate student  
population attended GSA  
events

**95**  
presenters

## Financial Supports: Bursaries, Grants and Awards

From May 2020 to May 2021:

**\$170,191.67** approved for 138 bursaries;

**\$24,648.59** approved for 52 Professional  
Development Grants;

**\$51,499.21** approved for 43 GSA Awards,

**\$188,228.00** approved for 32 projects.

[gsa.ucalgary.ca/financial](https://gsa.ucalgary.ca/financial)

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## Events and Discounted Tickets

With COVID-19, all GSA events were hosted virtually this year with great success. Many of the events were run in partnership with the GSA committees and subcommittees.

Main events included:

- Orientation Week
- Halloween
- Destress Week
- Images of Research Competition
- Online contests
- Discounted tickets
- Bell Let's Talk: Allan Kehler
- Academic Horror Stories

[gsa.ucalgary.ca/events](https://gsa.ucalgary.ca/events)

### Peer Beyond Graduate Research Conference

Peer Beyond Graduate Research Conference received a major refresh this year and with that was one of our most successful events. Over 3 days, the event had 100 presenters, nearly 300 attendees, and gave away over \$9,000 in awards. The GSA was also thrilled to have MLA Janis Irwin as our keynote speaker who shared her wonderful story.

**3K**  
students  
served

## Extended Health and Dental Plan

The GSA Health & Dental Plan serves over 3000 students and is designed to provide all GSA members with accessible and affordable extended health and dental care. The Plan is one of the largest and most complex services provided and managed by the GSA. It is professionally administered by Studentcare, and underwritten by Desjardins Insurance. The management of the Plan is overseen by the GSA Health & Dental Plan Committee. During the 2020-2021 academic year, the committee met regularly during a monthly standing time. The committee organized programming to engage plan members, responded to student needs during COVID-19, and prepared for the ending of the 2-year rate guarantee from the 2018-2019 competitive request for proposals (RFP) process.

### Reduction in Fees

A 2-year rate guarantee is a locked-in plan premium from Desjardins. Coming out of the 2-year rate guarantee required the committee to review a number of reports presented by Studentcare to confirm plan premiums for 2021-2022. The plan premiums are the amount remitted to the insurer on an annual basis for the host of benefits available to plan members. The premium projection reports presented by Studentcare indicated that Plan usage is returning to normal levels after the dip that was experienced at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The cost analysis for the plan suggests that there will be upward pressure in the coming years as a result of a number of benefit enhancements the GSA made during the RFP process. The benefit enhancements were made in response to feedback from plan members, and were possible due to the financial savings experienced through the RFP process. Any excess money the Plan collects is transferred into the GSA Plan Reserve. The RFP allowed the Plan to build a healthy Plan Reserve, to be used to respond to upward cost pressures on the plan in the future. Despite plan premiums trending upwards for the 2021-2022 academic year, Studentcare was able to confirm a no-change renewal for the GSA with Desjardins. Furthermore, the committee took deliberate action to review cost savings for students through the process. Ultimately, it was decided that a slight reduction to the plan fee to reduce cost pressures on GSA members would be appropriate provided the status of the Plan Reserve. The committee continues to review and adjust the fee structure for dependent enrolments, bringing the fee structure closer to a standardized cost methodology.

### Transition to the Alberta Provincial Drug Formulary

The Health and Dental Plan committee worked on transitioning the Plan's old legacy Plan Drug Formulary to the Alberta Provincial Drug formulary. This is common best practice for student health and dental plans in the province and has been a goal for the committee for several years. This decision was made after reviewing drug claims data and the drug exception process which allows students to claim for drugs that are not automatically covered by the Health and Dental plan. This formulary switch allowed GSA members to continue to claim the drugs they need, while positively impacting the Plan financially.



# Supporting Student Life

## Achievements from the subcommittees of the Student Engagement and Events Committee

### Community Engagement Subcommittee (CES)

The subcommittee accomplished two successful volunteer panels and two career panels. The career panels gave students insight into feasible volunteer and career opportunities from professionals in the field and the volunteer panels connected students with a diversified group of charitable and advocacy organizations within Calgary that were actively seeking out volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, a PenPal initiative was also initiated with the RockyView Foundation at two long-term care facilities. Furthermore, the CES made important contributions to the GSA Student Food Drive initiative as subcommittee members promoted it to their respective DGAs and solicited donations.

### Events Subcommittee (ES)

The Events Subcommittee organized “active” (event was run synchronously via Zoom) and passive (through social media or other channels) virtual events. Two active events had high attendance and engagements: “Culinary Adventures with Chef Adam Ryan” was a cooking class led by head chef, Adam Ryan, from a popular Calgary restaurant, The Coup; and the “DIY terrarium with Golden Acre” was a plant night event led by Golden Acre Home and Garden. For all events, the subcommittee members volunteered for at least 2 events per semester and the tasks were divided based on committee members’ interests so that the workload was distributed equally. Since the events were virtual, there were no costs to rent space or provide food, and the extra funds were used to provide raffles for the attendees as an incentive to attend and participate. This also left the subcommittee with a bigger budget to bring in professionals to run events (eg: Head Chef from The Coup for the cooking event; Horticulturist from Golden Acre Home and Garden for the DIY Terrarium event, etc).

### Gender and Sexuality Alliance Subcommittee (GSA^2)

The GSA^2 Subcommittee hosted intersectional events through the Lunar New Year and Persian New Year events, two most successful events this year.

The subcommittee also published blog posts to spread awareness and advocacy throughout the year for relevant events including Calgary Pride, Transgender Day of Remembrance, and Transgender Day of Visibility.

Below is the list of the hosted events and published blogs:

- Blog Posts (3) for Calgary Pride
- Pride Trivia Night
- Inclusive Canadian Thanksgiving
- Rainbow Coffee Chat
- Queer Games Night
- 2SLGBTQ+ Movie Night
- Blog Post Trans Day of Remembrance
- Trans Day of Remembrance Flag Raising
- Open Letter from GSA2
- Gingerbread Decoration Competition
- Rainbow Coffee Chat

- Chinese Lunar New Year
- Paint Night Takeover
- Vivek Shraya Book Club
- Anti-Oppression Workshop
- Blog Post Trans Day of Visibility
- Nowruz Persian New Year
- Healthy Sexuality Workshop
- Queer D&D

## Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee (MHWS)

**Mental Health & Wellness Resource Guide:** The Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee developed a comprehensive resource guide for mental health and wellness resources available at UCalgary, within Calgary, and within Alberta. This up-to-date guide provides an overview of resources that may be beneficial for undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, staff, and faculty at UCalgary. It includes updated information relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic, including changes to hours, online services, and changes to services. The final version was disseminated to departments in the Winter 2021 semester.

**Events:** The MHWS hosted 11 online events during the 2020 – 2021 academic year (see Events table). The speaker events covered topics such as building balance and tips and tricks to manage our own stress, developing stress management and healthy coping skills, and healthy sexuality and sexual health. Additionally, during the month of March, we held a three-part series speaker event focused on anxiety disorders, women in STEM and mood disorders.

**Bell Let's Talk Day:** The MHWS hosted Allan Kehler, one of Canada's most sought-after speakers for mental health and wellness. A renowned mental health advocate, Allan Kehler shared his personal story as well as valuable life lessons. At the time of the event, there were 173 registrants, and 90 attendees as well as numerous inquiries after the event as to whether the event was recorded.

**Social media:** The subcommittee increased social media presence by close to 550 Instagram followers and created Canva templates to facilitate content creation and marketing.

**Student-Supervisor Checklist:** The subcommittee drafted a proposal to include a more well defined "well-being" subsection in the student supervisor checklist.

## Newcomers and International Students Subcommittee (NISS)

The NISS delivered at least one event every month in the Winter 2021 semester. Collaborations between NISS and outside organizations including Glenbow Museum and Calgary Catholic Immigration Society went very well. NISS also utilized the platform Slack for deliverables from volunteers and communication. Volunteers were split up into three working groups and assigned to events throughout the semester. This worked very well and kept all busy.

NISS events include:

- How to live in Calgary
- Virtual Pumpkin Carving
- Workshop: Funding Applications
- Pub Style Quiz Night
- Tips and Tricks: Living in Canada
- Let's talk Canada History
- Nowruz
- International Culture Discovery
- Managing Finances: a Discussion

# Promoting Academic Work and Research

## Image of Research Competition

in collaboration with the Faculty of Graduate Studies

### Top Overall Winner:

“The spiral Down of Homeless in Calgary. Inclusive Affordable Housing, the way Up?” by Vincent Yong, Master’s student in Environmental Design



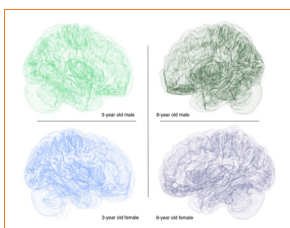
### STEM Category:



1st runner-up:  
“Dogs and coyotes sharing more than a common environment” by Karla Barcenas Barreto, Master’s student in Biological Sciences.



2nd runner-up:  
“Finding the way back home: tracking an endangered bat in the Rocky Mountains” by Emma Micalizzi, Master’s student in Biological Sciences

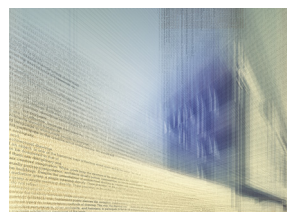


3rd runner-up:  
“Brains develop in many shapes and sizes” by Madison Long, PhD student in Neuroscience

### Social Sciences/ Humanity/Creative Category:



1st runner-up:  
“Women orphans of a nation: Refugees memories through amateur lens” by Amanda Zanco, Master’s student in Communication, Media and Film

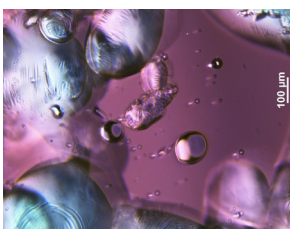


2nd runner-up:  
“Poetic Architectural Drawing” by Mohammad Moezzi, PhD student in Environmental Design



3rd runner-up:  
“Floating Between Truth and Fiction (An Inquiry into Spatial Perception)” by Hesamaddin Rezaei, Master’s student in Fine Art

### People’s Choice Award:



“The Colors of Emulsification” by Hector Bonilla, PhD Student in Chemical and Petroleum Engineering



“Nano-scale dopamine polymer forms kirigami like pattern under the UV-light” by Sultan Khetani, PhD Student



## Thesis Talk Thursday

Thesis Talk Thursday is a wonderful opportunity to share stories about the amazing research being done by graduate students at the University of Calgary. Every Thursday graduate students from different faculties and departments will be highlighted across all GSA social media channels. The students will be highlighted through videos, podcasts, or photos with a description of their research.

In 2020-21, Thesis Talk Thursday highlighted 32 graduate students and had over 1,000 views on the website.



## Other New Student Support Initiatives

- Graduate Student Disability Awards
- Partnership with Mitacs
- Thesis Talk Thursdays
- Policy "Cheat Sheet"
- Hotel Quarantine Program
- FGS Policy Changes for Supervision and Extensions
- Resource Guide for Graduate Students with a Supervisor Conflict
- Resource Page for Teaching Assistants
- Raise \$2,000 for the SU Campus Food Bank

# Celebrating Excellence

## GSA Awards

### **Excellence in Administrative Support (Support Staff)**

Monica Freeman, Department of Mechanical Engineering

### **Excellence in Administrative Support (Senior Administration)**

Dr. Mary Grantham O'Brien  
Professor, Department of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures and Culture  
Associate Dean, Policy of Faculty of Graduate Studies

### **Excellence in Research (Graduate Students)**

Sina Rezvani, Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

### **Excellence in Supervision**

Dr. Nancy Moules, Faculty of Nursing

### **Excellence in Research (Senior Research Affiliates)**

Dr. Elodie Labit, Department of Veterinary Medicine

### **Excellence in Teaching (Graduate Students)**

Dinu Attalage, Department of Civil Engineering

### **Excellence in Teaching (Senior Instructors)**

Dr. Jeff Pieper, Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering

### **Leadership Award**

Robyn Paul, Schulich School of Engineering  
Honourable mentions: Julia Duan, Faculty of Kinesiology; Anthonia Anowai, Cumming School of Medicine

### **Emerging Leader Award**

Chelsea Klinke, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology  
Honourable mentions: Kayla Dias, Department of Biological Sciences; Keshia Holloman-Dawson, Faculty of Law

### **GSA Champion Award**

Dr. Leslie Reid, Vice Provost of Teaching and Learning

### **Lifetime Achievement Award**

Harrison Campbell, Werklund School of Education

### **Graduate Representative Council Distinguished Service Award**

Kayla Dias, Department of Biological Sciences

### **Volunteer Excellence Awards**

Andrew Kemle, Department of Political Science  
Anthonia Anowai, Cumming School of Medicine  
Breni Sharma, Cumming School of Medicine  
Robyn Paul, Schulich School of Engineering  
Feyisetan Adebayo, Schulich School of Engineering

### **Graduate Student Sustainability Award**

Bitu Malekian, Schulich School of Engineering

### **Graduate Representative Council Initiative Awards**

- 1st Annual Food Studies Symposium (Chelsea Klinke, Gertrude Korkor Samar, and Simon Koots)
- The PHAS Graduate Assistant Workshop (Pamela Freeman, Becky Booth, Kyle Reiter, Omid Khajehdehi, Davor Curic, Carlton-James Osakwe, Svetlana Kuznetsova, Hadi Zadeh Haghighi, Mahsa Faryadras, Kaitlyn Stenhouse, Pooja Woosaree, Omid Aligholamioskooee, and Anustup Das)
- The Foothills Financial Literacy Workshop Series (Megha Murali, Rachita Panda, and Lucia Otero Varela)
- Encouraging Black and Racialized Applicants Through Admission Reforms (Keshia Holloman-Dawson)
- Software Training (Hector Bonilla and Antonio Garcia Vila)

**\$52K**  
**distributed**  
**for GSA Awards**



*From left, top row: Leslie Reid; Harrison Campbell; Robyn Paul; Chelsea Klinke; Monica Freeman; Mary O'Brien. From left, bottom row: Sina Rezvani, Nancy Moules; Elodie Labit; Dinu Attalage; Jeff Pieper; Kayla Dias; Bitia Malekian.*

*Special thanks to the Awards Committee and its members that:*

- Reviewed 128 applications and recommended top 20 applicants for the Alberta Graduate Citizenship Awards
- Reviewed and funded 51 applicants for the GSA Professional Development Grants for a total of \$24,648.59
- Presented 5 Excellence Awards, 5 Graduate Representative Council Initiative Awards



# Improving Communication

The GSA is committed to fostering direct and constructive communication between the GSA members, staff, and board to promote transparency, trust, and inclusion.

## Stats

Instagram:

**1.8K**  
followers

Facebook:

**2K**  
fans

Twitter:

**2.1K**  
followers

LinkedIn:

**64**  
followers

Website:

**190K**  
page views

**43K**  
users

(from May 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020)

Newsletter:

**60%**  
open rate

**8%**  
click rate

(from May 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020)

Communication is vital to the GSA. It adds values to our members by providing relevant information about our programs and services through direct and indirect channels, establishing initiatives to foster inclusion, and collecting feedback to improve our services. Internally, communications connect team members, avoid gaps and inefficiencies, foster collaboration which brings out empowerment and success.

## Strategies

1. Build the GSA brand equity;
2. Collect and publish relevant and current feedback and stories from students, staff, and executives;
3. Continuously review and adjust communications channels based on student feedback; and
4. Publish relevant and meaningful content from the GSA Executives, committees, and subcommittees on student advocacy and GSA services.

## Channels

- Website: [www.gsa.ucalgary.ca](http://www.gsa.ucalgary.ca)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/gsacalgary](https://www.facebook.com/gsacalgary)
- LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/gsacalgary](https://www.linkedin.com/company/gsacalgary)
- Instagram & Twitter: @gsacalgary

## New Communication Initiatives

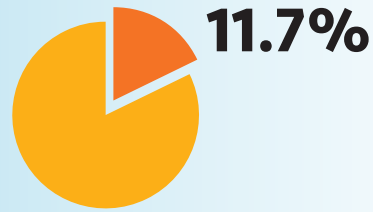
- Thesis Talk Thursdays
- Resource Guide for Graduate Students with Supervisor Conflicts
- Question of the Week
- Instagram Trivia
- Survival Guide
- Streamlined templates for GRC Reports
- Updated Cost Calculators
- LRC newsletters
- Surveys
- Live chats on website
- New newsletter format
- Monthly Advocacy Blogs
- New Awards platform

## Collecting Student Feedback

- Fall 2019 Survey: 238 responses (June 2020)
- GSA Annual Survey: 872 responses (March 2021)
- Mentorship Survey: 108 responses (April 2021)
- Return to Campus Survey: 1,104 responses (June 2021)
- Return to Campus Survey 2: 804 responses (August 2021)
- Personal Finances Survey: 450 responses (July 2021)

# Annual Survey 2020-21

The GSA administers various surveys throughout the year to collect student feedback. We also run an Annual Survey each March and April to measure student satisfaction with the GSA's programs and services; and to collect feedback on how to improve them.



**872 or 11.7%**  
**UCalgary graduate students**  
completed the 2021 GSA Annual Survey.

## Basic Demographics



**56% expected to have school-related debt upon graduation.**



**Most of survey respondents are in a Master's program.**  
61% Master's  
38% PhD



**46% study online. 24% blended and 25% in-person.**



**Most of survey respondents are in their first or second year of their study (74%).**



**56% live in rented housing.**



**94% are in a full-time program.**



**63% work full-time or part-time during the academic year.**



**48% have dependents.**

On average, each respondent uses  
**1.8**  
GSA programs and services.

**Top services by usage:**  
Health & Dental Plan Awards  
Events & Discounted Tickets

## Satisfaction Ratings



extremely, moderately, or slightly satisfied with GSA programs and services.



72%

GSA Health and Dental Plan

90%

events and discounted tickets



50%

internal advocacy

42%

external advocacy

88%

labour relations advocacy

*% of slight, moderate & extreme satisfaction*

## Key Takeaways and Recommendations

Top issues for graduate students are financial security and course quality and academic progress due to the impact of COVID-19 and tuition increases. Employment and mental health concerns are also imminent concerns for graduate students. Meanwhile, the lack of fair wages for academic positions (e.g., Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants) and high fees make it difficult for graduate students to make end meets.

COVID-19 and the lack of work-life balance bring about stress and deteriorating mental health for graduate students. Respondents ask for more effective mental health support including possible increased coverage for mental health services in the GSA Health and Dental Plan.

International students need more support from the GSA due to the higher tuition charge and lack of government funding during COVID-19. Some support for integration and immigration are highly in demand.

COVID-19 restricts in-person interactions and events. Graduate students therefore feel isolated and for some, feel Zoom fatigued. More social events and discounted tickets should be offered to help connect graduate students during this time. Any offerings that take into consideration different graduate student demographics such as graduate students in Edmonton, with families, distance students would be greatly appreciated.

Graduate students want to see more tangible results in most pressing areas including tuition and fees, affordable housing, UPass, TA/RA support, relationship with supervisors, and mental health.

Even though graduate students might be overwhelmed with information, most want to see more clear communication from the GSA about its programs, services, volunteering opportunities and would like to quickly learn about these services, especially for first year students. For elections, graduate students would participate more if they are informed of the candidates and their platforms.

# Improving Organizational Sustainability

The GSA is committed to fostering a nurturing, professional, and productive environment that empowers innovation and risk taking, while maximizing efficiency and impact.



# Achieving Organizational Sustainability through the 2019-22 Strategic Plan



## Continuous Planning and Implementation

In 2019, the GSA introduced the new Strategic Plan with the focus on four main areas including: Student Advocacy, Service Delivery, Communication, and Organizational Sustainability. Under each focus, the GSA outlines the objectives that are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound).

Over the past year, the GSA has put major focus on reviewing the objectives, forming strategies, and creating action plans to reach the desired objectives. Currently, a Strategic Plan tracking document has been established and maintained to keep track of the progress of the action items assigned to specific stakeholders to ensure accountability.

## Renewed Connection

Since the review and establishment of the action plans and tracking document, the GSA management team is glad to see the commitment from the stakeholders including the staff and executives to the 2019-22 Strategic Plan. The stakeholders are more aware of the tasks assigned to them and how these tasks are a part of the robust Strategic Plan of the organization.

## Integrated Communication

It is important to communicate with graduate students on the progress of the GSA Strategic Plan. The GSA has built the four focuses of the strategic plan into reporting templates for board members, Graduate Representative Council, and staff reports. This Annual Report is also closely tied with the Strategic Plan with updates and reports on each of the four focuses.

## Forward Commitment

The GSA is committed to the execution of the Strategic Plan and to the vision of becoming the leader in graduate student representation. Therefore, in the 2021-22 academic year, the GSA will continue to track the action items currently laid out in the plan; adjust the objectives, strategies and action items to the changing nature of the organization due to internal and external factors; and host discussion of the Strategic Plan regularly within staff and board meetings.

As 2022 is the last year of the 2019-22 Strategic Plan, the GSA looks forward to introducing the next Strategic Plan with the UCalgary's graduate student community.

# Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

The GSA is committed to fostering an inclusive workplace for the GSA staff, executives, and volunteers as well as to amplify the voices of the oppressed groups including, but not limited to, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and people of colour.

During the 2020-21 academic year, the GSA had done significant EDI work alongside with GSA committees and subcommittees.

## **Statements from the GSA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee**

- Statement on 215 Indigenous children bodies found in Kamloops Residential School
- Anti-Asian Racism Statement
- GSA Statement on Scholar Strike

## **Statements and Articles from the GSA Gender and Sexuality Alliance Subcommittee**

- Transgender Day of Visibility Article
- Open Letter from The GSA Gender and Sexuality Alliance Subcommittee
- Article: How to discuss issues of politics, gender, and sexuality
- Article: How to create an inclusive classroom as a graduate lecturer or teaching assistant
- Article: Challenging the Unjust System: Pride is A Riot

The GSA will and must continue its work in establishing equity in the workplace and in the community. Therefore, the GSA is committed to:

- Learning about racism and anti-racism within the members of GSA Board, Staff, and Senior Leadership Team
- Bringing diverse voices to decision-making tables
- Amplifying the voices of oppressed groups through statements, stories, events, communication, and resources
- Conducting EDI audit for the GSA
- Forming and building the EDI Committee
- Establishing EDI resources and guidelines for internal processes including communication, event, and human resources

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## Human Resources Sustainability

The GSA strives to enhance staff communication and support to increase employee satisfaction through robust staff engagement, cross-training, ongoing evaluation, and professional development. The GSA understands the importance of mental health in staff satisfaction and efficacy, therefore, the GSA aims to work toward a balanced and healthy workload for all staff and executives and build an inclusive and healthy working culture.

# Financial Sustainability

## Integrating of Accounting Procedures

Due to the impact of COVID-19 and the GSA working remotely, the GSA was able to setup a digital and integrated system for the approval of payables and processing of payments while maintaining the appropriate financial oversight. The GSA has integrated the accounting software with an approval platform and an electronic payment platform. This has saved the GSA time and money while making the process more efficient and error-free.

## Sponsorship and Advertising Program

One objective of the GSA Strategic Plan is to earn 2% of unrestricted revenues through new revenues. The GSA Sponsorship and Advertising Program, therefore, was established to connect with potential businesses to secure monetary and non-monetary donations to the GSA. This is also a way the GSA is able to add value to graduate students through exclusive discount offers, funded events and programs.

## Finance Committee Achievements

- Review the results of the GSA annual audit
- Reviewed the GSA and LDL Revised 2020-21 Budgets
- Revise the GSA Investment Policy
- Reviewed GSA financial statements
- Reviewed LDL financial statements
- Reviewed the proposed budget for the GSA, the LDL, Advocacy Levy, Health & Dental, Labour Relations Committee, Professional Development Grants Levy, and Quality Money

# Environmental Sustainability

## Last Defence Lounge Inventory

With the LDL closing in March 2020 due to the pandemic, the GSA was able to donate over \$7,000 worth of inventory food items to the Leftovers Foundation, which is a not-for-profit organization here in Calgary that is committed to fighting poverty, reducing food waste, and saving the environment.

## Sustainability Committee Achievements

- Hosted the GSA Sustainability Award Workshop, Vegan Cooking Class, DIY Reusable Beeswax Wraps Workshop, Starting Anywhere Garden with Farmer Kye, Human Right to Clean Water: Context for Canada's Indigenous Communities
- Partnered with the Office of Sustainability and other associations within and outside of the UCalgary Community such as Bike Calgary, Offline EducSation pilot project, a few DGAs, Roni's Kitchen, Corner Veggie, and Iniikokaan Centre.

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# Governance Sustainability

## Governance Committee Achievements

- Reviewed 10 GSA policies including the GSA Elections Policy
- Set up the committee to work fully remote

## Awards Committee

- Revised Terms of References for all awards, grants, and bursaries to improve clarity and address issues from previous year
- Improved internal awards administrative system and processes for higher efficacy

# 2020-2021 Financial Statements

The GSA successfully worked with KPMG to complete the audit of the financial statements for the year. In the opinion of the auditors, the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the GSA as at March 31, 2021, and our results of operations and cashflows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian Accounting Standards for not-for-profit organizations.

Please see below the GSA's audited financial statements with year ending March 31, 2021, and comparative information for 2020.

For more information, please email the GSA VP Finance and Services at [vpfs.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vpfs.gsa@ucalgary.ca)

## Statement of Operations

Year ended March 31, 2021, with comparative information for 2020

<b>Revenues</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>
Graduate Students' Centre Lounge	\$1,655	\$614,580
Graduate Students' Association	4,412,061	4,348,937
	<b>4,413,716</b>	<b>4,963,517</b>

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Cost of sales</b>	6,061	220,741
<b>General and administrative</b>		
Graduate Students' Centre Lounge	107,475	522,645
Graduate Students' Association	3,462,126	3,859,730
	<b>3,569,601</b>	<b>4,382,375</b>
<b>Realized gain on disposal of investments</b>	163,884	8,659
<b>Unrealized gain (loss) on investments</b>	33,508	(59,492)
<b>Loss on disposal of property and equipment</b>	-	(14,033)
<b>EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,035,446</b>	<b>\$295,535</b>

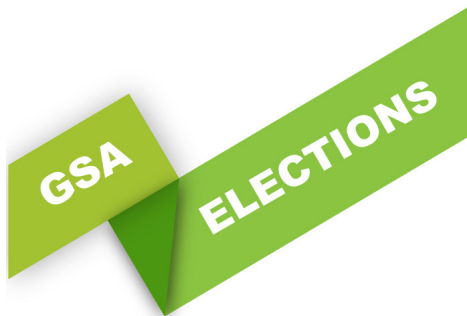
## Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2021, with comparative information for 2020

<b>Assets</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$5,074,745	\$2,157,165
Short term investments	-	500,000
Cash and cash equivalents	15,639	23,422
Inventory	3,777	17,889
Prepaid expenses and deposits	338,838	329,927
	<b>5,432,999</b>	<b>3,028,403</b>
Investments	299,600	1,559,563
Property and Equipment	634,643	713,834
	<b>\$6,367,242</b>	<b>\$5,301,800</b>
<b>Liabilities and Assets</b>		
	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	268,938	284,477
Deferred revenue (health and dental premiums)	1,153,670	1,108,135
	<b>1,422,608</b>	<b>1,392,612</b>
<b>Net assets</b>		
Unrestricted	2,660,149	2,242,331
Internally restricted	2,284,485	1,666,857
	<b>4,944,634</b>	<b>3,909,188</b>
Economic dependence	-	-
Commitments	-	-
	<b>\$6,367,242</b>	<b>\$5,301,800</b>

# **Moving Forward to 2021-22**

# 2020-21 Elections



The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) welcomes newly elected officials for the 2020-2021 academic year after our 2021 General Election held on March 8 and 9. The voter turnout was 7% seeing 508 current UCalgary graduate students voted at this election out of a total of 7,156 eligible

voters. This year, the election was hosted mainly virtually due to the pandemic's restrictions.

The GSA would like to congratulate the elected officials for the upcoming 2021-2022 academic year:

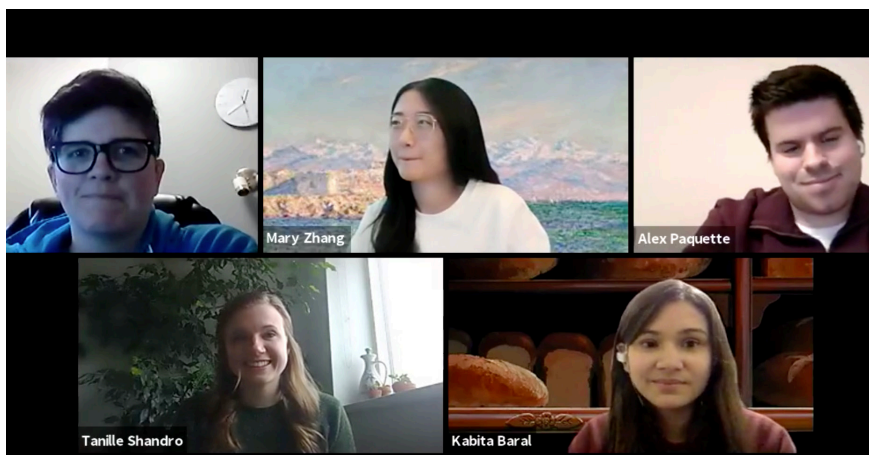
- President: Tanille Shandro, PhD Student in Chemistry
- Vice President Academic: Alex Paquette, PhD Student in Geoscience
- Vice President Student Life: Kabita Baral, PhD Student in Veterinary Medicine
- Vice President Finance and Services: Mary Zhang, PhD Student in Geoscience
- Vice President External: [currently vacant, to be filled in a by-election]
- Associate Vice President Labour: Keira Gunn, PhD Student in Pure Mathematics

The Associate Vice President (AVP) Labour position was acclaimed by Keira Gunn prior to the campaign period as per GSA Bylaws. This will be Keira's second term in this position since she was first elected in this position in the AVP Labour By-election in October 2020.

The GSA by-election for the VP Finance and Services was hosted on April 27, 2021.

The Graduate Representative Council representatives casted the vote according to the GSA Bylaws for the by-election and elected Kirsten Neprily to become the Vice President External for 2021-22.

Kirsten Neprily



Newly elected officials at the online Election Results Announcement event on March 10, 2021

From left to right, top to bottom: Keira Gunn, Mary Zhang, Alex Paquette, Tanille Shandro, Kabita Baral.

# Welcome 2021-22

# Board of Directors



## Tanille Shandro, President

PhD Candidate in Biophysical Chemistry

**Portfolio:**

- GSA Bylaws & governing documents
- All GSA affairs and operations
- Collective Agreement
- Your voice to the Board of Governors and governments

**Committee:** Governance Committee; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

**Email:** [pres.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:pres.gsa@ucalgary.ca)



## Alex Paquette, VP Academic

PhD Candidate in Geoscience

**Portfolio:**

- GSA Awards and Professional Development Grants
- Academic appeals and student issues
- Workshops and professional development

**Goals:**

1. Increase the minimum funding policy for PhD students.
2. Create a minimum funding policy for MSc thesis-based students.
3. Finish the new GSA awards website with a launch date of August 15th, 2021.
4. Collaborate with Mitacs to have more workshops for graduate students.
5. Create a TEDx style event for graduate students to showcase their research.
6. Advocate for graduate students on Academic, EDI and COVID-19 issues.

**Committees:** Academic Support Committee, Awards Committee

**Email:** [vpa.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vpa.gsa@ucalgary.ca)





## Kabita Baral, VP Student Life

**PhD Student in Comparative Biology and Experimental Medicine**

**Portfolio:**

- Events and discounted ticket sales
- Departmental Graduate Associations (DGAs) and Graduate Student Groups (GSGs)
- Student experience

**Committees:** Student Experience and Events Committee, Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee, GSA Gender and Sexuality Alliance Subcommittee (or GSA<sup>2</sup>), Events Subcommittee, Newcomers and International Students Subcommittee, Community Engagement Subcommittee

**Email:** [vpstl.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vpstl.gsa@ucalgary.ca)



## Kirsten Neprily, VP External

**PhD Student in Educational Psychology**

**Portfolio:**

- Municipal, provincial, and federal advocacy
- External relations

**Committee:** Advocacy Working Group

**Email:** [vpext.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vpext.gsa@ucalgary.ca)



## Mary Zhang, VP Finance & Services

**PhD Student in Geoscience**

**Portfolio:**

- Health & Dental Plan (H&D)
- GSA and Emergency Bursaries
- Last Defence Lounge

**Committees:** Finance Standing Committee, Sustainability Committee

**Email:** [vpfs.gsa@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vpfs.gsa@ucalgary.ca)



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AND WE LOOK FORWARD  
TO MEETING YOU ONLINE  
AND IN-PERSON!





GRADUATE  
STUDENTS'  
ASSOCIATION

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