



President's Report

As the President of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA), it has been an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling experience to reflect on the work we have accomplished throughout the year. Together, we have focused on initiatives that directly impact the well-being of graduate students, enhance our sense of community, and improve the services we offer. In this report, I will outline the key achievements that have defined my term and highlight our continued efforts toward strengthening our student body.

One of the most important initiatives I had the privilege of launching this year was the establishment of the **Compassionate Fund**. This fund was created in response to the grief and hardships many graduate students face during the loss of a loved one. The Compassionate Fund offers financial support to students during these difficult moments, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to navigate through such trying times. I believe this initiative is a vital expression of the GSA's commitment to caring for our graduate community, ensuring that no one faces these struggles alone. In line with my dedication to student health, I also focused on expanding the **eye care coverage** for GSA members. Previously capped at \$50, the initial coverage was insufficient to cover eye exams and glasses for many students. After working closely with our service providers and advocating on behalf of students, I successfully secured an increase in coverage to \$150 every two years. Furthermore, I sought out partnerships with eye clinics in Hamilton, Burlington, Toronto, and Mississauga, enabling us to offer full coverage for both eye exams and glasses at no extra cost to students. The positive impact of this initiative has been noticeable, with a significant increase in the use of these services. This eye care benefit will continue into the coming year, and students will be able to access it both on campus and at participating clinics during both the fall and winter terms.

I also worked closely with the GSA board and leadership to refine our financial strategy and improve the operational efficiency of the organization. A key accomplishment in this area was the signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** with Graduate Studies. This agreement will strengthen our ability to coordinate with the university and streamline communication. We will now be able to share essential information, such as student lists for newsletters and service updates, making it easier to communicate and serve our graduate student community. I am grateful to those who laid the groundwork for this partnership and to all those who helped us finalize the MOU. Increasing **employment opportunities for graduate students** was another key priority during my term. The GSA's Phoenix Grill and Bar has been an important space for students to gather socially and professionally, and I wanted to ensure that graduate students had priority for employment opportunities there. To further this goal, I worked on creating a **hiring policy** that includes GSA executive or staff oversight and ensures that graduate students are prioritized in the hiring process. This policy will be reviewed and passed by the bylaws committee by March. Additionally, I worked on increasing visibility for the 20% student discount, resulting in greater student engagement and use of the Phoenix Grill and Bar.



I also spearheaded the long-awaited redesign of the **GSA website**, an effort that is set to launch in March. After selecting a talented website designer, we have developed a site that will offer an improved, user-friendly interface and updated resources. The new website will make it easier for graduate students to access the information and services they need. Additionally, we have secured an ongoing contract for continued maintenance and updates, ensuring that the site will remain functional and up-to-date for years to come.

In terms of improving the **GSA office environment**, we recognized the need to enhance the physical space where we serve students. As a result, we made several key improvements, including extending office hours to better serve students. The office is now more welcoming, with free printing services, a snack table, and plants to create a comfortable atmosphere. We also installed an **owl camera** and **CCTV** to ensure the safety and security of our staff and students. While the office is located above the restaurant, these changes have made the space much more functional and welcoming, with additional gadgets that support staff efficiency. As this office is funded by student dues, it was important that we created a space that truly meets the needs of our community.

In response to the unique needs of graduate students, I worked to provide tailored **resources and events**. One of the highlights of this year was the **Thesis Writing Session**, which was our largest to date. This event offered students a dedicated space to focus on their thesis work, with the support of faculty and staff. The session was extremely well-received and demonstrated the importance of providing graduate students with opportunities to tackle academic challenges in a supportive environment. This event is a testament to our commitment to addressing the academic needs of our members, and I will continue to advocate for additional writing support as we move forward.

Another major initiative I am proud to have launched is the **Free Period Products Program**. This program ensures that students have access to essential period products without financial burden. In addition, we introduced the **Pantry Table**, which addresses food insecurity by providing non-perishable food items to students in need. The Pantry operates twice a month, and although it is a temporary solution, we are exploring more sustainable ways to address food insecurity. Additionally, the **Thrift Collection**, which collects lightly used clothes, has proven to be a practical and helpful resource for students facing financial challenges. These programs have had a tangible impact on students' lives, and I look forward to expanding them in the future.

Our **Cultural Heritage Event** has also grown significantly this year. What began as a small event in 2023, where I shared food from home, blossomed into a large, impactful celebration. Thanks to additional funding from Graduate Studies, we were able to scale the event to accommodate over 250 attendees. This celebration included a variety of food, honoraria for performers, and a larger venue, which all contributed to the success of the event. It was heartwarming to see the



positive impact this event had on our community, and I am excited to continue this tradition for years to come.

Financially, we have worked hard to ensure that the **2024/25 budget** reflects the priorities of our graduate student body. Through ongoing advocacy efforts, we were able to secure increased funding for key areas, such as travel expenses, professional development, and social events. This budget prioritizes the holistic development of our graduate students, ensuring that we continue to be a vital resource for both academic and personal growth.

Throughout the year, I participated in numerous **meetings with executive council members, student groups, service providers, administration, and other key stakeholders**. These meetings provided valuable opportunities to advocate for graduate students and push for meaningful change. Key advocacy efforts included opposing the Persona Non Grata policy, advocating for increased graduate funding, and advocating for better supervisory guidelines for graduate students.

As we look ahead to the future, there is still much work to be done. I will continue to advocate for improvements in **dental and health services**, as well as **childcare support** for graduate students. With the rise of domestic violence cases, I also believe it is crucial that we establish additional support services for survivor students. Additionally, **graduate student funding** will remain a top priority. Financial support is essential to both academic success and overall well-being, and I will continue to fight for increased funding for our community. As we move forward, I encourage everyone to continue working with passion, dedication, and a shared sense of purpose.

Best,
Kusum Bhatta
President

VP Internal Report – Kaustubh Dalmia

Events

As Vice President Internal, I successfully organized engaging Welcome Week activities for both the Fall and Winter terms. My responsibilities included creating registration forms, managing student and university correspondence, booking venues, and overseeing event execution.

- **Fall Term Events:** Hosted a barbecue, a forest hike, and a painting event, fostering community engagement among graduate students.
- **Winter Term Events:** Led the organization of a cultural event and another painting session, enhancing student participation and inclusivity.

Academic Committee

I played a key role in coordinating and facilitating regular Academic Committee meetings to address academic concerns and initiatives beneficial to graduate students. Additionally, I actively contributed to discussions and advocated for increased resources and support for graduate students during monthly Student Services Committee (SSC) meetings. In the Winter term, I also assisted in organizing dedicated writing sessions to support academic development.

Additional Contributions

Beyond my core responsibilities, I supported various GSA operations, including:

- Organizing and maintaining the GSA office, including inventory management.
- Assisting with technical troubleshooting, including laptop and gadget repairs.
- Designing posters and developing specialized eye care forms to meet unique student needs.
- Addressing issues with the Eye Care registration form to streamline the process.
- Researching and identifying potential insurance providers for GSA, facilitating connections with suitable options.

Through these initiatives, I have contributed to enhancing student experience, advocating for academic support, and improving operational efficiency within the GSA.

Vice President External Report - Farha Haider

As Vice President External, I am proud to present a comprehensive summary of the initiatives and achievements undertaken at the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) over the past year. My primary focus has been to amplify student engagement and ensure that graduate students are fully aware of the resources, opportunities, and support systems available to them through the GSA.

1. Strengthening Communication - Weekly Newsletters

I led the design and execution of the GSA's weekly newsletters—our primary communication channel ensuring that students remained informed about key updates, upcoming initiatives, and opportunities beneficial to their academic and social experience.

To enhance engagement, I incorporated visually compelling posters, cards, and promotional materials. Additionally, I introduced interactive sections such as a “Food Recipe of the Week” and “Picture of the Day” to make the newsletters more dynamic and engaging.

2. Organizing Events- Welcome Week & Beyond

I played a key role in planning and executing large-scale Welcome Week activities for both Fall and Winter terms. My responsibilities included:

- Creating registration forms and managing student sign-ups
- Coordinating catering, venue bookings, and event logistics
- Actively overseeing execution to ensure seamless student experiences

Notable events included a fall barbecue, university tour, painting sessions, laser tag, and board game night - all designed to foster community and belonging among graduate students.

Additionally, I represented the GSA at the SGS Graduate Resource Fair, where I engaged directly with over 200 students, increasing awareness of GSA initiatives and boosting social media engagement.

Currently, I am actively involved in planning a large-scale cultural event at CIBC Hall, leading efforts to coordinate performers, photographers and budget.

3. Advocating for Student Concerns: SIAC & Events Committee

As the coordinator of the Student Issues and Actions Committee (SIAC), I facilitated discussions on pressing student concerns, ensuring every voice was heard with respect and empathy.



Within the Events Committee, I worked to maximize student participation by designing budget-friendly events accessible to all. I also conducted surveys to gather student input, using data-driven insights to tailor events to their interests.

4. Designing Strategic Promotional Campaigns

I developed a wide range of promotional materials for key events and initiatives, including:

- On-campus eye exams, thrift events, Remembrance Day, Orange Shirt Day, and compassionate fund projects
- Insurance blackout periods and new executive team announcements
- Election nominations for committees and executive positions

Additionally, I designed a comprehensive guidebook detailing the GSA's services, including health and dental insurance, awards, and past events—a key resource for incoming and current students.

5. Recognizing Excellence: Awards Presentations

I actively contributed to the organization and presentation of GSA/SGS Graduate Awards, recognizing and celebrating outstanding students for their achievements and contributions.

6. Leadership in GSA Governance

I consistently attended executive, board, and council meetings, providing strategic input to drive impactful decision-making. I also engaged with the Student Success Centre and various university stakeholders to explore collaborative initiatives and expand support for graduate students.

Alongside the executive team, I participated in discussions with the Dean of SGS, successfully advocating for an extended student email list to enhance outreach and communication.

Further, during fall, I attended multiple department orientations, communicated about GSA offerings and presented swag items to new students.

Beyond my executive responsibilities, I personally assisted numerous students in navigating health insurance claims, compassionate fund applications, and other critical support services.

This report emphasises my commitment as Vice President External to enhancing student engagement, strengthening communication, and advocating for graduate student welfare. Through strategic initiatives and hands-on leadership, I have worked to make the GSA more accessible, transparent, and impactful.

GSA VP Services Annual Report - Liping Song

As the GSA VP Services, I am pleased to present a summary of our key initiatives and achievements over the past academic year, highlighting efforts to enhance services for graduate students.

Key Responsibilities and Achievements

1. Health & Dental Insurance Plan

- Ensured the plan met student needs through regular monitoring and negotiations with providers.
- Organized workshops to help students understand their coverage and claims process.

2. HSR Bus Pass and Student Services

- Coordinated with HSR for seamless bus pass distribution.
- Kept transportation information up to date on the GSA website.

3. GSA Clubs Management

- Re-registered 14 clubs and helped establish three new ones, bringing the total to 17 active clubs.
- Organized Club Committee Meetings to clarify registration, funding, and event planning.
- Improved the event funding reimbursement process in collaboration with the GSA Assistant Secretary.

4. Website and Information Updates

- Updated the GSA website with essential student resources, including health insurance, transportation, funding, and club information.
- Assisted new clubs in setting up their web pages.
- Assisted the development of a new, more user-friendly GSA website, set to launch soon.

5. Student Engagement and Events

- Organized major student events, including Orientation Week, BBQs, and hiking activities.
- Approved club event funding to support diverse student-led initiatives.
- Strengthened collaboration with the Student Services Center through regular meetings.

6. Communication and Student Support

- Addressed student inquiries and provided timely updates on GSA services and events.

Areas for Future Improvement

1. Increasing Participation in Club Committee Meetings



- Current attendance is below 50%. To improve engagement:
 - Introduce incentives such as additional funding for active participation.
 - Create an online forum to facilitate discussions beyond meetings.
- 2. Enhancing Awareness of GSA Funding Opportunities**
 - Many students are unaware of available funding. Solutions include:
 - Developing a step-by-step application guide.
 - Hosting Q&A sessions and targeted email campaigns.

Conclusion

This year has been focused on improving student engagement, streamlining processes, and expanding accessibility to resources. I remain committed to further strengthening GSA services for the benefit of all graduate students.

Thank you for your support and trust in my role as GSA VP Services.

VP Administration Report – Patrick Sauriol

This year in my position as VP Administration, I both got a lot done and did not do as much as I was hoping to accomplish. My comprehensive exams and other commitments with work sometimes conflicted with my schedule and work for the GSA for much of first semester. It was tough to balance my commitments, and I will admit that it sometimes led to me not completing tasks in a timely manner, however I still got things done.

At the beginning of my term, I spent time getting used to the role and learning the basics such as using Seafire, funding approvals, and going over the yearly budget. I was also learning the structure to the GSA and attending some meetings with parts of the university administration along with our weekly executive meetings.

In my role, I did many tasks for the GSA. I helped with the various program orientations that we attended, discussing the services that the GSA offers and bringing swag items for students. I helped with the welcome week barbecue that we held, setting up the space and talking to people about what the GSA offers. I also began to do research into setting up a childcare space for graduate students after the MSU approached us with an offer to help fund their childcare centre. This research led me to the conclusion that this would not be feasible for us to do now, neither start our own centre nor fund that of the MSU. I believe our best course of action, which I have suggested, would be to create a childcare bursary for students. This could later lead into us offering better childcare options, but creating our own centre would not be feasible currently.

I also worked towards getting a better deal with local physiotherapy providers to offer better care for graduate students. This took some time as many places did not get back to me. In mid December, I had managed to schedule a first meeting with a physio provider who ultimately did not show up and never followed up after this. In January I managed to get in contact with AIM Physio and Wellness, who I am currently in the process of brokering a deal with to offer a discounted rate to graduate students for physio, massage, and chiropractic therapy.

I also worked to create our long-term investment strategy. The GSA currently has a reserve amount that we are sitting on totaling around \$100,000. As chair of the Finance Committee, I worked with the team to do research into various investment options. My final recommendation was to invest in various ETFs to increase our return on investment and engage in more medium risk investing. Research into stock options was helpful, but ultimately deemed not feasible as stocks are volatile and require the ability to sell at any time, which the GSA is not able to do. Real estate was the other option. We also investigated this and is mentioned in my long-term investment strategy. Real estate is a possible option down the road once the GSA is



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better positioned to do this kind of investing but would require more research and development.

I also attended various meetings with members of the university administration, attended the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies conference to network and discuss graduate student issues, and approved the funding for various clubs and events. I also helped clear the backlog of paperwork for payments owed to The Phoenix.