



GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO GRADUATE STUDENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The goal of the GSA-UW is to work with UW administration and faculty to improve the graduate student experience. Through surveys and engagement with our graduate student Council, the following issues (in alphabetical order) have been identified as concerns within the graduate student community:



1. **Environmental Sustainability:** The GSA-UW supports the global fight against climate change and wishes to see UW become a leader in campus sustainability efforts. *UW should divest from fossil fuels and better align campus sustainability targets with the Paris Accord and the UN SDGs.*



2. **Equitable Faculty Funding and Recognition:** UW is renowned for its faculties of Engineering and Mathematics; however, research accomplishments and funding support in other faculties are often overlooked. *UW should adopt a 'whole-of-campus' strategy that better supports all faculties.*



3. **Equity and Anti-Racism:** BIPOC and LGBT2+ graduate student experiences at UW need to be better understood to support social and academic advancement. Moreover, [UW has unequitable gender representation and compensation structures](#). *UW should continue to engage with graduate students to identify and address issues of inequality and racism. Also, UW should provide equitable compensation and opportunities for women, BIPOC, and LGBT2+ members of our campus community.*



4. **Funding Transparency:** Financial commitments to graduate students outlined in letters of offer do not provide students with clarity on funding implications of starting on- or off-campus employment. *UW should standardize language contained in letters of offer, ensure that the conditions of funding are clearly articulated to graduate students, and provide ample notice of a reduction in funding.*



5. **Housing:** Through surveys, research, and student engagement, the GSA-UW has identified ongoing issues with on- and off-campus housing affordability and availability. *UW should work with the GSA-UW, WUSA, and regional governments to support a sustainable housing strategy.*



6. **Industry Connections:** PhD students have noted that there are limited opportunities to support professional development via co-op opportunities and industry events. *UW should provide more opportunities for PhD students to develop in-field connections and experience.*



7. **International Student Issues:** International students face numerous impediments to advancing their degree (e.g., financial, language, cultural, and social barriers), which have been further exacerbated by COVID-19. *UW should reduce tuition and [provide increased supports](#) for international students.*



8. **Ombudsperson:** The GSA-UW and WUSA believe that students can face conflicts with faculty and/or administration that requires impartial mediation existing policies / stakeholders cannot provide. *UW [should reinstitute an ombudsperson](#) to support procedural fairness for all members of our campus.*



9. **TA Experience:** TAs have noted issues with responsibilities not being clearly defined, employment rights being neglected, unmanageable workloads, limited training, and unpaid overtime. These issues are worsening due to the pandemic and the switch to a remote learning environment. Some members of our community [have commenced working with CUPE](#) to form a collective bargaining agreement to address these problems. *UW should increase TA compensation, provide more robust TA training ([including mental wellness training](#)), clearly define TA responsibilities, compensate for overtime (i.e., eliminate the 10-hour per week cap on paid hours), and provide more TA opportunities to reduce overtime and align [with a growing undergraduate student population](#).*



10. **Tuition Fees:** The ongoing pandemic has created additional financial stressors while reducing the quality of graduate education due to the switch to a fully online learning environment. For some international graduate students, tuition has increased since the pandemic started. *UW should reduce tuition for domestic and international students.*

KEY MESSAGE: UW is home to a diverse group of graduate students that conduct advanced research across all faculties. The GSA-UW is keen to work with UW administration and members of all faculties to support the interests of graduate students and improve our campus' approach towards innovation and the student experience.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Please visit the [GSA-UW webpage](#) or email [GSA-UW President](#).