



Board Chair's 2025 AGM Report

To: GSA Membership

Presenter: Kaylee Biggart, GSA-UW Chair of the Board of Directors
(gsa-bc@uwaterloo.ca)

Date of Meeting: April 6, 2025

Summary:

The GSA-UW Board of Directors is responsible for overseeing the governance of the GSA-UW, to ensure the organization is operating responsibly. Key responsibilities of Directors include, but are not limited to:

- performance monitoring of the GSA-UW's strategic directive,
- financial oversight of the GSA-UW,
- risk identification and management,
- GSA-UW governance, and
- ensuring compliance with provincial legislation.

Something that sets the GSA-UW apart from a typical not-for-profit organization is the fact that Directors are first and foremost students that are dedicated to their roles as Directors on a part-time basis, instead of holding a full-time position. Additionally, due to the nature of turnover in student organizations, it can be difficult to establish institutional knowledge that can be passed along as Directors finish their terms and new Directors replace them.

These challenges were quite prominent last summer, as there were only two Directors that were returning after the 2024 AGM (one's term wasn't up yet, the other ran for a second term). However, this also presented the Board with the opportunity to establish and implement a more rigorous training regime to address gaps in training – a project that was started shortly before the 2024 AGM and will be regularly reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Prior to the first Board meeting of the 2024-2025 term, all directors were required to attend a mandatory training session, held in person at the GSA Board Room. Topics covered included:

- a general introduction of the GSA-UW, including an overview of how the GSA-UW operates the Grad House,



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- expectations of individual Directors' day-to-day responsibilities,
- an overview of not-for-profit governance, and
- financial responsibilities of the GSA-UW as a whole, including the legal responsibilities that individual Directors hold to oversee the finances of the GSA-UW.

A similar training session will be held at the beginning of the 2025-2026 term, which will integrate feedback received from Directors throughout the 2024-2025 term to ensure training meets the needs of new and continuing Directors. Additionally, brief training refreshers during monthly Board meetings will be presented regularly, to ensure adequate knowledge retention.

There are several successes from the past year for the Board to celebrate. During the May Board meeting, the Board was successful in filling a vacancy by appointing an interim Director. This vacancy was the result of a resignation during the 2023-2024 term that was received after the call for nominations during the 2024 AGM, and therefore the vacancy could not be filled at the 2024 AGM without compromising the integrity of the Directors' election. Despite the majority of Directors having little experience with the role at that time, all Directors, but particularly the newly elected ones, rose to the challenge of administering a rigorous selection process to ensure the highest quality candidate was selected.

Directors have been very engaged in their responsibilities, which is evident from the frequent requests for further training that were communicated. For example, during the 2023-2024 term, the Board had approved a new investment plan for the GSA-UW. However, no Directors elected and appointed to the Board for the 2024-2025 term were members of the Board when this new investment plan was approved, so Directors requested in depth training about what the investment plan entails, how the plan ensures the long term stability of the GSA-UW, and what sort of implications the plan has on the GSA-UW's annual budget. To this end, training was provided in October 2024 by the GSA-UW's investment manager and accountant.

Additionally, in July 2024, the Board received training about the GSA-UW's health and dental plans from our Student Care representative. Information presented included how the health and dental plans operate, what sort of coverage is included in the plans, and the implications of the plans for the annual budget. This enables the Board to make informed decisions surrounding the health and dental plans, to not only ensure graduate students at the University of Waterloo get the best value for their dollar, but also to ensure impacts that administering the health and dental plans have on the annual budget



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are minimized.

On a lighter note, the Board also approved a financial contribution to the goose statue that WUSA had built outside of SLC and PAC. The Board felt it was important to demonstrate a sense of community by collaborating with WUSA to showcase pride in being students at the University of Waterloo, as well as maintaining a close working relationship with WUSA.

As is the case for any organization, internal collaboration is paramount to the organization seeing success and achieving goals. Regular communication between the Board, Council, and the Executive Team (ie., President, Vice-Presidents, General Manager, etc.) has been maintained throughout the 2024-2025 term. This has been accomplished by having the Council Speaker provide updates at monthly Board meetings, the Board Chair providing updates at monthly Council meetings, the President and/or one of the Vice Presidents providing updates at both Council and Board meetings, and finally, the Board Chair and Council Speaker regularly attending weekly meetings with the Executive Team.

Through the hard work of new and returning Directors, as well as collaboration within the GSA-UW, the Board has put itself in a very favorable position. The Board has a wealth of resources to utilize in fulfilling regular responsibilities, and continuously adds to this pool through regular training. Members should have a high level of confidence that the Board and, by extension, the GSA-UW is operating responsibly and with suitable oversight.