



To: GSA Membership  
Presenter: Neela Hassan, GSA President (gsa-president@uwaterloo.ca)  
Date of Meeting: April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025

**Summary:** The Graduate Student Association-University of Waterloo (GSA-UW) currently serves around 4700 graduate students, offering the following services and programs:

- Political Representation on and off-campus
- Health & Dental Supplementary plans (Including Mental Health)
- GRT & ION Transit UPass
- legal & Tax Aid
- Student Advising and Advocacy
- Graduate House

The year 2024-2025 was a landmark year for the GSA, as we launched several key projects to enhance student well-being and took significant steps to strengthen our internal organization. Last year, the GSA's initiatives and efforts were largely informed by the launch of the GSA 2024-2027 strategic plan in mid-2024, which was developed through extensive consultations with graduate students and our partners across campus, ensuring it takes into consideration the shifting challenges and needs of our community. Our efforts in year 2024-2025 is characterized by several key initiatives, including the indigenization of the GSA, strengthening relationships with key partners, expanding funding opportunities for graduate students, and enhancing internal organizational operations and systems. In 2024-2025, the GSA saw a significant increase in student engagement, with meaningful participation in GSA events and advocacy initiatives. Additionally, we had active representation in several important university-wide initiatives, including Freedom of Expression and Respectful Engagement, the Task Force on Social Responsibility in Investing, and the Principles for Institutional Partnerships. I invite all our members to read the report and share their feedback, comments, and suggestions to help us improve our efforts and initiatives.

### **Ongoing Partnerships**

- Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
- Student Success Office (GSPA)
- Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA)



- Writing and Communications Centre
- City of Waterloo
- StudentCare
- Grand River Transit
- Organize UW
- Ombudsperson Office

### **2024-2025 Priorities**

1. Continue and Advance advocacy and Support for Graduate Students
2. Foster Graduate Student Engagement
3. Develop and Improve Partnerships
4. Enhance Internal Systems

#### **1. Continue and Advance advocacy and Support for Graduate Students**

In the year 2024-2025, we enhanced our advocacy initiatives, aiming at facilitating an equitable, inclusive, and meaningful experience for graduate students at the University of Waterloo. One of the key achievements under our advocacy efforts has been strengthening relationships with various partners across campus, especially the Office of Indigenous Relations, the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-Racism (EDI-R), and the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre (WISC). Additionally, our housing initiative was launched. While the majority of our advocacy priorities were addressed through existing programs and services, there were certain areas where addressing emerging needs and gaps required the development of new initiatives. Some of our new advocacy initiatives in the past year included the Nourish N Go program, a funding opportunity for grad students to attend conferences, the launching of a Grad Student Book Club, and the International Student working groups at the city level. Below is the list of main advocacy initiatives in 2024-2025:

- Initiated the process of Incorporating Indigenous Artwork and cultural elements into GSA spaces.
- Enhanced relationships and collaboration with various partners across campus.
- Finalized the Memorandum of Understanding with the Graduate Studies Endowment Fund (GSEF) to provide funding for the Graduate Student Research Dissemination Award.
- Launched the Graduate Student Blog to promote engagement and share experiences.
- Implemented the Nourish N Go program, offering free prepared meals to graduate students.
- Launched a Book Club to support social, mental, and academic well-being of students
- Started collaborating with Campus Housing to support the Market Research project.



- Hosted Events for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to foster diversity and inclusivity
- Hosted Termly Housing Webinars to raise awareness about housing resources.
- Assisted in Funding and Hiring for the Ombudsperson's Office.

### **2. Foster Graduate Student Engagement**

Our efforts to enhance student engagement have culminated in a series of strategic initiatives, including the fortification of relationships with Departmental Graduate Student Associations, the provision of remuneration to select groups of student representatives, the expansion of our social media outreach, the facilitation of comprehensive consultations, and the implementation of various surveys. These initiatives are designed to cultivate a more inclusive environment that not only values student input but also fosters meaningful connections and community building. Collectively, these endeavors have significantly contributed to an enhancement in student satisfaction and active participation. The following are key initiatives aimed at fostering student engagement for 2024-2025:

- Developed and launched a comprehensive guideline on founding a departmental Graduate Student Association (dGSA), including the processes for registering and renewing a dGSA with the GSA, as well as conducting elections and referenda.
- Launched a Designated Funding Initiative for Departmental Graduate Student Associations (DGSA) to support their activities and enhance student engagement.
- Continued implementing termly volunteer initiatives to enhance engagement, including the distribution of appreciation certificates, provision of uniforms, and organization of volunteer appreciation events.
- Started Offering Remuneration for GSA Council members and the GSA Board of Directors to recognize their contributions and commitment.
- Successfully hosted, on average, six large-scale events each term focused on promoting student mental health and social well-being.

### **3. Develop and Improve Partnerships**

Our experience shows that improving current partnerships and developing new ones is essential for the GSA as it enhances our capacity to advocate for graduate student needs, broadens access to resources, and fosters a sense of community among diverse student groups. One of our primary objectives has been to cultivate systematic and purposeful relationships that establish a clear foundation for mutual expectations and collaborative engagement, while also ensuring equitable benefits for all parties involved. In 2024-2025,



we worked with a number of partners on- and off-campus to enhance the support and resources available to our graduate students. Below is the list of our key collaborators:

- Collaborated with the EDI-R Office on various GSA initiatives, including the review of Black and Indigenous scholarships and consultations on the GSA Strategic Plan.
- Engaged actively with the Office of Indigenous Relations and Indigenous leaders across campus to foster meaningful partnerships.
- Increased engagement with the Town and Gown Committee and the International Student Working Groups, collaborating with WUSA, Wilfrid Laurier University Graduate Students Association, and Conestoga College.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with CUPE Local 5524 to strengthen our collaborative efforts.
- Held regular meetings with Partners, such as the Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs Office, Student Success Office, the President's Office, and the Ombudsman's Office, to ensure effective communication and collaboration.

#### **4. Enhance Internal Systems**

In 2024-2025, we continued our efforts to strengthen the internal systems of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA). Various initiatives are undertaken to improve communication, streamline processes, and develop new systems that enhance our operational efficiency. These initiatives include the introduction of new technologies for better information sharing, the establishment of clear protocols to facilitate decision-making, and the creation of resources that support student engagement and involvement. Strengthening internal systems has proven to be crucial for ensuring effective representation and advocacy, ultimately enhancing the overall student experience. Below is the list of Some of Our Efforts Aimed at Enhancing Internal Systems in 2024-2025:

- Hired a full-Time Communications Specialist to strategically oversee the GSA's Promotion and Marketing Efforts to enhance visibility, improve engagement with students, and ensure a cohesive messaging strategy.
- Created detailed documentation for New Procedures to ensure clarity, consistency, and adherence to best practices across all operational facets of the GSA.
- Enhanced Communications and Messaging to improve outreach and engagement with the student body, utilizing a variety of channels to ensure that our initiatives, events, and resources are effectively communicated and accessible to all students.
- Refined specific portfolios to enhance efficiency and effectiveness by optimizing workflows and aligning them with the organization's current needs. This effort includes reviewing existing processes to find areas for improvement and putting in place specific strategies to boost overall performance and impact.



### Graduate House

In our ongoing efforts to enhance the Graduate House experience, we are dedicated to creating a welcoming and accommodating space for everyone in the University of Waterloo community. Our initiatives are shaped by a strong commitment to sustainability, support for local small businesses, and inclusivity. We strive to implement eco-friendly practices, source products from local vendors, and cultivate an environment that embraces diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. At the heart of our operations is our commitment to social well-being. We prioritize promoting mental health and nurturing meaningful connections among all our members. We believe that a strong sense of community enriches our shared experiences and elevates the significance of our achievements.

2024-2025 was a year of many positive changes at the Graduate House. We have focused on enhancing our facilities and programming to better serve our community. From the completion of the Chalice of Champions Mural Wall to the introduction of our new espresso program, these updates reflect our commitment to creating a welcoming and vibrant space. Additionally, our diverse event offerings have successfully brought the community together, ensuring ample opportunities for connection and celebration.

Here are some highlights:

#### Renovations and New Initiatives

- Designed the Chalice of Champions Mural Wall Art to encourage celebration of the completion of degrees
- Washroom renovations that include the replacement of lighting, dividers, mirrors, and counters.
- Launched the espresso program enhancing non-alcoholic options for graduate students and the UW community, and it has been well received due to its conservative pricing.
- Upgrading the seating in the Green Room to both comfort and aesthetics.
- Secured funding for the upper patio renovation from the University

#### Events

- Standing room only weekly events like Trivia
- Varied other events such as Music Bingo, Karaoke, Open Mic, Board Game Nite, Karts&Krafts (Mariokart & Craft Beer).
- Five events on Safe Love Week (well attended)
- Hallowe'en Party & Costume contest (sold out)
- Live Music Events with DJ or Band(s)



## President Report

- Cross promoting with UW Theatre to encourage attendance at student plays

### **Bookings**

- GH is still booked regularly by Grad & Undergrad departments alike.
- The Upper lounge is booked for anything from 'pints with faculty to Grad Student Valentine's Day events

### **Sales**

- Averaging approximately 30% increase sales over last year's fiscal (Sept 2024-Jan 25)
- A significant increase in use of the space by staff and faculty