



**GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION  
GRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL MEETING  
Tuesday, January 31, 2023, 5:30 PM**

**Attendees:**

Saaka Sulemana Saaka, President  
James Steele, VP Academic  
Cameron Armstrong, VP Finance and Services  
AC Cameron, VP External  
Masume Akbarki, VP Student Life  
Keira Gunn, Chair/GSA AVP Labour of Labour Relations Committee  
BrettC Nelson, Speaker  
Quinn Goddard, Clerk

**Meeting Began - 5:30PM**

**Online Registration - 5:30PM**

**Rollcall - 5:38PM**

**Territorial Acknowledgement (Masume Akbarki) - 5:44PM**

**Approval of Agenda - 5:45PM**

Opposed: 0  
CARRIED

**Approval of November 2022 GRC Meeting Minutes - 5:46PM**

Opposed: 0  
CARRIED

**GSA 2023-2026 Strategic Plan Approval [Saaka Sulemana Saaka] - 5:47PM**

- Strategic Plan: Explains what GSA intends to do for next three years, and how that action will be accomplished and monitored
  - o Vision: A community of highly engaged and thriving UCalgary graduate students
  - o Mission: To ensure needed services, communities, advocacy, and growth opportunities are available and accessible for all UCalgary graduate students
  - o Guiding values:
    - Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Accessibility
    - Student Voice
    - Balanced Well-Being
    - Transparency and Accountability
    - Collaboration
  - o Priorities:

- Broaden and Deepen Student Engagement (ensure diverse student voice, participation, leadership)
- Address Critical Barriers to Thriving (alleviate financial, mental health, etc. barriers)
- Grow Organizational Capacities (strengthen organizational infrastructure)
- What we need to do:
  - Deliver valued services
  - Advocate for graduate student priorities
  - Connect and build community
  - Offer growth opportunities (offer networking, skill building, volunteer, etc. opportunities)

*Motion to Approve the 2023-2026 GSA Strategic Plan - 5:58PM*

In Favour: 61

Opposed: 0

Abstained: 8

CARRIED

### **Studentcare Presentation [Sophia Haque] - 6:01PM**

- Studentcare<sup>1</sup> represents over 1,000,000 students across Canada
- Studentcare serves as Consultant (negotiate with insurers, plan design trend analysis, etc.) and Administrator (member services centre, etc.)
- Covers health (over \$10,000), dental (up to \$850), vision (up to \$300), travel (up to \$5 million)
- Professional Network: suite of practitioners that give students additional benefits outside of what is covered (typically save additional 30%)
- Over past 5 years
  - Artificial decrease in student use in claims for 2019-2020 (due to beginning of pandemic)
  - Overall, increase in claims for students
- This year, annual plan premium is \$635.53 but annual plan fee is \$626.00 (subsidized \$9.35 by GSA dedicated Health and Dental Internal Funds)
  - How plan premium cost is determined:
    - Claims: biggest driving factor in costs
      - If costs are going up, it is because students are using the plan
      - 11% increase in per capita claims for health, 1% decrease in dental (due to 10% enrollment increase in plan)
    - Inflation
    - Fixed Costs
    - Administration
  - Expect increase to cost of plan in next year
    - Projected increase to \$764.84
      - Projection based on first four months of data, will use additional month of data to clarify number

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<sup>1</sup> More information is available at <https://studentcare.ca>

- Cameron Armstrong: Designed simple survey (5 questions) to see what students want to see happening with their plan
  - o e.g. can take cuts in coverage to have less dramatic cost increase, but need to determine what cuts students would find acceptable
  - o Data from survey will be presented in February GRC Meeting
  - o This is last year of GSA's contract with Studentcare
  
- **Comment**: I have found the plan frustrating, especially regarding dental. At the end of the year, often have unclaimed money left over (e.g. cleaning is covered, but never used money available for scaling). The plan is going up in price every year, but some of the money available to me in the plan is going unclaimed
  - o Cameron Armstrong: Not everyone uses entirety of plan, or all parts of plan identically. Since other people use things you don't, it evens out
- **Comment**: Amounts in Studentcare presentation [presented at this meeting] are deceiving in terms of what they cover (e.g. indicates that you are covered for health over \$10,000, but only \$300 for chiro, physio combined). Make sure to check how you're actually covered before doing the survey
  - o Cameron Armstrong: Details of plan are given at the start of the survey
- **Comment**: My dentist told me this plan does not follow the Alberta dental association guide for price, so it "covers" 100%, but only 100% of a historical cost (e.g. from five years ago). This resulted in my "100%" coverage only covering about 60%
  - o [Studentcare representative asked student to follow up with them over email]

#### **Presentation by UCalgary President Ed McCauley [Ed McCauley] - 6:19PM**

- Eyes High<sup>2</sup> (2017-2022) ended in December 2022
  - o Focused on UCalgary transitioning into research university, so graduate students and postdocs figured prominently in plan
  - o Achieved goal of becoming one of top 5 research universities in Canada
- Need input from graduate students for what next plan looks like
  - o Plan comprised of
    - Institutional strategies that reflect values of institution (academic and board of governors)
    - Individual faculty plans
    - Portfolio plans that overlay faculty plans
    - Operational plans (e.g. operational excellence plan, research plan)
  - o Currently developing overarching plan, and need graduate student input on that
    - It is aspirational plan for where UCalgary will be in 2030
    - How will UCalgary distinguish itself as a university?
- **Comment**: Graduate students are getting ignored even when asking for very basic things. University makes it sound like they want graduate student input, but they just ignore us and hike tuition
  - o Ed McCauley: Graduate student input really does matter significantly, especially in regards to the operational excellence plan (e.g. in terms of tuition)

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<sup>2</sup> More information is available at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/eyeshigh>

- Saaka Sulemana Saaka: Wants to remind students that the president is actually here and does want to listen, so should use rest of time to ask him questions about the plan
- **Question**: During the time that Eyes High was in effect, university had more and more graduate students coming in. This means the money allocated for funding has to increase (e.g. 30% more students, and funding going to individual students not changing). Graduate students are feeling undervalued and exploited. University is massive institution with lots of money, much of which is going towards strategic plan and markers of excellence, but graduate students are doing most of the research that achieves those goals and not seeing money to reflect that. UCalgary has become one of top 5 research institutions, but on the backs of graduate students. Graduate students should not be applying for emergency bursaries, going into massive amounts of debt for research. Graduate students need to be reinvested in.
  - [Posed question to Ed McCauley] What is value of graduate students, what do we bring to this university?
  - Ed McCauley: Eyes High actually led to more investment in graduate students (e.g. Eyes High Scholarship)
  - Reply: Scholarships aren't enough, we need guaranteed basal funding
  - Ed McCauley: I am not being defensive, I am a big advocate for graduate students, have testified twice in front of Parliament
    - Graduate students are essential, appreciate your point that graduate students need to be seeing more support
    - Movements we have made to increase funding are clearly not enough
    - You are professionals that are driving research at UCalgary and that should be acknowledged and bolstered
  - Reply: Graduate students only have so long in university, so as administration "dithers on", graduate students don't see any changes during their time at university
  - Ed McCauley: Advocating strongly for increase in scholarships and bursaries
    - Especially advocating for increase in Tri-Council<sup>3</sup> funding since that feeds graduate funding in this country
- **Comment**: Want to emphasize that investing in graduate students could increase reputation of UCalgary and make the university stand out
- **Comment**: Emphasis on Tri-Council is great, but it makes it even harder for international students to get their foot in the door
- **Comment**: Almost 50% of graduate students are international students, but not able to access funding. We are suffering, not able to pay for tuition hike, and yet you [Ed McCauley] voted 'yes' for the tuition hike
- **Comment**: Tri-Council increases funding for students with highest income, students who don't have any scholarships are less in focus, and don't see increase in basal funding (focus on increased funding shouldn't go to richest 20% of students, should be redistributed)
  - Ed McCauley: Tri-Council funding not re-distributable by university
- **Question**: You say we [the graduate students] are driving research, but still want to get more and more tuition from us. You say the same thing that another executive said to us before in a previous meeting where they claimed they wanted input from us, and yet nothing changed – are you just playing a game, wanting to give us a false sense of being listened to?
  - Ed McCauley: No, your input is valued and you are being listened to
- **Comment**: Want to add to discussion on international students: international students often experience a bit of a bait-and-switch (they do not receive same access to supports, are often not

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<sup>3</sup> <https://research.ucalgary.ca/conduct-research/funding/apply-grants/external-grants/tri-council>

assigned supervisor at start of program, etc.). Many international students are also shocked to learn that tuition comes out of their funding (since this is not standard across the country) and that funding actually comes through some combination of TAships, etc. This means they're working long hours to get their stipend, while students at other institutions have to work less to get their funding

- **Comment:** "Consistent frustration" with the conversation and rhetoric surrounding talking to and listening to students, but actual meaningful engagement with community means change. I have students in my department with concerns about funding, housing insecurity, lack of university support. Have told administration time and again that the graduate students are not happy with changes in university, but see no changes, and this doesn't mesh with the claim that the university is listening or wants to listen
  
- Saaka Sulemana Saaka: I will sacrifice my spot in the Executive Reports to allow more questions
  
- **Comment:** Telling us about an increase in scholarships, when we are asking for more base pay, is irrelevant
- **Comment:** Graduate students with families are struggling - daycare expensive is very expensive at the university, I can't afford it for my daughter. Housing on campus is also expensive. What is being done to help graduate students stay on campus? What investments are being made in international students with families?
- **Comment:** There needs to be a deep review of all department funding policies. I can speak to horrible situation in Werklund – if I win an external scholarship (above \$5,000) based on my own merit, the scholarship goes to Werklund. This ends up reducing my minimum funding. This means that I'm expected to sessional-instruct and TA to actually receive the money from that scholarship, and that I can't make more than my minimum funding (\$18,000). You don't want us to take jobs outside of the university, but this makes it impossible to live – why am I even applying for scholarships?
  - o [Student in chat said the same thing happens in English department]
- **Comment:** Available stipends designed to keep students below poverty line and to keep students reliant on student loans. What we're saying: this is not business as usual, things are desperate
- **Comment:** You don't value graduate students, you won't provide basic needs for them. You talk about the environment, sustainability, revitalization, etc. and yet you're unwilling to invest in students to nurture the next generation
- **Comment:** We need more students at the upper-level of decision making – this is supposed to be a public institution, isn't it?
- **Comment:** UCalgary and other universities need to stop relying on graduate students' passion for research as a way to keep underpaying them

#### **Finance 101 [Cameron Armstrong] - 6:58PM**

- Most incoming money to GSA from Quality Money and GSA fees

#### **Executive Reports - 7:00PM**

- Skipped President's report (see comment during Ed McCauley's presentation)
  
- Cameron Armstrong (VP Finance and Services):

- Sustainability
    - Fighting single-use plastics in Mac Hall (will be illegal to distribute single-use plastics in 2024)
    - Styrofoam recycling program
    - Was on board to adjudicate Climate Action Grant<sup>4</sup>
      - 10 grants allocated to UCalgary applicants for employment related to helping mitigate climate change
  - Deployed health and dental coverage survey, proposing plan changes for vote by FSC/GRC
  - Search Committees' Process Change: postings advertised through volunteer databased, listservs, GSA newsletters
- James Steele (VP Academic):
- Have (almost) confirmed three weeks vacation/time off for thesis-based grad students instead of two, this will align us with other universities
  - Adjudicating the Bursary
    - GSA gives out three awards: Bursary, Support Bursary, Emergency Bursary
    - Latter two experienced increased demand, so they have been outsourced to registrar
      - Otherwise would need to hire another staff member just to deal with demand for needs-based funding
    - Received over 600 applications for Bursary, have enough money for 7 (needs-based funding available from university “woefully” low)
  - Big problem we’re facing is that provincial government is not supportive of graduate students, so go out and vote!
  - Peer Beyond conference coming up in 10 days
    - Joshua Whitehead will be keynote speaker
    - BrettC Nelson: our research is our passion, important that we come together to share that despite funding challenges
- Masume Akbarki (VP Student Life):
- Events for student experience
    - E.g. Intersectionality Symposium on March 10<sup>th</sup> – will increase awareness of underrepresented groups
      - Graduate students can receive EDI certificate
- AC Cameron (VP External):
- Food and Housing Working Group is moving forward
  - We haven’t lost the province or board of governors – still time to make tuition protest a priority, join LOUD
  - LOUD and Food-Housing working group looking for members
  - Drafting a UCGSA advocacy policy manual

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the Climate Action Grant is available at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/sustainability/mobilizing-alberta/climate-action-grant>. The following article details the launch of the program: <https://ucalgary.ca/news/ucalgary-launches-climate-action-grant-program-16m-federal-grant-office-sustainability>

## Tuition and Fee Consultation (TFCC) Updates [Saaka Sulemana Saaka] - 7:11PM

- Tuition and fees are going up
  - o In Board of Governors vote, GSA and SU representatives are only students with voting power on the matter
  - o Provincial government plays big role in funding that is available to students
  - o GSA will continue to work as representative so that student concerns taken into account
- Graduate students have voiced their concerns, but nothing changed
  - o After vote, I received so many emails from fellow graduate students
  - o Very disappointed with outcome
  - o If we have to pay more tuition, graduate students need to write to provost, president, deans, head of departments, etc. constantly to ask for change
  - o Presented proposal to provost, asked for reduction in proposed increases to tuition
  - o Made some minor gains regarding wellness centre, etc.
    - Not here to praise those, here with same frustration that tuition and fees continue to go up
- Less than \$100,000 left in support bursaries, speak to struggle of graduate students
  - o Need to channel struggle into collective advocacy
- **Question:** [directed to AC Cameron] How is collective action being communicated? Didn't hear about January 20th protest until it was actually happening. As Psychology GRC rep, also want to call situation with the animals<sup>5</sup> to attention for any future protests
  - o AC Cameron: LOUD will serve as decentralized network of engaged advocacy that can move quicker than GSA as institution
    - GSA subject to slow legislative processes (for something like protest, need to collect GRC, etc.)
  - o Clarification from audience member: January 20th protest primarily from undergraduates, came to graduate labour union, but many graduate students were not aware
    - LOUD will help facilitate. Currently organizing province-wide day of action (March 27th) asking all faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students to walk out
    - Don't want to disrupt graduate research, animals in basement were unfortunate
    - Now have 36 stewards throughout university for labour union, need more

## Question Period - 7:25PM

- **Comment:** Students often aren't even given a research space
- BrettC Nelson: There was no meeting last month, so communication has been comparably difficult, understandable increase in student questions

## DGA Period - 7:30PM

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<sup>5</sup> The protest on January 20th organized by the SU and LOUD took place by the Admin building. Protesters were initially unaware that psychology and neuroscience lab animals are kept in the building for research. The noise from the protest distressed many of the animals. pAs soon as protesters learned about this, the protesters moved their noisemakers outside.

### **Announcements [BrettC Nelson] - 7:31PM**

- Peer Beyond Conference (February 11-12)
- Upcoming GSA elections (students should consider running to be an executive next year)
- Take advantage of LDL discounts and event offerings
- Awards application intake open (excellence award, leadership award, emerging leader award)
- GSA Support Bursary, Emergency Bursary, and GSA bursary available for financial support
  - o Tuition reimbursement bursary and Canada housing relief  
(<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes/child-and-family-benefits/top-up-canada-housing-benefit.html>)

### **Other Business - 7:37PM**

- BrettC Nelson: It's not just you or your department that is suffering, need collective voice for advocacy, you're not alone

### **Meeting adjourned - 7:38PM**

Opposed: 0  
CARRIED