

ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - 2025

Prepared by

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WELCOME TO THE GSA



OUR ROLE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) at the University of Calgary is the official representative body for graduate students and plays a vital role in enhancing their academic, professional, and social experience. **In 2024–2025**, **the GSA served over 7,500 graduate students** across all faculties, ensuring their voices were heard and their needs addressed at every level of the university.

The Association provides services that support success and well-being. Health and dental coverage offers essential care, while awards, bursaries, and grants ease financial pressures and create opportunities for research and growth. Professional development workshops, volunteer opportunities, and year-round events that encourage engagement, skill-building, and connection. Graduate students also take leadership roles through GSA committees, helping design and deliver these initiatives.

The GSA operates the Last Defence Lounge (LDL), a graduate student-run restaurant and social space in MacEwan Student Centre. The LDL provides a welcoming environment where students can connect with peers, enjoy affordable meals, and take a break from academic commitments.

Advocacy is central to the GSA's mission. Through engagement with university leadership, government, and national organizations, the Association advances improvements in funding, services, and policies, acting as the bargaining agent on labour matters. By listening to members and responding to evolving needs, the GSA ensures every graduate student at the University of Calgary can thrive.



VISION

A community of highly engaged and thriving UCalgary graduate students.

MISSION

To ensure needed services, communities, advocacy, and growth opportunities are available and accessible for all UCalgary graduate students.

2023 - 2026 PRIORITIES

Broaden and Deepen Student Engagement - Ensure diverse student voices, participation, and leadership are embedded in GSA services and advocacy.

Address Critical Barriers to Thriving - Alleviate financial barriers, mental health barriers, and other emergent barriers through service delivery, collaboration, and advocacy.

Grow Organizational Capacities - Strengthen organizational infrastructure, competencies, and culture to sustainably benefit UCalgary's growing and diverse graduate student community.

LETTER **FROM THE PRESIDENT**



This year, we secured a 2% increase in the Quality Money (QM) allocation, aligned with the domestic tuition adjustment. The GSA's share for 2025-26 is \$591,950.05, which will continue to fund studentfocused initiatives such professional as development, academic support, and mental health resources. We also disbursed over \$307,000 through the Support Bursary, directly aiding 491 students. The Emergency Bursary Fund provided over \$22,700 in assistance to students facing critical financial hardship. The bursary pool enables the GSA, in partnership with the Registrar's Office, to remain responsive to evolving needs of fellow graduate students.

Fellow Graduate Students.

It was a profound honour and privilege to serve as President of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) for the 2024-2025 academic year. This past year brought significant challenges for our graduate student community financial pressures, -rising changing immigration policies, evolving institutional structures, and internal governance challenges -all of which tested the resilience of our Association. Despite these difficulties, we persevered. With steadfast commitment and collaboration, we delivered tangible outcomes and strengthened the GSA as an effective and representative voice for fellow graduate students at the University of Calgary.

\$591,950

Quality Money allocated for 2025-26

\$307,000+

Disbursed through the Support Bursarv

Students directly aided by the Support Bursary

In a landmark achievement, 93% of academically employed graduate students who voted ratified a new collective agreement—following years of consultation and collaboration. This outcome marks a significant milestone in our collective efforts to secure fair, transparent, and supportive working conditions.

Similarly, our advocacy within the Tuition and Fee Consultation Committee (TFCC) led to substantial progress. We successfully reduced the proposed tuition increases for international course-based students from 6% to 4%, maintained a 0% increase for all thesis-based students, and capped domestic increases at 2%. We also ensured that residence and meal plan increases were modest, and that 75% of parking rate increases stayed below \$2.50 per month for students.

We continued sustained advocacy with the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) to review the operating standards and adjust minimum guaranteed funding thresholds in light of the rising cost of living. At the appropriate time, the GSA and FGS will announce the minimum guaranteed funding amounts. Therefore, this remains a top priority for the coming year, and we urge all fellow graduate students to make their voices heard and engage with the GSA's representative structures.

As part of our commitment to good governance and legal compliance, we have drafted a new set of bylaws that will be workshopped with fellow graduate students and reviewed by legal counsel to ensure alignment with provincial legislations. This draft marks a significant step toward a more transparent, accountable, and representative organizational framework for the GSA.

Across portfolios, the GSA has continued to make a meaningful impact. The Vice President Academic (VPA) supported several students navigating complex academic challenges and helped foster a sense of belonging in often isolating research environments.

0%

Tuition increase maintained for all thesis-based students

75%

Of parking rate increases kept **below \$2.50** per month

150+

Participants at the Peer Beyond Graduate Research Conference

2%

Cap on domestic tuition increases

In addition to the Parenthood Townhall initiative, the VPA organized a successful Peer Beyond Graduate Research Conference with 150 participants. The launch of the Peer Beyond Research Conference Journal marked a major milestone in student-led scholarly publishing.

Our Vice President External (VP EXT) led impactful advocacy efforts at the provincial and federal levels. Through collaborative pressure with student allies, we ensured that research grants were excluded from Alberta's Bill 18. The VP EXT also contributed significantly to delivering the collective agreement, revision of quaranteed minimum fundina operating standards. and the tri-council capstone representation for graduate students across Canada.

New Health and Dental provider (PBAS)

Successfully launched

50+

Inclusive events organized through SEEC and its subcommittees

The Vice President Student Life (VPSL) significantly expanded the GSA's reach and programming. Over 50 inclusive events were organized through SEEC and its subcommittees. Highlights included advocacy efforts for Muslim students, LGBTQ+ students, and international students, as well as the Ramadan Karim initiative, which addressed food insecurity and fostered community. The portfolio also improved communication strategies through newsletter and website enhancements, and expanded support for DGAs, GSGs, and graduate student families.

The Vice President Finance and Services (VPFS) oversaw a successful transition to a new Health and Dental provider (PBAS), launched a new bursary for students facing urgent medical needs, and strengthened the GSA's suite of financial supports.

The portfolio introduced high-impact financial literacy workshops, led sustainability programming, and streamlined student discount and sponsorship systems, reinforcing our commitment to student wellbeing and financial stewardship. Last but not least, the VPFS co-led the bargaining team to the finish line and delivered the collective agreement.

On behalf of myself and the 2024/2025 Executive Team—Alex Poppendorf (Vice President Academic), Hunter Yaworski (Vice President External), Nadia Ghazanfari (Vice President Student Life), and Kaylee MacLean (Vice President Finance and Services)—I extend my sincerest gratitude to you, our fellow graduate students, all volunteers, and the GSA staff for your resilience, support, and collective impact. Your engagement, resilience, and solidarity made these accomplishments possible. I also want to extend a special thank you to the GSA bargaining team and the bylaws working group for your work.

Finally, whether you are an incoming or returning student, you are part of a vibrant and diverse graduate student community. I hope you find space to flourish and thrive within our university and graduate student community. These key achievements—and many more—are outlined in detail throughout this report. I encourage you to explore the full report to see the scope of our collective work.

Thank you kindly, and I wish you a fulfilling year ahead.

Warm regards, Saaka Sulemana Saaka

2024 - 2025 ELECTED EXECUTIVE











ADVOCACY OVERVIEW



ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS 2024–2025

The GSA advances graduate student priorities at every level of government, driving meaningful change through collaboration, persistence, and student-led advocacy. From hosting national leaders and influencing federal research policy to protecting student funding and affordability in Alberta, the Association championed fair, transparent, and inclusive policies that strengthen the graduate experience.

Through collective action, strong partnerships, and a commitment to representing every graduate student voice, the GSA delivered measurable progress that supports student success, well-being, and long-term equity across the University of Calgary community.

Federal

Hosted Prime Minister Mark Carney at the Last Defence Lounge

Provincial

Protected graduate student funding under the Provincial Priorities Act

Municipal

Collaborated with the SU on zoning reform to improve housing access

Institutional

Reduced tuition increases and advanced a minimum funding policy

FEDERAL ADVOCACY



- * Hosted Prime Minister Mark Carney at the Last Defence Lounge.
- Submitted a brief to the Standing Committee on Science and Research (SCSR) calling for additional graduate student funding from, and participation in the governance of, the proposed Capstone research organization.
- ★ Held the first ever Graduate Student Forum during CASA Advocacy Week.
- Our calls to exempt graduate students from international student caps received media attention from CBC, CTV, CityNews, and Global.

PROVINCIAL ADVOCACY



- Successfully fought to exempt graduate student funding (whether through research grants or professional development) from the reporting regulations in the Provincial Priorities Act.
- * Planned and held the first joint UCGSA, UAGSA, and AUGSA graduate student advocacy days at the Alberta Legislature.
- * Successfully lobbied for MNIF reporting reforms to the provincial government.
- * Co-wrote a joint provincial budget submission with the SU.
- Co-wrote and signed onto You Can't Keep Cutting Classes, an open letter signed by twenty-four other student associations, and which received significant media attention.
- * Co-wrote an open letter advocating for graduate student participation in Advanced Education's American Research Unit with the SU.
- * Wrote an open letter to Dr. Jack Mintz requesting that graduate students be appointed to the Expert Panel on Post-Secondary Institutional Funding and Alberta's Competitiveness.

MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY



- Continued to work with the SU on supporting zoning reform.
- Inquired to City Hall about the possibility of exempting student residences from property taxes, and how those savings could be passed on to students.

Institutional Advocacy

- 🗶 Zero-percent tuition increase to thesis-based graduate students (domestic and international).
- 🗶 Successfully advocated to reduce proposed international student course-based tuition increases.
- Continued to work with FGS to pass a comprehensive minimum funding policy.
- Collaborated with International Student Services (ISS) to provide information for international students on how to navigate the new federal regulations around Provincial Attestation Letters (PALs).
- * Continued to advocate for improved accommodations, including housing accommodations, for students with children.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Negotiated a four-year collective agreement between UCalgary graduate students and the Board of Governors, whose ratification vote passed with 93% in favour!

The CBA highlights include, but are not limited to:

- * Four rounds of pay increases:
 - **4**.75% in year one
 - 2% in year two
 - 2% in year three
 - 2% in year four
- A \$400 lump sum payment to academically employed graduate students with contracts from September 2023 to October 2024.
- The new Marker Grader position was protected by establishing an hourly Graduate Assistant Teaching (GAT) category that pays graduate students the same rate as Teaching Assistants and includes the same pay increases. This change effectively raised the pay rate for the position by more than \$20 per hour.
- * Additional maternal benefits.
- * Time-and-a-half pay for graduate students who work over the holidays.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

1,344

Discounted tickets sold

89

Events hosted by GSA and subcommittees (including online events)

\$7,000

Raised over three years through the Third **GSA² Annual Newbie Night:** A Charity Drag Show

600

Attendees at Fall 2024 GradO

130

Presenters at Peer Beyond Graduate Research Conference

64

Approved Quality Money (QM) projects

\$220,563

Quality Money invested in graduate student initiatives

53

Active Departmental Graduate Associations (**DGAs**)



Key Focus Areas for 2025 - 2026

- * Support and enable student led events.
- * Extend outreach and event access for satellite campuses.
- Implement more strategic and deliberate event planning.
- * Foster inclusivity by engaging a broader range of students.
- * Strengthen autonomy for Graduate Student Groups.

VOLUNTEERING & LEADERSHIP



SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- About **35 graduate students** served as chairs and vice-chairs of GSA committees and sub-committees.
- Selected and appointed by the GSA Elected Council.
- Provided leadership to fulfill the GSA mission and realize its vision.

COMMITTEES & VOLUNTEERS

- More than **150 committee members and event volunteers** contributed to initiatives,
 events, and activities in 2024–25.
- The GSA operated 14 committees and subcommittees.
- These committees and events significantly advanced the GSA's mission of improving graduate student experience and engagement.



VOLUNTEERING & LEADERSHIP



VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

- Around **100 graduate students** joined the program in 2024–25.
- Participants received information about volunteer opportunities with both the GSA and the University of Calgary throughout the year.

GRADUATE REPRESENTATIVES

- Over 25 Graduate Representatives were appointed by the GSA Elected Council.
- Served on multiple University of Calgary committees to advocate for graduate student interests.

LAST DEFENCE LOUNGE (LDL)

The Last Defence Lounge is your graduate student owned restaurant, and we are proud to continue to serve the University of Calgary community. Having relaunched in 2022 following the global pandemeic, the **LDL** has **reached unprecedented profits** for the second consecutive year after years of net losses. I want to thank everyone who has supported the LDL over this time.

Through dedicated staff including Chef Jim Doody, the LDL continues to provide our friends and stakeholders affordable, diverse and inclusive menus. Something we are very proud of is the **introduction of a pay what you can student meal**. Alongside this meal, we also have had to the opportunity to collaborate with internal and external partners to provide outreach and support for students who are experiencing food insecurity.

The LDL remains committed to support grad students with employment opportunities with five current graduate students on our staff.

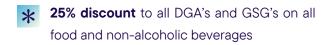
Without the continued support of the graduate student community and its partners on campus we would not have been able to achieve such lofty goals. I am very grateful to be part of such an amazing team and organization and am excited for the future of the LDL.

Matt Broughton

General Manager

Last Defence Lounge

DISCOUNTS PROVIDED TO GRAD STUDENTS





KEY FINANCIAL FACTS

\$744,436

2024-25 Revenue

An **increase** of **14%** over 2023-24

\$44,860

2024-25 Net Income

An increase of **706%** over 2023-24



KEY EVENTS HOSTED BY THE LDL

- * Fall And Winter Grad O
- * Year End Grad Fest
- * GSA Townhalls and Information Sessions
- ***** 3 Minute Thesis Finals
- ***** SEEC: Boardgame Nights
- Numerous DGA Social Events and Meetings
- * GSA Election Forums and Results

- ***** Halloween Grad Fest
- * Peer Beyond Conference
- Health and Wellness, Financial Workshops
- ***** GSA2: Newbie Drag Night
- NISC: Newcomers Welcome Event, Letters Home at the Holidays Event
- ***** Election Watch Parties

HEALTH & DENTAL

\$1,985,114

Health claims processed

5,334

Students enrolled in the Health Plan (5,077 single | 257 family)

222

Virtual health care visits completed (Sept 2024–Aug 2025)

\$1,699,331

Dental claims processed

5,316

Students enrolled in the Dental Plan (5,066 single | 250 family)

4.6/5

Average rating for virtual health care services

1–2 days

Average response time for inquiries and claims

Data based on September 2024 – August 2025 from Health Provider



Now in its second year with **Campus Trust**, the GSA continues to strengthen its health and dental program. The partnership has enhanced efficiency, transparency, and accessibility, ensuring graduate students receive dependable coverage and timely support.

KEY CHANGES

- * \$100 wellness benefit.
- * Faster reimbursement within 2 business days.
- * No blackout period.
- User-friendly platform that provides clear insights into your benefits, including dental, physiotherapy, prescription drugs, and more.

2025 - 2026 FOCUS

- Improving health and dental services by reducing wait time for inquiries.
- Advocating with the UCalgary Student Wellness Services for more student mental health support.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

*** GSA BURSARIES**

GSA Bursaries	2023 - 24	2024 - 25	Increased \$
# Approved GSA Bursaries	253	198	
# GSA Bursary Applications	1632	1024	
\$ Of GSA Bursaries	\$253,000.00	\$258,200.00	\$5,200

2% Increase in GSA bursaries

* PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT (PDG)

PDG	2023 - 24	2024 - 25	Increased \$
# Approved PDG	55	71	
# PDG Applications	377	137	
\$ Of PDG	\$36,918.00	\$47,805.00	\$10,887.00

29% Increase in GSA bursaries

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

* CITIZENSHIP AWARDS

Awards	2023 - 24	2024 - 25	Increased \$
# Citizenship Awards	20	20	
\$ Citizenship Award	\$40,000.00	\$40,000.00	\$0

Inc/Dec in Citizenship awards

***** QUALITY MONEY (QM)

QM	2023 - 24	2024 - 25	Increased \$
# QM Projects Supported	78	68	
\$ To Projects	\$236,420.00	\$253,749.10	\$17,329.10

7% Increase in Quality Money

2025 - 2026 FOCUS

- * Advocating for regulations for tuition and fee increases.
- * Advocating for increases in graduate student funding Federally and Provincially.
- * Supporting the Awards Committee to process large amount of applications.

GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2025, with comparative information for 2024

	2025	2024
Assets		
Current assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 4,223,083	\$ 3,035,901
Inventory (note 6)	19,247	19,160
Prepaid expenses Accounts receivable	19,426 17,832	1,659,483 16,055
Accounts receivable	4,279,588	4,730,599
	4,279,300	4,730,599
Investments (note 3)	2,755,945	3,264,126
Property and equipment (note 4)	405,689	451,884
Deposits	310,000	-
	\$ 7,751,222	\$ 8,446,609
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current liabilities:		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities (note 5)	\$ 319,068	\$ 1,219,605
Deferred revenue (health and dental premiums)	1,474,227	1,461,961
	1,793,295	2,681,566
Net assets:		
Unrestricted	3,748,039	3,393,607
Internally restricted (note 2)	2,209,888	2,371,436
	5,957,927	5,765,043
Economic dependence (note 7) Commitments and contingencies (note 9)		
	\$ 7,751,222	\$ 8,446,609

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

Approved on behalf of the Members:

President

VP of Finance & Services

GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Statement of Operations

Year ended March 31, 2025, with comparative information for 2024

		2025	2024
Revenues:			
Graduate Students' Centre Lounge (Schedule 1)	\$	744,436	\$ 653,426
Graduate Students' Association (Schedule 2)		5,594,491	5,605,150
		6,338,927	6,258,576
Cost of sales (Schedule 1)		221,707	206,555
General and administrative expenses:			
Graduate Students' Centre Lounge (Schedule 1)		477,869	441,305
Graduate Students' Association (Schedule 2)		5,587,140	5,679,628
		6,065,009	6,120,933
Excess (deficiency) of revenues over expenses before other items		52,211	(68,912)
Change in unrealized gain on investments		174,964	102,648
Realized loss on disposal of investments		(34,291)	_
Loss on disposal of property and equipment			(2,313)
Excess of revenues over expenses	\$	192,884	\$ 31,423

See accompany notes to financial statements.

AUDITOR'S REPORT

SCAN QR CODE TO ACCESS FULL GSA MARCH 31, 2025, AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS:



GSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE

Having joined the GSA last year, it's fascinating to look back at a flurry of developments aimed at providing positive support for graduate students.

Over the past year, the focus has been on streamlining systems and ensuring that core programs deliver the best possible service to the graduate student community.

Upon my arrival, a new Health and Dental program was rolled out. By shifting to a self-insured model, the GSA has been able to ensure that we receive the best value for services rendered, allowing us to minimize cost increases despite inflation.

The GSA has also made a serious effort to address the labour component of the Association, something that is statutorily mandated in law. By centralizing efforts and consolidating resources, we have ensured that Academically Employed Graduate Students (AEGS) have their complaints and grievances handled in a timely fashion.

As someone whose parents collectively worked as unionized employees at the University of Calgary campus for over 50 years, I was thrilled to see the **ratification of a new collective agreement**. With over 93% support and nearly 50% turnout from contract-holding AEGS, this marks one of the strongest endorsements in the province by membership, especially during a time of significant labour unrest.

We have also shifted our approach to events, leveraging the Last Defence Lounge more frequently to help stretch tight budgets while increasing accessibility for students...

As the year progresses, there will be an increased focus on supporting student groups that lead grassroots events. Despite regularly facing a loss of tens of thousands of dollars, the **Last Defence Lounge has become self-sufficient** and, thanks to the efforts of our Kitchen Manager and General Manager, made a return of revenue to the GSA.

The Association also engaged in some of its most significant political advocacy in recent years, whether hosting Prime Minister Mark Carney, meeting with major provincial party leaders, engaging multiple times with the Minister of Advanced Education, or building grassroots community support. In all of this, the GSA has worked to ensure that students' priorities remain at the forefront.

As we begin the new academic year, core services that students rely on will continue to be a priority. We have launched a new application platform for grants and bursaries, improving transparency and adjudication for programs like Quality Money. We are also working to streamline event organization to extend reach while empowering students to take leadership in planning and execution.

As the year progresses, the **GSA office will remain** committed to ensuring that students are at the centre of all operations, helping the Association thrive for both current and future students alike.



CONTACT US

