

University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society 2024 Executive Board Report

The GSS Executive Board consists of five elected graduate students and the Executive Director as a non-voting member. This year, five Executive Board members were acclaimed in the March 2023 election.

The 2023-24 GSS Board of Directors:

- Director of Communications: **Greg Gaube**
- Director of Finance: **Samuel Fielder**
- Director of Services: **Mitch Nascimento –Maggie Lawton as interim**
- Director of Student Affairs: **Lindsay Beal**
- Chair: **Wyatt Maddox**

The Executive Board is guided by the purposes of the GSS as stated in our Constitution and Bylaws. The GSS' purposes are:

- a) To represent the interests of the membership in a democratic manner in matters pertaining to education and the welfare of graduate students;*
- b) To promote the principle and practice of graduate student representation at all levels of decision-making at the University of Victoria and on all agencies or other bodies that deliberate on the affairs of graduate students;*
- c) To promote cultural, intellectual, and recreational activities among the members; and*
- d) To promote the academic and social welfare of its members through the provision of services.*

The GSS Executive Board

The Executive Board is made up of a diverse group of graduate students committed to ensuring that members of the GSS receive representation, services, and connection to community while attending their studies at UVic. We convene as a Board by-weekly to discuss and address student issues as they arise, plan events, and communicate the perspectives of each role in a collaborative setting.

As the Director of Communications, Greg Gaube is the vice-chair and takes responsibility for providing consistent messaging to GSS members. Greg has taken on the task of establishing the Grad House as a central community hub for graduate students by upgrading the patio and promoting the space. He has collaborated with the Communications Coordinator (staff – Petronella Daviel) to create a brand for the GSS that has drawn significantly more members to the building and to our events. Greg's major accomplishment over the past six months has been to greatly increase the engagement of volunteers to support the advocacy and events of the GSS.

Samuel Fielder, Director of Finance, has overseen the financial stability and security of the GSS with consistently prompt responses and action. Sam oversees the Personnel Committee, Appeals Committee, and Finance Committee. His work ensures that the members and staff are treated fairly and that the Services offered by the GSS and our associated organizations are followed as per our bylaws, and that the GSS finances remain balanced and organized. He collaborated with the Chair to complete an in-depth performance review for the Executive Director and completed the draft budget for the next fiscal year. Budget drafting involved intensive processes of consultation and distinct levels of approval that Sam navigated with confidence.

The Director of Services position held by Mitch Nascimento and temporarily by Maggie Lawton, coordinates the massive workload of organizing and conducting events at the GSS by chairing the Events Committee. Mitch took leave in August but had thoroughly planned events through the middle of October, which effectively alleviated a great deal of additional work his absence could have shifted to other board members. Maggie Lawton was onboarded and took up the role flawlessly. The events of the past six months were engaging, well attended, and provided important opportunities for community building, in line with our Annual Plan.

Student Affairs is a particularly complicated role at the GSS encompassing many of the most difficult tasks and emotional burdens. Lindsay Beal has taken up the role with enthusiasm and shaped the position to suit the needs and values of grad students. She has taken on several profound issues in the community including food insecurity, accessibility concerns for lactating parents, and climate anxiety. As the Chair of the Student Affairs Committee, Lindsay has led the development of detailed food security and sovereignty resources, facilitated collaboration with specific individuals and units on campus on joint advocacy, and created working groups to focus on issues of greatest concern to members. She is on the front lines at many events connecting directly with members to hear concerns.

I am Wyatt Maddox, Chair of the GSS. I have approached chairing the board as guiding voice with capacity to listen, engage in discourse, and support the directors through their roles. I actively keep my finger on the pulse of events and information that could or does impact GSS members to address issues as proactively as possible. As Chair of the Bylaw and Policy Committee, I have led policy reform to reduce colonial governance structures that present barriers to member engagement by removing the requirement to use Roberts Rules of Order for GRC and AGM meetings. Bylaw inconsistencies, conflicts, and amendments have been drafted to improve the effectiveness of the

Society that will be presented for approval at the 2024 SAGM. As chair, I have harnessed relationships with University Executives, government officials at all levels, and organizations in and around campus to ensure the needs of graduate students are communicated and prioritized in decision-making processes. I have focused a great deal of my energy on the restructuring of the Executive Board to combine the duties of Director of Communications and Director of Student Affairs into two new roles: Director of Internal Relations and Director of External Relations, eliminating the previous titles. This change has also reorganized the committees to combine Communications and Student Affairs under the umbrella of Advocacy Committee. This effectively pivots the GSS from a governance focus to advocacy. My hope with this work is that work will be more equitably dispersed between all roles at the GSS to enable a more action oriented and responsive society.

External Issues

While many external issues and pressures are impacting graduate students, the Board has chosen to take on the following as focal points for advocacy:

- Housing costs and stability
 - On-campus graduate housing
 - Advocacy for supports from government
- Food security and sovereignty
 - Full resource list
 - Relationships with community organizations
- Funding
 - Tri-council and other external agencies – Support our Science
 - Collaborating on FGS proposals and changes
- Accessibility
 - Lactation-friendly spaces
 - Umo use
 - Crosswalk availability

Internal Issues

Challenges facing students on campus and/or within academic bounds and life are too numerous to list; however, the Board has created a series of strategies through the Annual Plan to address those most prevalent:

- Engagement and connectivity
 - To ensure members have knowledge of and access to resources
- Graduate Hub Space
 - A community space where graduate students can feel comfortable, safe, and supported
- The Grad House Restaurant
 - Providing affordable food, entertainment, and atmosphere
- Student Advocacy
 - Hearing member concerns and ensuring that they are appropriately addressed
- Student Support Services
 - Providing the services that ensure health, opportunities, and support

Some additional key issues that have been identified over the fall and winter include:

- Board restructuring
 - Director of Communications and Director of Student Affairs became Director of Internal Relations and Director of External Relations
 - Communications Committee and Student Affairs Committee combined to Advocacy Committee
- Bylaw changes
 - Removal of requirement to use Roberts Rules of Order
 - Proposed amendments to streamline processes, improve effectiveness, and remove conflicts
- Volunteer engagement
 - Improving community connectivity through volunteer opportunities within the GSS

