

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA GRADUATE STUDENTS' SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting (online via Zoom)

November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

MEETING MINUTES

**VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT:**

1. Chair: David FOSTER
2. Director of Communications: Nicole KENT
3. Director of Finance: Ryan KHAN
4. Director of Services: Adair NG
5. Director of Student Affairs: Nahid SAFARI
  
6. Anthropology: Zonke Guddah
7. Art History & Visual Studies: Mel Granley
8. Biochemistry & Microbiology: Michael Allison
9. Biology: Sarah Lane
10. Earth & Ocean Sciences: Chrissy Schellenberg
11. Economics: Matheson Gillis
12. Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education: Emily Magel
13. Geography: Wyatt Maddox
14. Greek & Roman Studies: Alix Galumbeck
15. Health Information Science: Dee Wong
16. History: Dax Tate
17. Law: Paige Thombs
18. Linguistics: Mona Sawan
19. Music: Kayleigh Francis
20. Pacific & Asian Studies: Maeve Milligan
21. Physics & Astronomy: Bobby Bickley
22. Physics & Astronomy: Jess Speedie
23. Public Admin: Christopher Jones
24. Public Health: Zackary Derrick
25. Social Dimensions of Health: Eli Verdugo
  
26. Visual Arts: Colton Hash
27. Biochemistry and Microbiology: Ladan Kalani
28. Business: Kimberly Schaub
29. Civil Engineering: Mohammad Miri
30. Civil Engineering: Reza Arjmand
31. Computer Sciences: Mahya Khazaei
32. Computer Sciences: Koosha Samieefar
33. Curriculum and Instruction: Zibakhanima Alibalayeva
34. Curriculum and Instruction: Yuan (Ginny) Huang
35. Earth and Ocean Sciences: Madison Bombardier
36. Electrical and Computer Engineering: Yan Zhang
37. Mathematics & Statistics: Mitch Haslehurst
38. Mechanical Engineering: Aren Beagley
39. Mechanical Engineering: Yaser Mohammadi
40. Physics and Astronomy: Caleb Miller
41. Public Admin: Trisha Renken-Sebastian
42. Public Health and Social Policy: Daniel Gudino

*Staff, Non-voting attendees:*

Executive Director: Kyla TURNER  
Operations and Services Manager: Neil BARNEY  
Office Coordinator, Governance: Karen L. POTTS  
(Recorder)

Invited Guest: Robina Thomas, UVic AVP Indigenous

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND STANDING ITEMS**

The meeting was called to order on the Zoom Videoconferencing platform, at 5:01 pm with FOSTER in the Chair.

**2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

NG provided a personal land acknowledgement.

3. INVITED GUEST: QWUL'SIH'YAHT ROBINA THOMAS, UVIC AVP INDIGENOUS

Qwul'sih'yaht Robina THOMAS joined the meeting and spoke to the members of her personal history and background as a graduate student at UVic. THOMAS expressed a wish to have a dialogue with members present about her as the first Associate Vice-President Indigenous for UVic, however technical issues prevented the discussion. TURNER committed to rescheduling a forum with THOMAS for the SAGM in March 2022.

4. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

*Motion: RESOLVED that the Agenda of the November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 GSS Annual General Meeting is approved as presented.*  
*M/S EXECUTIVE BOARD / BICKLEY*  
*CARRIED.*

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

*Motion: RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 Semi-Annual General Meeting as presented.*  
*M/S EXECUTIVE BOARD / THOMBS*  
*CARRIED.*

6. AGM ATTENDANCE AND QUORUM REPORT – TURNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TURNER reported that the UVic Graduate Students Society had 3057 members as of September 30, 2021. She reported that there were 42 members in good standing registered as of 5:18 pm. GSS bylaws stipulate a 25 member minimum for a general meeting quorum therefore the meeting was declared quorate.

7. AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS – KHAN, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

REF DOC: [GSS 2020-21 Audited Financial Statements](#),

KHAN apologized for the AGM being a month late and explained that bookkeeping issues have been addressed. KHAN expressed appreciation for the new bookkeeping company engaged by the GSS, GritBooks.

KHAN noted that the change in net assets were primarily due to COVID and the closing of the restaurant.

Comparing the last 12 months, KHAN highlighted that the GSS was in a significantly better financial position than the previous year, largely due to increases in revenue to the Operating Fund, primarily the Health and Dental Fund.

Highlighted statement of revenue and expenses, wages paid had a significant decrease due to staff changes due to the closure of the restaurant and three months without an Executive Director.

Student Advocate Fund is now being reported correctly.

Very few differences between amounts given to auditors and the amounts approved by auditors.

Decreased long term debt, and on target to have paid off by 2025.

KHAN spoke to the issue of the restaurant. Previously Operating Funds had been used to subsidize the restaurant. The current Executive Board is putting together a plan to address the issue of the restaurant to ensure there can be increased transparency around the use of member fees.

KHAN reported that the Auditors have found that the financial statements presented are a fair and accurate representation.

*Motion: RESOLVED that the 2020-21 Audited Financial Statements are approved as presented.*

*M/S: EXECUTIVE BOARD/FRANCIS  
CARRIED.*

#### 8. REAPPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS – KHAN, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

TURNER and KHAN expressed confidence in, and appreciation for, the long relationship and support Obara & Associates have provided to the GSS. Both recommended re-appointment.

*Motion: RESOLVED that the 2021-22 financial auditors shall be: Obara & Associates.*

*M/S: Executive Board/SCHAUB  
CARRIED.*

Nota Bene: Shortly after the AGM, Obara & Associates changed their name to Clark Trowsdale LLP. The primary accountant working with the GSS, Shawn Trowsdale, remains our contact at Clark Trowsdale LLP.

FOSTER relinquished chairing of the meeting to KENT, in order to speak to the next agenda item.

#### 9. BYLAW CHANGES

*Motion: RESOLVED that the following bylaw amendments are approved, as recommended by the Bylaw and Policy Committee, with text in bold inserted, text in strikethrough deleted, and sections renumbered as necessary:*

##### BYLAW II – MEMBERSHIP

###### 2.4 Cessation of membership:

a. Membership **in the Society** shall cease when a member is no longer registered in the Faculty of Graduate Studies, with the exception of:

i. ~~Executive who shall continue to be members until expiry of their current terms of office, and~~ Students enrolled in concurrent graduate/undergraduate programs, who shall continue to be members during undergraduate terms, **and**

ii. **Members of the Executive Board, who shall continue to be members of the Society until expiry of their current term of office, provided that they are registered in the Faculty of Graduate Studies or in a concurrent graduate/undergraduate program for the first nine months of their term of office.**

b. Membership may be revoked by special resolution at a General Meeting.

c. Associate membership shall normally cease after one (1) year, upon non-payment of associate membership fees, or by Bylaw 2.4b. If necessary, Grad Council may renew associate membership.

d. Honorary membership shall cease according to Bylaw 2.4 b.

BYLAW IV – ELECTIONS AND REFERENDA

4.1 The Electoral Officer shall:

- a. Be ~~appointed by the Semi-Annual General Meeting in March for a term of office from April 1 to March 30 of the following year Grad Council;~~ **be elected at the Semi-Annual General Meeting in March for a term of office from April 1 to March 30 of the following year Grad Council;**
- ~~b. Be appointed in September, for a term that ends with the term of the Grad Council;~~
- c. Not be a nominee for any elected office of the Society nor be a current voting member of the Executive Board nor be a registered member of any referendum side;
- d. Be responsible for the operation of all elections, by-elections and referenda according to the By-laws of the Society, **and ensure the integrity of Grad Council elections;**
- e. **Oversee implementation of electronic voting platforms;**
- e. f. Notify all candidates of the Schedule of Elections; and
- f. g. Work with the Electoral Appeals Committee.

4.2 Electoral Officer Vacancy:

- a. **Should the office of Electoral Officer become vacant, a replacement shall be elected at the next Grad Council meeting or General Meeting who shall hold office for the remainder of the former Electoral Officer's term.**

4.56 Notice of Elections and Referenda:

- a. At least twenty-one (21) days' notice of an election and/or a referendum shall be given to members, specifying the schedule of elections and referenda.
- b. At minimum, notice shall consist of:
  - i. **An highly noticeable advertisement in one or more forms of independent campus media, if their publication schedule permits; of not less than a quarter (¼) page;**
  - ii. A poster-format notice sent to each academic unit ~~for posting;~~
  - iii. An **electronic message email** sent to every eligible member; and
  - iv. Notice to all Grad Reps.

4.89 Voting and Ballots:

- a. ~~Election~~ **Both physical and electronic ballots shall contain the name of the nominees, the positions that they are nominated for, and a place to register a vote. Voting by electronic means will be permitted.**
- b. Referenda ballots shall contain the question to be decided and provision for the member to record his/her vote.
- c. Voting by proxy is not permitted.
- d. The candidate or referendum side that receives the largest number of votes shall be declared elected or deemed passed.
- e. Candidates or referendum sides may select a scrutineer to attend the counting of ballots **for all voting platforms where this is permitted.**

**4.910** Preliminary results shall be posted on one or more of the Society's public-facing media platforms and in a visible public section of the Grad Centre made available to the membership electronically within two (2) business days of the close of polling. Official results shall be posted on one or more of the Society's public-facing media platforms and made available to the membership electronically upon the disposition of any appeals.

**4.1112** In the event that no nomination is received for an Executive Board position during the electoral nomination procedures as outlined in Bylaws 4.1 through 4.10, the following elections procedures will be followed:

- a. The electoral officer will issue a call for candidates for any Executive Board positions for which there is no nominee. The call for candidates will be issued via **electronic message email** to all members of the Society and a **poster-format notice sent to each academic unit, posters in all academic units** stipulating the process as outlined in Bylaw 4.11.b.
- b. Candidates can nominate themselves ~~in person~~ at the Semi-Annual General Meeting, or submit a written statement of candidacy to the electoral officer at least one day prior to the Semi-Annual General Meeting.
- c. If a position is contested, all Society members present at the meeting will vote by secret ballot to decide the winner.
- d. If the position is not contested, all Society members present will vote by secret ballot to acclaim the candidate.
- e. Bylaw 4.11 shall only be enacted in cases where one (1) weeks' notice can be provided before the Semi-Annual General Meeting.

**4.1213** Stipends for the Electoral Officer:

- a. The Electoral Officer shall be paid a stipend for each Election and Referendum period and shall be paid a **double stipend where an Election and Referendum period occur simultaneously.**

**The Electoral Officer shall not be paid a stipend for elections held at the Semi-Annual General Meeting. The base stipend for the Electoral Officer shall be set by the Stipend Review Committee and approved at a General Meeting.**

- b. **The Electoral Officer may be paid a stipend top-up for work on complaints, appeals and investigations of irregularities to ensure the integrity of elections, referenda or Grad Council elections. The Stipend Review Committee shall decide the top-up based on the Electoral Officer's report. The maximum top-up shall be equivalent to one month of the Chair's stipend.**

## BYLAW V – GENERAL MEETINGS

**5.5** Notice of a General Meeting:

- a. At least fourteen (14) days' written notice of a General Meeting must be given. Notice shall consist of advertisement **on one or more of in the Society's publications public-facing media platforms and on the Society's website, a poster-format notice sent to each academic unit for posting; an electronic message email sent to the entire Society membership; and notification sent to each Grad Council Representative.** Notice shall specify the following:

- i. Place, time and date of the meeting

ii. The agenda of business to be transacted

b. Notice for a General Meeting where the audited financial statements or budgets are to be reviewed and approved shall also include the availability of copies of the financial statements and budgets ~~at the Society's General Office~~ for no less than seven (7) days before the meeting.

5.6 Procedure at General Meetings:

**a. Meetings may be held either in person or virtually.**

~~a.~~ **b.** Quorum for all General Meetings shall be twenty-five (25) members. In the event that attendance at a General Meeting is above fifteen (15) but below twenty-five (25) members, the meeting will continue for the purposes of fulfilling the Society Act of British Columbia, but shall be limited to the following items of business:

i. meaningful, intentional, and related land acknowledgement

ii. reports of the Executive Board;

iii. reports of committees of the Society;

iv. adoption of the budget;

v. appointment of auditor;

vi. approval of the audited statements;

vii. ratification of acclaimed nominees for election; and

viii. reports on the status of the extended health and dental plan.

~~b.~~ **c.** Barring Extraordinary Electoral Procedures (see 4.11), voting at all general meetings shall be by show of hands when conducted in person and by polling when conducted virtually.

**d.** Voting by electronic means will be permitted.

~~e.~~ **e.** Voting by proxy is not permitted.

~~d.~~ **f.** General meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order, latest edition.

## BYLAW VI – GRADUATE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

6.1 Authority

The Grad Council shall have the authority to establish policies ~~and procedures~~ of the Society relating to **governance, advocacy and representation**, provided that they are in accordance with the constitution and bylaws of the Society.

6.3 Membership:

a. Graduate Council shall consist of:

i. The members of the Executive Board;

ii. The Grad Rep for each academic unit defined by the ~~University~~ **Society's policy**; and

iii. A graduate student representative of CUPE 4163.

b. Each academic unit shall be entitled to elect one (1) Grad Rep or two (2) Co-Reps, from among its graduate

students. Unless specified, the term "Grad Rep" in these bylaws includes Co-Reps.

- c. Grad Council may create Grad Rep positions for any group by a majority resolution. This Grad Rep position will be temporary, ending with the term of the current Graduate Representative Council, on August 31.
- d. A member of the Executive Board may not serve as a Grad Rep. If a Grad Rep is elected or appointed to the Executive, they shall be deemed to have resigned as a Grad Rep.
- e. Grad Reps shall have the power to appoint a proxy from their academic unit to act in their stead at a meeting of Grad Council. The proxy must be a member of the Society, and the proxy shall have full voting privileges for the meeting. The Executive Board may require the proxy to present a written authorization from the Grad Rep for the meeting they attend.
- f. Grad Reps and proxies should be selected and operate in accordance with the Society's ~~Policies~~ and ~~Procedures Manual~~.
- g. Where no voting member, whether Grad Rep, Co-Rep or proxy, from an academic unit attends **two (2)** ~~three (3)~~ consecutive meetings of the Grad Council, the Grad Rep(s), upon the direction of the Executive Board, cease to be member(s) of the Grad Council. The Executive Board shall notify the academic unit in question that its place on the Grad Council has become vacant.

#### 6.5 Procedures of the Grad Council:

- a. **Meetings may be held either in person or virtually.**
- ~~a.~~ b. Meetings of the Grad Council shall be run according to Robert's Rules of Order.
- ~~b.~~ c. Meetings shall be chaired by a member of the Executive Board or a meeting chair appointed by the Executive Board.
- ~~c.~~ d. Meetings shall begin with a meaningful, intentional, and related land acknowledgement
- ~~d.~~ e. Grad Council shall meet approximately once per month between September and April inclusive and as needed between May and August inclusive.
- ~~e.~~ f. Each academic unit has one vote at meetings of Grad Council
- ~~f.~~ g. Notice of a Grad Council meeting shall be given at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting.
- ~~g.~~ h. Agendas for Grad Council shall be circulated to all members of Grad Council, including Co-Reps.
- ~~h.~~ i. Quorum for Grad Council meetings shall be at least fifty percent (50%) of Grad Council members, excluding vacancies and regrets. No meeting of Grad Council is quorate with fewer than ten (10) members.
- ~~i.~~ j. For purposes of quorum at Grad Council, when two Co-Reps from an academic unit are present, they count as one member.
- ~~j.~~ k. If no quorum is observed, agenda items may be moved to the next meeting.
- ~~k.~~ l. All members of the Society may attend Grad Council meetings and participate in discussions, although only Grad Council members may vote. **Voting by electronic means will be permitted.**

#### BYLAW VIII – EXECUTIVE BOARD

##### 8.1 Purposes of the Executive Board:

The Executive Board shall manage the affairs of the Society and shall:

- a. Strike committees as necessary and select chairpersons for the committees;

- b. Appoint representatives to University committees as necessary;
- c. Hire and supervise employees of the Society;
- d. Establish policies of the Society, including all policies related to Society operations and management;**
- ~~d. e.~~ e. Have emergency authority to ensure compliance with all legal requirements; and
- ~~e. f.~~ f. Exercise the powers of Grad Council on an emergency basis between Grad Council meetings.

### 8.3 Term of Office

- a. The term of office shall be from April 1 to March 31.
- b. The Executive must be members of the Society upon their election and during their term of office, subject to the provisions of Bylaw 2.4.**

### 8.4 Procedures of the Executive Board:

- a. The Executive Board shall normally meet at least once per month.
- b. Meetings may be held either in person or virtually.**
- ~~b. c.~~ c. Notice of an Executive Board meeting shall be given at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.
- ~~c. d.~~ d. Quorum for Executive Board meetings shall be at least one-half (½) of its current voting members.
- ~~e. e.~~ e. Resolutions of the Executive Board shall normally require a simple majority vote of the voting members present to pass.
- ~~e. Minutes of the meetings shall be available at the Society's General Office for viewing by members.~~

### 9.1 The Executive Board, in addition to any duties imposed by the Society Act shall:

- a. Uphold the constitution, bylaws, and policy of the Society;
- b. Attend all Executive Board, Graduate Representative Council, and General Meetings;
- c. Attend meetings with senior university administrators;
- d. Report to the Graduate Representative Council and all General Meetings.
- e. Maintain a list of current Graduate Representative Council members and ensure that sufficient notice of all Graduate Representative Council meetings is provided to all Graduate Representatives;
- f. Hire and supervise management staff of the Society;
- g. Not concurrently be an employee of the Society;
- h. Coordinate and ensure Society representation on university committees;
- i. Represent the Society on search committees for senior university positions;
- j. Represent the Society on external bodies;
- k. Form committees as necessary;
- l. Appoint an Executive Board member to liaise with UVSS;
- ~~m. Appoint an Executive Board member to sit on the Advocacy Council;~~

- ~~m.~~ m. Appoint an Executive Board member to chair the Society Health and Dental Appeals Committee;
- ~~n.~~ n. Appoint an Executive Board member to sit on the University Grad Fee Reduction Appeals Committee;
- ~~o.~~ o. Be aware and accountable for the financial position of the Society;
- ~~p.~~ p. Ensure the maintenance of the Society's records;
- ~~q.~~ q. Ensure institutional memory for each Executive Board portfolio, campaign and committee is maintained; and
- ~~r.~~ r. Advocate on behalf of graduate student interests.

9.3 The Director of Communications shall:

- a. Publicize and promote the activities of the Society in cooperation with the Executive Board;
- b. ~~Oversee Act as Editor in Chief of the Society's publications, including The Unacknowledged Source, and both digital and print media;~~
- c. Work with Executive Board and other committees of the Society to develop consistent messaging and communications for Society campaigns;
- d. Assume the role of Chair in his or her absence; and
- e. Be responsible for other duties as agreed upon and assigned by the Executive Board.

9.4 The Director of Finance shall:

- a. Present budgets and audited financial statements to General Meetings for ratification by the members;
- b. Report on the financial status of the extended health and dental plan at General Meetings;
- ~~c. Act as chair of the Food and Beverage Advisory Committee of the Society;~~
- ~~c.~~ c. Be responsible for development and negotiation of staff and external contracts in conjunction with Executive Board;
- ~~d.~~ d. Act as primary signing authority for the Society;
- ~~e.~~ e. Normally act as the Personnel Officer for the Society; and
- ~~f.~~ f. Be responsible for other duties as agreed upon and assigned by the Executive Board.

BYLAW XIII – RECORDS

13.1. All records and minutes of meetings and current fiscal year financial records that are in hard copy shall be kept at the office of the Society. All electronic records shall be stored on a secure server in compliance with applicable privacy legislation. All approved minutes of Executive Board meetings other than in-camera sessions, minutes of Grad Council meetings and General Meetings, and financial statements shall be publicly available on the Society's website.

13.2 Members shall have the right to inspect the records of the Society upon written request, and in compliance with applicable privacy legislation. Records shall be made available within a reasonable period of time after receipt of written request.

**BYLAW XV – NON-PARTISANSHIP (New bylaw)**

**The Society is non-partisan and shall not endorse any political party or candidate for public office.**

*M/S: FOSTER on behalf of the Bylaw and Policy Committee/FRANCIS*

FOSTER spoke to the rationale behind each of the proposed bylaw amendments.

FOSTER was asked to clarify the changes affecting grad reps. FOSTER highlighted the changes to Bylaw 6.

*CARRIED.*

KENT ceded the chair of the meeting back to FOSTER.

**10. REPORTS TO THE MEMBERSHIP (SEE APPENDIX A: REPORTS RECEIVED BY THE MEMBERSHIP)**

a. MEMBERSHIP REPORT

TURNER reported that with 3057 members, this is a high number for the GSS. 73% of GRC seats are filled as of November 23, 2021, with 13 academic unit vacancies and the CUPE position vacant.

b. REPORT OF THE 2021-22 EXECUTIVE BOARD AND GSS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FOSTER noted that the current Executive took office during the third wave of COVID 19. To our knowledge, this is the first board that includes members not living in Canada during their term. This Board has never met in person as a group.

FOSTER noted that the Executive have been working on in-person events, accessibility and accommodations for members unable to attend UVic in person due to medical vulnerabilities or location, advocacy on health and safety measures around campus, and other issues focused on COVID-19. The full report of the work of the Executive Board is available in Appendix A.

TURNER gave an oral report on the work of the 2020-21 GSS Staff Team, including herself, Kyla TURNER, Executive Director; Neil BARNEY, Operations and Service Manager; Karen L. POTTS, Governance Coordinator; and Glenda BEECHAM, Health and Dental Coordinator. The full report of the Executive Director is available in Appendix A.

FOSTER was asked if the restaurant referendum would allow for members to contribute their suggestions, or only vote on prescribed options. FOSTER explained that the referendum will need to include questions regarding paying a fee to re-open the restaurant (the amount previously being subsidized by the Operating Fund), and, not to have any food or service. However, there will probably be a third option – a smaller fee supporting a smaller type of food and beverage service. Prior to this option being formulated, FOSTER explained that the Board intends to do consultations to flesh out what this might look like.

c. REPORTS OF GRC STANDING COMMITTEES

Chairs of each of the GSS Graduate Representative Council Standing Committees reported on their work. Copies of these reports are available in Appendix A.

- [Bylaw and Policy](#) – David FOSTER, GSS Chair
- [Communications](#) – Nicole KENT, Director of Communications
- [Events](#) – Adair NG, Director of Services

- [Appeals](#) – Adair NG, Director of Services
- [Finance](#) – Ryan KHAN, Director of Finance
- [Student Affairs](#) – Nahid SAFARI, Director of Student Affairs
- [Stipend Review](#) – Alix GALUMBECK, Chair, Stipend Review Committee

- d. SEMI-ANNUAL HEALTH AND DENTAL PLAN UPDATE - KYLA TURNER, GSS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
A copy of this report is available in Appendix A.

TURNER was asked about the possibility of having the referral requirement removed for counselling. TURNER committed to investigating this option.

SAFARI asked everyone to seek out the Student Wellness Centre survey regarding graduate students and mental health.

*Motion: RESOLVED that the 2021-22 Executive Board report, reports from the committees of the society, and the semi-annual extended health and dental insurance plans update are received as information.*

*M/S: FRANCIS/DERRICK  
CARRIED.*

## 11. OTHER BUSINESS (WITH NOTICE OF MOTION)/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next GRC meeting is December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. All GSS members can attend GRC meetings.

THOMAS rescheduled to future GRC/SAGM meeting.

**TASK: TURNER to rebook Robina THOMAS, UVic AVP Indigenous, as a guest speaker at a future GSS governance meeting.**

## 12. ADJOURNMENT

*Motion: RESOLVED that the 2021 GSS AGM is adjourned.*

*M/S: EXECUTIVE BOARD/RENKEN-SEBASTIAN  
CARRIED.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 pm.

klp/KT/klp

X 

David Foster  
GSS Chair 2021-22

X 

Kyla Turner  
GSS Executive Director

## APPENDIX A: REPORTS TO THE MEMBERSHIP

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### 2021-22 MEMBERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION REPORT

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#### MEMBERSHIP OVERVIEW: MARCH TO SEPTEMBER 2021

During the May-August 2021 semester, the GSS had 2602 members. As of October 5, 2021, the GSS had 3057 members for the Sept-Dec 2021 semester. We have seen a strong return to on-campus enrolment this Fall. The enrolment status of our members for these two semesters were:

Semester	On-Campus	Distance	Co-op
May-Aug 2021	696	1584	120
Sept-Dec 2021	1816	1118	115 (plus 8 co-op+class)

Welcome (back) to campus for all our members! We have missed you.

#### REPRESENTATION REPORT

The GSS has a mandate to increase graduate student representation on all decision making and advisory bodies around the University Of Victoria. As of October 28, 2021, the GSS has elected representatives to 52 committees around the University Of Victoria, and 4 external committees. A full list of these committees appears below to document the breadth of committee work conducted by GSS representatives around our University community and on issues relevant to graduate students.

#### A. UVIC COMMITTEES WITH GSS EXECUTIVE BOARD REPRESENTATION

##### UVic Senate Committees:

- Libraries
- Awards
- Learning and Teaching

##### UVic Hiring or Appointment Review Committees:

- Appointment Committee for the Vice-President Academic and Provost
- Appointment Committee for the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies

##### Other UVic Committees with Executive Board Representatives:

- UVic/GSS Operations Committee
- Graduate Executive Committee
- Faculty of Graduate Studies Council
- UVSS Liaison
- AVP Student Affairs and GSS Chair
- Bookstore Advisory
- Clubs Council
- Campus Planning
- Graduate Fee Reduction Appeals
- Graduate Student Recruitment, Retention and Success Implementation Committee (GRR IC)

- Ombudsperson
- Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Supervision and Mentorship
- Orientation Advisory
- VP Research Advisory
- BC Campus Suicide Prevention Initiative Project Steering Committee
- Student Experience Working Group
- Mandatory Temporary Medical Insurance Opt Out Appeal Committee
- Integrated Steering Committee for UVic's Climate Sustainability Action Plan

**External Committees with Executive Board Representatives:**

- GSSBC Executive Committee
- BC Transit Fare Technology Project Working Group
- Make Transit Work
- Victoria Regional Transit Commission's Student Transit Advisory Committee

**B. UVIC COMMITTEES WITH NON-EXECUTIVE BOARD REPRESENTATIVES**

**UVic Senate Committees:**

- Appeals
- Academic Standards
- Continuing Studies

**UVic Hiring or Review Committees**

- Appointment Committee for the Dean, Faculty of Humanities
- Appointment Committee for the Associate Dean, Faculty of Science
- Appointment Committee for the Dean of Fine Arts
- Appointment Committee for the Executive Director, Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation
- Appointment Committee for the Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities
- Appointment Committee for the Acting Associate Dean Research and Graduate Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences

**Other UVic Committees with Non-Executive Board Representatives:**

- Award for Excellence in Teaching for Experience Learning Adjudication Committee
- Andy Farquharson Teaching Excellence Award for Graduate Students
- Advisory Committee on Academic Accommodation and Access for Student with Disabilities
- Sexualized Violence Education and Awareness Advisory Committee
- Childcare Services Advisory Board
- Convocation Committee
- Student Life Grants Committee
- Multifaith Chaplaincy Advisory Committee
- Learning and Teaching with Technology Committee (LTTC)
- Transition to Online
- SupportConnect Advisory Group
- Vikes Nation Advisory Committee
- Strategic Research and Creative Works Plan 2021 – 2026 Advisory Group
- Faculty of Science Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee
- Faculty of Humanities Council
- Faculty of Social Sciences, Awards and Recognition Committee

- Faculty of Social Sciences, Equity & Diversity Committee
- Faculty of Social Sciences, Graduate Curriculum Committee
- Faculty of Social Sciences, Dean's Advisory Forum on Indigenization
- Social Sciences Dean's Advisory Forum on Indigenization

VACANCIES:

- Faculty of Social Sciences, Awards and Recognition Committee
- Faculty of Social Sciences Dean's Advisory Forum on Indigenization
- Wellness Education/Health Promotion Committee

Please consider stepping up to ensure graduate student interests are represented!  
<https://gss.uvic.ca/about-gss/get-involved/committees/grad-representation-at-uvic/>

## 2021-22 EXECUTIVE BOARD MID-YEAR REPORT

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### EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The GSS Executive Board consists of five elected graduate students and the Executive Director as a non-voting member. This year, three Executive Board members were elected in the March 2021 election, one Board member was elected at the March 2021 Semi-Annual General Meeting and one Board member was elected by Graduate Representative Council in April 2021.

The 2021-22 GSS Board of Directors:

- Chair: **David Foster**
- Director of Communications: **Nicole Kent**
- Director of Finance: **Ryan Khan**
- Director of Services: **Adair Ng**
- Director of Student Affairs: **Nahid Safari**

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

The GSS' purposes are:

- To represent the interests of the membership in a democratic manner in matters pertaining to education and the welfare of graduate students;*
- 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 which deliberate on the affairs of graduate students;*
- To promote cultural, intellectual and recreational activities among the members; and*
- To promote the academic and social welfare of its members through the provision of services.*

### COVID-19 CONTEXT

The 2021-22 GSS Board of Directors took office in April 2021, amid the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As global travel has been disrupted by the pandemic, the current Board is the first in memory to include members located outside of Canada. All Board meetings and business have been conducted virtually and the Board has never met in-person as a group. This posed unique challenges (e.g., having documents signed) but also allowed us to experiment with use of technology and methods of online engagement.

Many of the issues facing the Board have been related to the pandemic, such as deciding whether the GSS should host in-person events and advocating for adequate health and safety measures during the University's return to in-person classes. At its inaugural meeting on April 7, 2021, the Board passed a motion affirming that no GSS meetings or events would be held in person, as was determined by the previous Board on August 4, 2020. Later in the summer as BC entered Step 3 of the provincial Restart Plan, Board members felt that the option to resume in-person events with public health measures in place should be provided to the Graduate Representative Council. On July 20, 2021, GRC voted to allow in-person events with social distancing, capacity limits and an indoor mask requirement. However, the moratorium on in-person GSS meetings has been continued. While the GSS is now allowed to hold in-person events, none have taken place to date.

The Board has heard concerns from medically vulnerable students and international students, in particular, regarding accessibility and accommodations during the return to in-person classes. A concerted campaign that included the GSS, other BC student societies and university faculty associations and staff unions resulted

in the BC government approving a requirement for university students, faculty and staff to declare their vaccination status and undergo regular rapid testing if unvaccinated. BC's vaccination campaign has resulted in over 95% of students, faculty and staff at UVic being fully vaccinated and no reported COVID-19 outbreaks on campus to date.

The GSS continues to advocate for classroom accommodation when requested by students with disabilities and international students who have not been able to move to Canada. To that end, the Board has participated in the Access4All campaign led by the UVic Society for Students with Disabilities.

## EXTERNAL ISSUES

In addition to advocacy related to COVID-19, the Board has been active in graduate student advocacy and representation both on and off campus. Board members have participated in the hiring process for the new UVic Vice-President Academic and Provost, in particular our Director of Communications who has spent many hours on the hiring committee. The GSS Chair worked with the Victoria Regional Transit Commission to ensure the GSS was represented on the new Student Transit Advisory Committee. The Chair has also participated in conversations on shared provincial advocacy for graduate student funding and resources as part of the Graduate Student Societies of BC Executive Committee, which includes representation from UVic, UBC, SFU and UNBC.

With the return of many students to campus in September, lack of affordable or available housing in the Victoria area reached an unprecedented crisis point. This was compounded by the pandemic which delayed students returning to campus due to travel restrictions and uncertainty over which programs would be available online, as well as reluctance of homeowners to share their living space. The Board heard clearly from students that advocacy for more on-campus and off-campus housing is a priority. The University has also expressed a strong interest in working with students' societies to lobby municipalities and the provincial government to increase housing supply.

## INTERNAL ISSUES

One of the first issues the Board had to address was a significant increase in the cost of the Extended Health and Dental Plan passed on to the GSS from our insurance provider. The Board worked with the health plan broker to prepare three options for referendum of the GSS membership on June 9 to 11: a reduction in coverage with no fee increase; a fee increase with no reduction in coverage; and a smaller fee increase with slightly reduced coverage. The Board held a town hall meeting to answer students' questions and concerns about the referendum questions. The result was a voter turnout of 9% (significantly higher than the minimum threshold of 5%) and 75% voted in favour of increasing fees and maintaining coverage. For next year, the Board plans to revert to the normal schedule of Health and Dental plan referenda being held concurrently with GSS elections in March.

The Board has faced internal problems related to financial accountability since taking office. In early summer, the GSS lost our long-time contracted bookkeeper without warning or a contingency plan in place, due to lack of communication by the bookkeeper. This caused the GSS to fall more than six months behind in approving our financial statements. At the same time, the GSS experienced payroll issues related to the previous bookkeeper, where some Board members as well as staff were being paid incorrectly or not at all.

By July 2021, the Board had moved forward with hiring a new bookkeeper, who began in August. Due to the problems with payroll, the Board prioritized securing a bookkeeper with payroll expertise, and the financial issues have now been partially addressed. The backlog of financial statements resulted in the annual GSS

audit falling behind schedule, thus the Annual General Meeting had to be postponed from October 26 to November 23 in order to present the GSS' audited financial statements to members.

Another operational issue has been the GSS' current lack of staff capacity combined with increased demands for services such as individual advocacy and administrative support for the Health and Dental Plan related to the pandemic. Since 2019, the GSS has transitioned from having two managers and around 20 staff to one manager and three part-time staff. In August 2020, the GSS' long-time Executive Director departed, and the GSS was without any full-time staff until the new Executive Director started in November. This resulted in a backlog of work that has not been completely caught up, along with the demand for new work such as referendum proposals on use of the Grad House restaurant space.

In July 2021, the Board began the process of bringing back a second manager position. The hiring process was drawn out in part due to the need to focus on bookkeeping and payroll issues in August and September. However, the Board has finally completed hiring of a new Operations and Services Manager and looks forward to introducing them to the GSS membership.

## STRATEGIC GOALS

In its 2021-22 Strategic Plan adopted on July 28, 2021, the GSS Board identified the following areas of focus to achieve our goals:

1. Advance Advocacy Campaigns
2. Improve Internal Governance Structures and Representation
3. Increase Community Engagement
4. Enhance Visibility and Communications
5. Develop Internal Organizational Resources
6. COVID-19 Business Recovery

## ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

### PRIORITY 1: RA LEGAL STATUS AS UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEES

In 2012, the GSS began to advocate for graduate students employed as grant-funded research assistants (GFRAs). Under university policy, these students are not recognized as UVic employees, but only as employees of the individual faculty member who holds the grant. Some GFRAs have experienced problems such as not being paid for their work or being paid incorrectly. These employment issues led the GSS to seek legal advice in 2013 on GFRAs' employment status. From 2016 to 2017, the GSS lobbied the UVic administration to change policy so that GFRAs would be recognized as UVic employees, but these efforts were not successful. As GFRAs continue to report employment-related problems, the Board will continue to advocate for a change in status of GFRAs to employees of the University.

### Progress to Date

- Received an updated legal opinion on status of GFRAs from legal counsel.
- Consulted with CUPE 4163 to understand their position on GFRAs' status.
- Re-initiated a working group on GFRAs' status through the GRC Student Affairs Committee.

## PRIORITY 2: COMPENSATION FOR STUDENTS ON TIME-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES

Student representation on UVic committees provides an important avenue for consultation and ensures that the best interests of students are considered in important policy and operational decisions. However, participation in the more time-intensive committees, such as search and hiring committees, awards adjudication and appeal committees is challenging for many students due to the required time commitments. Student representatives are the only members on these committees who are not compensated for their time, as University faculty, staff and administrators incorporate committee duties into their working hours. The Board will work with UVic to develop a university policy that would recognize students' work on time-intensive committees through provision of a stipend.

### Progress to Date

- Developed a workplan for a Work Study student to conduct supporting research and analysis.
- Initiated a working group through the GRC Student Affairs Committee.

- **PRIORITY 3: ELIMINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MSP**

In January 2020, the BC government eliminated Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums for nearly all residents. However, MSP premiums were retained for international post-secondary students, who actually saw an increase in cost from \$37.50 to \$75 per month. The GSS requested that the Ministry of Health eliminate MSP for international students but without success. The Board will continue to campaign for the elimination of international student MSP in collaboration with other student societies.

### Progress to Date

- Created a petition to the BC Legislature calling for elimination of international student MSP.
- Collected signatures on the MSP petition during UVic orientation events and GSS office hours.
- Shared the MSP petition with other students' societies who have also collected signatures.
- Collaborated with CUPE 4163 to hold outdoor tabling events in November to collect more signatures on the MSP petition.

## GOVERNANCE AND REPRESENTATION

### PRIORITY 1: POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENTS

The GSS has begun the transition from its former policy governance model, where one committee was responsible for all policy development, to a new model where policies are divided into the categories of governance and operations with the appropriate development, implementation and approval authorities assigned to each policy. The significant outstanding work is revision of old policies to meet the criteria of the new framework.

### Progress to Date

- Developed an overarching Policy on Policies and Procedures which was approved by GRC.
- Committee terms of reference revisions to reflect the new policy framework approved by GRC.
- Interim procedures developed to assign appropriate development, approval and implementation authorities to existing policies pending their revision.

### PRIORITY 2: GRC STRUCTURE AND ELECTIONS

Two significant concerns have been raised regarding GRC structure and elections. Since the GSS does not conduct GRC elections, which are typically held by UVic staff, there has been a lack of GSS oversight of the integrity and security of GRC elections. Additionally, the GRC structure of one representative per academic

unit, regardless of size, results in large faculties and departments being under-represented, while even discontinued programs receive a seat so long as at least one student remains in the program. The GSS will consult members and develop bylaw amendments to increase GRC membership and make seat allocation more proportional, along with a referendum proposal to create funds for a GSS elections office that could conduct GRC elections.

#### Progress to Date

- Initiated a working group through the Bylaw and Policy Committee.
- Recommended a bylaw amendment to the November 2021 AGM that would enable limited oversight of GRC elections by the GSS Electoral Officer.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

#### PRIORITY 1: STUDENT WELLNESS

Graduate school can often be stressful, isolating and overwhelming to students, who must balance the demands of schoolwork, research, teaching and other employment to supplement their incomes. The additional mental, emotional and financial toll of the COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted graduate student well-being. The GSS aims to provide a variety of events and services to enhance the overall wellness of its members, as well as advocating for increased student supports and services from UVic.

#### Progress to Date

- Held monthly meetings between GSS Board and the UVic Student Wellness Centre.

### VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATIONS

#### PRIORITY 1: INCREASE CONTACT BETWEEN BOARD AND SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Prior to the pandemic, the GSS's communication strategy relied on in-person interactions focused on events and services located in the Grad Centre. Since moving online in 2020, there has been a sharp decrease in member engagement, especially in contact between the Board and general membership. The GSS will examine the successes and failures of online engagement over the last 18 months and provide more opportunities for all graduate students to meet their representatives.

#### Progress to Date

- Held a town hall meeting in June on the Extended Health and Dental Plan referendum.
- Participated in online and in-person Graduate Student Orientation.
- Board and staff members delivered 30 department orientation presentations in September.
- Board and staff participated in UVic's in-person Info Fair on campus.
- Hosted online social events with UVic Global Community for international students.

### RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

#### PRIORITY 1: HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

With the service changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the GSS transitioned from having around 20 employees to only four employees, of which one is full-time. The loss of the second manager position along with an increase in some areas of work such as individual student advocacy resulted in a higher workload for the Executive Director. The GSS has recognized a need to increase staffing levels in order to provide the required level of operations and services to effectively support the membership.

#### Progress to Date

- Completed hiring of a second manager position.
- Posted for 200 hours of Work Study and developed projects for Work Study students.

#### PRIORITY 2: REPURPOSE STUDENT ADVOCATE FUND

The Student Advocate Fund was established by a GSS fee referendum in Spring 2019. The original intent was to use the fund to hire a full-time staff person to support students in individual advocacy regarding issues with university policies and procedures, e.g., in complaints, appeals, hearings or judicial reviews. However, the staff position was not created because undergraduates voted against contributing to the fund, resulting in much less funding. The Student Advocate Fund's current Terms of Reference envision the fund being used to cover costs of individual advocacy for students on a case-by-case basis. In practice, very few student cases result in the type of intervention that would require allocation of funds under the Terms of Reference. As a result, no expenditures from the fund occurred for two years. To ensure the fund is used to benefit students, the GSS has committed to revising the Terms of Reference so the fund can be allocated to systemic advocacy, information, education and referrals.

#### Progress to Date

- Draft of revised Student Advocate Fund Terms of Reference forwarded to the Finance Committee for consideration by a working group.

#### PRIORITY 3: REVENUE STRATEGIC PLAN

The GSS has been described as a medium-sized organization with the budget of a small organization. Compared to most Canadian graduate student societies, the GSS collects significantly less in membership fees. In order to provide the level of governance, operations and service provision that our members expect, the GSS will explore strategies for revenue creation such as new student fees or external funding via grants from other organizations.

#### Progress to Date

- This project is awaiting further research and development.

#### COVID-19 BUSINESS RECOVERY

##### PRIORITY 1: CREATE AND IMPLEMENT HYBRID SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all GSS services were provided remotely from April 2020 to September 2021. With the return of many graduate students to in-person classes and activities, the GSS has begun the return to in-person delivery of some services while continuing to deliver all services online. The GSS will work toward a full return to in-person services (with continued online options) after April 2022.

#### Progress to Date

- Implementation of COVID-19 protocols for limited in-person service delivery after consultation with Board and staff.
- Resumption of in-person Health and Dental and UPASS opt-ins and opt-outs.

##### PRIORITY 2: DETERMINE USE OF RESTAURANT SPACE

The GSS traditionally operated a restaurant and café in the Halpern Centre, which has been closed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Prior to its closure, the GSS Restaurant Fund was running significant annual losses subsidized through transfers from the Operating Fund, a use not in keeping with the Operating Fund's

original purpose. The GSS plans to move forward by developing financial estimates for alternative use of the restaurant space and asking students via referendum whether they would like to pay the costs required to resume operation of a restaurant or convert the space to a venue for studying, meetings and GSS work. The referendum will be held in March 2022 to guide a reopening of the space in 2022-23.

Progress to Date

- This project is awaiting further research and development.

## SEMI-ANNUAL UPDATE ON THE OPERATIONS AND SERVICES OF THE GSS

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Report made: November 23, 2021  
Reporting on: April-September 2021  
From: Kyla Turner, Executive Director

### OVERVIEW

The GSS has had several very significant transitions throughout the last 18 months. The first of these was the closure of our Food and Beverages Services and a work-from-home order for front office staff in March 2020 due to the pandemic. The second was the Executive Director transition in August 2020, which resulted in a three month period at the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year where there was no management staff at the GSS. Due to the extent of work required to see the organization through these transitions, the 2020-21 Executive Board charged the 2021-22 Executive Board with planning and implementing the GSS's COVID-19 recovery. As of March 31, 2021, the 2020-21 GSS Executive Board felt that the impacts of COVID-19 could extend throughout the September-December 2021 semester and had planned for a re-opening of services in January 2022.

As we are all aware now, despite the vaccination roll-out, COVID-19 continues to create barriers for our operations and has made recovery planning a challenge. Due to a high rate of staff and board who have been deemed clinically extremely vulnerable, the GSS has taken a very cautious approach to our recovery planning by limiting our indoor, in-person events, requesting members who are able to access services virtually continue to do so, and by pausing planning on the re-opening of the Food and Beverage Services until such time as we developed the internal capacities related to staffing and a better knowledge of the impacts of the pandemic on food and beverage services.

Throughout this reporting period, uptake on GSS services remains strong despite our limitations. Staff have continued to provide services as outlined below and participate in creative planning around how to engage our members under the current circumstances. The status of our service provision is outlined below. Staff have also continued assisting members with advocacy concerns for issues as diverse as research supervision, funding, employment discrimination, housing availability and affordability, mental health, and domestic violence. We continue to be a resource for all graduate students across UVic to come to for systems navigation, peer support, governance and leadership capacity building, and we look forward to returning to being a gathering place for our members soon. You have all been dearly missed at Halpern Centre!

### HEALTH AND DENTAL PLAN

The GSS provides Extended Health and Dental coverage as part of our obligations under the *University Act*, which requires all BC universities to ensure that their students have comprehensive health and dental insurance for the duration of their studies. For more information on the Extended Health and Dental service, including coverage rates, please check out [our website here](#) and the semi-annual health and dental update as part of the AGM reports.

Before this reporting period, COVID-19 prompted one significant change to this service. In Summer 2020, the GSS voted on a referendum to include all full-time students in 3.0 units or more automatically in our insurance coverage. Prior to that, only full-time, on campus students were assessed. This has shifted the administration of this plan from opting in students who are part-time/off-campus to ensure a high level of coverage across our membership, to opting out students who have coverage through an alternative source. The most common sources of alternative coverage are through one's employment, spouse, or parent.

During the reporting period, the following opt-ins/outs were processed by staff:

Term	Opt In	Opt Out
May-August	16 students, 7 dependents	2
September-December*	17 students, 220 dependents	1009

\*These numbers were last updated October 19, 2021.

## UPASS PACKAGE

The GSS has a contract with UVic, UVSS, and BC Transit to offer a universal bus pass program for all GSS members registered in any on-campus courses. The UPASS package includes several on-campus services: the UPASS, Athletics and Recreation Services (ATRS), and the GSS fee. Students who meet specific criteria set by our contract with BC Transit may opt in or out of this service package. Find more information about the UPASS package [on our website here](#).

Before this reporting period, COVID-19 changed the administration of this service in several ways.

1. A greater number of students were registered as off-campus, resulting in more people needing to opt-in
2. The University Of Victoria granted us special permission for the 2020-21 academic year only to opt students into only the UPASS service, and not the full UPASS package.

Since September 2021, most students have returned to campus, decreasing opt-ins. The University also began enforcing the agreement that states students cannot opt-in to partial on-campus services. Therefore, the ATRS fee has been included in all September 2021 opt-ins. Some members have expressed concerns about the ATRS fee. GSS has addressed these to UVic leadership, but have been told that the fee is mandatory for all on-campus students or students opting in to the on-campus services package. We will continue to advocate for better access to athletics and recreation services for those paying the fee and for more affordable tuition and fees for all our members.

During the reporting period, the following opt-ins/outs were processed by staff:

Term	Opt In	Opt Out
May-August	218	43
September-December*	99	111

\*These numbers were last updated October 19, 2021.

## GSS GRANTS

The GSS collects and distributed funds for several grants/bursaries around campus. There are three grants/bursaries that are administered by Student Awards and Financial Aid (SAFA) and one that is administered by the GSS. The Conference Travel Grant, Distance Travel Grant, and Student-Parent Child Care Bursary are administered through SAFA, who reports to the GSS annually at fiscal year end (March.) The Department Grant is an internally administered GSS grant that funds the development and support for department-specific graduate student associations, academic or social projects and activities. For further information on the Department Grant, please see [our website here](#).

During this reporting period, no department grants were distributed. Grants are more frequently distributed September-March and we expect a return in uptake.

As this is the first Executive Director report in this format for our General Membership meetings, I did want to note that despite the myriad of challenges to organization social or academic projects/activities in the 2020-21 year, four departments did still apply for and receive GSS Department Grant funding in March 2021. Congratulations and thank you to the departments of French, Political Science, History, and English for your work in engaging your students in new and creative ways last year!

### **MODO CAR SHARING SERVICE**

The GSS maintains a group membership with Modo Car Sharing Service. Modo typically has “member-owners” purchase a \$500 share in the co-op, which is refunded when closing your membership. Those who join through the GSS do not need to purchase a share in the co-op, but rather pay a one-time non-refundable fee of \$25, which provides you with access for as long as you are a registered graduate student and are using the service. Up to 25 GSS members can join our Modo group plan.

As of September 2021, all available Modo slots have been filled. GSS staff have contacted all previous plan members to ensure that as many students have access to this service as possible.

### **FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES**

The GSS operates a full-service restaurant, the Grad House, and a coffee shop, Side Project Café. Both services offer members an inviting study and dining space. Side Project maintains a library of board games that members are encouraged to enjoy. The Grad House hosts events such as trivia nights, dungeons and dragons nights, and many other GSS events.

Due to the pandemic, the Food and Beverages Services at the GSS were closed as of March 2020. They have not re-opened since. A presentation regarding some of the challenges and barriers to re-opening was made at the October 26, 2021 Graduate Representative Council Meeting. We look forward to engaging with our members and gathering feedback to help us revise and revitalize our services in the near future to make sure GSS can offer relevant, accessible, engaging, and cost-effective services for all current and future members!

### **ROOM BOOKINGS**

The GSS offers the use of our board rooms for free for graduate students for graduate student activities (e.g. study/meeting space, thesis defense, etc.). There is a small charge for graduate students booking for private events (e.g. parties, tutoring services, etc.) and for non-graduate students to book this space.

Catering may be offered through the GSS Food and Beverage Services. No alcohol is permitted in these spaces due to liquor licensing requirements.

No room bookings have occurred during this reporting period due to COVID-19 restrictions. No catering services were offered due to the closure of the Food and Beverage Services.

### **ADVOCACY SUPPORT**

The GSS staff frequently support the Executive Board in achieving the goals outlined in the Annual Plan. Staff have arranged the following supports for these external to the Executive Board work:

1. Planning standing events for the GSS upon re-opening, such as Wednesday Coffee, Thesis Writing Group, Crafty Fridays
2. Meet with UVic leadership regarding housing advocacy joint efforts and strategies to remove the bylaws in Oak Bay disallowing secondary suites.
3. Create standing meeting with Student Wellness Centre to discuss student access to medical care

## STUDENT CASES

GSS staff are frequently an important point of contact for our members in reaching out for support, referrals, and advocacy. Without disclosing information that could link to specific members, staff have provided case management, referrals, and support to members in resolving concerns around:

1. Graduate supervision (approximately 10 cases)
2. Program delivery during COVID (approximately 5 cases)
3. Program leaves of absence (approximately 5 cases)
4. Affordable housing (approximately 15 cases)
5. Homelessness (approximately 10 cases)
6. Food insecurity (approximately 5 cases)
7. Mental health crises (approximately 20 cases)
8. Discrimination, harassment, and violence around the university (approximately 5 cases)
9. Domestic violence and sexual assault (approximately 5 cases)

During the reporting period of March-September 2021. These cases do not include those also referred to the Executive Board.

Due to COVID-19 moving program delivery online, many of the cases that the GSS staff dealt with in this reporting period occurred outside of BC or Canada. This resulted in the staff needing to develop referral networks for the issues above across the globe. The amount of support network development required to continue to support our members throughout their time at UVic.

## STAFFING

The GSS typically maintains an office staff of two full-time managers and 4 part-time unionized positions. For several years, the Events Coordinator and Office/Communications and Outreach Coordinator positions have been held by one member of staff. We therefore have a staff of five in the office or 3.6 FTEs (full-time equivalents).

The GSS has previously maintained a larger staff to run our food and beverages services. Most Food and Beverage employees were laid off in March 2020. No rehires have been made to date.

During this reporting period, Mindy Jiang left her role as the Health and Dental Coordinator to attend her own graduate program. We wish Mindy all the best and thank her for her service and dedication to members throughout much of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mindy increased our contacts with social services across Vancouver Island and single-handedly developed a referral network for students in distress to access telehealth supports. Thank you, Mindy, for all you did for the GSS.

We also happily welcomed Glenda Beecham as the new Health and Dental Coordinator in July. Glenda has hit the ground running in her new position and brings a fresh set of eyes to addressing post-pandemic challenges to offering affordable insurance options to our members.

After this reporting period but a success requiring particular consideration for this report, the GSS also promoted Neil Barney to the Operations and Services Manager position. The GSS has been without a second manager position since March 2020 due to the closure of our food and beverages services and a prior reclassification of the second management position as the Restaurant Manager. Neil has been our Office/Communications and Outreach Coordinator and Events Coordinator for many years and has strong ties with our membership and across UVic. We are happy to see Neil continue to work with members to keep our

services relevant and engaging for members and for him to continue to develop professionally with the GSS. Congratulations, Neil, and we are excited to see where your innovation and leadership will take the GSS!

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

The top priorities for the Executive Director in terms of operations, services, and personnel management for the next six months will be:

1. In-person service recovery – as we are still returning to a full compliment of staff, the GSS will be planning in earnest how to invite members back into our spaces as is safe.
2. Health and Dental insurance renewal negotiations – our broker was able to significantly bargain down the increased cost of our health and dental insurance for this academic year. However as per request of the members after the last health and dental fee referendum, we will look to engage our broker in examining alternative insurers to find the best possible plan for our membership.
3. Budgeting – as we look into the types of in-person services we can offer, we will need to revise our budget to ensure that we appropriately fund those services that our membership votes on.
4. Collective Bargaining – our non-management staff are unionized and their current Collective Agreement ends March 31, 2022. Collective bargaining is currently scheduled for February 2022.

### CONCLUSION

The GSS is coming out of a period of many significant transitions. However, we are now in a position to pivot to service recovery and revitalization. I am optimistic that the GSS can bring back services that have been much beloved, utilized, and supported by members, as well as creating new pathways forward to focus on the following principles:

1. GSS services should be first and foremost by members, for members
2. GSS services should also be accessible, affordable, and relevant to members
3. GSS should offer employment opportunities to members that can offer flexibility, decent wages, and decent work.

I would like to see the GSS work towards finding opportunities to provide our members with work opportunities that meet not only the above, but also offer relevant experience in non-profit leadership, student support, and community engagement in order to provide professional development as well as a paycheck.

## BYLAW AND POLICY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT, OCTOBER 2021

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### MEMBERSHIP

Chair: David Foster, GSS Chair

Ex-officio, non-voting members: Kyla Turner, Executive Director; Karen Potts, Governance Coordinator; Tiffany Kuo, Electoral Officer (July 20 to August 31, 2021)

2020-21 members:

- Bobby Bickley
- Tom Ferguson
- Hanna Kim, Amanda Leclerc, Luisa Trux (co-reps)
- Michelle Snidal
- Brooklyn Trimble (resigned April 30, 2021)
- Hannah Reid (resigned June 8, 2021)

2021-22 members:

- Moronke Harris
- Matheson Gillis
- Bruna Barusco
- Dee Wong
- Tom Ferguson
- Tyler Branston
- Stefanie Dorosz
- Bobby Bickley
- Christopher Jones (also Electoral Officer)
- Arash Isapour
- Paige Thombs

### OVERVIEW OF WORK COMPLETED

When I took office as GSS Chair in April 2021, the Bylaw and Policy Committee had only met twice since October. While the BPC did not have a formal workplan, a few priorities had been identified with ongoing work on GSS bylaw amendments to permit online voting and remove outdated references to physical space and advertising to reflect the new virtual context, as well as collection of GSS position statements for inclusion in the Governance Manual.

My term began with holding a training session for BPC members that covered general public policy development as well as policy in the GSS context. Creation of a Policy on Policies and Procedures was prioritized in order to introduce a systematic approach to development, approval and implementation of GSS policies. Under the Policy on Policies and Procedures, each policy will have an appropriate development body assigned to it, rather than the BPC serving as the default development body. Policies will be separated from enabling procedures and will be divided into a Governance Manual and an Operations Manual to reflect which policies relate to the Executive Board/GRC and governance issues, and which relate to staff and operational issues. The Policy on Policies and Procedures was approved by GRC on June 8, 2021, setting the stage for implementation of the new policy governance framework.

The BPC subsequently decided through consultation that the BPC was the appropriate body to collect recommendations for proposed new policies, decide whether the proposed policy fits in the Governance or Operations Manual and choose an appropriate development body. In addition, the BPC will continue to serve as the development body for governance policies. Revisions to the BPC's membership and terms of reference to reflect its new duties were approved by GRC on July 20, 2021, along with a revision to the Finance Committee's terms of reference to reflect its role as the development authority for financial policies and restricted fund terms of reference.

On the bylaw front, the BPC was active in developing amendments to include online voting and remove references to physical space and advertising, thanks to the work of our dedicated committee members. The Electoral Officer also put significant time and effort into reviewing the online voting amendments and participating in revisions to the Electoral Officer bylaw. I drafted a number of housekeeping bylaw amendments as well. All of these proposed bylaw changes were passed by the BPC for recommendation to the Annual General Meeting in October.

I am pleased to report that the BPC completed the following work in 2020-21:

- Policy on Policy and Procedures – APPROVED by GRC June 8, 2021
- Physical Space Bylaw Amendments – RECOMMENDED to AGM June 18, 2021
- Online Voting Bylaw Amendments – RECOMMENDED to AGM July 6, 2021
- BPC, Finance Committee and SRC TOR Revisions – APPROVED by GRC July 20, 2021
- Electoral Officer, Society Membership, Policy Creation, GRC Attendance, Non-Partisanship and Housekeeping Bylaw Amendments – RECOMMENDED to AGM August 13, 2021

## OVERVIEW OF INCOMPLETE AND OUTSTANDING WORK

Due to feasibility, time constraints and decisions of the BPC, several items are ongoing, incomplete or did not move forward. A proposed GRC election policy that would have given the Electoral Officer limited oversight of GRC elections did not pass because the BPC identified that bylaw changes would need to be made first (which were subsequently drafted and recommended to the AGM).

I proposed a University Representation Committee to provide a forum for the GSS and graduate student representatives on UVic governance bodies to collaborate, but this was shelved pending further consultation as BPC members felt it could create too many additional meetings for GSS reps.

A committee member drafted an amendment to Bylaw 10 that would provide clarity regarding the ability of the Stipend Review Committee to disallow an Executive Board member's stipend. This was not recommended to the 2021 AGM as the 2020-21 BC's term ended before it could receive feedback on the proposed wording from the Stipend Review Committee.

A BPC member undertook significant work on reformatting position statements for inclusion in the Governance Manual, and this project was left ongoing.

The issue of GSS membership for students on leave was referred to the BPC, and a committee member conducted some initial research, but the issue was left to be taken up by the current year committee.

Implementation of the Policy on Policies and Procedures is a significant ongoing project that is part of the larger work of revising all the GSS' current policies.

The Executive Board passed a motion to develop a conduct policy for Board and GRC members, which will be one of the BPC's next projects. Another project for the 2021-22 committee will be potential restructuring of GRC to increase membership and address disparities in faculty and department size.

#### **PRIORITIES FOR 2021-22**

On November 3, 2021, the BPC approved its 2021-22 Committee Workplan. The main projects included in this workplan are creation of a Board and GRC conduct policy, development of a proposal to restructure GRC and change how GRC elections are conducted, and continued implementation of the new policy governance framework. New electoral policy and a policy on in-camera Board meetings are also slated for development. Finally, the committee is moving forward with creation of a bylaw amendment that would allow students on leave to opt into full voting membership in the GSS.

## APPEALS COMMITTEE REPORT, OCTOBER 2021

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### COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:

- Adair Ng (Director of Services/Chair)
- Ryan Khan (Director of Finance)
- Glenda Beecham (GSS Health and Dental Coordinator)
- Mel Granley (GRC)
- Dax Tate (GRC)
- Mona Sawan (GRC)

### COMMITTEE WORK:

To date, the committee has met two times. On October 20<sup>th</sup>, we met for a training session co-facilitated by the health and dental coordinator and I. Then, on October 27<sup>th</sup>, we met to review twelve appeals. Our next meeting will be on November 17<sup>th</sup> to review one appeal received (to date).

### CHALLENGES:

Similar to last year, we have received a substantial number of appeals in comparison to previous years. I applaud the members of the committee for their dedication, attention to detail, and commitment to respectful discourse.

## EVENTS COMMITTEE REPORT, OCTOBER 2021

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### COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:

- Adair Ng (Director of Services/Chair)
- Neil Barney (GSS Events Coordinator/Office Coordinator-Outreach and Communications)
- Sarah Lane (GRC)
- Rohit Jain (GRC)
- Wyatt Maddox (GRC)
- Sara Fallahi (GRC)
- Anushka Halder (GRC)
- Matthew Somerville (CML)
- Oluwatosin Adeyemi (CML)
- Kaleigh Francis (CML)
- Emily Magel (CML)
- Kirsten Locher (CML)

### COMMITTEE WORK:

Given the large size of the committee this year, we scheduled two meetings on October 20<sup>th</sup> (10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.) to accommodate everyone's availability. Unfortunately, only half of the committee members attended across the two meetings.

During the meetings, we reviewed the committee terms of reference, discussed standing events, and shared our areas of interest in relation to events. The vast majority of the committee members are looking forward to the resumption of in-person events; namely social events including board game nights, jam sessions, and Wednesday coffee.

For our next meeting, all committee members were asked to come with one or two event ideas that they would be interested in planning.

### STANDING EVENTS:

- Wednesday Wednesday Coffee (sponsored by Student Life and the Alumni Association)
- Thursday Rotating events held jointly with campus partners (e.g. conversation group (Global Community), meditation (Multifaith), thesis writing group (Centre for Academic Communication), and getting active (Vikes).
- Fridays Crafty Fridays (e.g. Colouring and Cocoa, rock painting, holiday cards, collage, and button making)

### CHALLENGES:

For the time being, while we await further guidance regarding a return to in-person events, we will have to conduct events online. I recognize that the majority of students are likely overtaxed given the fact that they have been studying online since late 2020. Hopefully, the events we do host online will serve as a time to connect with one another while providing a relaxing/engaging experience.

Our GSS Events Coordinator/Office Coordinator-Outreach and Communications, Neil Barney, has accepted a new position as the GSS Operations and Services Manager. It will be a time of transition when someone new takes over Neil's current roles.

## FINANCE REPORT, OCTOBER 2021

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### Membership

Chair: Ryan Khan, Director of Finance

Ex-officio, non-voting members: Kyla Turner, Executive Director;

2021-22 members:

- Amir Sepahi
- Gerard Avellaneda Domeme
- Bruna Barusco
- Rohit Jain
- Jess Speedie
- Shahzeb Ijaz (Shaz)
- Carol Marinho-Ribeiro
- Adelle Jonker
- Saba Khosravi (Withdrawn)

### Overview of Work Completed

I started this role in mid-April 2021 and since then there were a few remaining issues due to having a non-communicative bookkeeper. She was unreachable and was having trouble getting work done, meaning that at the time our financial statements for fiscal year (FY) 2020/21 was not being worked on. From this point, it took several weeks from May to July to convince members of the UVIC board and management that we need to get a new bookkeeper to get our financial statements up-to-date for the month that we're in, as well as collect the financial statements for February and March 2021.

However, we obtained a new bookkeeper in August 2021. Although, by the time we got a bookkeeper on board, we were too late to have our audit done on time. The UVIC GSS had more serious problems, as it was difficult to ascertain where money was coming from and where it was going, as we had so many financial problems within the organization.

In November 2021, we were able to obtain our audited financial statements from our auditor – although, we are still behind on our financial statements and to date, we cannot account for our financial revenues and expenses on paper. Work is underway by our bookkeeper to get our financial statements updated, however this is taking a high amount of time.

In early November 2021, the Finance Committee held its first meeting, which should have been held in October, although there were severe timing issues. During our Finance Committee meeting, there was a Finance Committee Presentation that was provide to the members that covered the following: Introduction to the UVIC GSS and Committee; Purpose, Mission and Vision; Accounting Standards for Not-for-Profit Organizations; UVIC GSS Audited Financial Statements 2019/20; Audit; Budgeting Techniques; and, Work for 2020/21 (outlined below).

### Overview of Incomplete and Outstanding Work

There still needs to be a presentation of audited financial statements to the Graduate Representative Council (GRC), although this is forthcoming for November 23, 2021.

To support the Student Advocate Fund, the Bylaws & Policy Committee has put together a Student Advocate Fund to put together the Student Advocate Fund Terms of Reference, which still needs to be approved by the Finance Committee to be provided back to the UVIC GSS board for the GRC. Work is underway to review and make recommendations to the Student Advocate Fund Terms of Reference.

*GSS Annual General Meeting – Minutes*

Work is underway to gather data for the restaurant referendum, so that we can move forward on our calculations to determine the best course of action for the restaurant. To date, options include: (1) reopening the restaurant with all members subsidizing the restaurant through their fees; (2) reopening the restaurant with only some members subsidizing the restaurant through their fees; and, (3) closing the restaurant.

**Priorities for 2021-22**

The items below have been identified as priorities for the rest of the year that the Finance Committee will be working through:

UVIC GSS Audited Financial Statements – 2020/21

UVIC GSS Financial Statements – 2021/22

Restaurant Referendum

Student Graduate Fund

## STIPEND REVIEW COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT, OCTOBER 2021

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### MEMBERSHIP

Chair: Alix Galumbeck

Ex-officio, non-voting members: Kyla Turner, Executive Director

- Lingyu Jing
- Zackary Derrick
- Hannah Reid
- Eli Verdugo

### OVERVIEW OF WORK COMPLETED

Since March 2020, the Stipend Review Committee has met monthly to review the Executive Reports. The membership cap of the committee is now five.

The SRC conducted an audit of the duties performed by the different executive positions. The goal of the audit was to determine whether the duties should be reduced or if compensation for these positions could be increased. Ultimately, job descriptions for the executive committee were created. Moreover, individual 'top-offs' were given as additional compensation.

To streamline the review process, a new template was implemented for reports.

### PRIORITIES FOR 2021-22

The current committee will refine the job descriptions of the executive positions. We will continue to monitor hours, since there has been a trend in recent years of working significant overtime.

## STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT, OCTOBER 2021

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### Membership

Chair: Nahid Pourdolat Safari, GSS Director of Student Affairs

Ex-officio, non-voting members: Kyla Turner, Executive Director

2020-21 members:

- Talya Jespersom
- Michael Alliso
- Elyse Lowen
- Archita Adluri
- Lauren Peterson
- Aria Eini
- Gregory Gaube

2021-22 members:

- Rae Dias
- Ariya Eini
- Tahmineh Farnoud
- Dee Wong
- Wyatt Maddox
- Moronke Harris
- Maeve Milligan
- Zonke Guddah
- Echo Huang
- Michael Allison
- Gregory Gaube
- Chrissy Schellenberg
- David Serrano

### Overview of Work Completed

My term started considering that the previous student affairs committee has formed in Covid time and everything had shifted to online format which was completely new to the committee members. They have met regularly. Since October, there were some incomplete items from that committee that we have started to work on them and complete them.

The first concern came to student affairs committee around the tuition increase decision by the Board of Governors, as the international students' increased 3.75 percent in 2021-2022 school year, we have asked university to consider the negative results of these decisions on students' life and on their academic achievement.

In June, with discovery of unmarked graves at the sites of residential schools, student affairs committee devoted the monthly meeting to advocate who have been affected by this difficult situation and prepare a list of available options for students and their families both inside and outside of the university. This draft has been shared through GSS with students. The committee provided a list including mental health support systems, donation options and volunteer opportunities.

In 2019, the BC government announced that Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums would be eliminated by January 2020. However, while nearly all BC residents no longer pay MSP, the premiums were retained for

international post-secondary students, who actually saw an increase in cost from \$37.50 to \$75 per month. The GSS wrote a letter to the Ministry of Health in fall 2019 opposing the continuation of MSP premiums for international students, but so far the fee has not been changed. MSP premium costs was the most complained problem and student affairs committee has worked on a petition. In August, we developed a petition to the BC Legislative Assembly calling for the elimination of international student MSP premiums to circulate among members of the GSS, UVSS, GSSBC and other student societies. Besides, we have worked with GSSBC to coordinate advocacy for abolition of international student MSP premiums with other student societies. This item is nearly finished and it is not officially included in the list for 2021-2022 committee work.

#### OVERVIEW OF INCOMPLETE AND OUTSTANDING

A working group had worked on RA legal status subject last year and they have a made a draft ready to be delivered to the new president of university, President Kevin Hall. The draft was well written and could be effective, however with some changes through RA situations through CUPE4163, the draft was not fit the current situation and the whole process should be start over again. So due to lengthy process, in 2021 we postponed writing the letter to the president of the university and instead asked for the consultation with a lawyer before writing any letter. We are going to consult with past and present GFRA's to identify the current scope of the problem and the most appropriate and supported option to move forward.

#### PRIORITIES FOR 2021-2022

Student Affairs Committee has several ongoing and incomplete items that should move forward with new committee members. We are going to work in four working group on items including RA legal status, Housing crisis, UVic Committee Stipend, and Office Space problem.

Based on the decision of the board, UVic committee stipend advocacy will be done through Student Affairs Committee. Student representation on University committees is essential indecision making. Serving in some of the committees such as search and hiring committees, awards adjudication and appeal committees can be highly time-consuming. Therefore, the GSS supports a University policy that would provide stipends to student representatives on the most time-intensive committees to recognize their work. Housing crisis and office space have been included later in our list and hopefully will move forward in this educational year.

## SEMI-ANNUAL UPDATE ON THE EXTENDED HEALTH & DENTAL INSURANCE PLANS

Report made: November 23, 2021

Reporting on: March-September 2021

From: Kyla Turner, Executive Director

### PLAN BASICS

The GSS provides graduate students with access to an extended health and a dental insurance plans through Pacific Blue Cross. The plan includes benefits for prescription drugs, ambulance services, paramedical services, basic dental care, and travel insurance benefits.

All full time graduate students with at least 3.0 units or more are assessed plan fees automatically with their tuition once per academic year. Graduate students assessed with the fees with tuition had the option to opt-in their dependents at additional cost during the opt-in period. Part-time graduate students had the option to opt-in themselves and their dependents during the opt-in enrollment period with separate processes and payment through the GSS.

Members' health and dental plan fees cover the premiums paid to the insurer as well as the cost for the GSS to administer the plan.

### PLAN ADMINISTRATION

The GSS said a fond farewell to Mindy Jiang, our Health and Dental Coordinator since December 2019 in August 2020. Mindy left the GSS to pursue her own graduate studies. We wish her all the best and thank her for seeing our organization through the challenges of the pandemic. Mindy went above and beyond to create resource lists for members looking for supports on issues as diverse as mental health counselling, domestic violence, food insecurity, and telehealth during her tenure at the GSS. She was an exemplary member of our team and centred the wellbeing of our members in all her work.

We have also been lucky enough to welcome a new Health and Dental Coordinator, Glenda Beecham, in August 2021. Glenda joins us as a UVic alumna and current student. She has already proven to be a thoughtful, diligent coordinator and we are so happy to have her as part of our team. Welcome, Glenda!

### REFERENDUM

In June 2021, the GSS hosted a referendum on the GSS Extended Health and Dental fees. The referendum was required in order for the GSS to set appropriate fee and coverage levels for the September 2021 – August 2022 insurance plans.

In Spring 2021, the GSS's insurance broker, Aon, negotiated with Pacific Blue Cross on our behalf to get the best price for our health insurance. We expect the prices to go up a little every year with inflation. This year, insurance costs have risen sharply across the board. This is in part due to the increased cost of PPE and sanitization supplies and personnel needed for all medical and dental services under COVID-19. Unfortunately, as these costs cannot be billed to primary insurance, the costs are passed on the secondary insurance plans, like the GSS Extended Health and Dental plans.

The initial quote from Pacific Blue Cross was a 10% increase in the cost of insurance for the same level of coverage. Aon negotiated that down to about 6% at the highest. We knew that that level of increase may not be affordable for all our members. Therefore, we worked with Aon to create three options for how the GSS could keep our insurance affordable without losing too much coverage. The fee/coverage options were:

1. Significantly decrease dental coverage in order to keep fees stable
2. Increase fees by 6% to keep all health and dental coverage the same
3. Slightly decrease dental and paramedical coverage and increase fees by 3%

The GSS posted an FAQ to our website and hosted a townhall meeting to answer member questions about these changes. Engagement from our membership was strong. Option 2 passed with 75.3% of voting members supporting an increase to fees in order to maintain coverage, and 73.1% of voting members supporting option 2 over option 3. Therefore, the GSS fees for health and dental insurance have increased by 6% for the 2021-22 academic year.

We recognize the need to take further action in the years and months to come in order to provide our members with comprehensive, affordable health and dental insurance. We thank all members who voted in the referendum.

## ENROLMENT

As of October 15, 2021, there were 1930 students enrolled on the plan. 120 family units, and 220 individual dependents, have opted in to the GSS Extended Health and Dental Plans.

## MEMBER SUPPORT

Staff work directly with our membership to answer questions about our plans and to resolve any problems they counter. Dominant issues from March to September 2021 were:

## REFERENDUM AND FEE INCREASE

As mentioned above, the GSS posted a detailed FAQ about the referendum on our website and hosted a townhall meeting on June 8<sup>th</sup> about the available options. We were happy to see members engaged in this important issue and asking questions to make the best choice for themselves and their colleagues.

## COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to impact our Health and Dental plans administration, particularly by restricting travel for international students unable to come to Canada. Our Coordinator continues to work with UVic to ensure students receive up to date information regarding travel restrictions and insurance.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND STUDENTS STUDYING OUTSIDE CANADA

International students continue to be impacted by travel restrictions: increased testing, vaccination, and documentation requirements and the need self isolation. The GSS continues to work with the International Centre for Students (ICS) to provide students with the information they need to travel to Canada or travel outside Canada for the students studying abroad.

We have worked with ICS recently to provide updated messaging for students who were vaccinated outside Canada, or who were unable to receive a vaccine before arriving in Canada, to ensure that they could access the BC Vaccine Passport and UVic vaccine self-declaration portal.

## APPEALS

Graduate students can appeal decision about their eligibility for opt ins and opt outs of the plan. Appeals are heard by graduate student volunteers who serve on the Appeals Committee. The Committee includes members from the GSS Executive Board and Grad Council, supported by the Health & Dental Coordinator. They meet monthly, receive training on the appeal process and insurance rules twice annually. Once decision

are determined, the committee chair (Director of Services), works with the Health and Dental Coordinator to notify the appellants and implement the decisions.

The Appeal Committee heard 3 cases from March 2021 to September 2021.

The GSS Staff would like to share their appreciation for the 2020-21 Appeals Committee for their extensive work throughout an incredibly busy year. Thank you to all members of the Appeals Committee for their care, time, and consideration to the important issues facing our members.

2020-21 Appeals Committee members:

Mindy Jiang	Daniel Gudino	Jacob Hunt	Erin Donald	Mel Granley	Maeve Milligan
Glenda Beecham	Adair Ng	Nahid Pourdolat Safari	Hannah Reid	Tiffany Kuo	

## FINANCIAL OUTLOOK FOR THE PLAN

### RETENTION ACCOUNTING

The GSS Extended Health and Dental Plans use retention accounting. A model of insurance contract that allows the GSS to share plan profits with the insurer without the risk of fully funding our own plan costs. The retention accounting contract requires us to maintain a Claims Fluctuation Reserve (CFR), calculated at 15% of total paid claims. Any profits above the reserve are available to the GSS to use in maintaining the plan. Since the shift to retention accounting, the GSS has been slowly building the CFR, and at August 31, 2019 the required CFR was achieved for both the Extended Health and Dental Plan for the first time.

### CONTRACT RENEWAL

The GSS renews the Extended Health and Dental Plan contract with the insurer (Pacific Blue Cross) annually. The broker, AON, negotiates the renewal and advises the Executive Board throughout the process. We will keep the membership informed throughout the negotiation process regarding potential costs of the Health and Dental Insurance plans for the next academic year.

### SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2021 SEMESTER PREVIEW

The GSS will provide a full report of the plan use at the Semi-Annual General Meeting in March 2022. However, this September we had a much higher than average number of opt-out requests. Prior to the June 2020 referendum, only full-time, on-campus students were assessed for health and dental fees with their tuition. In order to keep as many members as possible insured when UVic went online for the 2020-21 academic year and to maintain our coverage costs as a larger group plan, the GSS held a referendum to assess all full-time students for health and dental insurance. This fundamentally changed the enrolment period workload for GSS staff. Prior to the pandemic, we'd have ~1800-2000 students assessed and ~200 opt outs, this year we assessed ~2900 students and opted out ~900. The primary reason to opt out was alternative coverage (through employer, partner, or parent). To a lesser extent, international students who could not arrive in Canada opted out as well, but in far fewer numbers.

As we are still seeing the effects of COVID-19, I recommend examining the auto-assessment and opt-out rates in September 2022 to ensure that the spike in opt-outs was not a COVID-related spike. However, if opt-outs remain over 500 in the Fall term, I recommend taking the membership to referendum again to review the eligibility criteria for automatic health and dental assessment to return to full-time, on-campus students

being automatically assessed and encouraging all other members who don't have coverage to opt-in to our plan. This would decrease the administrative workload for our staff and members at the start of the academic year. However, the GSS will need to ensure we have robust communication strategies with distance members before considering a referendum that would require distance students to opt *in* to the health and dental insurance plans.

## CONCLUSION

The GSS Extended Health and Dental Insurance Plans remain a popular service for our members. The Health and Dental Coordinator continue to be busy throughout the year supporting students with questions about the plan and administering the opt in/opt out process. As of October 15, 2021, the plans are financial stable, but the GSS remains mindful that enrolment changes and increasing costs of healthcare are a risk area for the plans moving forward.