

Semi-Annual Update to the Membership on the Operations and Services of the GSS

Report made: March 25, 2025

Reporting on: October 2024-February 2025

From: Kyla Turner, Executive Director

Overview

As with my [last report](#), I'll start this one with a huge thanks to the volunteers, GRC reps, board members, and staff who have continued to grow and nourish the GSS's community this year. The GSS is run by and for students. We wouldn't be here without you.

I'd also like to kick this report off by saying that I feel like the 2024-25 academic year has been the most successful for the GSS since my arrival in 2020. A huge part of the praise for our organizational productivity this year goes to our Board. Thank you, Rosemary Webb, Jitendra Palaparty, and Maggie Lawton for joining the board from GRC (or previous short-term board stints) this year! I hope everyone will join me in not only offering thanks to but also the fondest of farewells to our multi-term Chair and Director of Finance. Samuel Fielder joined the GRC in 2022-23 before being heavily recruited onto the board as our Director of Finance for 2023-24 and 2024-25. For someone who wasn't certain he wanted to run for the board at first, Sam has proven himself one of the most productive, insightful, and optimistic board members I've ever had the pleasure of working with. We can all thank Sam for the revisions to our financial policies, improving our purchasing procedures, and even setting up and taking down the Grad House patio each year! Wyatt Maddox joined the GRC in 2021-22, served as Director of Services in 2022-23, and has served two consecutive terms as Chair. From my first meaningful interaction with Wyatt (at a virtual movie night where Wyatt, as an Events Committee member, fought through a million tech issues and the only instance of zoom bombers in GSS history to make sure grad students could chill out and watch Encanto), he has been problem-solver supreme. His leadership over the GSS has allowed us to flourish into an effective advocacy-focused community-hub on campus. He has set the standard for all future GSS Chairs and leaves us with massive shoes to fill. Thank you, Wyatt and Sam, for showing the GSS immense dedication and support and rebuilding us from the ground up post-pandemic.

During this reporting period, Sam has completed one of the major tasks required to modernize GSS services and procedures by restructuring our fund accounting to significantly simplify the GSS's finances and reduce bookkeeping/accounting labour and costs. Sam and Wyatt have also completed work on the bylaw amendments that would open the door for grant funded programming to happen at the GSS, which we will be voting on at this SAGM. Following the re-structure of the board, the restructure of our finances was a necessary and timely step to increase our organizational effectiveness.

During this reporting period, Sam was also instrumental in preparing the GSS for Collective Bargaining with the BC Union Workers Union, which represents all non-management GSS staff. We were able to settle on a fair and comprehensive Collective Agreement that will continue to support the GSS and our staff from 2025-28. I will also thank here the members of the union's bargaining committee, Irfan Tanveer, Petranella Daviel, Molly Heaney-Corns, and Mel Mendoza. Thank you for taking your duty to

represent your colleagues seriously and working with Management to find a successful path forward for our workplace.

In my last report, I noted the fund overhaul and a website redesign as long-term goals for the organization. I'm happy to announce that in addition to all the financial projects undertaken, Sam has taken a leadership role in the full re-design of the GSS website. We hired Caorda Web Solutions in January and they are currently working on the re-design and re-launch of the GSS website. Our aim is to more accessible and relevant for our members. We will provide an update to membership about this change as soon as possible.

Outside of effusive my praise for Wyatt and Sam, I will note that this reporting period has seen yet more growth for the Grad House restaurant, as we have surpassed our revenue targets (almost) every single month this year (Darn you, February snow days, for shutting us down!)

After three years of very significant organizational change, Management is planning a slower year in 2025-26 to allow us to assess how the board, fund, and service restructuring is working and what needs to be tweaked. Coming up in the next few years for the GSS, to continue our transition to a community building and advocacy focused organization, will be, perhaps, a constitutional change to enshrine advocacy work as one of the most important cores of the GSS for the next 10+ years.

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 full-time, on-campus students have comprehensive health and dental insurance for the duration of their studies. Additionally, starting in 2025, there are new BC Education Quality Assurance (EQA) measures for public post-secondary institutes enrolling international students. One EQA measure is that all public PSIs must have a mechanism to ensure that all international students in programs of more than 15 weeks must have access to comprehensive health insurance in BC.

For more information on the GSS Extended Health and Dental insurance, including coverage rates and referenda results/plan changes, please check out [our website here](#) and the semi-annual health and dental update as part of the AGM reports.

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

Term	Opt In	Opt Out
May-Aug 2024	9	0 – May start students are not assessed this fee
Sept-Dec 2024*	125 students, 176 dependents	412
Jan-Apr 2025**	3 students, 8 dependents	54

*This was provisionally reported at the 2024 AGM, but have since been updated with the final numbers for the term.

**These numbers were last updated January 31, 2025. The deadline to opt in or out was January 22.

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 fees. 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](#).

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

Term	Opt In	Opt Out
May-August	33	48
September-December*	59	65
January-April**	66	55

*This was provisionally reported at the 2024 AGM, but have since been updated with the final numbers for the term.

**These numbers were last updated January 31, 2025. The deadline to opt in or out was January 22.

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](#).

From April 1, 2024 to February 19, 2025, the GSS has distributed \$8910 of a budgeted \$12000 in Department Grant funding. Our thanks and congratulations to Psychology, Biology, Pacific and Asian Studies, Physics and Astronomy, Social Dimensions of Health, History, Writing, Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, Environmental Studies, Biochemistry and Microbiology, Art History and Visual Studies, Anthropology, SLLC, Medical Science/Neuroscience, and English for their applications! Projects supported this year ranged from departmental Townhall meetings for grad students, escape room outings, conferences and symposia, department level graduate student unions' operations, and holiday/end-of-term parties.

While applications remain open for projects that will occur before March 31, 2025, I can report now that we've see 74% of funds used this year and will be decreasing funds available to the Department Grant for the 2025-26 fiscal year as a result. After three years of seeing total distributed funds average at \$10,250, we are aligning our budget with this amount. We've budgeted \$11,000 for 2025-26.

Year	2021-22*	2022-23**	2023-24	2024-25
Budgeted amount	\$9,000	\$12,250	\$17,500	\$12,000
Distributed	\$1,800	\$11,482	\$10,350	\$8910
% Used	20%	94%	59%	74% provisional

Modo Car Sharing Service

The GSS maintains a group membership with Modoo Car Sharing Service. Modoo 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 Modoo group plan.

As of February 2025, 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, which offer members an inviting study and dining space. We strive to keep food affordable, nutritious, and delicious. The Grad House hosts events such as trivia nights, Winter Pride, and many other GSS events.

During this reporting period, the Grad House hosted the Welcome Back BBQ, an Ice Cream Socials, the January Pancake breakfasts, 3 drag shows, sex toy bingo, queer pitch-your-friend dating event, several maker markets, and monthly trivia nights.

In October 2024, the GSS hosted the second annual Graduate Student Appreciation Week (GSAW) with funding from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the VP-Research and Innovation's office. While our wonderful board and Events Coordinator did the organizational work of GSAW, in the Food and Beverage Services section of this report, I'd like to highlight the work of volunteers and Grad House employees for their work making the pub nights and Excellence in Graduate Research Symposium fun and well-run on the day of the event.

Last, I'd like to report on the financial health of the Grad House. As you will see in our audit report at the AGM, we exceeded revenue projections for April 1, 2023-March 31, 2024 by some 30%. In the second complete year of operation, from September 1, 2023-August 31, 2024, the Grad House had a revenue close to \$390K, which continues to exceed revenue expectations. My thanks especially to Jun and Maddie for creating food and drink menus that keep people coming back and to Neil Barney for his excellent leadership over the Grad House.

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. Side Project/David Clode Room maintains a library of board games that members are encouraged to enjoy. Room bookings during this reporting period include student study space/meetings, CUPE union meetings, language learning groups, and campus partner meetings.

During this reporting period, we've seen a standing booking for the Board Game Club, campus union meetings, Knitting circles, and many more. We've also hosted multiple defenses, naloxone training, a clothing swap, plant swap, book swap, cookie decorating and more this year!

Advocacy Support/Student Cases

GSS office 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
2. Degree progress
3. Discrimination and harassment around the university
4. Funding agreements

5. Program leaves of absence
6. Mental health crises

Staffing

The GSS typically maintains an office staff of two full-time managers and 4 part-time unionized positions. Over this reporting period, we have had no turn over in the front office. Irfan, Petranella, and Abby continue to be the face of the GSS on a day-to-day basis and we are lucky to have them.

Additionally, our Food and Beverage Services team includes many individual staff members ranging from casual to full time in positions including Head Cook, Line Cooks, Dishwashers, Server/Bartenders, and Front of House Coordinator. Welcome to the following new hires:

- Alynne Sinnema
- Kenno Legario
- Talietha Sangha
- Chen Wang

We are also so happy to welcome back Jackie Rutherford and Choy Suson!

At the time of writing, our Head Cook position is posted. After re-opening the Grad House and leading our kitchen for 2.5 years, Junichi Lariago resigned his position to pursue the next step of his post-graduation journey. We wish him all the best and will remember him every time we munch on delicious stir fries, sisigs, and chicken abodes in the Grad House. Thanks for building up our kitchen, Jun! You will be so missed.

As mentioned above, the GSS went into Collective Bargaining with the BC Union Workers Union on February 18 to set our 2025-28 Collective Agreement. My thanks to Sam and Neil for all their work in supporting the Management bargaining committee in revising budgets, job descriptions, and more to ensure that our workforce can be effective and well supported in their work. And thanks again to Irfy, Petri, Molly, and Mel for serving as the Union's bargaining committee.

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. Board training onboarding in April 2025
2. Annual planning for the 2025-26 Board
3. Summer projects planning for the office staff

Conclusion

The GSS continues to host services that have been much beloved, utilized, and supported by members. We will, as always, 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.