

2024-25 Executive Board Report

March 03, 2025 SAGM

The GSS Executive Board consists of five elected graduate students and the Executive Director as a non voting member. This year, four Executive Board members were acclaimed in the March 2024 election, and the Chair was elected through democratic process.

Membership

Chair: Wyatt Maddox

2023-24 members:

- Director of External Relations: Jitendra Palaparty
- Director of Finance: Samuel Fielder
- Director of Internal Relations: Rosemary Webb
- Director of Student Life: Maggie Lawton
- Kyla Turner, Executive Director, ex-officio, non-voting

Duties

The Executive Board is guided by the purposes of the GSS as stated in our Constitution and Bylaws. The GSS' purposes are: a) To represent the interests of the membership in a democratic manner in matters pertaining to education and the welfare of graduate students; b) To promote the principle and practice of graduate student representation at all levels of decision making at the University of Victoria and on all agencies or other bodies that deliberate on the affairs of graduate students; c) To promote cultural, intellectual, and recreational activities among the members; and d) To promote the academic and social welfare of its members through the provision of services.

Overview of Work Completed

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

As the Director of External Relations, Jitendra Palaparty has taken on important issues and consistently raises concerns, particularly for groups experiencing inequities. She participates in a variety of committees across campus and within the greater community to further the voices of graduate students in issues of housing, transportation, and community-building. Jitendra jointly chairs the Advocacy and Campaigns Committee with the Director of Internal Relations. Her network of connections across campus have improved our communications, partnerships, and supports.

Samuel Fielder, Director of Finance, has overseen the financial stability and security of the GSS with consistently prompt responses and action. Sam oversees the Personnel Committee, Appeals Committee, and Finance Committee. His work ensures that members and staff are treated fairly and that the Services offered by the GSS and our associated organizations are followed as per our bylaws. His dedication to the role has kept the GSS finances balanced and organized. Sam has recently completed the budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year with exceptional diligence and in close collaboration with the Executive Director. He has guided and supported the Finance Committee through reform of our financial policies to protect the longevity of the organization. Sam participated in the annual performance review for the Executive Director, participated in collective bargaining with the GSS staff and their union, and took a leadership role in the negotiations and referendum around switching health insurance brokers.

The Director of Internal Relations position held by Rosemary Webb focuses on advocacy within the campus community by supporting students to take on issues and leading campaigns. Rosemary sits on a variety of committees to share the concerns of graduate students with organizations focused on campus-based matters. This role has required Rosemary to be vocal, inquisitive, and adaptable with a significant number of difficult changes both on campus and globally during their tenure. They have worked diligently to advocate for accessibility and equity on campus. They have been successful in negotiating relationships between campus organizations such as the Faculty Association, UVic Executive, the Centre for Accessible Learning, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Maggie Lawton, Director of Student Life, coordinates the massive workload of organizing and conducting events at the GSS by chairing the Events Committee. With a robust committee, Maggie suffers only from the potential of exhaustion with the countless ideas and support her leadership has garnered. Her organization and coordination ensure that events are planned well ahead of time and executed with ease for volunteers and staff alike. Her work is vital to connecting with graduate students and ensuring that there are opportunities beyond the academic in the time spent on campus.

As Chair of the GSS, I (Wyatt Maddox) have approached leadership as guiding voice with capacity to listen, engage in discourse, and support the directors through their roles. I actively keep my finger on the pulse of events and information that could or does impact GSS members to address issues as proactively as possible. As Chair of the Bylaw and Policy Committee, I led policy and bylaw reform to streamline and guide the organization. As chair, I have harnessed relationships with University Executives, government officials at all levels, and organizations in and around campus to ensure the needs of graduate students are communicated and prioritized in decision-making processes. I have been actively involved in the Faculty of Graduate Studies committee for Graduate Supervision Policy Review, advocating for more graduate student voices at the table. I currently sit on the Appointment Committee for the President and Vice Chancellor of the university, ensuring that graduate student feedback is considered in the reappointment process. As Chair, I provide support, information, and guidance to the Executive Directors, GSS Managers, and GSS Staff to ensure they are each able to reach their goals within their positions.

Kyla Turner is the Executive Director of GSS and continues to be the exceptional leader needed to guide the GSS forward. Her tireless work on behalf of graduate students ensures that all benefit through her focus on equity-based advocacy. Their work is indispensable.

Annual Plan

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

- Fostering Student-Centric Partnerships
 - Improve inter-organizational relations
 - Increase member access to and awareness of resources, information, and advocacy
 - Connect graduate students with local and broader communities
- Advocating for graduate student support & well-being
 - Promote equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-colonial practices and policies
 - Enhance graduate student quality of life and academic experience
 - Magnify and empower of graduate student voices
- Facilitating personal & professional development opportunities
 - Strengthen organizational capacity through volunteer empowerment
 - Encourage an active, engaged, and well-rounded community
 - Ensure development and growth of our members
- Providing access to on & off-campus resources
 - Improve graduate student wellness
 - Better use of underutilized resources
 - A positive grad school experience

Internal Issues

The Graduate Students' Society as an organization shifts and with the election of new Board Members, the attitudes of Graduate Student population, and the setting of academia in a local, provincial, national, and global context. As such, changes within the organization are necessary to maintain relevance, accessibility, and balance.

Some key issues that have include:

- Move to StudentCare
 - Changing health insurance providers reduces individual costs and removes blackout periods for existing members
- Bylaw changes
 - Bylaw 4.4 & 14.3a to clarify budgetary accounts, including those increasing by CPI
 - Bylaw 14.4 to broaden funding avenues
- Financial restructuring
 - To reduce the number of separate accounts for improved transparency and accountability and limit the cost of future accounting expenditures
 - Policy reform has begun this process