

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

Report made: October 28, 2025

Reporting on: March-September 2025

From: Kyla Turner, Executive Director

## Overview and Highlights

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.

Since my last report, we have completed several long-term projects. We launched a completely re-designed website. My thanks to Petranella Daviel, GSS Events and Communications Coordinator, for leading that project, along with Caorda Web Solutions for all their work. The re-design has received a lot of positive feedback for style and seems to be much easier to navigate for users.

We have fully re-developed our financial policies over the use of restricted funds. You may notice a difference in how the audit is presented this year. Previously, we reported what was effectively an audit of each of our major funds: the Operating Fund (main GSS account), Food and Beverage Fund (Grad House), and Health and Dental Fund (student insurance). While having this level of detail was useful for determining which programs required the most financial support (a subsidized lower-cost restaurant, obviously), the format of the audit also deemed all transfers between funds as debts one fund owes to the other. Rather than continuing to report on "debts" the GSS owes itself, we are now presenting an audit that focuses on the overall health and wellbeing of the organizations (without 1. the cost of auditing each fund separately and 2. reporting our audits as if the GSS is somehow the unholy trinity of three businesses that are simultaneously a single business.)

In this reporting period, we have also made significant headway on the proposed fee referenda for Spring 2026. At the time of writing, we intend to take the Student Advocate, University 101 and World University Services Canada (WUSC – undergrad student refugee program) fees to referendum for reduction or elimination; and the Constituency Group fee for a significant increase. As we will make clear throughout the referendum process, University 101 services have ended, the Student Advocate fee does not have a stable or regular use, and WUSC supports exclusively undergraduate refugee students, with graduate students paying double the fee rate for this last program compared to their undergrad peers. By comparison, the Society for Students with a Disability, Students of Colour Collective, UVic Pride, the Gender Empowerment Movement (GEM), and the Native Students Union are some of the most frequently used campus services among GSS members. All these services fall under the umbrella of "Constituency Groups." Graduate students current fund these services at about 10% the rate of undergrads: our fee is only \$1.33/term for all five services.

Perhaps the biggest change this reporting period is the change over of our Extended Health and Dental insurance plans to a new broker. Following a March 2025 referendum, we've joined the biggest student insurance network in Canada, Alumo (formerly Studentcare). GSS members can now access services

related to their health insurance through the Alumo office in the SUB. The change over saved members more than 10% of GSS Health and GSS Dental fees for the 2025-26 academic year.

## Individual Service Reports

### Food and Beverage Services (Grad House)

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 too-many-to-count year-end parties and bookings to count across March-May. We reduced our hours on May 1 for Summer. While demand has been slower this summer compared to the academic year, we still expect to meet our revenue targets for the year. We remained above our monthly revenue targets on average across April-August.

More recently, the Grad House hosted the Welcome Back BBQ, Pancake Breakfast, and Ice Cream Social as part of the GSS orientation event schedule. My thanks to the Grad House staff team and our many event volunteers for kick starting this academic year with a bang!

Forthcoming in November, the GSS will host the third annual Graduate Student Appreciation Week (GSAW) with funding from the Faculty of Graduate Studies. While our wonderful board and Events Coordinator do the organizational work of GSAW, in the Food and Beverage Services section of this report, I'd like to highlight our 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. I hope to see all of you out to GSAW next month!

### 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 universities must have a mechanism to ensure that all international students in programs of more than 15 weeks have access to comprehensive health insurance in BC. Our program allows UVic to meet this requirement.

As mentioned above, in March 2025, 76.2% of voting members opted to move our insurance brokerage to Alumo. I want to thank our previous broker, Aon, for their many years of dedicated service and support. In particular, Harrison Redpath, our Aon representative, was a joy to work with.

Alumo is the largest student insurance network in Canada, and was better able to leverage their total student society population size to obtain a slightly more competitive premium rate for the current academic year. Our insurance provider remains unchanged for basic health and dental: Pacific Blue Cross. Our gender affirming care (GAC) has move to Greenshield, Alumo's preferred GAC provider. Additionally, our travel insurance is moving to Securian Canada for the same reason. For more information, see the Extended Health and Dental report on the 2025 AGM agenda.

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

Term	Opt In	Opt Out
Jan-Apr 2025*	3 students, 8 dependents	54
May-Aug 2025	4	0 – May start students are not assessed this fee
Sept-Dec 2025**	TBD	376 from dental 386 from health

\*This was provisionally reported at the 2025 SAGM, but have since been updated with the final numbers for the term.

\*\*These numbers were last updated October 10, 2025. The deadline to opt in or out was September 22. At the time of writing, Alumo had not confirmed all opt ins with the GSS.

## 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
January-April*	65	55
May-August	22	49
September-December**	91	94

\*This was provisionally reported at the 2025 AGM, but have since been updated with the final numbers for the term.

\*\*These numbers were last updated October 10, 2025. The deadline to opt in or out was September 22.

## GSS Grants

The GSS collects and distributed funds for several grants/bursaries around campus. There is one bursary administered by Student Awards and Financial Aid (SAFA), two grants administered by the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS), and one that is administered by the GSS. The Student-Parent Child Care Bursary are administered through SAFA, who reports to the GSS annually at fiscal year end (March.) FGS administers the Conference Travel Grant and Distance Travel Grant. 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 March 31, 2025, the GSS has distributed 100% 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.

Due to a significant slow down in applications for January-March 2025, the Finance Committee, with consultation with the Board and staff, reduced the total funding available for the 2025-26 fiscal year to \$11,000. This is more in line with historical uses of this fund, which have been:

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	\$12,000
% Used	20%	94%	59%	100%

\*COVID related closures and public health orders prevented students from planning social and academic events. \*\*We piloted having two funding streams this year, but one stream was severely underutilized.

**Modo Car Sharing Service**

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

As of September 2025, we have, for the first time in one of these reports, MODO SPOTS AVAILABLE! Sign up at the office! My thanks to Petri and Irfy in the front office for increasing our regular check ins with members on our Modò plan to ensure that everyone on our account is actively using the service. This has allowed more GSS members to obtain access to this service.

**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 naloxone training, a clothing swap, plant swap, book swap, bird feeder making, painting and potting planters, 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. Program leaves of absence
2. Graduate supervision
3. Degree progress
4. Funding
5. Discrimination and harassment around the university
6. Mental health crises

**Staffing**

The GSS typically maintains an office staff of two full-time managers, 1 full-time and 2 part-time unionized positions. Over this reporting period, we have had no turn over in the front office. Petranella, Irfan, and Abby continue to be the face of the GSS on a day-to-day basis and we are lucky to have them.

As it is their third September all working together, the start of this academic year was particularly smooth for service provision. Thanks, team, for all you do!

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:

- Julie Wolfe
- Shawn Jung
- Marjorie Arcayan
- Sam Steeves

We are also so delighted to announce that we have had two promotions since my last report. Bianca Razon, who has been with us as a Line Cook since January 2023, has taken the reign in the kitchen as our Head Cook. Bianca brings new ideas and fresh flavours to the kitchen. Our heartfelt thanks to Junichi Lariego, who returned temporarily this summer to the Head Cook role until we were able to hire Bianca. We wish Jun all the best and will remember him every time we munch on delicious stir fries, sisigs, and chicken abodes in the Grad House. In addition, the venerable Maddie Stinson, Front of House Coordinator, left her role to pursue her PhD in the Maritimes. James Colalillo has taken over and, personally, I'm looking forward to seeing how our punny drink names evolve under his leadership. James has been working as a bartender/server here since October 2024. The two Grad House leaders who re-opened the restaurant post-COVID have passed their torches to experienced, innovative, creative hands.

I'd also like to thank and welcome two new union representatives in this report. Petri Daviel and Jacqui Rutherford are now our union stewards. Thank you for your volunteerism that keeps our workplace safe, inclusive, and supportive. We've already had our first Labour Management Committee meeting with these two wonderful stewards to address our staff's needs and to foster our organizational growth. The GSS, as always, remains adamantly pro-union.

### 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. Overseeing the transition to Alumo for health and dental insurance (September-December)
2. GRC recruiting and onboarding in September-November 2025
3. The Spring 2026 fee referendum
4. Annual board elections in February-March 2026

### Conclusion

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