

# 2025-26 Board Report

October 28, 2025 AGM

## Membership

The GSS Executive Board consists of five elected graduate students and the Executive Director as a non-voting member. This year, the Chair and Directors External and Finance were acclaimed in the March 2025 election, and the Directors Internal and Student Life were elected through democratic process.

Chair: Rosemary Webb

2025-26 members:

- Director of External Relations: Jitendra Palaparty
  - Interim Director of External Relations (July 22-September 15): Wyatt Maddox
- Director of Finance: Maggie Lawton
- Director of Internal/University Relations: Sarah Roberts
- Director of Student Life: Asma Noureen
- Kyla Turner, Executive Director, ex-officio, non-voting

## Duties of the Committee

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

In addition to our bi-weekly board meetings, I have met with Directors one-on-one on a monthly or bi-weekly basis as necessary, to provide support, strategize together, and keep Directors on track with assigned work. I believe this has helped me understand which aspects of each position require more support, or which projects board members have taken on may need more time and energy. In these meetings I try to both commend the Directors on specific aspects of the work that they are doing while also suggesting areas for improvement.

Jitendra Palaparty continues to keep the Board well apprised of ongoing and upcoming concerns from the committees she sits on, as well as student groups around campus and beyond. Since she was in this role for 2024-25 as well, her connections are strong and she has been able to engage in long-term conversations with many of our stakeholders. Jitendra is a keen advocate for international students and updates the rest of the Board on ever-changing federal regulations. She has been working to improve communication between different offices at UVic around student registration, particularly for international students with accommodations for part-time study. Jitendra has worked to ensure GSS

BC (the coalition of grad student societies at institutions around BC) remain in contact with each other, and follows up with the other component Universities to share information and ensure alignment in advocacy strategies e.g. to the provincial government. Thanks to Jitendra's connection with the student body, she is invaluable in disseminating information to students around campus and getting participation and feedback from members.

Wyatt Maddox was our interim Director External while Jitendra was on leave. Wyatt helped the Board prepare for September orientations and events. He helped Sarah clarify some of the Advocacy & Campaigns Committee work plans she had created over the summer, as well as the accompanying task log. Wyatt also provided a fresh set of eyes on our Annual Plan (as he has been involved in the creation of three annual plans over his Board terms!) which was much appreciated. Thank you Wyatt for stepping in!

Maggie Lawton has done an incredible job transitioning roles from Director of Student Life last year; the torch was passed so smoothly that I feel like she needs very little input from me. She is great to work with in our monthly Management-Chair-Finance meetings (with Kyla and Neil), and always able to fill me in on any Finance information I am unfamiliar with as it's one of the few GRC committees I have not sat on. Maggie has been steadfastly attempting to get financial and demographic information from the constituency groups we support through GSS fees to prepare for our upcoming fee referendum, which is intended to better align the fees we give to constituency groups with their individual needs as well as graduate student usage of the constituency group services/supports. I am excited to see the fee referendum continue to take shape! Maggie has been a great mentor to Asma, including in GSAW preparations with Sarah and myself. It has been a relief to have members of the Board who have served in multiple roles, to aid onboarding and continuation of strong service.

Sarah Roberts gracefully balances work of vice-chair on both Advocacy and Campaigns and Appeals Committees, while of course dedicating time, energy, and thought to the many UVic committees she sits on. She is a trustworthy voice on said UVic committees, from her years of experience on the Graduate Representative Council (GRC). Sarah completed significant work streamlining Advocacy and Campaigns goals and campaigns through structured work plans and a task log for committee members, to ensure that they have clear understanding of the work expected of them. Sarah took the time to format our Annual Plan beautifully and I think the document is clear and compelling thanks to her work. Sarah has built and fostered new partnerships with folks at UVic, including the Graduate Studies Career Educator Samantha Ogradnik, and the UVic Innovation Centre (both of whom will be involved in the Graduate Student Appreciation Week, keep an eye out!). Sarah's long history of involvement with the GSS means that she understands the context of many of our decisions and discussions when they stem from long-term conversations/issues, and she is a great help in explaining that context to newer Board or GRC members.

Asma Noureen continues to bring fresh ideas for events to appeal to various members of our membership and community, and is always willing to try something new to see how it goes. She has built and maintained strong connections with partners to offer students a wide variety of opportunities, often working closely with Sarah, particularly in preparation of Graduate Student Appreciation Week. Asma seeks ways to develop professionally in order to better serve our membership, for example doing a Community Learning Program with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. Asma is curious in all we do and keen to learn more about the GSS' history, and is sure to ask questions when she needs to. Many of her questions also make me think of things in different ways, so they truly are helpful to everyone!

Kyla Turner is an incredibly valued guiding light in everything the Board does. They are a key lead on advocacy around harm reduction, letter-writing to the provincial Government, and have been very vocal about housing advocacy (and encouraged our membership to be vocal as well!). We have very recently seen direct impacts from that housing advocacy work! Kyla has guided the Board and staff through the change to Alumo and all that entails, with more patience than most would probably have. She remains patient when I ask her the same question five times and will give me the answer in five different ways if I need it, which I am grateful for. In onboarding our Board this year, which consists of three returning members and two new directors, Kyla made sure to provide appropriate and relevant information and training to all members, which I recognize may have been challenging to balance. It has been a great pleasure working so closely with Kyla through the first half of my term as Chair, and experiencing the rollercoaster that is this work.

## Annual Plan

In creating our Annual Plan, the Board identified three key areas of focus: Connection & Recognition, Access & Support, and Engagement & Empowerment. Within Connection & Recognition our goals are to continue a strong feedback loop with our members, and celebrate our successes. For Access & Support, we are addressing affordability where we can, trying to improve low-barrier disability supports, and equipping Teaching Assistants with the tools they need to support accessible learning. Our intentions for Engagement & Empowerment are to enrich members' experiences in a variety of skill-building areas, and increase engagement in events and services for all graduate students.

We have had very strong engagement with membership in the first month and a half of the semester – there has been great turnout at events, and the Board all delivered orientations incredibly well. Huge kudos to everyone involved in the September rush, including our staff and our volunteers! Our Fee Referendum planning is well underway thanks to Maggie (as mentioned above), and we will have more to communicate to membership in the coming months. We of course have Petranella Daviel, our Events and Communications Coordinator, to thank for highlighting successes in our socials – including recent housing advocacy news! The Board is also trying to be better about celebrating the work we do at GRC meetings and in talking to students at various events. I think it's been a learning process for us all to not be so humble, but we are definitely learning.

## Overview of Incomplete and Outstanding Work

Some of the areas of our Annual Plan deserve more or continued attention as we move into the second half of our terms as an Executive Board. These include advocacy around the BC Graduate Scholarship and the Graduate Student Tuition Income Offset Plan fee, which have both been on our docket for a while but not received much dedicated work yet. I also hope that in the next six months we put more energy into connecting with the Centre for Accessible Learning, Learning and Teaching Innovation, and CUPE around TA/Lab Instructor training and support. Finally, I would like to see us explore more professional development partnered events/workshops – but, some of this is coming up in Graduate Student Appreciation Week and events leading up to that week!