

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

Report made: March 24, 2026

Reporting on: October 2025-February 2026

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, Alumo (formerly Studentcare) has resolved a major issue with Pacific Blue Cross (PBC), which was blocking our members' access to their extended health and dental insurance. PBC had assured both Alumo and the GSS that moving from 7 digit ID numbers to 8 digit would not be a problem, but the change created a plan-wide lock out for our members. Alumo addressed this with PBC on our behalf. Alumo is also now overseeing all customer care and front-end plan administration.

In this reporting period, the Finance Committee has received and reviewed information from many of our campus partners and developed a fee referendum impacting: University 101 (program ended), GSS Student Advocate fund, GSS Food and Beverage fund, World University Services Canada – UVic student refugee program, and all UVSS Constituency Groups. The Constituency Groups include the Society for Students with a Disability, Students of Colour Collective, UVic Pride, the Gender Empowerment Movement (GEM), and the Native Students Union. This referendum, which will be completed before this report is made, is intended to re-align GSS fees with the services our members use most.

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, Welcome BBQ, Pancake Breakfast, Wednesday Coffee and many more GSS events.

During this reporting period, the Grad House has continued to see strong growth in sales. We remained above our monthly revenue targets on average from September to February. Readers may remember that the Grad House point of sale system glitched in October, leading to three weeks without a functioning debit/credit card reader. All thanks for the repair to this goes to Neil Barney, Operations and Services Manager, who very genuinely chased down our new card reader after multiple delivery problems and managed to get IT support from every available provider in record time. Thanks, everyone, for bringing in your cash. We saw only a small reduction in sales over this period, which is remarkable. Business also returned to normal immediately after the new card reader and point of sale system was installed. We are so grateful for our customers' loyalty!

Also in this reporting period (and more happily), the GSS hosted the third annual Graduate Student Appreciation Week (GSAW), funded by 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 night and Excellence in Graduate Research Symposium fun and well-run on the day of the event.

More recently, the Grad House hosted the January Pancake Breakfast as part of the GSS January orientation event schedule. My thanks to the Grad House staff team and our many event volunteers for kick starting this calendar year with a bang!

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 referenced above, in March 2025, 76.2% of voting members opted to move our insurance brokerage to Alumo. Alumo is the largest student insurance network in Canada, and has been able to leverage their total student society population size to obtain a slightly more competitive premium rate for the current academic year. Since taking over our plans administration, Alumo has resolved an error on Pacific Blue Cross's part that cut our members' access to their insurance accounts. The GSS office staff continue working with Alumo staff to ensure timely service provision for opt outs/ins. Thank you to all members for your patience as the onboarding process to a new service provider required a large lift from Alumo staff.

As Alumo is now administering our opt ins/outs, I have removed information about how many of these GSS staff have processed during this reporting period.

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	22	49
September-December*	90	97
January-April**	80	92

*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 February 9, 2026. 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 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, 2025 to February 28, 2026, the GSS has distributed 100% of a budgeted \$11,000 in Department Grant funding. Our thanks and congratulations to Social Dimensions of Health, Physics and Astronomy, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Chemistry, French, Anthropology, History, Biochemistry and Microbiology, Environmental Studies, Art History and Visual Studies, Earth and Ocean Science, Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, and Medical Science/Neuroscience, Computer Science, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, and Psychology for their applications! Projects supported this year ranged from conferences and symposia, department level graduate student unions' operations, and department socials/parties.

Due to a much tighter anticipated budget in 2026-27, the Finance Committee, with consultation with the Board and staff, reduced the total funding available for the 2026-27 fiscal year to \$10,000. Graduate Representative Council has been active and engaged in re-working our grant criteria and regulations to ensure that these funds can be distributed fairly.

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, MODò 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, 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. Program leaves of absence
4. Mental health crises
5. Discrimination and harassment around the university

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. 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:

- Camryn Thompson
- Pyper Heaney-Corns

I'd also like to thank and welcome two new union representatives in this report. James Colalillo and Shawn Jung are now union stewards from front and back of house in the Grad House respectively. Thank you for your volunteerism that keeps our workplace safe, inclusive, and supportive. 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. Board training April-May
2. GRC recruitment and training August-October

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.