

2025-26 Board Report

March 24, 2026 SAGM

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. Wyatt Maddox was elected as Interim Director of External Relations per our bylaws in the July Graduate Representative Council (GRC) meeting. Lily Abells and Curran Chapman were elected as Interim Directors of External Relations and Student Life, respectively, in the January GRC meeting. Thank you to Jitendra and Asma for their time with us on the Board and all the work they completed and energy they put into their roles from April to December.

Chair: Rosemary Webb

2025-26 members:

- Director of External Relations (April-December 2025): Jitendra Palaparty
 - Interim Director of External Relations (July 22-September 15 2025): Wyatt Maddox
 - Interim Director of External Relations (January 27-March 31 2026): Lily Abells
- Director of Finance: Maggie Lawton
- Director of Internal/University Relations: Sarah Roberts
- Director of Student Life (April-December 2025): Asma Noureen
 - Interim Director of Student Life (January 27-March 31 2026): Curran Chapman
- 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 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. This allowed us to share or delegate responsibilities where possible, and I could better understand what aspects of the roles Directors needed support with. In these meetings I would commend the Directors on specific aspects of the work that they were doing and also identified areas for improvement. The one-on-one meetings helped me grow as a Chair, and I learned a lot from my Directors on management styles, effective communication, and what is needed to support each other.

From October onwards I would say the Executive Board had a much greater blending of our individual roles, as we were helping each other and putting our energies where needed. This included the facilitation of Graduate Student Appreciation Week (after much planning!), advocacy around the Post-Secondary Institution Review, covering two vacant Board positions until we elected Interim Directors per our bylaws, running our regular elections and this year's fee referendum, and covering my 3-week leave in mid February/early March.

Graduate Student Appreciation Week went well and saw good turnout at most of the events! Each of our Board members were involved in varying capacities with planning, facilitating, and attending events within the week. As with the previous two years, the Directors of Student Life and Internal Relations along with our Events and Communications Coordinator and Operations and Services Manager have reflected about how the Week went and what could be modified going forward. Thank you Asma, Sarah, Petranella Daviel, and Neil Barney!

The Post-Secondary Institution (PSI) Review, announced late November, took the majority of Board attention and capacity for the last portion of our terms. I am so proud of all the work that we have done to address concerns with the Review's Terms of Reference and procedures, and advocate for graduate students. A big thank you also goes out to the graduate students in Political Science who have been working hard on this issue, and working with us where possible. The Executive Board has written letters, hosted drop-in advocacy working group meetings weekly (thanks for leading those, Kyla!), was interviewed for newspapers and radio, attended an engagement session with the leader of the review, lobbied to local government, met on a bi-weekly basis with other student organizations and unions around B.C., and educated our membership as much as we can (including by updating our website with all the information and actions we've taken!). This has been a hectic and challenging time, as the bulk of the work had to be done on December-February and onwards, amidst the winter closure, Board vacancies, and standard start-of-semester chaos. The entire Board has been working tirelessly and will pass the reins onto the incoming Board with plenty of documentation and support as we wait for the results of the Review to be announced.

Our fee referendum, planned since last summer, took place this month. Massive thank you to Maggie and Kyla for all of the work they did leading up to the referendum. Myself, Irfan, Kyla, and Semyon Drozdetckii (our Elections Officer) also worked hard in December and January to update our elections and referendum campaign guides. Semyon has done a great job as our Elections Officer this year, and we are very grateful to have had them! As always, we have identified areas for future improvement with our procedures and our guiding documents, which will be revised before next year's cycle. The Executive Board also formed "yes" campaign sides for the referendum questions this year, and Maggie, Sarah, Lily, and Curran did great work organizing campaigning while I was on an unfortunately-timed leave. I am very thankful that we have had such a strong team, fully capable without me!

Maggie deserves an extra shout-out for her time as Vice-Chair while I was away from February 10-March 2. Although the team as a whole has known about this absence since August, that doesn't necessarily mean any of us understood at that time how much would be on our plates come spring! With the PSI review, the B.C. 2026 budget releasing (including news about a delay to UVic's new on-campus housing), and the referendum, the Board had their work cut out for them. Maggie has done an incredible job leading and coordinating the team both with me and without me this year!

Annual Plan

In creating our Annual Plan at the beginning of our terms, the Board identified three key areas of focus: Connection & Recognition, Access & Support, and Engagement & Empowerment. Within Connection & Recognition our goals were to continue a strong feedback loop with our members, and celebrate our successes. For Access & Support, we intended to address 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 were to enrich members' experiences in a variety of skill-building areas, and increase engagement in events and services for all graduate students.

This year, particularly with the PSI Review, we updated the membership as consistently as possible regarding the work the Board was doing. A big part of this was our Events and Communications Coordinator Petranella keeping our website up-to-date! All of our Board members have been really great at engaging with members as well, showing strong attendance at events and as representatives of the GSS. A big shout out to GRC this year, who have been very eager and involved! Our meetings every month have very robust discussions which shows that folks are interested and want to know more about what the GSS is doing, as well as what else we *could* be doing. Our Graduate Representatives, as well as our members who find and talk to our Directors around campus, have been instrumental in identifying areas/issues that the GSS should be aware of or focus on.

Our advocacy around affordability, as mentioned, changed in focus from the areas in our Annual Plan to the PSI Review. One of our main concerns there has been the threat to the 2% domestic tuition increase limit, and more generally, access to post-secondary education for lower income students and rural/remote learners. The Executive Board has been spearheading the advocacy on this! With regards to supports for TAs and lab assistants, the Advocacy and Campaigns Committee has been working to connect with CUPE4163 and Learning and Teaching Innovation (see that report for more!).

For skill-building, thanks to the PSI review, we've had more advocacy training this year than ever in my time with the GSS! Thank you to Kyla and our graduate students in the Political Science department for leading those trainings. We've also had a lot of *fun* skill-building opportunities through our events, like various crafts and skating, and professional skill-building through partnered events with the Libraries and Careers Services (see the Events Committee report for all our great events)!

Overview of Incomplete and Outstanding Work

Some of the areas of our Annual Plan did not get addressed, which is entirely normal and predictable! The Advocacy and Campaigns report covers some incomplete and ongoing work regarding those areas we didn't get to – including the BC Graduate Scholarship and the Graduate Student Tuition Income Offset Plan fee, and increased TA supports.

The current Board will do all we can to prepare the incoming Board for the ongoing work required around the PSI Review, as we expect the results to be released at the end of this month, which means a new chapter for our advocacy. The contacts we have made at other B.C. PSIs will be a huge help here! All in all I think the Executive Board did well to achieve goals we set out 10 months ago, while remaining flexible and addressing emergent concerns/issues. I am proud of my team and proud to be a part of said team! It has been a wild year and I cannot thank my Board or the wider GSS membership enough.