

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

Report made: October 20, 2026

Reporting on: February-September 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.

In this reporting period, we've onboarded the 2026-27 Executive Board. My thanks to Sarah Roberts for her many, many years of service to the GSS on the Graduate Representative Council, sitting on what felt at times like EVERY SINGLE UVic committee, then serving on our Board. Sarah stepped away from GSS work over the summer to finish up her degree. Violet Cieslik, initially elected as the Director of Internal/University Relations, took over the role of Chair and Hannah Brown was elected as the new Director of Internal/University Relations. Both Violet and Hannah bring a wealth of student governance and advocacy work to their new roles on the board. Eleanore Todd, Victor Marrugat Arnal and Manuel Centeno Duque have been our anchors throughout these board transitions. We are very lucky to have the leadership of all these amazing grad students!

Also in this reporting period, we have undertaken significant policy development work to entirely re-draft our elections and referenda policies to address issues that arose in the administration of our Spring 2026 referenda. We had our first ever referendum complaint this year and discovered that our current policies were not sufficient to support the Electoral Officer in resolving complaints. As Violet will present at the Annual General Meeting, we have re-written our bylaws and policies to provide improved support for the Electoral Officer and establish an Elections Committee to ensure our elections are overseen by a team of graduate students.

Since my last report, we have also renewed our Extended Health and Dental insurance policies. We saw a very significant increase in costs this year. As such, we will hold a referendum in Spring 2027 regarding our insurance plans to readjust our fees and coverage rates to align with member needs. Eleanore Todd and I are planning a series of member engagements during the Fall term to ensure that we have a strong sense of our members' priorities when it comes to insurance coverage vs. costs.

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 thrive. In the first five months of the fiscal year, our sales were approximately \$226K, or 38% of total anticipated annual revenue. At 42% of the

way through the fiscal year, and with our four slowest sales months included on that figure, we are on track to meet or exceed our total annual sales targets.

More recently, the Grad House hosted the Pancake Breakfast and Welcome (Back) BBQ 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!

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.

In March 2025, our members voted to move our insurance brokerage to Alumo. Having now completed the first year of plan brokerage, Alumo has been active in resolving some “first-year hiccups” in taking over our plan, such as Pacific Blue Cross re-issuing all ID numbers with 8 digits instead of 7 (as reported in my March 2026 SAGM report). Robyn Paches, Alumo Senior Director – Partnerships, who will be presenting on our plan usage and renewal tonight at the AGM, has been working very closely with Jacqueline Rutherford, Finance and Benefits Coordinator, Neil Barney, Operations and Services Manager, and myself to ensure smooth operations for the 2026-27 academic year. We will see much more of Robyn in future, as he will be assisting myself and Director of Finance, Eleanore Todd, in engaging our members throughout the Fall 2026 term in preparation for a Spring 2027 fee referendum.

Please note, that the GSS Executive Director used to report on our health and dental insurance plans as these services were all administered by GSS staff. Since Alumo has taken over plan administration, the GSS team does not have independent access to assess the number of opt ins/outs, family enrolments, etc. that were previously reported. Future plan reports will be presented by Alumo.

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*	92	82
May-August	88	62
September-December**	111	74

*This was provisionally reported at the 2026 SAGM, but have since been updated with the final numbers for the term.

**These numbers were last updated September 23, 2026. 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, 2026 to September 23, 2026, the GSS has distributed 31.5% of a budgeted \$10,000 in Department Grant funding. Our thanks and congratulations to Biology, Public Administration, Geography, Business, Earth and Ocean Science, and Physics and Astronomy for their applications! Projects supported this year ranged from conferences and symposia, department level graduate student unions' operations, and department socials/parties. We strongly encourage further applications throughout the rest of the fiscal year.

Modo Car Sharing Service

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

As of September 2026, we have three Modo spots available! Sign up at the office! My thanks to Petri and Irly in the front office for increasing our regular check ins with members on our Modo 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. Degree progress timeline extensions

2. Leaves of Absence
3. Supervisor conflicts
4. Housing
5. Post-graduation job hunting tips

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, the fantastic Abby Fleck left her position at the GSS. Abby was the last Health and Dental Coordinator and helped immensely in the transition of our health and dental insurance service provision from in-house to Alumo. Jacqueline Rutherford, a long-time GSS employee joined the front office team as the Finance and Benefits Coordinator, the role replacing Health and Dental Coordinator on April 1, 2026. 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:

- Ling Shan Bovenkerk
- Zoe Scogna
- Ilse Klapwyk
- Nathan Champion
- Lauren Burton
- Ace Deiparine
- Sara O'Connor
- Mandy Scott

I'd also like to thank our union representatives in this report. Petranella Daviel, James Colalillo and Shawn Jung are union stewards from front office, front of house 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. Fee Referendum Prep: Health and Dental Fee referendum in Spring 2027
2. Excellence in Graduate Research Symposium – coming up in November
3. Grad Student Appreciation Week – moving to January this year!

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.