

Overview of the GSS Strategic Framework

The Mission of the Graduate Student Society of UBC-Vancouver:

The GSS advocates for, promotes, and protects the academic, social, intellectual, cultural and recreational interests of its members.

This GSS Strategic Framework establishes the priorities and direction of the Graduate Student Society of UBC-Vancouver for 2017-2021. The Framework encompasses three themes to support the success and wellbeing of UBC graduate students: (1) Graduate Student Academics, (2) Graduate Student Community, and (3) Our Graduate Student Society. Within each theme are goals that the GSS will work towards, including steps to achieve each goal and specific actions for each step. Many of these actions are already underway at the GSS; they have been included because they constitute essential steps in the five year vision of the GSS. The Framework has been written to be specific - so as to make feasible accomplishments and progress towards large goals and preserve the intent of these goals - and also to include sufficient flexibility - in order to assure that the GSS can address graduate student needs as they change, or as the environment changes.

Preparation of the GSS Strategic Framework. This document was prepared by the GSS Strategic Planning *ad hoc* Committee from March 2015 to November 2016, following consultation and research including but not limited to the GSS Bylaws, GSS Mission, material from a past GSS Council retreat, the annual GSS Graduate Student Satisfaction Survey (GSSGSSS) results from 2014 and 2015, GSS World Cafe events, the UBC strategic plan ('Place and Promise: The UBC Plan'), the 2010 MMK External Review of the GSS, as well as input from several GSS committees, conversations with previous GSS executives, and graduate students.

The Framework has been presented in two forms: the first (available <here>) as a full-length document, which outlines the anticipated actions for each goal, intended to be used as an internal reference document; the second (herein) as a shorter 'Overview' document without the specific actions, intended to be more readable so that the vision and goals of the GSS are clear and unobstructed.

Implementation of the GSS Strategic Framework. The implementation of the Framework is the responsibility of the GSS President, with assistance from the Executives and staff (2017-21), as established in the GSS Bylaws (14.1.4). The Framework is both broad in its scope and ambitious in the proposed goals. Furthermore, the goals and actions in this Framework fall under the purview of many different GSS roles, including the executive team, but also (e.g.) GSS Senators, GSS external representatives, several GSS committees, and committee Chairs. Therefore, the GSS Strategic Planning *ad hoc* Committee recommends that a new GSS committee is struck to address and assist with the logistical challenges of implementing this Framework, including (e.g.): developing an accountability system for each GSS role in relation to progress on the Framework; developing a year-by-year strategy to help tackle these ambitious goals over the five years planned, and to assure annual progress; revisiting priorities to ensure that the Framework addresses the current needs and environment of UBC graduate students; establishing accountability and transparency of GSS Executives and committee Chairs on progress on the Framework; and more, as discussed in more detail in Theme 3: *Our Graduate Student Society* (Goal 3.2, A-B).

1. Graduate Student Academics

The GSS empowers UBC graduate students to succeed in their academic endeavours at UBC by conducting research-based advocacy on academic issues affecting graduate students.

Goal 1.1: Develop an effective process for graduate student consultation.

- A. Establish an effective process for consulting graduate students and graduate student organizations across and off-campus.

Goal 1.2: Empower data-driven change for graduate students across the University.

- A. Maximize the use of data on the UBC graduate student experience.
- B. Encourage and promote graduate student representation throughout the University, including on Department, Faculty, and University-level committees.

Goal 1.3: Foster ongoing collaboration and communication with the University.

- A. Develop and maintain positive working relationships with the decision-making leadership at UBC, including the President and Vice-Presidents, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (FG+PS), Deans, the Board of Governors, and Senate.
- B. Proactively approach, and collaborate with the University on issues concerning graduate students.

Goal 1.4: Support positive working relationships between graduate students and their supervisors.

- A. Develop resources to support graduate students in building, navigating, and maintaining a positive relationship with supervisors, including conflict resolution.
- B. Advocate for specific minimum standards for graduate student supervision at UBC.

Goal 1.5: Expand and increase awareness of professional development opportunities.

- A. Foster the professional and academic growth of graduate students.
- B. Expand the professional development opportunities available to graduate students by partnering with UBC graduate student organizations, the Graduate Pathways to Success (GPS) program, as well as organizations outside of UBC.

Goal 1.6: Advocate for improved graduate student financial support.

- A. Collect data annually to assess the financial health and needs of UBC graduate students.
- B. Maintain a positive working relationship with the University, the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (FG+PS), and the UBC Teaching Assistant union (CUPE 2278), to facilitate ongoing collaboration and consultation.
- C. Conduct independent research and work with the University and the FG+PS to assess whether the current graduate student funding systems are best serving UBC graduate students, including assessing current graduate scholarships (e.g. Four Year Fellowships; 4YF) and minimum stipends.

Goal 1.7: Strengthen GSS impact through provincial and federal government lobbying.

- A. Assess the needs of UBC graduate students with regards to the provincial and federal governments.
- B. Collaborate and develop priorities with other student societies - including the UBC AMS, other graduate student societies, and provincial and national student organizations.
- C. Lobby with provincial and national government bodies.

2. Graduate Student Community

The GSS supports UBC graduate students by fostering a safe, inclusive, and global community on and off-campus, and by providing accessible resources to improve health and well-being.

Goal 2.1: Actively support the health and well-being of UBC graduate students.

- A. Promote an active lifestyle and a sense of community among graduate students by providing various sport and recreational activities on- and off- campus.
- B. Enhance access to resources that support graduate student mental health.
- C. Foster a safe and supportive working environment and campus for graduate students.
- D. Ensure continued graduate student health insurance coverage according to the needs of graduate students.

Goal 2.2: Strengthen graduate student community at UBC.

- A. Continue to hold graduate student orientations to welcome incoming students at the beginning of academic terms.
- B. Engage graduate students in an inclusive environment through social and intercultural programming, including classes and events.
- C. Support community-building through Graduate Student Organizations, particularly for off-campus groups.
- D. Provide opportunities for all UBC graduate students to participate in the life and community of the GSS, as Councilors, Executives, or Ordinary Members.

Goal 2.3: Improve access to graduate student spaces at UBC.

- A. Advocate for improved working spaces for graduate students on-campus.
- B. Simplify and improve processes for the use of GSS spaces.

Goal 2.4: Advocate for graduate students' non-academic needs.

- A. Develop GSS resources to advocate for graduate student matters of interest on and off-campus.
- B. Support graduate students with families.
- C. Support and protect graduate student housing on the Point Grey campus.

Goal 2.5: Empower UBC graduate student involvement in decisions and conversations affecting graduate students across UBC and across the country.

- A. Promote and encourage graduate student involvement and discussion on 'big-picture issues'.
- B. Increase student engagement with the GSS.

3. Our Graduate Student Society

The GSS continually strives to improve its efficiency, transparency, accountability, and communication in order to better fulfill its vision and purpose.

3.1: Improve the efficiency, productivity and effectiveness of the GSS Council.

- A. Empower elected GSS members to succeed in their roles with the GSS.
- B. Empower GSS committees to make lasting change.
- C. Empower GSS Executives to meet their goals and help fulfill the GSS Mission Statement.
- D. Establish accountability and transparency of GSS Executives and committee Chairs on progress on the Strategic Framework.
- E. Act upon the improved GSS consultation & data collection system, and be quick to respond to new data, and to initiate inquiries to seek new data, and make data-driven, thoroughly researched decisions based on available & obtained data reflecting UBC graduate students.
- F. Improve the GSS archival process to ensure that past documents are easily available for future elected GSS members.
- G. Consider forming a GSS-Alumni Advisory Panel to improve institutional memory and Council/Executive assistance. This could consist of volunteer positions held by willing former GSS Executives and other former GSS members that can be consulted on an *ad hoc* basis for advice on issues outside of the immediate experience or expertise of the current Council, in addition to, rather than as a substitution for, expert professional advice where it is required. .
- H. Evaluate options for restructuring the GSS, e.g. considering alternate Council size or establishing a separate GSS Board of Directors from GSS Council, as highlighted in the GSS External Review (MMK, 2010).
- I. Operate and maintain a financially stable Society.

3.2: Foster a forward-thinking and retrospective Society.

- A. Create a GSS entity responsible for assisting with the logistical implementation of the Strategic Framework, such as a new committee (Governance and Accountability Committee).
- B. Develop an ongoing process of strategic planning at the GSS.
- C. Increase the impact and accessibility of the GSS Elections.

3.3: Support GSS staff.

- A. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all GSS staff.
- B. Maintain a stand-alone human resources (HR) handbook/guide for all GSS staff.
- C. Optimize communication between staff and Council.

3.4: Communication & Transparency.

- A. Adapt and expand GSS communication practices to fully maximize the reach of GSS communications to all UBC graduate students, including but not limited to social media, email, and in-person dialogue.
- B. Increase overall Society transparency.
- C. Improve communication for Councillors.

3.5: Strengthen GSS relationships with other graduate student-run groups on campus.

- A. Support GSS Affiliate Organizations and Graduate Student Organizations (GSOs).
- B. Strengthen the GSS relationship with the Alma Mater Society of UBC-Vancouver (AMS).
- C. Consult UBC graduate students on whether they wish to retain membership in the AMS.