



**GRADUATE
STUDENT SOCIETY**
UBC VANCOUVER

Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Our Mission:

The Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver advocates for, promotes, and protects the academic, social, intellectual, cultural and recreational interests of its members.

Introduction and Context

This Strategic Plan establishes the priorities and direction of the Graduate Student Society of UBC-Vancouver (GSS) for 2022-2026, and outlines goals to direct the GSS on these priorities. The Plan encompasses three themes to support the success and wellbeing of UBC graduate students:

1. Graduate Student Academics
2. Graduate Student Community
3. Our Graduate Student Society

Within each theme, priorities have been identified, including goals and proposed strategies (PS) to reach each goal.

In this Plan, clarity and specificity are important so that progress can be evaluated on each goal over time. Given the identified weak institutional memory within the GSS, a relatively large number of goals and priorities have been included. The Plan has also been written to be sufficiently flexible in how these goals are carried out and how to measure success for each goal; flexibility is important to ensure that the GSS can address graduate student needs as they change, or as the environment changes, and also to empower incoming GSS Executives, Councillors, committee Chairs (etc.) to establish their own strategies to achieve these goals, while preserving the original intent.

Preparation of the GSS Strategic Plan

This document was prepared by the GSS Strategic Planning ad hoc Committee from 2019 to October 2021. As is typical for a strategic plan, this was built upon a traditional 'SWOT' analysis of the GSS as an organization, encompassing the organization's current internal characteristics (i.e. Strengths and Weaknesses) as well as the external environment that the GSS may face from 2017-2021 (i.e. Opportunities and Threats).

Strengths: In the next five years, the GSS can leverage these strengths to achieve its goals and vision. e.g. Representation on decision-making groups across the University, GSS Affiliate Organizations, familiarity of GSS Councillors with the challenges of GSS constituents.	Weaknesses: In the next five years, the GSS can actively work to address these weaknesses. e.g. GSS visibility, membership engagement, institutional memory, Council efficiency.
Opportunities: In the next five years, the GSS can capitalize on upcoming opportunities to leverage GSS priorities.	Threats: In the next five years, the GSS can prepare for and combat potential risks for failure. For example, a new UBC President, new UBC strategic plan, upcoming federal, provincial, and municipal elections. e.g. A budgetary deficit, a referendum that may change our relationship with the UBC Alma Mater Society.

Consultations & Research

The following research and consultations have informed the design and content of the GSS Strategic Plan:

- Results from the annual GSS Student Satisfaction Survey (2019)
- The 2019 Themes survey sent to the student body
- Consultations and discussions on proposed themes in Council
- The GSS Mission Statement
- The GSS Values
- GSS Bylaws
- The UBC strategic plan
- Extensive internal consultations from late 2020 to early 2021 with GSS staff, executives, and committee heads
- External consultations with student organizations and UBC staff
- Input from several GSS committees in the form of direct feedback on draft versions of the strategic plan

Therefore, the Priorities, Goals, and Proposed Strategies presented in this Strategic Plan are the result of nearly two years on consultation and careful consideration, and the GSS of 2022-2026 should do its utmost to accomplish each Goal and diligently monitor progress through the accountability measures outlined below.

Implementation & Accountability

GSS Bylaw 14.4 states that the implementation of the Strategic Plan is the responsibility of the GSS President, with assistance from the Executives and GSS staff. To ensure feasible implementation—given the broad scope and the required involvement of many different GSS roles—a sustainable system of monitoring and accountability are required to ensure that the GSS pursues this Strategic Plan, that priorities established in this document are made priorities for GSS action from 2022-2026, and that progress is continually made on the goals herein.

This system is outlined below and expanded upon in Goals 3.2A-B, and requires that all GSS Executives and committee Chairs set annual goals and action plans pertaining to the Strategic Plan and relating to the goals within or closest to their position's purview. Explicit suggested GSS position(s) for each goal are included in Subsection II of the Strategic Plan. The GSS Governance & Accountability Committee (G&AC) was struck in late 2016, in part to establish feasible timeframes for goal completion and to monitor progress on the Strategic Plan over time. Because the GSS Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) already exists to monitor Executive goals, and this Strategic Plan highlights the importance of GSS committees also setting goals, both EOC and G&AC will play the important roles of guiding and finally accepting goals from Executives and committee Chairs, monitoring progress throughout the year, and reporting to Council on the overall progress on the Strategic Plan.

Reporting systems

GSS Executives are accountable to the EOC; GSS committees are accountable to the G&AC.

Step 1. The EOC and G&AC will inform GSS Executives and committee Chairs of the involved process and timeline.

Step 2. Executives and Chairs will set annual goals on their portfolio and pertinent sections of the GSS Strategic Plan.

Step 3. The EOC and G&AC will evaluate Executives and committees on their progress three times a year, at 1, 6, and 12 months after the beginning of Executive/committee terms.

Step 4. The EOC and G&AC will report to Council at least once a year on the overall progress on the Strategic Plan, including progress of individual committees and Executives.

THEME 1: GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

1. **Priority 1:** Support graduate student funding, tuition, and economic security

a. **Additional information:**

- i. GSS advocacy for graduate student funding forms a core part of our overall advocacy strategy. The GSS recognizes that graduate students often face financial hardship, and can depend on precarious forms of income such as grants and scholarships. To this end, the GSS must put financial concerns forward as a key priority and continue to advocate not only for more funding in the short and long term, keeping in mind its centrality to graduate student wellbeing and success at UBC.

b. **Goal 1:** Advocate for increased PhD student stipends

- i. P.S. 1: Target PhD minimum funding levels of \$24,000 by 2024 and \$26,000 by 2026 with annual inflation indexing thereafter
- ii. P.S. 2: Expand the UBC 4YF to 5 years of funding (5YF)
- iii. P.S. 3: Expand the number of Aboriginal Graduate Fellowships, the duration of the fellowship (to 5 years) and the value of the fellowship

c. **Goal 2:** Advocate for 100% offset of PhD tuition via PAEIA, PAEIPA or other mechanisms

- i. P.S. 1 VPUAA advocates for this, and ensures that graduate students are not overly exposed to fee increases over time
- ii. P.S. 2 GSS collaborates with existing bodies such as the Senate, BOG and G&PS to put this into action over the next 5 years

d. **Goal 3:** Advocate for the creation of minimum funding policy and tuition waiver for master's students

- i. P.S. 1: Collaborate with G+PS to draft a Master's funding roadmap, and advocate for adherence to that road map in relevant UBC decision making bodies
 - ii. P.S. 2: Advocate for more funding opportunities exclusive to Ph.D. students to be made available to master's students
- e. **Goal 4:** Preserve and expand GSS Graduate Student Financial Aid (GSFA)
 - i. P.S. 1: Explore how funding for GSFA can be directly linked to GSS events
 - ii. P.S. 2: Expand messaging and visibility related to the GSFA
 - iii. P.S. 3: Look for other avenues where the GSS can provide direct support/relief to graduate students facing difficulties

2. **Priority 2:** Develop GSS advocacy alliances federally, provincially and within UBC

- a. **Additional information:**
 - i. Interlinking our efforts with wider networks of student associations and alliances is a continuing project that will not only help strengthen our position as advocates for UBC graduate students, but help us cement advocacy efforts into longer-term plans and trends across student associations throughout the country. Equally important is ensuring that the UBC GSS is a leading voice in these efforts
- b. **Goal 1:** Build the Canada Graduate Student Alliance into a fully-fledged student advocacy alliance on par with UCRU, CASA or CFS
 - i. P.S. 1: The UBC GSS, in collaboration with other CGSA members should evaluate the feasibility and utility of steps to formalize the CGSA.
 - ii. P.S. 2: The CGSA should conduct annual lobby days, issue press releases and statements on pressing graduate student issues and send budget submissions whenever possible; The UBC GSS should continue to be a leading voice in the CGSA.
- c. **Goal 2:** Establish the BCGSS as the leading voice in British Columbia on Graduate Student Issues
 - i. P.S. 1: The BCGSS should conduct annual lobby days, issue press releases and statements on pressing graduate student issues and send budget submissions whenever possible.
 - ii. P.S. 2: The UBC GSS should continue to be a leading voice in the BCGSS
 - iii. P.S. 3: The UBC GSS, in collaboration with other BCGSS members should evaluate the feasibility and utility of steps to formalize the BCGSS.
- d. **Goal 3:** Strengthen ties with the AMS and collaborate on external advocacy, university advocacy, services and events within the UBC community
 - i. P.S. 1: Cross advertise AMS/GSS events, news, and/or other important information on each other's communication platforms

- ii. P.S. 2: Foster direct collaboration between AMS/GSS committees working on similar issues (e.g., ACEX & AMS Advocacy comm or services committee and AMS student life committee)
 - iii. P.S. 3: Invite AMS execs to GSS council meeting and to relevant committee meetings
- e. **Goal 4:** Strengthen ties with CUPE 2278 and collaborate with them in supporting graduate student workers at UBC
 - i. P.S. 1: Extend invitations to the CUPE president and external representatives to GSS council and ACEX committee
 - ii. P.S. 2: Cross advertise GSS/CUPE events on each others communication platforms
 - iii. P.S. 3: Advocate for inclusion of CUPE representatives in UBC decision making on graduate student workers
- f. **Goal 5:** Build relationships with the UBC Longhouse and SAGE, allowing them to inform direction for GSS advocacy and develop GSS Indigenization and Reconciliation advocacy goals
 - i. P.S. 1: Establish regular meetings (i.e., quarterly) that could be coordinated by a tentative Indigenous Graduate Student Committee
 - ii. P.S. 2: Create strategy to invite and consult with Indigenous graduate student organizations such as SAGE regarding GSS decisions that affect Indigenous graduate students directly

3. **Priority 3:** Advocate for the individualized needs of members of the UBC graduate student community

- a. **Additional information:**
 - i. While the GSS operates as an advocate for the interests of all UBC graduate students, we must recognize the individual needs of every student we advocate for, and how these may be vastly different based on a student's particular background and situation. To this end, the GSS must make a particular effort in supporting all of our graduate student communities.
- b. **Goal 1:** Advocate for the needs of Indigenous graduate students
 - i. P.S. 1: Over the next year, conduct robust consultation with the community of indigenous students and faculty at UBC and develop a plan to guide long-term indigenous centered advocacy priorities. Following this, over the 3 ensuing years, incorporate the work previously developed into the GSS goal setting/tracking framework.
- c. **Goal 2:** Advocate for expanded mental health supports and funding for students
 - i. P.S. 1: Potential specific advocacy targets including, but not limited to:
 - 1. Better resourcing of UBC counselling services
 - 2. Increasing mental healthcare coverage in the GSS/AMS health and dental plan

3. Advocate for empathetic treatment and increased flexibility for graduate students struggling with mental health issues
- d. **Goal 3:** Advocate for the needs of international students
 - i. P.S. 1: Advocate for international student eligibility in federal, provincial, and university fellowships, bursaries, grants and programs
 - ii. P.S. 2: Advocate for an expedited path to permanent residency and citizenship for international graduate students
 - iii. P.S. 3: Oppose the higher rate of tuition increases for international students
- e. **Goal 4:** Advocate for the needs of students with dependents
 - i. P.S. 1: Advocate for subsidized childcare for UBC students
 - ii. P.S. 2: Expand daycare and childcare related spaces on campus
- f. **Goal 5:** Advocate for the needs of students with disabilities
 - i. P.S. 1: Advocate for further remote-work accessibility for graduate students who have difficulty commuting to campus
 - ii. P.S. 2: Advocate for subsidized accessibility devices to assist graduate students with disabilities who require them for their coursework or research, and/or establish a voucher system for a graduate student to request funding for a technology/device to assist them with their research

THEME 2: RESILIENCE

1. **Priority 1:** Advocating for a Just Recovery

a. **Additional Information:**

- i. COVID-19 has revealed the inequalities in health, justice, and sustainability that BIPOC communities face in both the Global Majority and Minority. Minority groups suffer disproportionately from climate injustice. UBC is an international community, and climate change affects all UBC graduate students.

b. **Goal 1:** Adopt Just Recovery Principles as an investment and finance strategy for the GSS

- i. P.S. 1: Create a Just Recovery Advisory Board of members of relevant student organizations in partnership with AMS (e.g., climate justice UBC, SAGE, Black student caucus).
- ii. P.S. 2: Make adherence to the Just Recovery Principles an advocacy area to be pursued by the Executive team within broader advocacy goals
- iii. P.S. 3: Communicate the GSS's use of the Just Recovery Principles to the graduate student community, and seek input from the community on how to further green our investment strategy

c. **Goal 2:** Advocate for the UBC Senate and BOG to adopt a UBC tailored version of the Just Recovery Principles with associated implementation plan.

- i. P.S. 1: Make this an advocacy priority for GSS Executives

- ii. P.S. 2: Coordinate Just Recovery Principles-related GSS advocacy with graduate student representatives to the Senate

2. Priority 2: Collaborating with our Peers for Climate Action and Sustainability

- a. **Additional Information:** UBC has many different graduate student groups on campus, with each pursues their own sustainability efforts and initiatives. As the GSS, we have a lot of power to develop ideas and actions originated in our diverse student body, and be leaders in graduate student-led sustainability action.
- b. **Goal 1:** Align GSS climate advocacy with the Climate Hub
 - i. P.S. 1: Explore the creation of joint events with the UBC Climate Hub and the GSS through Services Committee work when possible
 - ii. P.S. 2: Explore outreach options to educate GSS graduate students
 - iii. P.S. 2: Explore the creation of further avenues of input for campus-wide sustainability initiatives into the GSS decision-making process
- c. **Goal 2:** Synchronize our sustainability efforts with those of the AMS, sustainability-focused and non-sustainability focused groups on campus, leveraging our connections with the graduate student community to make these efforts more impactful
 - i. P.S. 1: Create a systematic approach to collaborate with different groups on campus with regards to sustainability initiatives by opening regular lines of communication
 - ii. P.S. 2: Bring together GSS and non-GSS events that are open to community members within our newsletters and website to encourage participation of graduate students and GSS members
- d. **Goal 3:** Focus our sustainability actions in the context of the GSS's commitment to reconciliation through sustainability collaboration with Indigenous graduate student-focused groups on campus
 - i. P.S. 1: Conduct consultation with Indigenous graduate students when starting new sustainability related initiatives
 - ii. P.S. 2: Make this a priority in a tentative GSS Indigenous Committee

3. Priority 3: Strengthening sustainable GSS operations

- a. **Additional Information:**
 - i. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the GSS had significant cost and energy savings through the transition to online operations. However, as a society, our focus should be to rebuild to a better state than we started in.
- b. **Goal 1:** Completely transition GSS towards online operations post pandemic in order to reduce paper documentation and transportation needs for in-person meetings, as well as making the GSS more accessible to all graduate students.

- i. P.S. 1: Create a unified set of general operations recommendations to bolster current unwritten practices governing usage of online & in-person resources to conduct GSS business
 - ii. P.S. 2: Conduct open training sessions on new technologies and online orientations to navigating online spaces with new councillors, staff, governors, and executive.
 - iii. P.S. 3: Close loopholes in policy that occurred with the transition to online spaces.
- c. **Goal 2:** Re-examine our own ongoing environmental impacts due to ongoing activities such as practices within GSS-sponsored spaces and events
 - i. P.S. 1: Encourage the practice of periodic environmental review of events to find opportunities to minimize waste and impact

4. **Priority 4:** Securing new revenue and cutting costs

- a. **Additional Information:**
 - i. The impacts of GSS fiscal investments have ramifications on equity and sustainability on campus. Aligning our financial goals with our stated ideals is thus key to operating with integrity in this space.
- b. **Goal 1:** Audit GSS investments to maximize growth while maintaining ethical investment strategies.
 - i. P.S. 1: FEOO delivers a comprehensive report to council every 5 years on the areas of investment that may or may not have ties to or directly supports the oil and gas industry.
 - ii. P.S. 2: FEOO delivers a yearly report to council on the rate of return and impact of on campus initiatives that prioritize sustainability and the green economy.
- c. **Goal 2:** Create an Endowment Fund that directly invests in green initiatives on Campus.
 - i. P.S. 1: FEOO delivers a report on Endowment Fund Feasibility every year to council until its deliverability is possible

THEME 3: OUR SOCIETY

- 1. **Priority 1: Prioritizing Staff & Committees** - Maintain staff, minimize staff turnover through competitive salaries, continued engagement through effective HR practices, & improve monitoring of staff satisfaction. Support staff through work-learn positions

- a. **Additional information**
 - i. The permanent and part-time staff at the GSS are by far our most important assets as a society. The high turnover of GSS councillors and the limited time

graduate students have to engage in the society means that not only is much of the vital GSS work performed by staff, but many customary and historical GSS practices rely on staffers' memory and experience within the society. High turnover in the society's staff could thus pose a serious threat to the GSS's effectiveness, and calls for continued engagement with staff to make sure that their needs and concerns are addressed so that they have the tools to be more effective, and stay longer with the society.

- b. Goal 1:** Introduce a mechanism to continually review staff salary competitiveness and Executive/Chair/Committee compensation
 - i. P.S. 1: HR reviews job search websites biannually and keep track of staff salaries in comparable positions within the market
 - ii. P.S. 2: Continue to peg staff salary and Exec honoraria to yearly inflation/cost-of-living changes (e.g. CPI), and extend this to Chair and Deputy Chair honoraria to minimize administrative overhead for HR and make sure staff are compensated fairly using a standard procedure, implemented yearly through a meeting of HR Committee
 - iii. P.S. 3: Introduce performance bonuses to be given by HR to staff, Execs, or Committee Chairs for excellent work in supporting the GSS's functions
 - iv. P.S. 4: Explore a more universal remuneration scheme for committee participation, both within-committee, and for participation from out-of-committee members that functions
- c. Goal 2:** Introduce work-learn positions for staff and committees to alleviate burden and increase engagement of the GSS with the wider community
 - i. P.S. 1: Engage with UBC and the AMS to include UBC-GSS positions within existing work-learn programs

2. Priority 2: Transparency, Visibility, & Accessibility - Maximize engagement with online platforms to increase the ease of record-keeping as well as facilitate accessibility to GSS functions through all-online or hybrid events

- a. Additional information:**
 - i. GSS records are limited to only a few years back on the Teams platform, and much previous work pre-COVID-19 was done on shared Google Documents. Digitalizing paper records for storage on Microsoft Teams and moving existing digital records currently kept on other platforms on an *ad hoc* basis would greatly reduce friction in accessing documents related to previous and current programs/practices/etc...
 - ii. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that all-online or hybrid meeting models need not be a contingency with regards to COVID-19, but present an opportunity to fit GSS activities better into graduate students' already busy schedules

- b. Goal 1:** Create coherent best practices for Teams document organization and archiving to all staff and committees
 - i. P.S. 1: Create guidelines/instructions for folder organization within Teams, and record-keeping KPI's and goals
 - ii. P.S.2: Get a scanner and digitize historical GSS documents at Thea Koerner House, and create an Archive section on the Teams platform so councillors can
 - iii. P.S. 3: Create a work-learn or part-time staff position for digital archiving
 - iv. P.S. 4: Provide training for Teams usage to incoming councillors that fits into an overall onboarding playbook that can be store centrally and easily accessible so anyone can review it as well as propose changes as required over time

- c. Goal 2:** Overhaul the GSS's data gathering and analytics. Create a new digital strategy, leveraging the Teams and SharePoint platform in order to make the GSS in general, and individuals and committees able to access the data in particular, more responsive to changes in our environment and our community, and ready to respond to student concerns and trends in student satisfaction
 - i. P.S. 1: Standardize sets of student satisfaction and/or student life surveys so that the society can compare results across annual or biannual queries in order to anticipate and define trends, and increase the GSS's responsiveness to graduate student needs on a continual, short-term basis
 - ii. P.S. 2: Create a centralized repository for all outreach done by various Society, Executive, and Committee-level surveys so that other data can be explored by staff, Executives, and Committees in an organized manner, and facilitate the sharing of analyses
 - iii. P.S. 3: Maintain anonymized historical information about GSS Councillor membership when it comes to area of study & background, to begin to document historical trends in GSS participation for the future

- d. Goal 3:** Hybrid GSS meetings. As the GSS opens up, we will need infrastructure to support meetings where some of the attendants are present and some aren't
 - i. P.S. 1: Explore the feasibility of hybrid meeting rooms in Thea Koerner or the Nest. If not necessary, encourage hybrid meetings through group Teams calls on shared laptops.
 - ii. P.S. 2: Communicate that in-person meeting attendance is not required and can be done remotely at the discretion of committee and general meeting chairpersons
 - iii. P.S. 3: Explore the feasibility of access to Annual General Meetings, Council meetings, and Committee meetings through video link in a way that is accessible to all interested UBC graduate students who may not have the time to displace themselves to Thea Koerner or other physical UBC-GSS meeting areas

3. Priority 3: Reforming for a Broader and More Dynamic GSS

a. Additional information

- i. The success of any organizational structure is highly dependent on how amenable its structure is to the work it does. Currently, a number of disparate problems need attention in order to make sure that the GSS's structure helps it accomplish its mission in the next 5 years. Departmental allocations of councillor seats lead to a variety of different rules and norms within each department for selecting its councillor, increasing the difficulty for the GSS to verify the fairness of elections. Additionally, small departments receiving one departmental representative, while much large ones may only receive one or two, introduces a democratic deficit and reduces the competitiveness of elections.
 - ii. Furthermore, the way in which the GSS conducts business and makes decisions should be facilitated by its structural organization, not dictated by it. In this sense, further efforts should be made to increase general knowledge of what is happening between committees, and increase the opportunities for decisions to be shared among a wider swathe of the GSS's leadership as they are being developed and put into effect.
- b. **Goal 1:** Redistribute council seats by moving to a "representation by faculty" system rather than the current "representation by department" system
 - i. P.S. 1: Explore how this restructuring will affect currently-seated councillors
 - ii. P.S. 2: Open a line of communication with UBC Faculties on how faculty-wide elections would be conducted
- c. **Goal 2:** Foster a strong council culture, minimize disputes, foster collaboration, leadership, and accountability between committees and executives
 - i. P.S. 1: Encourage periodic attendance of councillors in certain committees doing work related to their own, i.e., G&A Committee members attending one in three C&P Committee meetings, and bringing back notes to their own committees
 - ii. P.S. 2: Finalize an integrative dispute resolution procedure to clarify how disputes between Councilors and Chairs within the GSS are handled
 - iii. P.S. 3: Expand the scope and impact of all-chairs meetings by including execs and a staff representative, and formalizing the all-chairs meetings as an item in the Policy Manual
 - iv. P.S. 4: Explore strategies to allow for all chairs meetings to be a forum for chairs to make strategic decisions alongside Execs as an intermediate forum between the Executive Committee and Council
- d. **Goal 3:** Break up the FEOO into a VP finance position and EOC chair position, and explore the possibility of re-introducing assistant VP positions to decrease the burden on our VPs
 - i. P.S. 1: G&A, EOC, and CPC Committee collaborate to determine the best course of action to overhaul GSS policies linked to these positions
- e. **Goal 4:** Support diversity in GSS leadership positions, ensuring that leadership positions are representative of the UBC student body & GSS as a whole
 - i. P.S. 1: Send out yearly surveys to track diversity within GSS leaders

- ii. P.S. 2: Outreach directly to leaders in broad variety of student organizations, especially organizations representing minority communities
 - iii. P.S. 3: Review the process for committee chair selection, making sure that neutral criteria are emphasized
- f. **Goal 5:** Establishment an Indigenous Committee or Subcommittee to oversee the GSS's relationship and collaboration with the Indigenous community
 - i. P.S. 1: Collaborate with SAGE and existing Indigenous graduate student groups in order to explore how an Indigenous Committee would fit within the GSS
- g. **Goal 6:** Strive to continuously increase student engagement with the GSS through a coordinated strategy focusing on the key areas where the GSS interfaces with the UBC graduate student body
 - i. P.S. 1: Increasing GSS awareness within the community, AGM attendance, and voting engagement through regular Council meeting integrative reviews of our outreach strategies, seeking input from different committees from their areas of expertise
 - ii. P.S. 2: Continuously review our engagement strategies and opportunities through the formation of an informal Engagement Working Group from GSS members and staff involved in engagement-related activities, to advise VPs on a monthly basis