



UNIVERSITY  
of Prince Edward  
ISLAND

TO: UPEI Senate

FROM: Marva Sweeney-Nixon, Associate VP Research & Dean of Graduate Studies

DATE: March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024

RE: Annual report of the Senate GSAC

---

Mandate and Composition of GSAC:

The **mandate** of the Graduate Studies Advisory Committee (GSAC) is to further the mission of UPEI in the pursuit of excellence in graduate studies, and to report to the UPEI Senate on graduate studies issues, trends, and initiatives. The **composition** of the GSAC supports this mandate with representatives drawn from each Faculty administering graduate-level program(s), typically via their respective Graduate Studies Coordinator. Other members include key stakeholders in the delivery of graduate-level studies (Associate Registrar, representation of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars). Regular guests from the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) attend GSAC meetings.

The committee is chaired by the Associate VP Research & Dean of Graduate Studies, and the current committee members and regular guests are:

- \* Arts: Doreley Coll
- \* Business: Tina Saksida
- \* Education: Kathy Snow
- \* FSDE: Grant McSorley
- \* Library: Donald Moses
- \* Nursing: Gail Macartney
- \* Registrar's Office: Darcy McCardle
- \* Science: Joel Ross
- \* Vet Med: Laurie McDuffee
- \* President of the Graduate Students Association (GSA): Nabeel Zafar, formerly M. Paulina Hernandez
- \* Postdoctoral Representative: Kate Kelly
- \* Guests from FGS: Kendra Mellish, Graduate Programs Officer; Susie Zavala, Program Manager for Cleantech.

Gratefully acknowledged is the administrative support provided by Colleen Gallant, the Administrative Assistant to the Dean of FGS.

---

**Office of the Associate Vice President Research & Dean of Graduate Studies**

550 University Avenue, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada C1A 4P3  
researchservices@upei.ca | <https://www.upei.ca/research-services>

## Summary of Committee work in 2023

In 2023, the full GSAC met regularly in person to conduct its work, with **key activities** over the period of March 2023 to 2024 in these categories:

### **1- Graduate funding opportunities**

- The allocation of funds for graduate students to units from core budget was determined via a collaborative decision-making process and based on the prior year's graduate student enrollment data. First, \$100,000 from the annual UPEI Budget to FGS was divided across the faculties based on their proportion of graduate student enrollments in Fall 2022. An additional \$15,000 allocation to the FGS budget was divided across faculties with research-based thesis students based on enrollment data.
- A two-year pilot utilizing some reclaimed funds was established and additional funds were allocated to faculties with research-based thesis students based on enrollment data, with approximately \$107,000 proportionally disbursed across Arts, Science, Engineering, and Education. Discussion of the use of an anonymous gift of \$3000 was determined to be best established as a short-term emergency fund for graduate students to access via an application.
- Members of GSAC adjudicated and/or supported securing adjudicators for several graduate awards administered by FGS/Research Services e.g. Tri-Agency CGS competitions, Banting PDF funding, Levesque etc. The increasing challenges of securing adjudicators for the timely adjudication of internal and external student awards were discussed.

### **2 Reviewing and revising Graduate Studies regulations**

The following changes were discussed or operationalized by GSAC this year; these modifications don't require Senate approvals, only changes to the website:

- Led by the Library, GSAC revised a thesis submission workflow form.
- Led by the Associate Registrar, GSAC discussed ways to streamline leaves of absence and other elements affecting all graduate students.
- GSAC decided to remove Ghana and Nigeria from the list of countries where there are English Language Proficiency Requirements (ELPR) for graduate admissions at UPEI.
- GSAC discussed and operationalized removal of conditional acceptances into the PsyD program.
- Roundtable conversations on sharing and troubleshooting admissions practices, processes, and challenges have been a reoccurring theme of the GSAC meetings. The GSAC supported the development of a pilot with the Faculty of Sustainable Design Engineering on delaying the timing of the requirement for a confirmed supervisor for an Admission decision. This change to later in the process is better aligned with UPEI's commitment to EDI and is anticipated to provide potential supervisors with access to a broader range of potential trainees to join their research program.
- GSAC discussed ways to streamline offerings of research methods courses in different units.

- GSAC has started to discuss the roles of supervisors and supervisory committee members. A revised policy will be developed and utilized across programs documenting the responsibilities of the student, supervisor, and supervisory committee.
- A subcommittee of GSAC was re-established and tasked with critical review and renewal of graduate academic regulations, with gaps identified. A key agenda item the subcommittee will critically explore the possibility of establishing definitions of full-time and part-time status options for graduate students, and establishing a more formalized deferral of admission mechanism.
- GSAC received regular updates and provided feedback on the development of a course-based Masters focused on leadership in Cleantech and Sustainability. The full application will go to Senate in Fall 2024.

### **3 Coordinating educational and PD opportunities for graduate students and Postdoctoral Fellows**

GSAC members contributed to ideating, prioritizing, and disseminating information about educational and PD opportunities for graduate students and Postdoctoral Scholars. Engaging the target audience has been a challenge, and GSAC proposed a number of methods of increasing engagement, such as providing compensation for committee participation, clearly outlining the scope of commitments, customized marketing methods for target audiences, food or coffee at events, and emphasizing the benefits.

A survey of graduate students' needs and priorities was distributed in Spring 2023, with key identified topics informing the development of workshops to date. Collaboration with the Graduate Student Association was used for a few events e.g. 3-Minute Thesis (3MT) and a roundtable of graduate students aligned with a national initiative coordinated and funded by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Ways to support and provide community building opportunities for Postdoctoral Scholars has been a reoccurring priority discussed. Several initiatives to bring together Postdoctoral Scholars across disciplines have been undertaken, including a short survey of interests and an informal social. Further initiatives are recognized as required, and the GSAC has pledged support and proposed the idea of a small fund from FGS for a collaborative research initiative by at least 2 Postdoctoral Scholars.

Respectfully submitted,

*Mawa Sweeney Nixon*