



# **Graduate Student Senate President's Report**

**Board of Trustees**

**May 17, 2024**

**Prepared By: Ijaz Ul Haq and Cara Simone, President and Vice President of the Graduate Student Senate**

In the academic year 2023-2024, the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) at the University of Vermont has continued to drive meaningful progress by more deeply understanding and enhancing the graduate student experience. This report encapsulates our key strategic initiatives that have markedly benefited academic, professional, and personal development for our students, particularly during these globally tumultuous times.

## **Achievements and Strategic Initiatives**

The year was marked by significant support for research and professional growth, strengthening the Graduate Student Senate to match the growth of the Graduate College through increased community engagement, infrastructure improvements, and improved amplification of graduate voices through increased participation on key university committees. Finally, GSS passed three resolutions this semester.

The first resolution calls for the creation of an Open Access Publication Fund for graduate students, which asks for a fund to be developed to support graduate students publishing their own work and accessing the work of other researchers. This increased financial support would reduce financial barriers, promoting greater visibility and dissemination of our students' research outputs.

The second resolution asks for more detailed reports regarding UVM's divestment of funds from fossil fuel companies. This advocacy effort aligns our investment practices with our commitment to sustainability, and we were pleased that the UVM Board of Trustees approved this initiative in 2020. Graduate students, especially those whose studies touch on environmental stewardship are looking for a more detailed confirmation of this effort.

The final resolution that was passed addressed a much-needed increase in the GSS fee, from \$7/\$10 to \$15/\$25, which will enable GSS to employ a part-time coordinator, support clubs, committees, professional development, and increase student engagement. This resolution was passed unanimously and is widely supported.

Other achievements include creating Comprehensive fee waivers for Research Assistants and Teaching Assistants, which GSS has contributed to for the past few years, alongside the Graduate College and Dean.

Community engagement and inclusivity were vigorously promoted through extensive support for over 20 student clubs and the inaugural GSS Orientation. These efforts have significantly boosted participation and fostered a more inclusive and professional community atmosphere.

Infrastructure improvements were also a highlight, with the move to a new office space in the Discovery Building, which will improve our operational capabilities and accessibility by graduate students.

In governance, we achieved unprecedented levels of representation in university decision-making, ensuring that graduate student voices are effectively integrated into policy discussions.

### **Crisis Management Initiatives**

In response to the ongoing global challenges, the GSS implemented robust crisis management initiatives to support our students' emotional and physical well-being. These included coordinated healing sessions with the Interfaith Center and comprehensive safety workshops with UVM Security. These efforts have been crucial in maintaining a supportive environment during these difficult times.

### **Survey and Data-Driven Future Planning**

The year concluded with the deployment of an inaugural comprehensive student survey, designed by GSS committees and the Executive Council to gather essential feedback from the graduate community. This survey has provided valuable insights into student needs and concerns.

Reflecting on the past year, the Graduate Student Senate has made substantial strides in enhancing the graduate experience at the University of Vermont. Our continued focus on advocacy, support, and engagement has prepared us well to meet future challenges and opportunities.

### **Acknowledgments**

I extend my deepest gratitude to the University administration, our collaborative partners, and the dedicated graduate student community. The successes of this year are a testament to our collective commitment and perseverance.