

Draft GSS Strategic Plan 2014-2017

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Executive Summary

Five years after separating from the Simon Fraser Student Society in order to become an independent student organization, the Graduate Student Society (GSS) of Simon Fraser University has developed our first three-year Strategic Plan. This plan identifies the Mission, Vision, Values, Priorities, & Objectives that will guide the work of the GSS for the next three years – and beyond.

In addition to presenting the Strategic Plan itself, the following document outlines our next steps, including how the Strategic Plan will be implemented and how success will be measured. As such, the presentation of our Strategic Plan is only one of several goals for this document. Perhaps more importantly, it is intended to serve as a living resource as we act upon our identified Mission, Vision, Values, Priorities, & Objectives. It will also be useful as future student leaders continue to establish and enact strategic goals for our young, vibrant organization.

Introduction

2013 was a big year for the Graduate Student Society of Simon Fraser University! We turned five, we welcomed a new Executive Director, and we undertook the development of our first Strategic Plan. These three major milestones are certainly related to one another. The GSS has reached a critical point of stability in our day-to-day operations that has allowed us to effectively turn our attention to strategic planning and visioning for the future. At the same time, we remain nimble enough (partially due to being a relatively small student organization, which itself is related to our youth) as an organization to embrace opportunities for change. Indeed, this is arguably the aspect of the GSS that we received the most positive feedback about during our consultations for this Strategic Plan. One student wrote to us after a suggestion that she made for our newsletter was incorporated into the following month's installment. She expressed both excitement and disbelief that an organization was able to listen to and incorporate feedback from its members with such alacrity. Furthermore, during the consultation we held with the GSS' central stakeholders and partners, our organization was described as: "eager, cooperative, adventurous, growing, proactive, changing, and as having tremendous potential." All of this points to the GSS' capacity to be responsive and committed to changing where new opportunities and better solutions are possible.

One of the most important lessons that a student-led not-for-profit organization can learn is about how to be strategic in planning and goal setting. The familiar saying "stand for something or you'll fall for anything" comes to mind. However, it is perhaps better altered to "set specific, strategic goals or you will try to take on everything and likely accomplish nothing." There are so many projects and initiatives that *could* be taken on at any given point. More challenging still, they *all* have merit! In the world of student organizations, where the people filling leadership roles are often only around for a year, it is very easy to approach work in ad hoc and piecemeal ways. This can result in a really cool, interesting, vibrant quilt of projects, but it is unlikely to add up to the

kinds of comprehensive benefits that can be sustained and carried forward throughout the years. Furthermore, it can lead to each year's crop of leaders reinventing the wheel – spending significant time and energy on work that has already been taken on, in slightly different ways.

We are incredibly grateful to the GSS' Executive Director – Amina Rai – for arriving to our organization with such vision, drive, and conviction. She saw the real opportunities that the GSS had to be an exemplary student-led organization and she spoke passionately about the ways that a comprehensive and executable Strategic Plan could help us to strive for this goal. We were convinced. With support from the GSS' Advocate – Christina Batstone – Amina then developed the process to guide the development of just such a Strategic Plan, beginning with an Executive Committee retreat to hammer out some draft ideas and continuing through an extensive consultation process that sought insight from both our membership and our key stakeholders/partner organizations.

The GSS' three-year Strategic Plan is intended to help us chart a course. At the outset, we are well aware that there will be unanticipated changes in the wind and impossible-to-predict-obstacles that will inevitably shift the direction of our organization in ways that are beyond the scope of our current imaginings. Fundamentally, our strategic goal is to encounter change in ways that continue to fulfill our Mission, Vision, and Values. With the support and collaboration of our membership, Simon Fraser University, other student-led organizations, and all our partners, we feel ready for the next three years!

GSS Executive Committee, 2014-2015

From the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies – Students

Being a graduate student can be a lonely process. Competitive, outcome-focused, abundantly varied in its expectations and experiences, sometimes solitary, always privileged, graduate study can be the best and the worst of times for many of our students. All of our graduate students come with impeccable intellectual credentials and many have participated in student governance or in their communities during their undergraduate years. But the transition to graduate education is unique. The gulf between undergraduate and graduate life is greater than most anticipate and those who have not crossed it cannot know its significance. It is for this reason that an organization for graduate students run by graduate students is so essential. And for this reason that it is so surprising that Simon Fraser University did not have the Graduate Student Society until 2008. It is an impressive young association that has already accomplished a great deal and will continue to do so.

Perhaps I should not confess this but I will. Until I became Associate Dean, Graduate Studies with a portfolio focused on students in 2011, I knew very little about the GSS. I may be forgiven – the organization was only three years old – but the point is that I was essentially a blank slate. Since then the GSS has repeatedly and convincingly impressed me with its vigor, its focus and its competence in understanding and meeting the myriad needs of graduate students coming to SFU. Whether through the health and benefits plan, the important work of the GSS Advocate, or through the various programs that foster intellectual exchange and supportive relationships, including

Orientation, the Think Again! conference, funds for Professional Development and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing, and social events that help our students emerge from labs, libraries and archives to enjoy this beautiful place we live, the GSS makes the life better for graduate students at SFU.

This first Strategic Plan for the GSS demonstrates that it is poised to carry on doing good work. 'Responsive stewardship' is a phrase I have heard around the GSS offices. I like it because it foregrounds leadership as service that nurtures resources, including the energy and willingness of graduate students themselves. This strategic plan itself is, as you will find, built in relationship, intentional and forward-thinking. It is balanced between attending to the long-term needs of graduate students in our province and meeting the immediate desires of the students on our three campuses today. It promises fellowship and support and will inspire passionate leadership not just here at SFU but beyond in ways that bring SFU's emphasis on community engagement to life in real time.

'Collaboration and Partnership' is one of the key Priorities of this strategic plan and the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Fellows looks forward to our continued relationship. It challenges us; it energizes us; it makes us better at what we do and that makes us better at serving graduate students. We offer congratulations to the GSS on five years of tremendous work and eagerly anticipate the implementation of this strategic plan.

Dr. Mary-Ellen Kelm
Associate Dean, Graduate Studies – Students.

Mission, Vision, and Values

The Executive Director (Amina Rai) and Advocate (Christina Batstone) organized and facilitated a Strategic Planning retreat for the 2013-2014 Executive Committee from July 5th-7th 2013. The key elements of the plan were initially drafted at this retreat; these drafts became starting points for an extensive consultation process with the GSS membership and key stakeholders.

Mission Statement

A Mission Statement is intended to describe the overarching purpose of an organization – the reason why it exists. In order to develop the GSS Mission Statement, the Executive Committee reflected on the following questions:

- What do we do?
- For whom do we do it?
- Why do we do it?
- How do we do it?

At the end of the Strategic Planning Retreat, the draft Mission Statement read:

The Graduate Student Society at Simon Fraser University is a dynamic, member-driven organization that supports graduate students to achieve their personal, professional and academic goals at SFU and beyond. The Society is committed to receptive stewardship in order to provide relevant representation, advocacy, and services to our membership.

In drafting this statement, the Executive Committee wanted to highlight that the GSS exists to support graduate students as they achieve *their* goals; we recognize that graduate students have many different reasons (personal and professional) for pursuing graduate studies and that graduate programs themselves are increasingly varied. We feel that it is important that our members feel supported personally, professionally, and academically during the course of their graduate studies *and* as they seek to apply the skills and insights that they develop at SFU to other pursuits. We recognize that the impacts of graduate studies are not limited to the university context and we therefore feel strongly that the support provided by the GSS should similarly expand beyond the walls of SFU wherever possible. This is perhaps more readily reflected in our external advocacy efforts, which are focused on lobbying the government and other external agents on behalf of graduate student interests.

We also wanted to emphasize the GSS's status as a member-organized, member-led, and member-run organization. We used the phrase "receptive stewardship" to try and capture the nature of work at the GSS; student leaders and staff are charged, during their tenure, with caring for the well-being of the organization, which truly belongs to the membership. We seek to act as stewards or caretakers of the Society by consistently soliciting feedback from graduate students at a variety of levels (i.e., at Council, on Committees, informally at events, through surveys, townhalls, and consultation sessions, etc.). In this way we consider ourselves to be *receptive* to our members as we act as stewards of the Society. Finally, we sought to enumerate some of the key roles played by the GSS at SFU, namely: representation, advocacy, and the offering of a variety of services to our members.

After engaging in extensive consultations with the GSS membership, the Mission Statement was changed to remove the phrase "receptive stewardship." While the Executive Committee continued to feel that this phrase captured an important element of our work, we received a significant amount of feedback indicating that graduate students found this to be an inaccessible turn of phrase: we could hardly consider ourselves to be "receptive" if we disregarded this negative reaction from our members! Ultimately, we felt that we were able to remove this phrase without significantly altering the overall meaning that we had hoped to capture in our Mission.

The GSS Mission Statement

The Graduate Student Society at Simon Fraser University is a dynamic, member-driven organization that supports graduate students to achieve their personal, professional and academic goals at SFU and beyond. The Society is committed to providing responsive and relevant representation, advocacy, and services to our membership.

Vision Statement

A Vision Statement is a long-term goal intended to inspire members and stakeholders while speaking to an organization's values. It is broad, but clear, and usually does not change over time. In order to develop the GSS Vision Statement, the Executive Committee reflected on the following questions:

- What purpose does our organization serve?
- Why would another person or organization want to work with us?
- What makes us unique from other non-profits/student organizations?

At the end of the Strategic Planning Retreat, the draft Vision Statement read:

To be an exemplary student organization led by a passionate community dedicated to the well-being and success of its members.

The Executive Committee wished to emphasize the GSS's goal to be outstanding as a student-led organization. Furthermore, the Vision Statement encompasses our firm belief that it is the mutually beneficial cycle of being dedicated *to* and receiving leadership *from* our membership – a passionate community of graduate students – that will allow us to achieve exemplary status. In other words, we seek to foster community and inspire passionate leadership amongst our members through our commitment to their well-being and success. Finally, this Vision Statement incorporates the GSS's commitment to collective – rather than hierarchical or exclusionary – leadership.

We received positive feedback on the Vision Statement throughout our consultation process and therefore only made a small grammatical change to arrive at the version included here.

The GSS Vision Statement

To be an exemplary student organization led by a passionate community, dedicated to the well-being and success of its members.

Values

Core Values are intended to articulate the beliefs and qualities of an organization. The challenge in drafting Values is to move beyond the “laundry list” of descriptive words that could be used to describe an organization in order to identify the words that truly resonate at the core of the organization. Identifying the most relevant and significant Values can be an elusive process. In order to develop the GSS Values, the Executive Committee reflected on the following questions:

- Which values do we want the GSS to demonstrate and model through our personal work behaviors, decision-making, contribution, and interpersonal interaction?
- Which values speak to the beliefs, practices, and behaviours of the GSS?
- Which values help each person establish priorities in their daily work life?
- Which values do we want to guide every decision that is made within the organization?

At the end of the Strategic Planning Retreat, the draft Core Values were:

- Support for higher education*
- Collaborative decision-making
- Fair and equitable practice
- Accountability
- Receptive stewardship*

Asterisk indicate phrases that the Executive Committee was not settled on by the end of the retreat – we felt that these ideas captured important Values for the GSS but did not feel decided on those particular words to describe our intentions.

We received a fair amount of feedback on the Values through our consultations. The wording of the Values was also the most consistent area of debate amongst the Executive Committee, Council, and Staff. Below are the Values that were ultimately decided upon, with descriptions of their intended meanings:

The GSS Core Values

Collaborative decision-making: At all levels of the organization, the GSS values consultation, deliberation, respectful debate, and teamwork in decision-making. Towards this end, we actively solicit and listen to feedback as a meaningful part of decision-making.

Fair and equitable practice: As the representative body for all graduate students at SFU, the GSS values the fair distribution of resources and equality of access to opportunities amongst the entirety of our membership.

Accountability: The GSS values transparency and responsibility in our governance structure, as well as in our relationships with our members and external partners. Towards this end, we strive to continuously strengthen our governance and communication mechanisms.

Responsive Stewardship: The GSS values leadership that actively considers the needs, interests, and perspectives of the membership in order to ensure the long-term well-being of the organization.

Support graduate students in their pursuit of public higher education: The GSS values the educational pursuits of our members and provides services and resources that support the fulfillment of personal, professional, and academic goals through public higher education.

Priorities & Objectives

Draft Priorities were outlined during the Executive Committee Strategic Planning retreat. These draft Priorities became the core of the in-person consultation sessions hosted through the fall semester of 2013. The consultation sessions allowed us to both fine-tune our Priority statements and articulate the Objectives that fall under each Priority.

Priorities

Priorities are intended to operationalize the Mission and Values of the organization into goals and actionable plans that help strive towards the organization's Vision. In order to develop the GSS Priorities, the Executive Committee and Staff conducted evaluations of the state of the projects, initiatives, and structures currently in place in the organization. These "SWOT" (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses are included as an Appendix to this document. Information from the SWOT analyses was sorted into overarching themes at the retreat and these themes were used to help us develop our draft Priorities.

At the end of the Strategic Planning Retreat, the draft Priorities were:

- Education and Training
- Communication
- Membership and Participation
- Long-term Financial Stability
- Operational Organization and Efficiency
- Collaboration and Partnerships

The major feedback that we received on these Priorities during the consultation process was: to add “Advocacy” as a Priority; to reconsider “Communication” as a Priority (since it seemed to fit as an Objective under the other Priorities); to clarify the title of “Education and Training.”

Below are the Priorities that were ultimately decided upon, with descriptions of their intended meanings:

Collaboration and Partnerships: The GSS will prioritize strengthening our existing partnerships and developing new partnerships. We seek effective collaborations in order to deliver the services required for graduate student success.

Advocacy and Representation: As a representational body, the GSS prioritizes acting as an advocate for graduate student issues at SFU and in the province of BC. We seek to represent our membership internally and externally with a high degree of accountability.

Professional Development and Training: The GSS prioritizes the professional development of our membership in order to support them to achieve their personal, academic, and professional goals. Furthermore, the GSS prioritizes the effective training of student leaders, such that they take significant benefit from the contributions that they make to our Society.

Long-Term Financial Stability: The GSS prioritizes the responsible, ethical, and sustainable investment and use of our members’ fees and all other funds developed by the organization.

Membership Engagement and Participation: The GSS prioritizes fostering an engaged membership in order to ensure that graduate students benefit from our efforts and feel empowered to take on the leadership of the organization.

Operational Efficiency and Organization: The GSS prioritizes efficiency in the operation of our non-hierarchical, collaborative organization. We seek to consistently improve our governance structure and operational procedures in order to support effective decision-making across the organization.

The Priorities will be assigned to Executive Committee members and become the focus of their portfolios. At the time of writing, it is anticipated that the Priorities will be distributed amongst the Executive Committee as follows:

Academic and Internal Relations Officer – Operational Efficiency and Organization
Coordinating and External Relations Officer – Advocacy and Representation
Financial Coordinator – Long-Term Financial Stability
Graduate Services Coordinator – Collaboration and Partnerships
Member and Community Relations Officer – Membership Engagement and Participation
Professional Development Coordinator – Professional Development and Training

The GSS Staff team will also actively support the pursuit of the GSS Priorities and Objectives.

Objectives

Objectives are intended to be concrete, measurable goals that allow an organization to gauge their progress in achieving their Priorities. The Objectives included in this plan were developed through in-depth consultation on the drafted Priorities.

Priority 1: Collaboration and Partnerships

Objectives
Network with organizations dedicated to students at SFU in order to establish stronger community relations across all campuses and enhance information-sharing practices amongst groups.
Centralize coordination and collaboration across organizations dedicated to students to minimize the duplication of efforts.
Strengthen collaboration between the SFU GSS and other student societies.
Increase the role of the GSS and graduate students as integral stakeholders in SFU's decision-making processes.
Increase dialogue with external organizations that have overlapping interests with GSS members.

Priority 2: Advocacy and Representation

Objectives
Ensure that advocacy initiatives (internal and external advocacy) are well-organized, coordinated, and based on direction from Council and the GSS membership.
Advocate for equitable access to University and GSS services for graduate students studying at SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey.
Raise awareness of the Advocacy service across campuses and increase Advocate's outreach efforts in SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey.
Advocate for accessible, affordable, and quality public higher education in BC and nationally.

Priority 3: Professional Development and Training

Objectives
Connect graduate students with professional development and career education opportunities across all three campuses at SFU.
Empower student leaders by providing meaningful professional development and training opportunities.
Develop effective transition mechanisms for student leaders.

Priority 4: Long-Term Financial Stability

Objectives
Create a long-term financial plan for the GSS.
Maintain a portfolio of socially responsible investments.
Diversify the GSS's sources of revenue.

Priority 5: Membership Engagement and Participation

Objectives
Establish the GSS as a central stakeholder in graduate student orientations.
Provide events for graduate students that combine professional, academic, and social interests.
Establish the GSS as a central and first-line information hub for graduate students at SFU.
Foster "pride in membership" in the GSS amongst graduate students in order to promote feelings of community and belonging amongst our membership.
Increase the GSS's presence across all three campuses.

Priority 6: Operational Efficiency and Organization

Objectives
Clarify roles, responsibilities, direction, and boundaries for staff and student leader positions.
Improve the internal administrative processes within the GSS.
Increase coordination and collaboration between all facets of the GSS governance structure (Committees, Council, Caucuses, and Staff).
Conduct regular reviews of GSS services to ensure that graduate students' needs are being appropriately addressed.

In January 2014, the Executive Committee, including the newly elected Coordinators, participated in a two-day retreat. All four members of the GSS Staff also joined on the first day of the retreat, helping to build the team dynamic across our office and contributing their energy and insight to our strategic planning efforts. At this retreat we worked to: 1. Finalize the Objectives identified through the consultations, 2. Develop milestones, and 3. Identify timelines for actualizing the Objectives. In June, after the Strategic Plan has gone to vote by the general membership, the Executive Committee (with a new team of Officers!) will have another retreat, at which point they will establish plans for actualizing all of the milestones and Objectives.

Milestones, Implementation, & Evaluation

Milestones

Milestones have been identified in order to support the pursuit of each Objective. These Milestones are considered to be Short Term (0-6 months), Mid Term (6-18 months), or Long Term (18-36 months) goals. The start date for these timelines is May 1st 2014, after the Strategic Plan has been brought to the GSS membership and the new team of Officers has begun their terms. The completion of Milestones will allow us to keep on track for achieving our Objectives and ultimately our Priorities.

Priority 1: Collaboration and Partnerships
1.1 Network with organizations dedicated to students at SFU in order to establish stronger community relations across all campuses and enhance information-sharing practices amongst groups.
1.1 a) Create a caravan of services to reach out to the three campuses on a consistent schedule (Long Term)
1.1 b) Create an inventory of organizations to dedicated students at SFU and their related meetings (Mid Term)
1.1 c) Determine the most effective ways to network with organizations dedicated to students at SFU in order to establish stronger community relations across all campuses and enhance information-sharing practices amongst groups (Mid Term)
1.1 d) Determine where other organizations dedicated to students at SFU could strengthen services to graduate students (Mid Term)
1.2 Centralize coordination and collaboration across organizations dedicated to students to minimize the duplication of efforts.
1.2 a) Create an inventory of initiatives across organizations dedicated to students at SFU (Mid Term)
1.2 b) Determine where it is most effective to centralize initiatives across organizations dedicated to students at SFU to minimize the duplication of efforts (Long Term)
1.2 c) Develop mechanisms to centralize coordination and collaboration to minimize the duplication of efforts (Long Term)
1.3 Strengthen collaboration between the SFU GSS and other student societies.
1.3 a) Develop a mechanism to effectively share information and exchange best practices with graduate student societies in Canada and students' societies in BC (Long Term)
1.4 Increase the role of the GSS and graduate students as integral stakeholders in SFU's decision-making processes.
1.4 a) Advocate for the formalization of graduate student representation in Terms of References for hiring committees for SFU senior administration (Mid Term)
1.4 b) Increase the communication between the GSS and graduate students that sit on formal SFU decision –making bodies (Short Term)
1.4 c) Develop a formal process of how we communicate opportunities and appoint graduate students on SFU decision-making bodies (Mid Term)
1.4 d) Investigate opportunities to elevate participation through existing seats on university

committees (such as JOG, SGSC, etc.) (Mid Term)
1.5 Increase dialogue with external organizations that have overlapping interests with GSS members.
1.5 a) Strengthen relationships with external organizations that hold seats on Council (Mid Term)
1.5 b) Investigate opportunities of other external organizations on Council (Mid Term)

Priority 2: Advocacy and Representation
2.1 Ensure that advocacy initiatives (internal and external advocacy) are well-organized, coordinated, and based on direction from Council and the GSS membership.
2.1 a) Make yearly advocacy plans that identify specific campaign goals (Short Term)
2.1 b) Ensure that campaigns are well documented (timelines, correspondence, successes, obstacles, summaries of key meetings, etc.) (Short Term)
2.1 c) Actively seek opportunities for collaboration in advocacy efforts (including between student leaders and committees at the GSS) (Short Term)
2.1 d) Elevate the participation of committee members in advocacy efforts (Mid Term)
2.1 e) Clarify roles and responsibilities for advocacy initiatives at the GSS (including distinguishing between the Environmental and Social Justice Committee and the Collective Advocacy and Campaigns Committee) (Short Term)
2.1 f) Establish opportunities for initiative specific participation in GSS advocacy efforts (Mid Term)
2.2 Advocate for equitable access to University and GSS services for graduate students studying at SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey.
2.2 a) Seek written confirmation from SFU regarding the prioritization of the GSS and graduate students in the future space plans of the University (Mid Term)
2.2 b) Increase awareness of graduate students' service needs (and ways that these needs differ from those of undergraduate students) amongst the university administration and other service providers (Long Term)
2.2 c) Make use of existing resources at the GSS and at the university to improve the GSS's service provision in Surrey and Vancouver (Mid Term)
2.2 d) Investigate opportunities for GSS representation on administrative committees in Surrey and Vancouver (Short Term)
2.2 e) Strengthen GSS awareness of Surrey and Vancouver student concerns through increased representation of Surrey and Vancouver students in GSS governance (Mid Term)

2.3 Raise awareness of the Advocacy service across campuses and increase Advocate’s outreach efforts in SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey.
2.3 a) Ensure that information provided about the Advocacy service is detailed, readily accessible, and well distributed across all three campuses (Short Term)
2.3 b) Increase the Advocate’s ability to work remotely (including the ability to book individual meetings with students) to ensure an effective, regular presence on all three campuses (Mid Term)
2.3 c) Encourage users of the Advocacy service to provide targeted feedback (particularly about how they heard of the service) and make effective use of this feedback (Mid Term)
2.3 d) Increase circulation of the Advocate’s annual report (Short Term)
2.4 Advocate for accessible, affordable, and quality public higher education in BC and nationally.
2.4 a) Successful advocate and implement a process for the creation of a graduate provincial scholarship, alongside Graduate Student Societies from UBC, UNBC, and UVic (Long Term)
2.4 b) Actively seek participation with advocacy initiatives and campaigns across BC and nationally that would positively impact graduate students (Long Term)
2.4 c) Approach advocacy for public higher education holistically, considering the impacts of things like deferred maintenance, accessibility, transit, childcare, etc. (Long Term/ongoing)
2.6 d) Chose advocacy projects with discernment in order to ensure the highest possible impact and avoid spreading the GSS’s resources thin (Long Term)

Priority 3: Professional Development and Training
3.1 Connect graduate students with professional development and career education opportunities across all three campuses at SFU.
3.1 a) Identify professional development and career education opportunities for graduate students across all three campuses (Short Term)
3.1 b) Create communication tools and resources to disseminate information about professional development and career education opportunities to graduate students across all three campuses (Mid Term)
3.1 c) Identify gaps in professional development and career education and assess the GSS’s role in addressing these gaps (Long Term)
3.2 Empower student leaders by providing meaningful professional development and training opportunities.
3.2 a) Identify the training needs of the various groups of student leaders at the GSS (and graduate student representatives that are appointed through the GSS) (Mid Term)

3.2 b) Develop training workshops and resources for the various groups of student leaders at the GSS (Mid Term)
3.2 c) Provide comprehensive and consistently scheduled training for Caucuses, Committee members, Councilors, and other interested graduate students (Long Term)
3.3 Develop effective transition mechanisms for student leaders.
3.3 a) Ensure the position-specific deadlines align with position transition timelines (Short Term)
3.3 b) Ensure election timelines allow for transition between outgoing and incoming elected student leaders (Short Term)
3.3 c) Clarify the steps and responsibilities for transition of incoming and outgoing elected student leaders (Mid Term)
3.3 d) Develop best practices for written transition resources and materials (Mid Term)

Priority 4: Long-Term Financial Stability
4.1 Create a long-term financial plan for the GSS.
4.1 a) Create realistic 3-year projections for: changes in membership fees, anticipated operating budgets, and expenditures (Mid Term)
4.1 b) Create and maintain a GSS budgeting guide that includes information about consultation processes and review mechanisms (Mid Term)
4.1 c) Conduct an audit of the GSS's space needs to anticipate costs associated with space expansion and/or modification, in order to determine the sufficiency of the Capital Fund for meeting anticipated space costs (Long Term)
4.1 d) Monitor the GSS's credit rating and borrowing capacity and research ways to strengthen each (Mid Term)
4.1 e) Develop Regulations for each of the GSS's five funds: Capital Fund, Contingency Fund, Legal Defense Fund, Benefit Plan Bursary Fund, and Benefit Plan Contingency Fund (Short Term)
4.1 f) Ensure that the GSS has clear short- and long-term investment plans for all funds, and that these plans are reflected in an up-to-date Investment Policy Statement (IPS) (Short Term)
4.2 Maintain a portfolio of socially responsible investments.
4.2 a) Approve, at Council, an Investment Policy Statement (IPS) that mandates that the GSS's

investment manager seek socially responsible investments (including fossil free investments) for the GSS (Short Term)
4.2 b) Divest completely from direct fossil fuel investments by 2019 (Long Term)
4.3 Diversify the GSS's sources of revenue.
4.3 a) Identify at least 10 possible new sources of revenue (for example, business ventures, sponsorship, etc.) (Short Term)
4.3 b) Research the feasibility of pursuing at least 3 of the sources of revenue identified (Mid Term)
4.3 c) Implement at least one new revenue-generating project (Long Term)
4.3 d) Ensure that all new revenue-generating projects are congruent with the GSS's Governing Documents. Where appropriate, ensure that relevant GSS Governing Documents include sufficient flexibility in order to support the implementation of new revenue generating projects (Long Term)

Priority 5: Membership Engagement and Participation
5.1 Establish the GSS as a central stakeholder in graduate student orientations.
5.1 a) Conduct GSS orientations for new graduate students across all campuses at key intake periods (Fall and Spring) (Long Term/ongoing)
5.1 b) Investigate how the GSS can best participate in departmental orientations and create a system for doing so (Mid Term)
5.1 c) Determine an annual schedule for ongoing orientation workshops (Mid Term)
5.1 d) Implement and assess ongoing orientation workshops (Long Term)
5.2 Provide events for graduate students that combine professional, academic, and social interests.
5.2 a) Establish process for actively seeking suggestions for social events from the GSS membership (Short Term)
5.2 b) Organize social events for GSS members that prioritize diversity of participation (Mid Term)
5.2 c) Establish effective systems that connect graduate students with events happening across the SFU community (Mid Term)
5.4 d) Create a mechanism to support graduate students in implementing their own community development initiatives (Long Term)

5.4 Establish the GSS as a central and first-line information hub for graduate students at SFU.
5.4 a) Create a communications strategy that address the GSS’s social media presence, listerv use, event promotions, and website usage (Mid Term)
5.4 b) Investigate the creation of a GSS mobile app (Mid Term)
5.4 c) Improve the ease of navigation on the GSS website (Mid Term)
5.5 Foster “pride in membership” in the GSS amongst graduate students in order to promote feelings of community and belonging amongst our membership.
5.5 a) Establish a process for communicating GSS achievements (successful projects, campaigns, initiatives, etc.) (Short Term)
5.5 b) Increase communication of the achievements and activities of GSS members through social media (Short Term)
5.5 c) Establish regular membership appreciation initiatives (volunteer appreciation events, etc) (Long Term)
5.5 d) Investigate partnerships through which GSS members will receive tangible benefits from membership (discounts at retailers, etc.) (Long Term)
5.6 Increase the GSS’s presence across all three campuses.
5.6 a) Increase the accessibility of GSS staff and services across all three campuses (Long Term)
5.6 b) Increase collaboration with organizations that provide services to graduate students in Surrey and Vancouver (Mid Term)
5.6 c) Work with graduate students in Surrey and Vancouver to develop strong communities on their respective campuses (Long Term)

Priority 6: Operational Efficiency and Organization
6.1 Clarify roles, responsibilities, direction, and boundaries for staff and student leader positions.
6.1 a) Complete position descriptions for all staff and CERO position (Short Term)
6.1 b) Review all student leader positions and governance structures to ensure they meet the needs of the organization and reflect current practices (Mid Term)
6.1 c) Implement a staff position description review process to ensure they meet the needs of the organization and reflect current practices (Short Term)
6.2 Improve the internal administrative processes within the GSS.

6.2 a) Create a GSS administrative service manual (Mid Term)
6.2 b) Create a governing document index (Short Term)
6.2 c) Standardize filing across electronic and paper-based systems (Long Term)
6.3 Increase coordination and collaboration between all facets of the GSS governance structure (Committees, Council, Caucuses, and Staff).
6.3 a) Explore the mechanism to clarify the working relationship between members of the Executive Committee (overlapping responsibilities and position responsibilities) (Mid Term)
6.3 b) Explore the mechanism to clarify the working relationship between staff, Executive Committee and student leaders (Mid Term)
6.3 c) Development and implement mechanisms for coordination and collaboration between all facets of the GSS governance structure (Committees, Council, Caucuses, and staff) (Long Term)
6.4 Conduct regular reviews of GSS services to ensure that graduate students' needs are being appropriately addressed.
6.4 a) Create a schedule and process to review GSS services to ensure graduate students' needs are appropriately addressed (Mid Term)

Implementation

The GSS staff and student leaders will implement the Strategic Plan according to the identified timelines and milestones, as much as is possible. At the Spring 2014 Executive Committee retreat, the student leaders will be supported to develop Action Plans for each Objective. The drafting of Action Plans is intended to be a fairly quick process, since the Milestones have already been identified. The idea is for more time to be dedicated to working towards the Milestones than drafting additional plans.

Action Plans are intended to be fluid and adaptable; in future years, they will be drafted at the beginning of each student leader's tenure and adjusted as the year progresses. Staff will assist student leaders in both developing Action Plans and meeting the Objectives that they are intended to satisfy.

Evaluation

If Action Plans are followed correctly, Milestones will be achieved on the proper timelines, Objectives will be satisfied, and Priorities will be met. Council will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of Action Plans on an on-going basis, through the monthly reports provided by Executive Committee members. To facilitate this, student leaders will report to Council on the status of their individual Actions Plans regularly. Council is also tasked with deciding on

appropriate sanctions for student leaders who do not prioritize the work suggested by their Action Plan or who fail to meet key goals laid out by the Action Plan.

In addition, the Executive Committee will report on progress made in implementing the Strategic Plan at every Annual General Meeting and in the GSS Annual Report. These Reports will include information about successes/challenges encountered for all Priorities and Objectives. In addition, they will include future plans for ensuring the GSS's Strategic goals are met.

Stages of Approval

Approval Process

The elements of this Strategic Plan were drafted by the Executive Committee, with tremendous support from the Executive Director and the Advocate. Extensive consultation and a variety of opportunities for feedback were central to this drafting process.

Council approved draft elements of the Strategic Plan at critical points, including:

- The Mission Statement, Vision Statement, and Values in July 2013; and
- The Priorities in July 2013; and
- The Objectives (developed through consultations) in December 2013; and
- The completed draft Strategic Plan was recommended for approval at the AGM by Council in February 2014.

The completed draft Strategic Plan was presented for approval by the General Membership at the 2014 AGM in February.

Appendices

Appendix A: Strategic Plan Consultation Content

Strategic Planning Sessions

Outline for GSS team:

3:45 pm - Two student leaders welcoming attendees to session.

4:00 pm - Welcome to attendees and Introduction (Part 1).

4:15 pm - Attendees are encouraged to walk around and look at the Priorities placed on the wall with descriptions and questions for discussion (see below). Attendees are requested to put a post-it note on the two Priorities that they hope to discuss during the session. During this time, the GSS team is walking around the room fielding questions (Part 2).

4:30 pm - While staff are tabulating the Priorities and setting up break-out sessions, the student leaders facilitate the broad discussion about the GSS (Part 3).

4:50 pm - Three Priorities are chosen and three “stations” are created. Attendees are requested to go to the breakout group that they are most interested in. So for example, if *Collaboration & Partnership*, *Membership Engagement & Participation*, and *Operational Organization & Efficiency* are selected, these three Priorities will be the focus of the breakout sessions. Three GSS team members will facilitate the discussion of the Priorities and use the Discussion Questions to help the flow of the conversation. Your role will be to provide basic information, answer questions, and record discussion points (Part 4).

Here are a few tips for a good discussion:

- Provide pertinent information for the discussion at the beginning of the session but avoid overloading the attendees.
- Incite conversation within the group but avoid dominating the discussion.
- Ask questions to get the conversation flowing - if there is a suggestion, positively reinforce their contribution and ask for them to expound on their suggestion in an encouraging manner. For example “That’s a really interesting suggestion, can you tell me a bit more about what you mean?”

At the end of the discussion, as a participant from the group to present to the larger group.

5:20 - 5:30 pm to 6:00 pm - Reconvene as a large group and have each breakout group present to the larger group. After each presentation there will be time to provide feedback and comments, expand on points made, etc. *Facilitators can help this discussion by saying things like “What does everyone else think about the point by group X do to a, b, c?”*

6:00 pm - Dinner is served. Discussion can carry on about the points made if necessary.

Closing - Formally close the session by thanking everyone and asking them to fill out feedback forms and leave them at the table or return them to the GSS, if they require additional time.

Tasks to be assigned for each session:

- Sign in - Student Leader
- Transcriber (live into a google drive, projected)
- Facilitators for breakout sessions
- Food set up and distribution
- Exit Surveys (hand out and collection)
- Clean up (everyone!)

Introduction:

Part 1 - Introduction (15 minutes)

- Welcome
 - Introduction - who I am, my position with the GSS
 - Introduce others helping with the session
 - And maybe a group introduction (if not too big of a group - name, department and a funny fact about yourself? - we can all partake).
 - Thank you so much for being here.
 - We’re excited to have you here.
 - Hope to have a fun session full of creative ideas and helpful feedback.

Before we begin...The GSS in 2 minutes or less...

- What is the GSS?
- What does the GSS do for you?
- What services do we provide?

Typing out notes on document being shown on screen.

Hardcopy "About Us" information is distributed to attendees so people can reference the information throughout the session.

- Recap history
 - GSS was made by students to ensure a strong graduate student voice at SFU and beyond.
 - This is our Society/your Society and it is still 5-years young! Which means that we are always learning and changing and figuring out the best ways to do things. Just like any five year old, we learn best by trying things, paying attention to things and listening to the people around us who care about us!
- Session
 - Strategic planning is an inspiring process of thinking about where we want our organization to take us in the future and how we will get there.
 - In striving for meaningful consultation, the GSS is committed to hearing from our members to learn more about their needs and ways to respond to these needs.
 - However, we also recognize that with so many diverse voices, it may not always be possible to ensure that every single identified need is met.
 - We also recognize that some of you may not be very familiar with the GSS - that is OK! We still are wanting to hear your input!
 - We are committed to listening, we are committed to problem solving, but we are also restrained by a) funding, b) staff power/hours for work, c) the fact that all of the student leaders are full time students pursuing graduate degrees, just like all other members.
 - We kindly ask you to keep that in mind during this session! :)
 - Defining what kind of feedback is helpful (future and solution oriented) and what kind of feedback isn't helpful (nit picky about particular words, "complaint" oriented, problem focused)

Part 2: Selecting the Priorities (10 minutes)

Here's your opportunity to select what we discuss today. As you'll notice, all across the room are "Priorities" posted to the wall and windows, including in the boardroom. We will give you all two post-it notes. Have a look at the Priorities, read the descriptions, and place a post-it note on the Priority that you'd like to discuss today. Under each Priority is a definition of why and how the Priority was conceived to help you with your selection and give you more context to its meaning in relation to the GSS.

Reconvene as a large group. While GSS staff prepare the Priorities discussion stations.

Part 3: Broad Discussion (20 minutes)

Now that you've had the opportunity to look at the six Priorities the GSS Executive Committee has drafted, we're eager to hear if you think there's anything we're missing with what we have tentatively developed?

What are you hoping the GSS can do for you that you don't currently see happening?

What would elevate your graduate experience at SFU?

GSS team: make sure to be on the lookout for suggestions that are Objectives that can fit within a Priority.

Part 4: Priorities (5 minute introduction + 20 minutes at each station)

You'll see that the breakout sessions have been created. We are hoping that the groups will have an evenly distributed group of people at each breakout session but definitely feel free to go to a Priority theme discussion that you're most interested in. In these groups the facilitators will help get the conversation going but really this is an opportunity for you to talk and for us to listen. No idea is silly, no suggestion is ridiculous. This is our chance to be creative as a membership and think about what we want from our Society moving forward. With that said, head to the discussion group you're most interested in!

Part 5: Reconvene and present on Priorities (20-30 minutes)

We'd love to hear what each group has discussed during the breakout sessions. This is also everyone's opportunity to chime in and ask questions, provide more feedback and make new suggestions. Each presenter will be given 3 minutes to present the major ideas that their group has come up with.

Description and Definition of Priorities:

Communications (Internal and External)

Description:

This priority is about the way the GSS conveys information to our members to ensure they are fully informed about the Society and the services and resources we provide. The GSS recognizes the need for a communication plan to reach out to our members in an efficient and effective way; however, the development of that plan is dependent on the outcomes of this strategic plan.

This discussion will include creative ideas to strengthen the GSS brand, best practises in disseminating information, and ensuring members are well informed about their Society.

Questions for Discussion:

- When you see the priority "communications" what comes to mind? How could the GSS satisfy this priority?
- How much communication would be appropriate for grads to receive from the GSS?
- What mediums are the most effective in our multi-media approach to marketing and promoting the GSS? How important is the use of social media?
- Do graduate students recognize themselves as GSS members? How can we foster this identification?
- What would effective communication about our events and socials look like?
- What level of priority should the GSS website have in our communication plan?
- How important is "brand power" and "brand recognition" to you? Is this something the GSS should focus on?

Operational Organization & Efficiency

Description:

This priority is about ensuring the GSS's governance structure and administrative systems are well designed. This strategic planning process gives us an excellent chance to determine if we are growing and developing in ways that make sense for our Society and are well thought through. This discussion will require understanding about our structure which can be found in our "About the GSS" handout.

The discussion would be best served by being divided into two sections: Governance and Administration.

For Governance - the GSS is interested in hearing the perspective of our members on whether the positions and responsibilities of the GSS Executive Committee, the role of the other Committees, and Council makes “sense” to our members. Although abstract, we are ultimately interested to hear any suggestions or feedback members may have on structures that empower students have in governing our society - Council, committees, and Executive Committee.

For Administration - we are curious to hear from members if the way we currently manage our systems - cheque requisition forms (for those that are aware), bursary applications, etc. are functional, clear, accessible and efficient for the membership.

Questions for Discussion:

- When you see the priority “operational organization and efficiency” what comes to mind? How could the GSS satisfy this priority?
- What could be changed about the GSS’s offices that would make them more welcoming to members?
- What are your thoughts about the GSS Officer and Coordinator positions? Do each of the individual portfolios make sense to you? What about the division between Officers and Coordinators and the differences between their election processes?
- Do you feel like the structure of the GSS and our three “C”s (Council, Committees and Caucuses) is functional? Do you have suggestions for how it could be altered or improved?
- Have your experiences with GSS administrative processes (such as cheque recs, grant applications, etc.) been positive? How could these processes be streamlined or approved?
- Sometimes improving administrative efficiency can be time consuming and pull staff and students away from service delivery or other more noticeable tasks. How do you feel improving efficiency should be balanced with service delivery?

Education and Training

Description: The GSS supports our members’ pursuits of graduate-level education and provides resources and services to help them succeed at SFU. These resources and services include professional development grants (otherwise known as travel grants) to assist students with funding to attend conferences locally, regionally or nationally, Caucus Grants, and the upcoming SPICES program. We also provide a dedicated professional Advocate to directly assist students facing academic or nonacademic challenges while attending SFU.

The GSS provides excellent professional development opportunities through involvement on the GSS Council, Committees, or serving as a student leader on our Executive Committee. We also provide professional development events (such as Research Speed Dating and the Think Again! conference).

Questions for discussion:

- Do you feel supported with your professional development at SFU? If not, what is lacking?
- What would you like the GSS to focus on for increasing professional development? For example, increasing funding for existing services, creating a new GSS service, or more advocacy on improving professional development at SFU?
- What other forms of support do you believe are lacking but necessary for a successful graduate educational experience at SFU? How do you believe the GSS should help fulfill these needs?

- When you see the priority “education and training,” what comes to mind? How could the GSS satisfy this priority?

Collaboration and Partnerships

Description:

The GSS is a very new organization - 5 years old! Now that we’ve become comfortable in our surroundings, we’ve started branching out and have begun to work with other groups on campus and in the province. These collaborations extend our reach and also help us to ensure that we aren’t duplicating efforts with the events and services offered by our partners. However, we haven’t had an opportunity to examine what relationships are of top priority for us, which groups we should connect with further, and what we should consider to be of lesser priority.

The discussion for this priority would be best served by looking at partnerships and collaborations within the SFU community and then outside the community. Inside the community, we’re interested to hear what ways members believe we should strengthen relationships and what projects and initiatives we should actively seek to engage.

For groups outside of SFU, we are interested to hear what members think about working closer with other student organizations across the province and Canada.

Questions for discussion:

- When you see the priority “collaboration and partnerships” what comes to mind? How could the GSS satisfy this priority?
- What groups within the SFU community do we identify as being particularly important to the GSS? What should these relationships look like? In other words, what type of collaborations would members like to see?
- Should the GSS prioritize working with student societies across the province? In what ways should we work with these other societies?
- Should collaboration with graduate societies take precedence over collaboration with undergraduate, mixed, and technical institute and college student societies? Why or why not?
- Are there services or events that are offered by other organizations inside or outside of SFU that the GSS could partner with in order to avoid duplicating effort and ensure that the membership has access to a broad range of services?
- What is your reaction to the following statement: the (undergraduate) Simon Fraser Student Society is the GSS’s closest and most powerful ally? Explain.

Membership Engagement and Participation

Description: One of the reasons the GSS was created was to establish a representational body for graduate students at SFU and to ensure that graduate student issues were adequately and successfully addressed. With the creation of the GSS we have seen the beginnings of a graduate student community but desire to make it more stronger and cohesive.

We are aware that graduate school can be a lonely endeavour - departments are small, research and lab work can be solitary, and a student’s social budget is often very small. The GSS seeks to establish a more interdisciplinary and united community where graduate students are able to forge friendships across disciplines. We want to provide social opportunities that also stimulate the intellectual mind. Discussion on this priority will be about what members think the GSS can do to make that community come to fruition. This discussion will also involve talking about the future of the GSS space.

Questions for discussion:

- When you see the priority “membership engagement and participation” what comes to mind? How could the GSS satisfy this priority?
- Do you feel like you belong to a graduate community? If so, what does that community look like? If not, why do you think that is?
- What level of responsibility does the GSS have in fostering a graduate community at SFU?
- What role do caucuses have in creating a graduate community and how should the GSS support (or not) their work in this?
- How do we foster community across the three SFU campuses, especially in light of the fact that the GSS currently does not have space in Surrey or Vancouver?
- Sending staff or students to do outreach on other campuses may detract from their time at the Burnaby Campus, potentially affecting office hours and accessibility. How do you feel about this?
- Do graduate students like the current location of the GSS in the Maggie Benston Centre?
- What do members think about the Build SFU project and the lack of GSS participation in the project?
- If we could create a neighbourhood for the GSS, who would we want as our neighbours?

Long Term Financial Sustainability

Description: This budget cycle the GSS passed a balanced budget. Although challenging, we were able to transition some of our pilot services into permanent services for our members - including the emergency grocery card program, and the family subsidy program. We are fortunate to have a Capital Fund (fund developed for the future of GSS space).

However, we are aware that if we desire to continue to grow and develop the services that we offer to our members, we also need to seek potential new revenue streams and prioritize our commitment to financial stability.

There are a few topics under this priority that require discussion:

- The future of membership fees.
 - Should membership fees increase?
- Exploring revenue options.
 - What realistic alternative revenue options should the GSS explore?

Questions for discussion:

- When you see the priority “long-term financial stability” what comes to mind? How could the GSS satisfy this priority?
- Membership fees automatically increase each year according to the cost of living. Additional increases to this have not been planned. How and when should membership fees increase? What would be considered a reasonable increase?
- What alternative revenue options should the GSS explore? Are there any types of revenue options that you would not be comfortable with the GSS pursuing?
- Staff wages and benefits are a large expense for the GSS; however, some societies hire staff specifically to manage and explore new money making opportunities. How do you feel about increasing staff for the purpose of revenue generation? Would it be a reasonable option for the GSS to consider given our small number of employees?

- Is there an unmet need on campus that you can identify that the GSS might be able to capitalize on in order to generate revenue?
- Should we prioritize divesting our funds and ensuring fossil free investments? Why or why not?
- What is your comfort level with operating deficits and debts? Are these things reasonable in some circumstances? Why or why not?

Appendix B: Update After Consultation Period

I. Background Information

On August 14, 2013, Council unanimously voted to approve the draft Core Values, Vision Statement, and Mission Statement that were drafted by the Executive Committee at a retreat held in July 2013. As committed to by the CERO, these guiding statements were disseminated to the GSS membership for consultation and feedback.

Core Values

Support for [public] higher education

Collaborative decision-making

Fair and equitable practice

Accountability

Responsive Stewardship (formerly Receptive Stewardship)

Vision Statement

To be an exemplary student organization, led by a passionate community and dedicated to the well-being and success of its members.

Mission Statement

The Graduate Student Society at Simon Fraser University is a dynamic, member-driven organization that supports graduate students to achieve their personal, professional, and academic goals at SFU and beyond.

The Society is committed to responsive stewardship in order to provide relevant representation, advocacy, and services for our membership.

II. Consultations

GSS Member Consultations

From September 25, 2013 to November 20, 2013, four in-person consultations were held for graduate students. Below is a breakdown of the number of members who sent in RSVPs as well as those who actually attended.

SFU Burnaby: September 25, 2013 – 22 RSVPs, 20 members in attendance

SFU Surrey: October 23, 2013 – 9 RSVPs, 1 member in attendance

SFU Vancouver: November 7, 2013 – 10 RSVPs, 25 members in attendance

SFU Burnaby: November 20, 2013 - 10 RSVPs, 14 members in attendance

Each member of the Executive Committee helped to facilitate at least one consultation session, with the CERO present and supporting the facilitation of all sessions. The sessions provided excellent opportunities for student leaders to connect directly with GSS members, listen to their concerns and ideas, and discuss the priorities for the organization moving forward. GSS members were given the opportunity to choose which identified Priorities to discuss in each session. Of the six Priorities, the following were chosen for discussion at the sessions: Collaboration and Partnerships, Membership Engagement and Participation, Long-term Financial Sustainability, Education and Training, and Communication.

Moreover, these sessions offered informal social opportunities for GSS members to connect with one another and discuss life as a graduate student at SFU. Members of the Executive Committee found these sessions invaluable and motivating for the final stages of drafting the strategic plan.

Stakeholders Consultation:

Given that “Collaboration and Partnerships” was identified as a key priority, the GSS invited stakeholders to discuss graduate community at SFU and participate in a visioning session about strengthening relationships between organizations and departments on all three campuses.

The meeting was held on November 25, 2013 and was attended by:

- Wade Parkhouse, Dean of Graduate Studies
- Mike Soron, Executive Director, Sustainable SFU
- Shahaa Kakar, Outreach Coordinator, Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group
- Nadine Chambers, Women’s Centre Coordinator, Simon Fraser Student Society
- Colleen Knox, Executive Director, Simon Fraser Student Society
- Chardaye Bueckert, External Relations Officer, Simon Fraser Student Society
- Melissa Roth, Organizer, Teaching Support Staff Union
- Nicole White, Head of the Research Commons
- Heather DeForest, Librarian, Research Commons

One of the questions asked to stakeholders was to describe their past and current relationship with the GSS in three words. This exercise resulted in some interesting insights about the GSS. The following descriptive words were used (asterisks indicate words that were mentioned more than once):

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Potential* | • Proactive |
| • Collegiate* | • Futuristic |
| • Committed* | • Tentative |
| • Friendly | • Rocky |
| • Cooperative | • Collaborative |
| • Challenging | • Student Advocacy |
| • Eager | • Growing |
| • Adventurous/“Game” | • People (Community of People) |
| • Growing | • Changing |

Meeting with the stakeholders proved to be a catalyst for discussion about increasing communication, collaboration, and community amongst the diverse group of unions, societies, and departments that exist at SFU. Several ideas raised in this session were incorporated into the objectives of the Strategic Plan.

Online Survey

In addition to the in-person consultations, we hosted an online survey to solicit feedback on the Strategic Plan. This survey was linked from the front page of our website and was advertised in newsletters and numerous all-grad emails. The survey closed on November 25th at 9:00 am.

The survey results were helpful, on the whole; however, there were a few cases where feedback was difficult to contextualize/interpret within the discussion of the Strategic Plan. A few respondents used the survey to air grievances against their departments or to request very specific projects and initiatives that are beyond the scope of the Strategic Plan (or even of the GSS as an organization). In most cases, however, respondents provided excellent insights about the GSS's Mission, Vision, Values, Priorities and potential Objectives.

Demographics

We do not have complete information on all participants because providing this information was largely optional. We have an equal split of men and women, as well as Masters and Doctoral students. We have had students from 21 departments participate, with the largest portion of students coming from Engineering, Mechatronics, and Business (20 people combined).

III. Feedback received on Core Values, Vision Statement, and Mission Statement

Values:

Overall, positive feedback with the following suggestions:

- Change "Support for higher education" to "Support for **public** higher education"
 - *"I strongly believe the first value should specify "Public" higher education. (I also think post secondary education is better phrasing, but if you're going for shorter that's fine). As more for profit colleges are opening up, and public post secondary system is being starved, the GSS should be advocating for public education that is accessible to all."* – Survey Participant
- Clarity required for the meaning of "Fair and Equitable Practice"
- Clarity required for "Receptive Stewardship" (now changed to "Responsive Stewardship") --> suggested to reconsider this wording in it's entirety
 - *"I don't understand what receptive stewardship means and a value should be understood without having to be explained."* - Survey Participant
 - *"I would suggest clarifying some of the values. For me, it is not clear what 'Fair & Equitable Practice' or 'Receptive Stewardship' means."* – Survey Participant
 - *"Receptive Stewardship – what does that mean?"* – Survey Participant

Vision Statement:

Overall, very positive feedback with the following questions:

- *“What is your definition of success? This could be varied – success could mean grades, or it could mean program/diploma completion, or it could mean experiences or vocationally. Or perhaps you are leaving it for broad interpretation.”* – Survey Participant
- The Executive Committee acknowledges that “success” was, indeed, left deliberately vague to allow for broad interpretation.

Mission Statement:

Overall, positive feedback with the following suggestions:

- *“Remove ‘dynamic.’ The word ‘dynamic does not add to the mission statement. In my opinion, student organizations are not static so this does not need to be highlighted.”* – Survey Participant
- *“The first sentence is good. However ‘receptive stewardship in order to provide...’ is a bit ambiguous.”* – Survey Participant

IV. Feedback on Strategic Priorities and Objectives

Priorities

The GSS membership was also consulted on the GSS’s Strategic Plan’s Priorities. Ultimately, the Priorities are intended to operationalize the Mission and Values of the organization into goals and actionable plans that push towards the organization’s Vision. At the Strategic Planning Retreat, the Executive Committee drafted the following Priorities for the GSS:

- Education and Training
- Communication
- Membership and Participation
- Long-term Financial Stability
- Operational Organization and Efficiency
- Collaboration and Partnerships

Overall, positive feedback was received with the following suggestions:

- Adding “Advocacy” as a Priority:
 - *“Advocacy for graduate students on campus should be priority. A little hesitant to consider outside advocacy because causes may not represent belief systems and political concerns of all members in a representative manner.”* – Survey Participant
 - *“It is apparent that graduate students need strong advocates on campus, and the GSS is in the best position to present a diverse grad student body.”* – Survey Participant
 - *“I notice that advocacy is not listed as a priority and only mentioned once in the Mission, Vision, Values and Priorities of the GSS”* – TSSU Member at Stakeholders’ consultation session

- Reevaluate “Communication” as a Priority and redistribute the Objectives currently considered under “Communication”:
 - *“Most of them sound good, but I’m confused about what “Communication” means. Communication with whom, and about what? Communication sounds like a necessary aspect of working toward the other priorities, but I don’t understand how it’s a priority in its own right.”* – Survey Participant
 - *“Does Communication include advocacy?”* – Survey Participant
 - *“Marketing sounds to economic. I think we should focus on communication among members and GSS membership identity and belonging. Something like “proud member of GSS’ instead of “we want your money.”* - Survey Participant
 - *“I think branding presence is a natural consequence of the interaction and sense of belonging that each student has about our student society.”* – Survey Participant
 - *“I’m really uncomfortable with the corporate language of “branding” and “marketing” used in two of the objectives. The university is increasingly being recast in corporate language and power relations, and I do not want to see the GSS replicate that. Our members are not “customers” – they are the Society itself.”* – Survey Participant
 - *“Understand the need for a communications strategy, not clear on why the word marketing has been incorporated. I do not think this is about “selling” to members.”* – Survey Participant
 - *“Why would you want to market towards members?”* – Survey Participant

- Reevaluate the title of “Education and Training” and change to “Professional Development and Training”
 - *The word “education” may be considered ambiguous in meaning and advocacy for public higher education has been addressed under Mission Statement and possible addition of “Advocacy and Representation”* – GSS ED and Advocate

V: Draft Final Objectives

In order to elaborate on our Priorities and track their trajectories over the duration of the Strategic Plan, each Priority becomes a heading under which Objectives are grouped. Objectives are concrete, measurable goals that enable us to judge whether we have satisfied our Priorities. The Executive Committee and Council will select the most popular and relevant Objectives to include in the final draft of the Strategic Plan.

Priority 1: Collaboration and Partnerships

Objectives
Create a forum of organizations dedicated to students at SFU in order to establish stronger community relations across all campuses and enhance information sharing practices amongst groups.
Assess initiatives on campus that duplicate GSS work and develop mechanisms to centralize coordination and collaboration and minimize the duplication of efforts.
Strengthen the “BC GSS” as a collaboration between the SFU GSS and other graduate student societies in BC. Ensure that the BC GSS meets regularly in order to effectively share information, pursue joint advocacy, and exchange best practices.
Strengthen relationships with the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) and the Teaching Support Staff Union (TSSU) in order to effectively collaborate on joint advocacy projects.
Increase the profile of the GSS as an integral stakeholder in University decision-making processes.

Priority 2: Advocacy and Representation

Objectives
Organize yearly advocacy plans (including internal and external advocacy campaigns and initiatives) based on direction from Council and the GSS membership.
Advocate for equitable access to University and GSS services for graduate students studying at SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey.
Raise awareness of the Advocacy service across campuses and increase Advocate’s outreach efforts in SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey.
Advocate for accessible, affordable, and quality public higher education in BC and nationally.

Priority 3: Professional Development and Training

Objectives
Work with University departments such as Career Services and the SFU Alumni Association to provide professional development and career education opportunities for graduate students across all three campuses.
Develop effective transition mechanisms for student leaders so that all information, resources, and tools are readily accessible for newly-elected student leaders.
Provide comprehensive and consistent training for Caucuses, Committees, and Council in order to empower student leaders and afford access to meaningful professional development opportunities.

Priority 4: Long-Term Financial Stability

Objectives
Create a long-term financial plan for the GSS, including realistic projections for changes in membership fees, anticipated operating budgets, and expenditures.
Invest in fossil free products and transition into a completely green investment portfolio in 3 years.
Ensure that the GSS has clear short- and long-term investment plans for all funds.
Establish new sources of revenue through partnerships, ethical sponsorships, and collaboration with stakeholders on projects, initiatives, and services that directly benefit graduate students.

Priority 5: Membership Engagement and Participation

Objectives
Conduct GSS Fall orientations for new graduate students across all three campuses and increase GSS presence at departmental orientations.
Host regular cross-disciplinary and cross-campus socials for graduate students.
Create a communications strategy that addresses GSS's social media presence, listserv use, event promotion, and website usage.
Establish the GSS's online presence as an information hub for graduate students at SFU.
Secure dedicated graduate student space at SFU Vancouver and SFU Surrey and increase the GSS's presence across all three campuses.
Foster "pride in membership" in the GSS amongst graduate students in order to promote feelings of community and belonging amongst our membership.

Priority 6: Operational Efficiency and Organization

Objectives
Clarify roles, responsibilities, direction, and boundaries for staff and student leader positions.
Improve the internal administrative processes within the GSS and ensure that all Executive Committee members and staff are knowledgeable about these systems.
Conduct regular reviews of GSS services to ensure that graduate students' needs are being appropriately addressed.
Develop mechanisms to increase coordination and collaboration between all facets of the GSS governance structure (Committees, Council, Cacus, and staff).

V. Next Steps

- **December to January 2014:** Drafting of the Strategic Plan
- **January 11th and 12th, 2014:** Executive Committee Retreat and finalizing of Strategic Plan
- **End of January 2014 (date to be announced):** Submission of the draft GSS Strategic Plan to Council for discussion and/or approval.
- **February 2014 (date to be announced):** Follow-up with Council
- **February 26, 2014:** Presentation of the Strategic Plan at Annual General Meeting
- **Post-February Annual General Meeting:** After the complete Strategic Plan is voted on at the GSS Annual General Meeting on February 26th, 2014, the Executive Committee - in collaboration with Committees, Councilors, and staff - will draft Action Plans for each Objective (assuming that the Plan is approved by the membership). These Action Plans will include more detail about how each Objective will be met, including assigning a plan leader, delegating specific tasks and responsibilities, and identifying performance indicators.