



**Graduate Student Association**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA**

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# ANNUAL REPORT

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**2023-2024**



APRIL 30, 2024

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
Leadership and Service Center. Russell House 227. Columbia, SC 29208

## Contents

<b>President’s Farewell</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>A Word from the University President, Michael Amiridis</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>A Word from the Provost and EVP for Academic Affairs, Donna Arnett</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>A Word from the Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support, J. Rex Tolliver</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>A Word from the Dean of the Graduate School, Ann Vail</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>A Word from the Chief of Staff for Student Affairs and Academic Support, and the Associate Vice President for Student Life, Anna Edwards</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>A Word from the Director of the Leadership and Service Center, Ambra Hiott, and the Assistant Director for Student Governance of the Leadership and Service Center, Emma Ormond</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Who We Are</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Graduate Student Association 2023-2024 Executive Board</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Leadership Transition</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Graduate Student Association 2023-2024</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>President’s Cabinet</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>2023-2024 Finance Committee</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>GSA Representation in University Committees</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>General Body Meetings</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Fall &amp; Spring Social Events – 2023-2024</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Townhall Event – February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Mentorship Luncheons</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Health &amp; Wellness Events</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Professional Development Workshop</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Graduate Student Needs Assessment Survey</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Incorporation of the GSA Awards by the Graduate School</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>2023-2024 GSA Teams Retreat: A Successful Day of Building Dreams Together</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Reports of the 2023-2024 GSA Executive Board</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Report of the Vice President – Iftakhar Ahmad</b> .....	<b>23</b>

Report of the Treasurer – Ritwik Nag.....	24
Report of the Graduate Council Representative – Gaurav Harshe .....	26
Report of the Former President – Andrew Kramarchyk.....	30
Reports of the GSA President’s Cabinet.....	32
Report of the Chief of Staff (President) – Nolan Foreman .....	32
Report of the Chief of Staff (Vice President) – Adedoyin Adekunle .....	33
Report of the Secretary of Veteran Affairs – Ciji Sims .....	34
Report of the Secretaries of Health & Wellness – Anna Chupak, Macie Goodman, & Tamera Harris .....	35
Report of the Secretary of Women's Affairs – Justine Truc .....	36
Report of the Secretary of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion– Anne-Laure Sabathier .....	36
Report of the Secretary of Sustainability– Erin Looney.....	37
Report of the Co-secretary of International Student Affairs –Samuel Cheung ..	38
Report of the Co-secretary of International Student Affairs – Omid Oshriyeh...	39
Report of the Co-secretary of International Student Affairs – Lakshmi Tanuja Tanga.....	40
Report of the Secretary for Graduate Assistantship – Anthonia Awhinawhi.....	40
Report of the Secretary of Legislative Affairs – Samantha Hulett.....	42
Report of the Secretary of GSA Awards – Mehrnoush Mokhtarnejad .....	42
Report of the Secretary of Professional Development – Nayeem Mohammad...	43
Report of the Secretary of GSA Affairs – Drew Beecham .....	43
Report of the Secretary of Graduate Student Organizations – Jillian Chamberlain .....	44
Going Forward: 2024-2025 Executive Board.....	46
Connect with the GSA.....	47

## President's Farewell



Dear Graduate and Professional Students,  
It is a privilege and honor to serve as the president of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) at the University of South Carolina (USC). This marks my last year as an active executive within the GSA as I plan to graduate in the near future and shift my focus towards completing my doctoral studies. Reflecting on my time with the GSA evokes a deep sense of gratitude and nostalgia; it has been a transformative journey that has significantly contributed to my personal and professional growth. The GSA has not just been a part of my academic life but has profoundly shaped my development and understanding at USC.

My journey with the GSA began in 2020 when I served as co-secretary general health under President Margaret A. Carson. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, I observed firsthand how the GSA collaborated with USC authorities to ensure the safety and well-being of students on campus. This experience was incredibly educational, teaching me about the inner workings and initiatives of the GSA. During this period, through GSA's advocacy, USC began offering fully subsidized health insurance to all full-time PhD students and graduate assistants who chose the student health plan. After a brief hiatus, I returned in 2022 as the Graduate Council Representative under President Maxwell Akonde. That year, we achieved significant improvements in support and engagement for graduate students, including raising the minimum hourly wage from \$9 to \$14 starting January 1, 2023, and initiating a detailed stipend and cost of living survey to inform our advocacy efforts. We also secured sponsorship for eight students to attend the Disney Walt Leadership Experience, formed the Graduate Student Association Advisory Council, and participated in various school orientations to enhance GSA visibility. Additionally, we allocated over \$20,000 to support graduate student organizations and engaged in substantial advocacy work at Capitol Hill and other venues.

Encouraged by our successes in 2022-2023, I ran for vice president in the 2023-2024 GSA elections and was elected alongside Andrew Kramarchyk as president, Iftakhar Ahmad as treasurer, and Gaurav Harshe as graduate council representative. Our committee commenced duties on May 1st, 2023. However, due to unforeseen

circumstances, Andrew took medical leave in November 2023 and resigned in January 2024 due to health issues. Following the GSA constitution, I assumed the presidency, Iftakhar moved up to vice president, leaving the treasurer's position vacant until a special election in February 2024 when Ritwik Nag was elected treasurer.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all the GSA secretaries for their unwavering support during this period of transition. Their dedication has been instrumental in continuing the important work of the GSA. Special thanks to Iftakhar, Ritwik, Gaurav, and my Chief of Staff, Nolan, for their tremendous support in organizing our activities efficiently and effectively. I am also grateful to Andrew Kramarchyk for his foundational efforts, which have greatly facilitated my transition into the role of president.

I must acknowledge Emma Ormond, Assistant Director for Student Governance at the Leadership and Service Center, for her invaluable advice and guidance. Dr. Ambra Hiott, Director of the Leadership and Service Center, has also been a constant source of support, for which I am deeply appreciative. Further appreciation goes to Dr. Ann Vail, Dean of the Graduate School, and Dr. Anna Edwards, Chief of Staff for Student Affairs and Academic Support, Associate Vice President for Student Life. Their mentorship and guidance have been crucial in navigating my responsibilities and advancing our mission. Thank you all for your commitment and support, which continue to inspire and drive our collective efforts.

Together in this academic year, we have achieved the following:

1. Successfully advocated for an increase in graduate assistantship stipends for Ph.D. students, resulting in a new minimum annual stipend of \$20,000 for all funded Ph.D. students.
2. Presented GSA opportunities at over fourteen different college and school orientation programs.
3. Held a GSA Orientation attended both in-person and virtually by GSA members, along with key figures from the Graduate School, Student Life, and the Leadership and Service Center.
4. Collaborated with the Graduate School and Student Life to implement the Graduate Student Needs Assessment (GSNA), and worked with Parking and Transportation Services to secure a USC Annual Parking Pass for 2024-25 as a grand lottery prize for students who complete this survey.
5. Integration of the GSA awards with the Graduate School awards, as the Graduate School and Student Life take ownership of recognizing the contributions of graduate and professional students.
6. Collaborated with the Graduate School to organize the Graduate School's Recognition of Excellence ceremony.

7. Collaborated with the Graduate School to engage graduate students in a detailed review of the Ph.D. process, facilitated by discussions with the authors of 'The New Ph.D.'
8. Organized town halls with graduate students to address pressing issues, including stipends, tuition waivers, GSA funding, and health insurance concerns.
9. The GSA Finance Committee allocated over \$30,000 to support various graduate student organizations.
10. Worked with the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), the Provost Advisory Committee on Women's Initiatives (PACWI), and secured grant funding from the Office of Access and Opportunity to host luncheons for diverse graduate and professional student groups.
11. Introduced a sustainability luncheon promoting the office of sustainability, which seeks to foster environmental, economic, and social responsibility within the Carolina community through collaborations with students, faculty, staff, and community members.
12. Enhanced support for international students through a strong partnership with the International Student and Scholars Support office.
13. Continued traditional GSA activities, including social events on Greene Street, mental health initiatives, and professional development workshops.
14. GSA members actively participated in various university committees, advocating for student issues.
15. A GSA representative served on the Mayor of Columbia's Collegiate Advisory Council.
16. The GSA President represented the organization at the Southeastern Conference's Graduate Student Body Consortium.
17. Published an article in the Daily Gamecock highlighting the need to address the concerns of graduate and professional students.
18. Continued regular advocacy efforts with various administrative professionals.
19. Accomplished much more.

As we approach the conclusion of this academic year, I am delighted to announce that the newly elected GSA executives, led by President Gaurav Harshe, will officially take office on May 1st, 2024. I extend my best wishes to them as they prepare to continue this vital work. I am confident that under their leadership, the GSA will achieve even greater milestones.

The GSA is more than just an institution; it actively cultivates leadership and scholarly skills among its members, setting the stage for significant societal contributions. The foundation of each committee is built on the work of its predecessors, and the continuation of this legacy is crucial. During this period, we have seen numerous examples of how the GSA harnesses leadership for significant societal impact. For instance, Dr. Jennifer Mandelbaum, a distinguished alumna and former GSA president (2018-2019), was elected to the New Hampshire House of Representatives.

Her journey from academia to public service perfectly illustrates the leadership trajectory we aspire to cultivate among our members. Moreover, I am delighted to announce that Ritwik Nag, our Treasurer, and Julia van de Sandt, our esteemed Executive Board Advisor, alongside Maxwell Akonde, who has served in various capacities including President (2022-2023), Vice President (2020-2021), and Data Management Secretary (2019-2020), have been honored with the prestigious 2023-2024 SPARC Graduate Research Grant. This recognition by the SPARC Graduate Research Grant not only underscores the significance of their individual research and scholarly projects but also exemplifies the high caliber of academic pursuit and leadership within our association.

Serving as your president has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, filled with learning and invaluable interactions. As I bid farewell, I carry with me a treasure trove of memories and experiences from my time here. I wish the University of South Carolina and the greater Gamecock community the very best of luck in all future endeavors. May we continue to strive for excellence in every aspect of our academic and professional lives.

Forever to thee.

*Rajat Das Gupta*

Rajat Das Gupta  
President, Graduate Student Association  
University of South Carolina

## A Word from the University President, Michael Amiridis



As a thriving research institution, the University of South Carolina draws strength from the engagement of the more than 6,400 graduate and professional students in our university community. We strive to provide an environment where they can succeed and excel in their

academic and professional journeys, as well as one that recognizes their unique contributions to Carolina life. As partners in this mission, we applaud the strong representation and dedication of the Graduate Student Association, which gives voice to the needs and perspectives of these students.

During the past year, I have had the pleasure of meeting and communicating with both Andrew Kramarchyk and Rajat Das Gupta in their GSA leadership roles, along with other cabinet members. I applaud their committed advocacy on behalf of their fellow graduate students. Among its many initiatives, the GSA has used its voice to help establish a minimum stipend for Ph.D. students and to provide mentorship opportunities for diverse student groups. In collaboration with The Graduate School, GSA is working to improve data-informed decisions through a Graduate Student Needs Assessment this spring. And the GSA continues to be an invaluable resource in communicating to university leadership about the important issues that most affect our graduate student population.

I look forward to continuing this valued partnership with GSA, working together in the best interests of USC's graduate and professional students.



## A Word from the Provost and EVP for Academic Affairs, Donna Arnett



As provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at the University of South Carolina, I am committed to enhancing the graduate student experience and supporting your academic success. Together with President Amiridis, we are prioritizing creating a user-friendly university environment that spotlights student success and growth in scholarship. Your needs as graduate students are a critical component of advancing that mission.

In collaboration with Dean Vail, we have renewed our focus on the recruitment and retention of graduate students, recognizing the invaluable contributions you make to our campus community.

In response to concerns regarding finances and accessibility, I recently increased the minimum full-time Ph.D. student stipend to \$20,000, supported raising the minimum hourly wage to \$15 per hour and waived the graduate application fee. I am dedicated to prioritizing financial assistance for graduate students as we explore the best options for increasing scholarship growth going forward. We continue to ensure your access to essential services such as healthcare and professional development opportunities.

I deeply appreciate the vital role graduate and professional students play in building and sustaining a culture of academic excellence at the University of South Carolina. Your unique perspectives, keen insights, and original ideas enrich our university environment and drive progress across various fields.

As we move forward, I look forward to working with the Graduate Students Association to build upon a culture here at the University of South Carolina where all graduate and professional students not only succeed but thrive.

## **A Word from the Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support, J. Rex Tolliver**



As the academic year concludes, I want to express my appreciation for the Graduate Student Association's hard work and dedication to enhancing the student experience at the University of South Carolina.

I have enjoyed regular meetings with GSA leadership, who have thoughtfully articulated the thoughts, concerns and contributions of their constituents. I am grateful for their strong advocacy on behalf of all graduate students and share their desire to build and sustain a campus

environment that celebrates graduate students' accomplishments and facilitates their further success.

Despite the challenges of this academic year, GSA's achievements have been significant. The leadership has effectively combined flexibility with a steadfast commitment to their priorities, and this has not gone unnoticed. GSA has made a positive impact on the Carolina community. I look forward to our continued partnership and to your future efforts and successes.

## A Word from the Dean of the Graduate School, Ann Vail



On July 3, 2023, I arrived on the University of South Carolina campus to a warm welcome and an active, vibrant, and inspiring graduate student body. Working with graduate students and the Graduate Student Association has been the highlight of my first year. Great research universities have great graduate students—the University of South Carolina is no exception. Thank you for your many contributions to the Graduate Student Association, The Graduate School, and our great university. I was pleased to serve as one of the Graduate Student Association's

advisors. Your goals aligned with the Graduate School goals, which lead to a coordinated effort to provide the best possible experience for graduate students. Working together in conjunction with Provost Donna Arnett, we expanded compensation for student employees and Ph.D. students. While we still have more work to do, great strides were made. As a result of Graduate Student Association advocacy, we expanded access to graduate student-centered services.

The Graduate Hub includes support for fellowships, career services, and student success. Other campus entities joined the efforts to expand graduate student services including the Provost's Office, Office of Student Affairs and Academic Support, University Libraries, Student Success Center, Student Health Center, and the Gamecock Community Shop. Together, we strive to improve the graduate student experience.

The Graduate Student Association served as an advisory group to me as I implemented new initiatives and examined current programs and practices. Your input regarding the graduate school application process has been critical in identifying and implementing improvements to the process. Your feedback related to international transcripts informed the process along the way.

As you move on to new challenges and opportunities, I know you will build on the firm foundation you have developed through your involvement in the Graduate Student Association. Best wishes for continued success. I look forward to watching you as you continue your leadership in your chosen professions.

## **A Word from the Chief of Staff for Student Affairs and Academic Support, and the Associate Vice President for Student Life, Anna Edwards**



It has been an incredible opportunity this year to support and work alongside members of the Graduate Student Association as they continue to advocate for the needs of graduate and professional students across campus. The group managed transitions in leadership and priorities extremely well and remained focused on the students at the university.

The team, led first by Andy Kramarchyk, and then by Rajat Gupta as president, developed a robust and expansive strategic plan that

addressed key priority areas. Rajat and others in the organization stepped up to lead when Andy's health took him away from GSA and campus. The priority areas were the foundation of the activities and programs supported by the organization throughout the year. The executive officers and cabinet members focused on advocating and addressing the needs and priorities throughout the year.

The addition of Dr. Ann Vail as the new Dean of the Graduate School was a tremendous asset to the support team for GSA. Dr. Vail provided exceptional leadership and mentorship to the students and to the staff who lead and serve together.

As associate vice president for Student Life, I served as an advisor (and mentor, I hope) to the leadership team of the Graduate Student Association. We conducted regular meetings to stay abreast of needs of the students, and opportunities for engagement at the university. With new and changing university leadership, these regular meetings were important to stay abreast of ongoing activities and provide consistent support to the students. There were ongoing conversations with Student Government and other student organizations on how to best support the needs of graduate students.

The organization continues to be led by strong students who are clear in their purpose and priorities. Student leaders met regularly with university administrators and other officials to share their priorities and work to address needs of graduate students from financial packages and stipends to student experiences, to trainings and workshops to mental health. As leadership changes evolve across the university, the voice of graduate students has never been more important than it is now. All students must continue to work together in a coordinated manner to see that the needs of students remain at the forefront of university administration.

It continues to be an honor to support the student experience beyond the classroom for graduate students. I am inspired by their vision and their commitment to improving the experience for graduate students and look forward to the continued efforts in the year ahead.

## **A Word from the Director of the Leadership and Service Center, Ambra Hiott, and the Assistant Director for Student Governance of the Leadership and Service Center, Emma Ormond**



It has been such a pleasure working with the Graduate Student Association as their advisors. The members of GSA have used their position to advocate on behalf of Graduate Students, provide programming to create community, and built strong and lasting relationships in the USC community.

Using the survey results from the Graduate Student Basic Needs survey, GSA has developed and worked on the advocacy points of an increase in tuition support, on-campus housing opportunities, and the further development of university stipends.

GSA has also developed a variety of programs to meet Graduate Student needs. They have offered mentorship luncheons that cover a variety of identities found within the USC community. Some of these luncheons include womyn, LGBTQIA+, and Black graduate and professional students. Additional programming efforts included socials, town halls and mental health events.

Finally, GSA has welcomed and worked closely with the new Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Ann Vail. Through their close work they have been able to move forward with their advocacy points and build strong relationships within the Graduate School.

## Who We Are

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the voice of the graduate student community at the University of South Carolina. Our organization is dedicated to the advancement and development of graduate and professional students at USC as we serve and advocate on behalf of the interests of nearly 7,000 graduate and professional students.

### Graduate Student Association 2023-2024 Executive Board



**President**  
Rajat Das Gupta  
*PhD Candidate*  
**Epidemiology**



**Vice President**  
Iftakhar Ahmad  
*PhD Student*  
**Computer  
Science &  
Engineering**

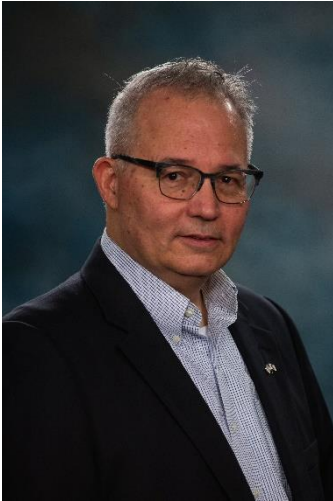


**Treasurer**  
Ritwik Nag  
*PhD Student*  
**Electrical  
Engineering**



**Graduate Council  
Rep.**  
Gaurav Harshe  
*PhD Student*  
**Higher Education**





**Former President (May 2023-  
January 2024)**

**Andrew Kramarchyk**  
*Ph.D. student*  
***Political Science***

## **Leadership Transition**

In March 2023, a GSA election was held to elect executives for the 2023-2024 session. Andrew Kramarchyk was elected as the president, Rajat Das Gupta as the vice president, Iftakhar Ahmad as the treasurer, and Gaurav Harshe as the graduate council representative. The committee assumed office on May 1st, 2023. In November 2023, Andrew took medical leave due to health-related issues and resigned in January 2024 owing to his medical condition. As per the GSA constitution, Rajat assumed the role of president, and Iftakhar was promoted to vice president, leaving the treasurer's position vacant. A special election was held in February 2024, during which Ritwik Nag was elected as the treasurer.

## Graduate Student Association 2023-2024

### President's Cabinet

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>School/College</b>
<i>Chief of Staff (President)</i>	Nolan Forman	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Chief of Staff (Vice President)</i>	Adedoyin Adekunle	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>GSA Executive Board Advisor</i>	Julia van de Sandt	Darla Moore School of Business
<i>Secretary of Community Outreach</i>	Eric Whiteside	College of Education
<i>Secretary of Graduate Assistantships</i>	Anthonia Awhinawi	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>Secretary of GSA Awards</i>	Mehrnoush Mokhtarnejad	School of Journalism and Mass Communications
<i>Secretary of Graduate Student Organizations</i>	Jillian Chamberlain	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>Secretary of GSA Affairs</i>	Drew Beecham	Joseph F. Rice School of Law
<i>Co-Secretary of Health &amp; Wellness</i>	Anna Chupak	Arnold School of Public Health
<i>Co-Secretary of Health &amp; Wellness</i>	Macie Goodman	College of Pharmacy
<i>Co-Secretary of Health &amp; Wellness</i>	Tamera Harris	Arnold School of Public Health
<i>Co-Secretary of International Student Affairs</i>	Yu (Samuel) Cheung	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>Co-Secretary of International Student Affairs</i>	Omid Oshriyeh	College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management
<i>Co-Secretary of International Student Affairs</i>	Lakshmi Tanuja Tanga	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Secretary of Legislative Affairs</i>	Samantha Hulett	Arnold School of Public Health
<i>Secretary of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</i>	Anne-Laure Sabathier	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>Co-secretary of Professional Development</i>	Nayeem Mohammad	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Co-secretary of Professional Development</i>	Sabah Anis	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Secretary of Veteran Affairs</i>	Ciji Sims	School of Medicine Columbia
<i>Secretary of Women's Affairs</i>	Justine Truc	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>Secretary of Disability Affairs</i>	Bradley Crain	College of Education
<i>Secretary of Sustainability</i>	Erin Looney	Arnold School of Public Health
<i>Secretary of Social Media</i>	Blessing Emodi	College of Education

### 2023-2024 Finance Committee

<b>Name</b>	<b>School/College</b>
<i>Ritwik Nag, Chair</i>	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Iftakhar Ahmad, Former Chair</i>	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Jo Minns</i>	College of Education
<i>Suyash Vardhan Singh</i>	College of Engineering and Computing
<i>Jillian Chamberlain</i>	College of Arts and Sciences
<i>Drew Beecham</i>	Joseph F. Rice School of Law

## GSA Representation in University Committees

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Name</b>
<i>Blatt PE Center Advisory Committee</i>	Andrew Kramarchyk
<i>Religious Affairs Committee</i>	Lakshmi Tanuja Tanga
<i>Scholastic Standards and Petitions</i>	Samantha Hulett
<i>Commencement</i>	Andrew Kramarchyk
<i>PACWI</i>	Justine Truc
<i>Graduate Council</i>	Gaurav Harshe
<i>Affirmative Action/EO/Diversity/Inclusion</i>	Andrew Kramarchyk
<i>MUNGO Awards</i>	Mehrnoush Mokhtarnejad
<i>FS Information Technology Committee</i>	Rajat Das Gupta
<i>FS University Athletics Advisory Committee</i>	Tamera Harris
<i>Parking Appellate Court</i>	Iftakhar Ahmad
<i>Parking and Transit Advisory</i>	Jillian Chamberlain
<i>Health Services Advisory Committee</i>	Anna Chupak
<i>Non-Campus Safety Committee</i>	Yu (Samuel) Cheung
<i>Environmental Sustainability</i>	Erin Looney
<i>Board of Student Publications and Communications</i>	Blessing Emodi
<i>Veteran Student Services Advisory</i>	Ciji Sims
<i>Freedom of Expression</i>	Bradley Crain
<i>Cockstock Committee</i>	Gaurav Harshe
<i>ASPH Dean's Student Advisory Council</i>	Rajat Das Gupta

## General Body Meetings

The general body meetings for 2023-2024 hosted a number of higher administration staff at USC in order for them to speak directly to graduate students about their positions and how their offices could better support graduate students.

Notable speakers were President Michael Amiridis, Provost Donna Arnett, and Dean of the Graduate School Ann Vail. Discussions were on topic ranging from stipends to housing and better support of the graduate and professional students.



### GSA Meetings

The GSA Cabinet meets on Fridays from 4:00pm to 5:30pm in the Leadership and Service Center, Second Floor of the Russell House. All graduate and professional students are welcome to attend GSA Cabinet meetings. Meetings will be held in person with virtual options and graduate and professional students are invited to email our general mailbox ([sogsa@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sogsa@mailbox.sc.edu)) to receive the meeting information. GSA Cabinet meetings for the Fall, 2023 semester are:

September 8, 2023

September 22, 2023

September 29, 2023

October 13, 2023

October 27, 2023

November 10, 2023

December 1, 2023



## Fall & Spring Social Events – 2023-2024

On Wednesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the Graduate Student Association held their respective Fall & Spring Socials for graduate and professional students.



The fall social took place at the Republic Biergarten, and the spring social was held at the Top of Carolina, providing excellent opportunities for graduate students to mingle with peers and enjoy food and drinks in a relaxed, non-academic environment.



Spring Dinner



## Townhall Event – February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) hosted a town hall on February 26 to directly address the concerns and needs of graduate and professional students, who often feel overlooked within the university community. Key topics discussed included health insurance, stipends, tuition, and basic needs insecurities, with significant achievements highlighted such as the recent implementation of a \$20,000 minimum annual stipend for Ph.D. students. However, several ongoing issues were identified, including financial and communication problems with event bookings, limited mental health resources during summer, and challenges with the Garnet Gate system affecting access to GSA funding.

Additionally, students expressed concerns about financial burdens related to required



The poster for the GSA Townhall Meeting features the USC Graduate Student Association logo at the top left. Below it, a black banner reads "BE PART OF OUR DISCUSSION AT". The main title "GSA TOWNHALL MEETING" is in large, bold, red and black letters. To the right is a hexagonal image of a campus walkway. Below the title, a calendar icon indicates the date "MONDAY 26th February, 2024". A clock icon shows the "START AT 3:30pm - 5:30pm". A globe icon says "Please register using the link in our bio!". At the bottom right, it says "Food will be served!" and "Russell House Room 322" with a location pin icon.

paid software for courses and research, food insecurity, and the overall financial insecurity impacting areas like housing and parking. Solutions such as better partnerships for software access, establishing a graduate-focused food pantry, and advocating for more comprehensive housing solutions were suggested to help alleviate these pressures.

Overall, the town hall illuminated the critical role of the GSA in harnessing leadership to advocate for and support graduate students, but also highlighted the need for broader university involvement to

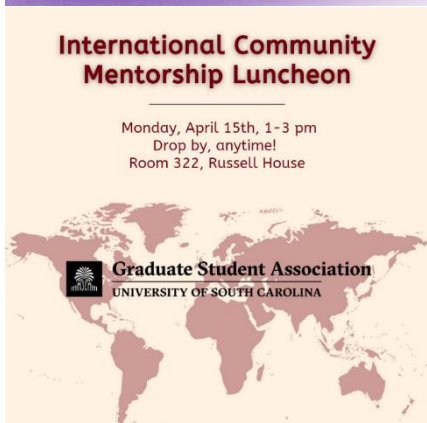
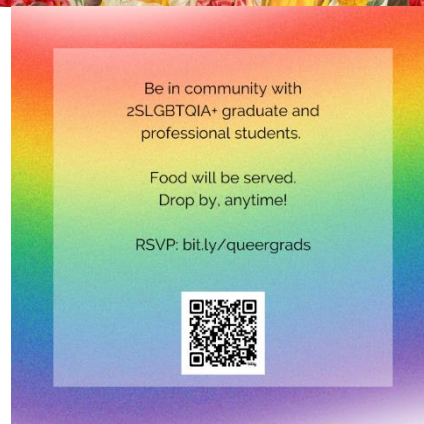
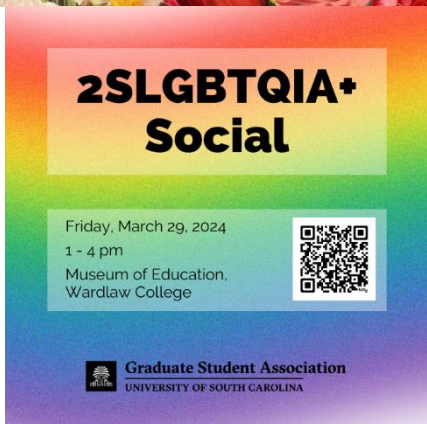
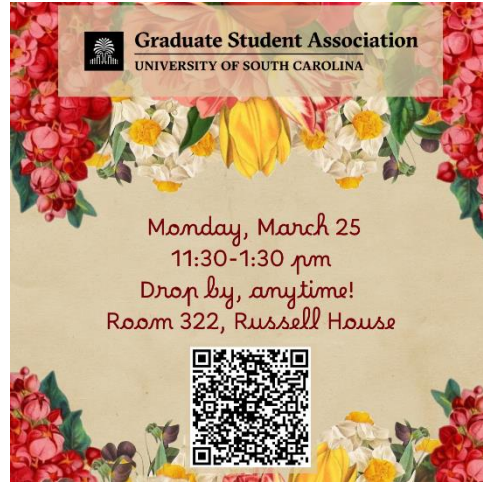
address the complex challenges facing this vital part of the academic community.

Based on the town hall, Gaurav Harshe published a guest column in The Daily Gamecock, which can be accessed at the following URL:

<https://www.dailygamecock.com/article/2024/03/guest-column-graduate-professional-students-at-usc-deserve-better-opinion-harshe> .

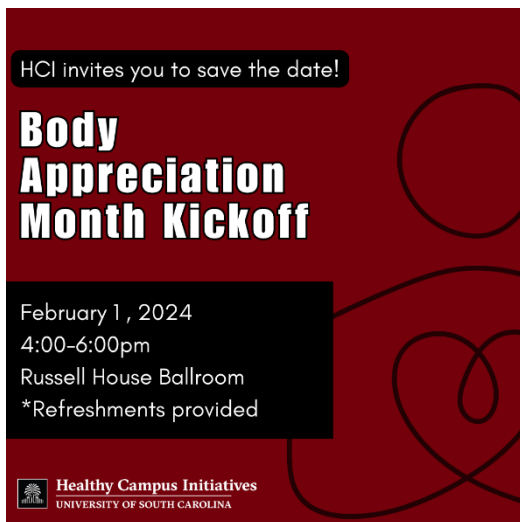
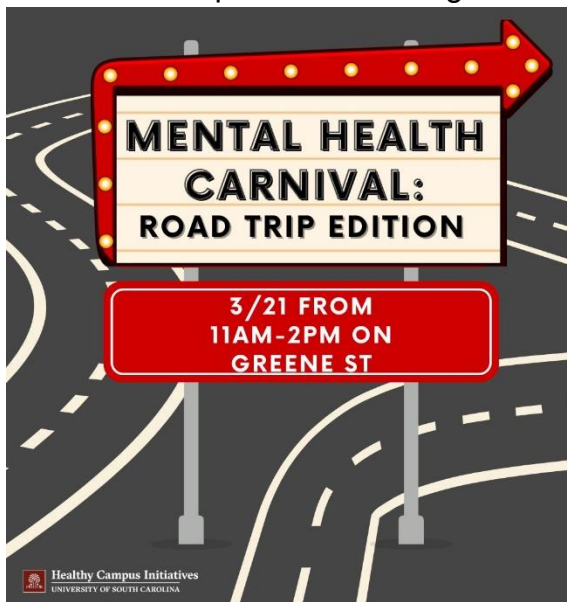
## Mentorship Luncheons

We continued our mentorship luncheons this year. Like the previous year, we were awarded a Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Grant by the Office of Access and Opportunity. With the support of this grant and our core GSA budget, we implemented the luncheon events. This year, we introduced a sustainability luncheon to foster environmental, economic, and social responsibility within the Carolina community through collaborations with students, faculty, staff, and community members.



## Health & Wellness Events

Throughout the year, our health and wellness team successfully organized a series of engaging events aimed at promoting overall well-being among graduate students. These included multiple tabling events focused on sustainability and mental health, two cooking classes led by a campus dietician and a resilience and mindfulness program coordinator, and a mindful wellness walk designed to foster connection and relaxation. Additionally, we compiled a comprehensive resource document for graduate students, featuring services like Gamecock Recovery and the Gamecock Pantry, and we are analyzing data from the 2023 National College Health Assessment to tailor future events to the specific needs of graduate students.



## FREE Mindful walk & Activity

April 8th, 1:30-3PM

We all know that finals can be a very stressful time for students. To help combat the stress, the Graduate Student Association is hosting a mindfulness event. This is a great time to unwind and connect with fellow graduate students. We hope to see you there!

**Event Details:**

- Mindful walk around the horseshoe
- Water Color painting
- Leo the therapy dog

**SIGN UP NOW!**



**Meeting location:** Student Health Center - C.A.L.M. Oasis Room, Room 215



## Professional Development Workshop

GSA, in conjunction with the Dean's Student Advisory Committee (DSAC) at the Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, organized a career webinar. This webinar aimed to highlight career planning and professional opportunities available at the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) for students at the University. The event was conducted via Microsoft Teams.



## Graduate Student Needs Assessment Survey

GSA Collaborated with the Graduate School and Student Life to implement the Graduate Student Needs Assessment (GSNA) and worked with Parking and Transportation Services to secure a USC Annual Parking Pass for 2024-25 as a grand lottery prize for students who complete this survey.

## Incorporation of the GSA Awards by the Graduate School

The GSA Award was introduced in the 2020-2021 academic year with the purpose of recognizing graduate students and celebrating the amazing accomplishments on our campus. The ultimate goal was for these awards to be integrated by the Graduate School and Student Life. This year, the Graduate School has revised their awards to include the following GSA awards, along with other fellowships:

1. Excellence in Access and Opportunity Award
2. Outstanding Community Engagement Award
3. Outstanding Research Award
4. Dean's Award for Doctoral Achievement

The USC Graduate School hosted a Recognition of Excellence Ceremony for graduate students in the Lexington Meeting Room at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center on April 19, 2024. This program, held in conjunction with Discover USC day, was co-sponsored by the GSA.

## 2023-2024 GSA Teams Retreat: A Successful Day of Building Dreams Together



The Graduate Student Association successfully hosted the 2023-2024 GSA Teams Retreat on Labor Day, bringing together members for an afternoon filled with team-building activities and networking. Held at the picturesque North Columbia location, the retreat took place on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023 from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

The event achieved a remarkable turnout with key members such as Andrew Kramarchyk, Anna Chupak, Anne-Laure Sabathier, and many more joining the fun. The afternoon kicked off promptly at 2:15 PM with participants gathering for the first of many engaging activities designed to strengthen bonds and foster collaboration among GSA members.



The retreat featured a variety of activities, including pool games and team competitions, creating a relaxed yet motivational environment for all attendees. Notably, the event also catered to non-swimmers, ensuring inclusivity and respect for all participants. In addition to the games, attendees enjoyed a delicious barbecue, complete with drinks and snacks, enhancing the authentic American atmosphere of the gathering.

For those who needed transportation assistance, arrangements were made to ensure everyone could attend without hassle. The retreat concluded on a high note, with participants leaving inspired and more connected than ever. The GSA extends its gratitude to everyone who made the effort to attend and contribute to the retreat's success. For those unable to attend, the GSA encourages a continued focus on team building within their respective roles.

## Reports of the 2023-2024 GSA Executive Board

### Report of the Vice President – Iftakhar Ahmad

I served as Treasurer for GSA for the year 2023-2024 until February 2024. Later on, I moved up to the position of Vice President due to a change in leadership positions of GSA for the unfortunate illness of Andy (then-president).

During my tenure as treasurer, I maintained GSA internal budgets and helped cabinet secretaries organize many events. I particularly collaborated with Erin in holding the GSA Fall Social and it was a great success with the presence of nearly 100 graduate students. At the beginning of our term, I also helped other GSA executives to organize the cabinet orientation. Later on, I collaborated with Erin and Gaurav to organize the Spring Dinner. I worked closely with Rajat to organize the GSA Townhall which was also a great success with the presence of plenty of graduate students and we discussed the issues faced by graduate students and also publicized the upcoming GSA executive election. I also organized the GSA year-end celebration program and collaborated with the newly appointed Treasurer (Ritwik nag) Rajat to manage certificates and souvenirs for all the cabinet secretaries and GSA affiliated officials.

While being treasurer my utmost focus was to make the graduate organizations more engaging on the campus and involve as many organizations as possible to hold meaningful events to make the graduate life experience better. I worked with Jillian (GSO Secretary) to spread financial information with graduate organizations and encourage them to be more involved and host engaging events.

I worked on allocating approximately \$22,500 to different graduate organizations for different events and conferences. I worked with my finance team to meet every other week to discuss over requested budgets. Moreover, in early January my finance team decided to increase to per-organization total budget cap to help them host more relevant and successful events.

I hold a training session for the cabinet secretaries regarding the guidelines and procedures for holding and requesting budgets for internal events. I also worked closely with Emma to maintain the GSA internal budget and I approximately allocated \$14,000 for different internal events. I met with Emma and Matt every other week to properly maintain and discuss GSA internal and Graduate Organization budgets.

Finally, I worked and assisted other GSA executives and secretaries whenever possible. I encouraged fellow graduate students to join in cabinet secretary positions and tried to promote the importance of GSA to graduate students. I along with other executives tried

our best to make GSA more engaging and I believe our success is represented by the participation of a good number of students in our events and a lot of graduate students running for executive positions for the year of 2024-2025.

### Report of the Treasurer – Ritwik Nag

My role in GSA started from the month of February. I was fortunate enough to win the special elections and take part in the events unfolding in GSA as a Treasurer. As the treasurer I have organized three biweekly finance committee meetings, where funds were allocated to not only various graduate student organizations but also various organizations requesting funds for conferences. Contribution of GSA with funding ranged from graduate organizations holding panel meetings, luncheons, study breaks to state-wide and nation-wide conferences. Other than my duties as a Treasurer, I have taken part in Town-hall meeting, helped organize the Spring Social and international mentorship luncheon with my fellow GSA members. Although my duration as a Treasurer was short, it was impactful for my overall career growth. It fills me with immense pride that I could, in however small capacity, was able to contribute to the work performed by the Graduate Student Association.

*The financial report of GSA is presented below, jointly prepared by Iftakhar Ahmad and Ritwik Nag:*

### GSA Allocation Budget Summary

Organization Name	Event Name	Allocated (USD)
Black Graduate Student Association	BGSA Welcome Event	550
College of Pharmacy Graduate Student Association	Pizza with Pi	198.39
College of Pharmacy Graduate Student Association	Pizza with Matt	200.04
College of Pharmacy Graduate Student Association	Pizza with Pi	200.04
Iranian Student Association	Mehregan	1335.26
National Org for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists	Inaugural Meeting	74.95
Black Graduate Student Association	USC Homecoming Celebration	333.96
National Org for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists	2nd meeting	74.95
Black Graduate Student Association	Midterm Movement	225
Graduate Org of the Earth, Ocean and Environment	SEOE Conference	905
Black Graduate Student Association	Speed Networking	250
Black Graduate Student Association	Spring Welcome Social	452.5

Black Graduate Student Association	More Money Less Problems	394.5
Black Graduate Student Association	Crazy Little thing called love	459.5
Doctoral Associates in COMD	American Sign Lang Conference	2000
LGBTQ+ Graduate Student Association	LGBTQ+ Holiday Party	70
College of Pharmacy Graduate Student Association	Future Stem Heroes Fair	2064.81
Student Personnel Association	HESA Hooding	982.1
Bangladesh Student Association	Banglafest	5950
Graduate Org of the Earth, Ocean and Environment	Retreat	1455
College of Pharmacy Graduate Student Association	Pizza with Dr. Reeder	204.93
Graduate Students in Linguistics	Student Research Symposium	1150
Black Graduate Student Association	Black History Month Game Night	155
Black Graduate Student Association	Community Services: Keep the Midlands Beautiful	148.77
Sport and Entertainment Graduate Student Association	2024 NASSM Conference	2000
Graduate Association of Biological Science	GABS data dinner 2024	500
Black Graduate Student Association	Demystifying Grad School	165
Black Graduate Student Association	Elections and rescheduled game night	155
Black Graduate Student Association	Art as an outlet	395
College of Pharmacy GSA	Pizza with Dr. Broude	204.93
LGBTQ+ Graduate Student Association	End-of-Year Event	69
Black Graduate Student Association	Graduate Drop-In with Dr. Watson	111.01
	<b>Total Spent</b>	<b>23,434.64</b>
	<b>Unspent</b>	<b>10,933.86</b>

### GSA Operational Budget Summary

Explanation	Requested (USD)	Spent (USD)	Unspent (USD)
GSA Executive Officer Stipends	6000.00	4328.91	1671
Travel for Advocacy Meetings in Washington DC	2000.00	0.00	2000
GSA Informational Handouts	200.00	0.00	200
GSA Welcome Back Social (Fall + Spring)	1750.00	2045.69	-295.69
Professional Headshots	400.00	379.27	20.73
GSA Executive nametags and door plates	200.00	200.00	0
DEI Event /Mentorship Event	2400	2746.80	-346.8

GSA Cabinet Orientation	1000	656.92	343.08
Fall and Spring Town Halls	1500	1468.86	31.14
Emerging new priorities	1500	318.58	1181.42
End of Year Appreciation Luncheon	1600	2127.96	-527.96
Graduate Student Awards	500	124.20	375.8
GSA Executive Portrait	100	110.00	-10
T-shirts and pins / Mugs and certificates	900	391.46	508.54
NAGPS Membership	600	600.00	0
<b>Total Allocation</b>	<b>20650.00</b>	<b>15498.65</b>	<b>5151.35</b>

*\*\*A few line items were overspent, and the cost was adjusted from other line items.*

### **Report of the Graduate Council Representative – Gaurav Harshe**

On Monday, August 28th, the Graduate Council Meeting was held from 2-3:30 pm at the Thomas Cooper Library.

The meeting primarily focused on Orientation Outreach efforts, with details as follows:

- There were 13 Presentation/PPT engagements and 3 Virtual Remarks engagements.
- Approximately 550+ students were interacted with.
- 13 connections/contacts were made with departments, colleges, and other AA/SA units.

Various outreach engagements were listed, including presentations at ISSS Early Arrivals, College of HRSM, USC Seniors, CSW (MSW program), GSA Orientation, College of Education, CEC Mech Eng., Darla Moore School of Business Masters (non-MBA) programs, CEC (Computer Science), School of Medicine (Masters programs), CEC (Chemical Eng.), CSW Doctoral Program, and Education Admin Doctoral Program, among others.

Sub-committees were formed, including Exec and Advisement, Wellness and Development (chaired by the Vice President), Recognition and Awards (chaired by the Treasurer), and Identity, Representation, and Advocacy (chaired by the Graduate Council Representative).

Fall Social Planning was also discussed, with considerations such as venue and proximity, budget, outreach, and engagement type.

On Monday, September 25th, the Graduate Council Meeting took place from 2-3:30 pm at the Close-Hipp Building.

During the meeting, the following events were discussed:

- Fall Social, scheduled for September 27th, on Wednesday evening.
- A monthly meeting with Dean Vail and Student Life was scheduled for that Thursday.

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The Graduate Council Meeting on October 23rd, held from 2-3:30 pm, addressed several topics:

1. Fall Social Recap: The event on September 27th had over 80 participants.
2. Support for Students Affected by the Middle East Conflict: Discussions focused on providing assistance, including funding and other supplemental resources.
3. Insurance Copays: There was an inquiry into whether copays had been raised.
4. Employer/Employee Relations: Likely discussed any pertinent issues in this area.
5. International Student Basic Needs: Concerns such as housing, transportation, and food insecurity were addressed.
6. Parking Issues: It was noted that overnight parking in the graduate lot was disallowed, and there were concerns about gameday parking taking precedence.

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On Monday, November 27th, the Graduate Council Meeting was held from 2-3:30 pm at the Close-Hipp Building. During the meeting, it was noted that President Kramarchyk would be out of the office until the end of the semester due to medical leave.

Upcoming events and initiatives discussed included:

- Mindfulness Baking Program on December 6th at the Center for Health and Well-Being.
- Plans for spring activities, including Mentorship Affiliate Luncheons (with support from the Office of Access and Opportunity), Headshots, Spring Social, Elections, Year-end celebration, and Awards.

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December Report: Collaboration with the Graduate School and Student Life is underway to revise the Needs Assessment survey for the upcoming semester/year.

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At the January 22nd meeting, GSA discussed

- soliciting panelists for various affiliate luncheons this semester, focusing on the womyn, international, 2SLGBTQIA+, and Black/African/American student communities.
- Additionally, plans were made for the upcoming Spring social event.
- Elections for the next executive cabinet are slated for March, with ongoing discussions about the current President position, including consideration of a special election.
- GSA Cabinet member Macie Goodman, Secretary of Health and Wellness, attended as a guest and expressed intent to apply for the Graduate Council Representative position for the next academic year.

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At the February 26, 2024 meeting:

- President Amiridis's visit to the GSA Full Board meeting on 2/16 was discussed, covering topics such as tuition waivers, stipends, housing, parking, WiFi, enrollment trends, and research standing.
- Special Election: Following the vacancy of the GSA President role, the current VP assumed the position, resulting in the current Treasurer becoming the VP. This created a vacancy for the Treasurer position, leading to a special election. Ritwik Nag was elected after a close run-off in a 3-candidate race.
- General Elections: The regular cycle election will commence on March 5th with the opening of candidacy submissions and conclude on March 27th with the final results. Further details are available on the website.
- GSA Townhall (2/26): A townhall meeting will be held to listen to the concerns of graduate/professional students and address their questions. This input will assist in gathering data for the Graduate Student Needs Assessment survey.
- Provost Arnett has agreed to virtually attend the last Full Board meeting on 3/29 to address graduate student needs.
- Mentorship Luncheon events: Events for the International community (3/11), Queer community (3/18), and Black community (4/17) are scheduled. Panelists and mentors are being solicited to participate in these events.

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At the March 25, 2024 meeting:

- Last Cabinet Meeting (3/29): Guests Provost Arnett and Dean Vail attended.
- Affiliate Events: Scheduled events include the Womyn's Luncheon (3/25), 2SLGBTQIA+ Social (3/29), International Community Luncheon (4/15), and Black Graduate Students Luncheon (4/18).

- Theme Events: Sustainability Luncheon (4/3), Mindfulness Walk (4/8), Spring Social (4/10), Cooking Prep Class (4/10), and Cabinet Appreciation Year-End program (4/16) are planned.
- Transition Period: The transition period involves wrapping up this academic year's reports and preparing for upcoming elections, with results set to be declared on 3/27.

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At the April 22, 2024 meeting:

- Affiliate and Social Events: Various events including the Womyn's Luncheon, Sustainability Luncheon, Black/African/American Art Luncheon, International Community Luncheon, 2SLGBTQIA+ Social, Spring Dinner at Top of Carolina (80+ attendees), and Meal Prep Cooking Class were well attended.
- End-of-the-Year Celebration: Faculty and staff from the Graduate School and Student Affairs, as well as cabinet secretaries and both outgoing and incoming executive members, were honored. Each attendee received a certificate of appreciation and a GSA year-branded coffee mug as a memento.
- Elections 2024-2025: Gaurav Harshe (President-Elect) won unopposed, Erin Looney (Vice President-Elect) won after a close margin run-off election, Iftakhar Ahmad (Treasurer-Elect) won unopposed, and Hannah Malcolm (Graduate Council Representative-Elect) won with a close margin.
- Transitionary Meetings: Concurrent meetings are being held between the Department of Student Life, the Graduate School, and both the incoming and outgoing executive members to wrap up this year and begin planning for the next.

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In addition to serving as the Graduate Council Representative and facilitating communication between the Graduate Council and the Graduate Student Association, I also spearheaded the development of the Sub-committee on Identity, Representation, and Advocacy. This subcommittee comprised the Secretaries of International Affairs, Veterans Affairs, Community Engagement, Disability Affairs, Women's Affairs, and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Affairs. In my capacity as the leader of this Sub-committee, we successfully organized numerous affiliate socials and luncheons catering to Womyn, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, international communities, and Black/African/American students. Additionally, we orchestrated themed events such as the Sustainability Luncheon, fostering inclusivity and engagement within our graduate student community.

I'm eagerly looking forward to assuming the position of President for the GSA in the upcoming year, working closely with the Executive and Cabinet Secretaries to provide enhanced support for graduate and professional students during their time at the University of South Carolina.

### Report of the Former President – Andrew Kramarchyk



To the Graduate and Professional Student Community,

I first wish to say that it has been an honor and privilege to serve you as President of the Graduate Student Association for the first half of this academic year.

In March of 2023 I made the decision for run for GSA President, was elected in April, and hit the ground running with my fellow executive officers. It was a whirlwind spring/summer: building our team of cabinet secretaries, appointing

GSA members to a variety of university wide committees, as well as meeting and working with our new Dean of the Graduate School.

Initiatives and objectives met during my tenure in office included:

- Advocating for Increase in GTA stipend for Ph.D. students which ultimately lead to realization of a floor increase for all funded Ph.D. students to \$20,000/annum.
- Visited and participated in over fourteen different colleges/schools' orientation programs to present GSA and the opportunities therein.
- Organizing the GSA Orientation, attended, in-person, or virtually, by all GSA members as well as key members of the Graduate School and Student Life and the Leadership and Service Center.
- Partnered with the Graduate School to provide graduate student involvement in a comprehensive examination of the Ph.D. process by way of a book review with the authors of 'The New Ph.D.'
- Organized town halls with administrators to address heightened concerns including those of health insurance.
- Through the work of our GSA Finance Committee, we supported graduate student organizations with over \$30,000 budget allocation.
- Collaborated with different groups including the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), and the Provost Advisory Committee on Women's Initiatives

(PACWI), with a grant funding from the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion, to organize luncheons for different graduate and professional students' identity groups.

- Supporting international students through our close relationship with the International Student and Scholars Support office.
- Continued the traditional GSA social events, extravaganzas on Greene Street, mental health campaigns and breaks, professional development workshops, and professional headshots.
- GSA members serving on different committees across the university and providing representation to issues of students on these committees.
- Participation of GSA representative on the Mayor of Columbia's Collegiate Advisory Council.
- Participation of GSA President in the Southeastern Conference's Graduate Student Body Consortium

November 4, 2023, was a day that changed my life forever. I was stricken with a medical condition which required brain surgery and a two-week hospital stay, followed by several months of treatment. Fortunately for me and my family I have beaten the odds and became, and remain, a survivor. The illness did, however, require me to relinquish my position as GSA president. Fortunately for the Graduate and Professional student population of USC our Vice-President, Rajat Das Gupta, accepted the role of President as set forth in our Constitution and By-laws. Rajat's VP position was filled by our Treasurer, Iftakhar Ahmed, and we held a special election for a new Treasurer, won by Ritwik Nag. While still not back to 100% I have been able to return to campus on a limited basis to attend GSA functions as well as functions within my doctoral program in the department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences.

My most fond memories of this past year are the lasting friendships I have made with our entire GSA team as well as the countless university faculty, staff and administrators: from the Graduate School, Student Life, Provost and President's offices as well as the Deans offices from the several Schools and Colleges I was blessed to work with this past year. All sectors of the larger University made the GSA feel welcome and appreciated, and to them all I owe a great deal of gratitude.

My single biggest goal for GSA this past year was to create greater sustainability and successorship among the GSA membership. Coming into the 2023 GSA elections we had only eight candidates for four executive offices: the President and Vice-President offices were non-competitive, and the Treasurer and Graduate Council Rep races had three candidates each. Of the eight candidates for executive office, four came from the ranks of the incumbent GSA members: 3 cabinet secretaries and one executive. Post election, upon establishing our cabinet, we had only two out of 26 cabinet members

return. We knew that these retention rates were unsustainable – we needed to infuse interest for GSA into new Graduate and Professional students earlier in their tenure at USC and also maintain their interest by keeping them involved, but not overburdened, through collaborative and cross-cabinet initiatives.

I am happy to report that our efforts and advocacy to these goals have paid dividends: the ten candidates for the four 2024/2025 executive office races are a 25% increase over last year, and three of the four races including both the President and Vice-President offices will be competitive. That is a 50% increase. In addition, we have six different GSA incumbents included in the overall ten candidates; that alone is a retention increase of 100% (three to six). It's still too early to tell how many of our rank-and-file cabinet secretaries will return to the GSA, but early words indicate a higher level of interest and a sense of unfinished business from this year's cohort. All good signs for positive succession.

Best wishes to all for a successful conclusion to your graduate studies and to a fruitful and rewarding academic or professional career!

Forever to thee.

## **Reports of the GSA President's Cabinet**

### **Report of the Chief of Staff (President) – Nolan Foreman**

Serving as the Chief of Staff for the GSA President throughout the 2023-24 academic year has been an extremely rewarding, fulfilling endeavor. As someone without any prior experience in a student body/student life role, I took this position head-on, starting by spearheading a complete revamp of GSA's casual and professional online presence as a leader of the GSA Communications and Promotions sub-committee. Past members of GSA had noticed a lack of graduate student interaction on our social media platforms, which warranted an overhaul of current practices and a new approach to graphic design and interaction encouragement, leading to a significant increase in graduate student interactions on our posts and at our GSA-sponsored events. None of this could have been possible without the help of every member of this sub-committee: Drew Beecham, Blessing Emodi, Adedoyin Adekunle, Jo Minns, and Mehrnoush Mokhtarnejad.

In addition to this new social media approach, I also saw a need to modify the way we treat our GSA newsletters. In past years, our organization has generally released two newsletters a month, detailing several GSA- and university-sponsored events that benefited graduate students. While this approach was extremely informative, not many graduate students seemed to take the time to read through these newsletters, effectively invalidating the generous time spent on creating them. To promote "readability," I decided to shift GSA newsletters to monthly installments that only contained a handful of the most

important events for graduate students to convey the information quicker. Based on some recent comments, it appears that this approach to the newsletters has made it easier to skim them briefly, which was the desired goal.

I also served as the sole graduate student representative on the faculty-led Instructional Development Committee, whose goal was to gauge interest in new learning management systems (LMS) for the university through discussion with LMS representatives and attending topical seminars. In doing so, our committee was able to suggest a new LMS for university-wide use. We also discussed shortcomings of current student evaluation of teaching (SET) forms with the primary goal of drafting questions for an SET that more accurately reflects the effectiveness of teaching at the University of South Carolina. SETs are an important metric often used to assess how well a professor teaches and often have implications for earning tenure, so this examination was critical for university professors.

Less specifically, my time as Chief of Staff for the President also involved fulfilling any needed roles, whether it was taking minutes at some of our full board meetings or volunteering at our events. Regardless of the task, I thoroughly enjoyed my time as a Cabinet member of GSA; it is something I would recommend to anyone interested in making a difference at USC. Though I will be graduating this year and therefore cannot remain a part of this organization, I am proud of what we accomplished and the obstacles we overcame to promote the well-being of all our (graduate student) Gamecocks.

### **Report of the Chief of Staff (Vice President) – Adedoyin Adekunle**

Adedoyin served as the Chief of Staff to the Vice President of the Graduate Student Association during the 2023-2024 academic year. As the Chief of Staff to the Vice President, I assisted with some of the operations of the GSA, events planning, and served as a member of the Communications and Promotions team and the Wellness and Development team.

As a member of the Communications and Promotions team, I served as an intermediary, alongside the Head of Communications team and Head of Promotions to ensure cabinet secretaries fill out all event forms properly and monitored GSA email for grad students' inquiries. As a member of this team, my role also included gathering information on events and their frequencies and garnering opinions about event titles and subject matter from cabinet secretaries to be featured in GSA's monthly newsletter. I am pleased to have served under the Communications and Promotions team for many reasons — the teams' resilience in following up with events, creating content for GSA's social media pages to promote graduate events and most importantly, for the Head of Promotions team's unwavering dedication and support to all things GSA.

It was an honor to have also served as a member of the Wellness and Development team. By being a member of this team, the GSA provided me an opportunity to learn and relearn pertinent issues concerning graduate students and diverse ways the University and its community can go by resolving those issues. My perspective has changed on graduate students' life, mental health awareness, nutrition, and the necessity of sustainability, all of which are indicative of my experience working with this team.

It was a fulfilling experience to serve as the Chief of Staff to the Vice President of the Graduate Student Association, and an honor to serve with fellow graduate students. I look forward to continuing to assist GSA in the near future.

### **Report of the Secretary of Veteran Affairs – Ciji Sims**

**Activities Report:** I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Veteran Affairs Committee Chair of the University of South Carolina's Graduate Student Association (GSA). I would like to thank former President of GSA Andrew Kramarchyk for providing me with this opportunity to contribute to the success of the GSA in supporting the graduate students at the University of South Carolina. I would also like to thank the Interim President Rajat Das Gupta and the rest of GSA's members in continued success of the GSA's efforts in advocacy for the graduate students. In my time as the Veteran Affairs Committee Chair, it was my honor to represent the GSA at the 2023 Veteran's Day Breakfast and 2023 Veteran's Day 5k. Additionally, I had the esteemed honor in supporting the University of South Carolina's GSA Community Outreach Committee Chair Jermaine Eric Whiteside in his efforts to develop the Graduate Student Assistance Transition (GSAT) program seeking to aid in the transition of military veterans' conversion to undergraduate and graduate programs at the University of South Carolina.

**Future Plans:** Although the GSA has had success in supporting and engaging the graduate students at the University of South Carolina, there is a perpetual need for GSA's work in advocacy, connection, and inclusivity as a service to the graduate student population. It is my recommendation that surveys are conducted to assess the needs and/or wants of the graduate student population, review the results, and evaluate how GSA can meet these needs.

**Gratitude:** Thank you for your time and generosity. It has been a pleasure working with all of you.

## Report of the Secretaries of Health & Wellness – Anna Chupak, Macie Goodman, & Tamera Harris

The General Health and Wellness committee comprised Anna Chupak as the Secretary of Mental Health and Wellness, Tamera Harris as the Secretary of General Health and Wellness, and Macie Goodman as the Secretary of Health and Wellness. Over the year we organized and hosted various events, including multiple tabling events, two cooking classes (one baking and one meal preparation), and one mindful wellness walk. The tabling events occurred on Greene Street and promoted sustainability (Green on Greene) and mental health (You are More Than and the Mental Health Carnival). The cooking events were done with a dietician on campus and a resilience and mindfulness program coordinator in the Student Health Center. This was through the Healthy Campus Initiatives. During the events, we explored the importance of slowing down and using your senses to create a soothing event for graduate students to connect and destress. In the meal preparation class, we hope to teach students how to prepare an easy but nutritious homemade meal that they can incorporate into their hectic week. The mindfulness walk will be hosted for all graduate students and hopes to connect the graduate student population in an activity that promotes general well-being in a central on-campus space. Throughout our tenure, we worked to create a condensed document of resources for graduate students including Gamecock Recovery, the Gamecock Pantry, and the Student Health Center to be distributed and accessible to graduate students across campus. We are also reviewing the data from the National College Help Assessment from 2023 to continue to create events targeting graduate student needs.



### **Report of the Secretary of Women's Affairs – Justine Truc**

During the 2023-2024 academic school year, I have had the honor of serving as the Secretary for Women's Affairs for the Graduate Student Association of the University of South Carolina. It has been an incredibly rewarding experience advocating for the needs and concerns of womyn graduate students within our academic community. Working alongside my peers who share a passion for gender equality and empowerment has been both inspiring and fulfilling. I am forever grateful for the opportunity that was given to me and hope to carry on the work started by the Graduate Student Association in the coming years here at USC.

In the fall of 2023, I put together a resource booklet that was circulated via our monthly newsletter and which aimed at providing guidance and shedding light on the resources available for graduate students thank to the University of South Carolina support. In collaboration with my peers in the Graduate Student Association, we organized a womyn's luncheon in the Spring semester aimed at providing support and mentorship to womyn graduate students. Gaurav Harshe put together a subcommittee to organize the luncheon.

Moreover, my role of secretary of women's affairs also led me to PACWI (Provost Advisory Committee for Women's Initiatives). As the chair of the Graduate Student subcommittee, I tried to represent the specific needs of women-identifying graduate students thanks to the help of the other wonderful individuals who made and will continue to make PACWI such an important organization. In the Fall of 2023, I participated in PACWI's signature event, "Lighting the Way," which promotes access, equality, and inclusivity for women in higher education. Additionally, in the Spring of 2024, I played a key role in organizing and chairing a graduate student panel for the yearly Women's Leadership Institute. This year conference's theme, "the Sisterhood of Brave Conversations,' underscores the importance of fostering dialogue and sharing resources to support womyn's leadership and success in academia.

### **Report of the Secretary of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion– Anne-Laure Sabathier**

I was fortunate to serve as GSA Secretary of DEI during this Academic Year. The two events that have been put together in the fall were co-sponsored with QGSA (Queer Graduate Student Association) and BGSA (Black Graduate Student Association) and were graciously funded by the DEI grant that GSA obtained. A 2SLGBTQIA+ Social was planned, organized and put together for March 29th with the thorough involvement of Gaurav Harshe, future president of GSA for next year, and was set up as a drop-in style meeting with different students who self-identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. The BGSA event is scheduled for April 18th in the Russell House Underground and aims at being a wider event than a luncheon to celebrate Black identities in Art. Food is to be

catered from an African restaurant, multiple stations will be creating involving art making, open mic, zen corner, etc. This event is being organized with Gaurav Harshe as well, and Gwen Hopper, current president of BGSA.

### **Report of the Secretary of Sustainability– Erin Looney**

Throughout the 2023-2024 academic year, I had the privilege of serving as the inaugural Cabinet Secretary of Sustainability within the Graduate Student Association. My tenure was marked by proactive engagement, strategic collaborations, and impactful initiatives to foster a culture of sustainability within our graduate and professional community.

During the fall semester, I embarked on a mission to cultivate meaningful partnerships with key stakeholders dedicated to sustainability. By forging alliances with the Office of Sustainability, The Graduate School, and the Gamecock CommUnity Shop, I laid the groundwork for comprehensive sustainability advocacy tailored to the unique needs of graduate students. One of the flagship events of this semester was the groundbreaking "Hot Couture: Fast Fashion's Impact on Climate Equity." This interdisciplinary event, organized in collaboration with the Arnold School of Public Health Dean's Student Advisory Council, attracted over 50 attendees, including esteemed guests such as Cocky and Dawn Staley. Through a multifaceted approach encompassing a resource fair, expert panel discussions, student presentations, and a captivating slow fashion show, participants gained invaluable insights into the environmental ramifications of the fashion and textile industry. Additionally, I planned and executed the GSA Fall Social at Republic Biergarten, where over 100 graduate students attended, providing an inclusive platform for networking and community building among graduate students.

Our sustainability efforts gained momentum in the spring semester by organizing a successful Sustainability Luncheon commemorating Earth Month.

This event served as a platform for approximately 20 individuals to engage in thought-provoking discussions led by graduate students representing diverse fields of sustainability. Their invaluable feedback highlighted existing concerns and illuminated pathways for future initiatives to advance our sustainability agenda. Finally, I helped to coordinate the Spring Dinner, an alternative to the GSA Spring Social, was hosted on April 10<sup>th</sup> at the Top of Carolina.





A cornerstone of GSA's sustainability endeavors was the green certification of GSA events in collaboration with the Green Certification team of Sustainable Carolina and the Office of Sustainability. Through meticulous planning and execution, we successfully implemented measures to prevent and minimize extraneous waste, setting a precedent for sustainable event management within our organization. Furthermore, I spearheaded efforts to foster community engagement by connecting GSA with the Food Recovery Network and facilitating the redistribution of leftovers from significant events such as the GSA Town Hall and Womyn's Luncheon, thereby minimizing food waste and promoting social responsibility

In conclusion, I am immensely proud of our strides in advancing sustainability initiatives within the Graduate Student Association during the 2023-2024 academic year. As I transition into the role of Vice President of the Graduate Student Association, I am eager to build upon our achievements and continue championing sustainability in the pursuit of a greener, more equitable future.

Sustainably yours...

### Report of the Co-secretary of International Student Affairs –Samuel Cheung

We would like to thank GSA for helping us and letting us serve the University. Being a secretary of international student affairs is a challenging yet valuable position in the cabinet. Amazingly, international students make up a significant population of graduate students, as well as the members of GSA.

Although many events, inside and outside the cabinet, did not happen as we predicted in the past term, we understand the importance of handling stress and building resilience, and that is also a critical part of the students' lives. Closely associated with this idea, we proposed that other than focusing on merely the needs of international students, the community should also focus on understanding the coping methods and resources of these students as they are studying abroad. We encouraged surveys that use USC students as the targeted sample can add open-ended sections to inquire about students' experiences in life stress and coping responses to enrich our

understanding of stress and resilience. We are extremely willing and happy to support both the graduate students' needs survey and especially the most recent version of the international students' needs survey which adheres to this approach!

We acknowledge that the "International Student Luncheon" has been successful in 2022 as we heard many valuable opinions and experiences from the participants, and we are interested in maintaining this event on a yearly basis starting in 2024. It is proposed that a new topic attached to each luncheon event is more encouraging so that both speakers and participants will be facilitated to contribute during their discussions about the versatile lives of international students without focusing excessively on stress and challenges. As a result, we strongly hope that the luncheon titled "Studying Abroad: challenges and the international wisdom of coping" can be launched soon.

Besides, with a hope to introduce GSA to both local students and international students, we increased our participation in promoting with the current, and the forthcoming GSA president.

### **Report of the Co-secretary of International Student Affairs – Omid Oshriyeh**

I joined the GSA board later in the game (around October 2023), following an invitation from Andy to collaborate. While initially without a formal title or position, I've since become actively involved. As the sole representative from the College of Hospitality, Retail, and Sports Management, which has over 2,700 students, I've been a consistent presence at GSA cabinet meetings attending most of them. During these meetings, I've offered insights into the challenges faced by graduate students, particularly within our college. Moreover, I've engaged in one-on-one discussions with Andy and Sam regarding the unique issues confronting international graduate students at USC.

Additionally, I've partnered with Andy and Samuel on a graduate student needs assessment survey. My ongoing involvement includes aiding in data analysis, aiming to glean quantitative insights into the barriers hindering graduate students from fully embracing the Gamecock experience.

Furthermore, I've actively supported GSA events, such as hosting the GSA table at the 'You Are More Than Event' on Wednesday, January 31st alongside Anna Chupak.

Looking ahead, I'm committed to continuing my contributions to GSA, with an even greater level of engagement. Now that my coursework is complete, I have the capacity to dedicate more time and energy to GSA activities.

## **Report of the Co-secretary of International Student Affairs – Lakshmi Tanuja Tanga**

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with gratitude for the support and collaboration that have defined our journey. Serving as a vital bridge between the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and the university at large, we have embraced the challenges and opportunities that come with advocating for international students.

In the dynamic landscape of international student affairs, our role as the Secretary has been both enriching and demanding. From navigating the diverse needs of our international student population to fostering resilience in the face of uncertainty, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to creating a supportive environment for all.

Throughout the year, we have prioritized initiatives aimed at understanding and addressing the multifaceted experiences of international students. Our efforts have included advocating for comprehensive surveys that delve into the coping mechanisms and resources utilized by international students, shedding light on their resilience amidst the complexities of studying abroad.

We recognize the success of the "International Student Luncheon" in 2022 and aim to continue this annual event, with a focus on diverse themes to encourage engagement and sharing among attendees. The upcoming luncheon which we are planning to launch soon, titled "Studying Abroad: Challenges and International Wisdom of Coping," is poised to spark insightful discussions. Additionally, we've intensified efforts to engage the wider university community, promoting awareness of GSA resources for international students. Through enhanced participation in promotional activities, we endeavor to bridge the gap between local and international students, fostering unity and inclusivity within the university.

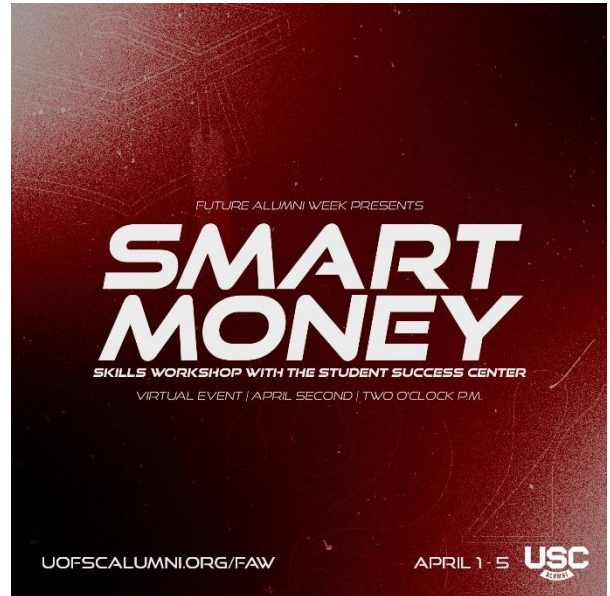
Looking ahead, we remain committed to our mission of advocating for the needs of international students and promoting a culture of support and understanding within the university community. As we embark on the new academic year, we are excited to continue our journey of empowerment and collaboration.

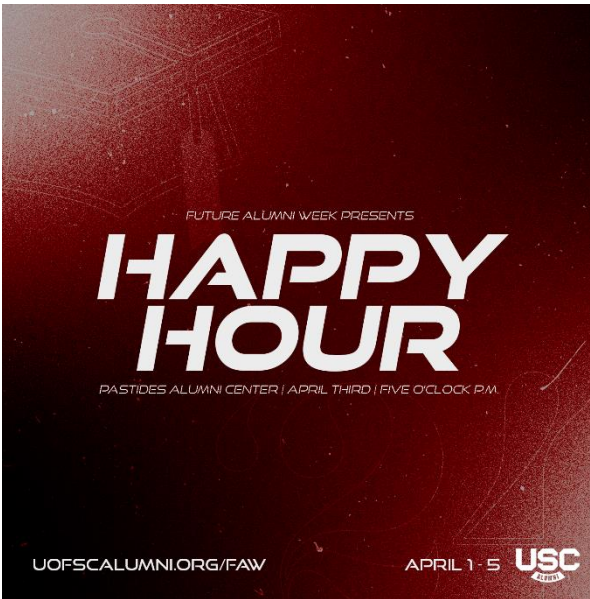
We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who have supported us on this journey, and we look forward to the opportunities that lie ahead.

## **Report of the Secretary for Graduate Assistantship – Anthonia Awhinawhi**

The Graduate Student Association continues to strive for the betterment of graduate student experiences through various initiatives and collaborations. As the Secretary for Graduate Assistantship, I am pleased to present this report outlining activities and achievements within our organization. I had the privilege of meeting with Matt

Klopfenstein, the Assistant Director of National Fellowships. During this meeting, we discussed avenues for providing comprehensive information about financial aid, assistantships, and fellowships to graduate students. Understanding the importance of financial support in graduate education, we emphasized the need for accessible resources and guidance. As a result, relevant information was compiled and disseminated through our newsletter, ensuring all graduate students have equitable access to vital financial aid information. Recognizing the valuable contributions of graduate assistants and seeking to foster a stronger connection between alumni and current students, I initiated a collaboration with the Alumni Association. Through joint efforts, we organized events from April 1- 5 to appreciate graduate assistants for their dedication and hard work. This collaboration not only acknowledges the contributions of graduate assistants but also strengthens ties between alumni and the current graduate student community. By leveraging the expertise and networks of alumni, we aim to provide valuable support and mentorship opportunities for current graduate students. Lastly, in collaboration with the Bilingualism Matters Center, I organized a brown bag lunch event focused on promoting GSA among the international community. This event provided a platform for international graduate students to learn about GSA's initiatives and how they can actively participate in shaping the graduate student experience. By fostering inclusivity and cultural exchange, we aim to create a supportive environment where all graduate students feel valued and empowered.





### **Report of the Secretary of Legislative Affairs – Samantha Hulett**

My efforts with the GSA involved helping with the fall social and helping to take pictures and talk with attendants during the event. I talked with USC students and graduate students about what kinds of policies and advocacy efforts they would like to see happen on campus. I helped to advocate with students about policies that would help to improve their lives on campus and what they themselves can do to help their voices be heard. I talked with students about the importance of advocacy and talked about advocating for green policies. I helped in the planning and organizing of the sustainability potluck.

### **Report of the Secretary of GSA Awards – Mehrnoush Mokhtarnejad**

I am sharing a summary of my contributions and engagement within the Graduate Student Association (GSA) over the past year. Here are some key highlights:

- Communications and Promotions Team: Throughout the year, I was an active member of the Communications and Promotions Team within GSA. My role encompassed monitoring our various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. I conducted analyses to gauge the effectiveness of our communication strategies and attended bi-monthly committee meetings to contribute insights and ideas for enhancing our outreach efforts.
- GSA Fall Social Event Committee: I served on the GSA Fall Social Event Committee. During this event, my responsibility was engaging with new students,

fostering connections among attendees, and creating a welcoming environment for all participants.

- GSA Year-End Program Committee: I played a significant role in the GSA's Year-End Program Committee. In this capacity, I designed certificates of appreciation for all members in recognition of their contributions to GSA during the 2023-2024 term. Moreover, I led the designing of souvenir mugs for GSA members and directors, which were distributed during the Year-End event held on April 16th.
- CommUnity Facilities Tour: On October 16th, I had the opportunity to participate in a tour of CommUnity Facilities (Gamecock Pantry). Led by Executive Director Olivia Gillespie, the tour provided valuable insights into the operations of the CommUnity Shop and its important role in supporting students. By understanding its functions more deeply, I am better equipped to advocate for resources and support for our student community.

These experiences have been enriching. They have allowed me to contribute meaningfully to the GSA while also expanding my knowledge and network within the university community.

### **Report of the Secretary of Professional Development – Nayeem Mohammad**

As the cabinet secretary overseeing Professional Development, our objective was to organize headshot events during the Fall of 2023 and Spring of 2024. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, these plans were stymied. Traditionally, the university relied on photographers employed by the Communications and Marketing Division for such events. At the conclusion of the 2022/23 academic year, however, the division altered its policy, opting to hire photographers on an as-needed basis and allowing organizing departments to manage the hiring process independently. Despite reaching out to various freelance photographers, it became apparent that their remunerations far exceeded the allocated budget for the event. After discussing the issues during GSA meetings, we could not unearth a solution while balancing the budget, hiring a professional photographer, and organizing the event.

### **Report of the Secretary of GSA Affairs – Drew Beecham**

This year has been a phenomenal year for our communications and promotions team! We increased our posting frequency and saw some great interaction with the graduate student body! We posted about 20 posts this year, averaging about one post every other week with each post averaging 20 likes and 258 views. Our most liked post, a post recapping our Fall Social, received 67 likes and over 500 views. Over the past

semester, we have reached roughly 1,000 people through our Instagram page and have increased our follower count to nearly 1,000. Roughly 40% of accounts reached by our page were by non-followers, meaning that GSA's social media presence has grown and will continue to grow!

I look forward to see how the next GSA team continues to grow our social media presence, and thus, our ability to reach out to our community and continue to serve them!

### **Report of the Secretary of Graduate Student Organizations – Jillian Chamberlain**

In fulfilling the Cabinet role of Secretary of Graduate Student Organizations and member of the Finance committee, it was vital to spend the academic year laying the groundwork for the future of GSO success. The year began with the goal of conducting outreach, educating GSO's of their resources, and enhancing advertising and organization through the use of Garnet Gate. These goals were set with the intention to assist student life as it continues to recover from the pandemic, in addition to addressing the pre-existing issues of graduate students seeking belonging and community on campus. These goals were satisfactorily executed so that next year has a strong jumping off point to further bolster GSO presence and activity. Efforts to achieve this included extensive liaising between GSA and GSO's for events and opportunities, extra financial education, additional Garnet Gate education, gathering data on how to best prepare organizations to function at high capacity, and advertising GSO events using the GSA platforms. Tangible evidence of these efforts include the registration of 43 Graduate Student Organizations (not including organizations that are registered under a different category but still accept graduate students), allocating \$23,000 to fund over 30 graduate student events on campus, and increased Garnet Gate usage. I look forward to seeing the widespread involvement and campus presence of Graduate Student Organizations in the near future!

**Thank you for another great year making the graduate student experience at the University of South Carolina the best it can be. Let's continue to move forward and work hard for all graduate students!**



Best,

GSA Executive Board 2023-2024

**Rajat, Iftakhar, Ritwik, and Gaurav**

## Going Forward: 2024-2025 Executive Board



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