Board of Directors Handbook
2025-2026

Graduate Students' Association
Board of Directors Handbook

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Enacted: September 2011 **Last Review:** Oct 2025 **Next Review:** April 2026

About the GSA

Brock University was established in 1964 as a small, solely undergraduate institution located within the basement of a local church, then later housed within a former manufacturing site. Though starting with humble beginnings, Brock University has grown to be a comprehensive post-secondary institution with both undergraduate and graduate programs across six academic faculties.

Our place within the university community first came informally, where in 1970 the first graduate programs were offered. Over the next three decades, the graduate student population continued to grow to meet the demand of the region and beyond. In the late 1990s, Graduate Studies was formally organized into a faculty, joining the six academic faculties at the University. The GSA followed the lead of the faculty shortly thereafter.

In 2001, we welcomed our first executive team and became the official representative of graduate students at Brock. In 2008, we were formally incorporated as a non-profit corporation without share capital and have continued to refine our mandate in response to the evolving needs of our membership.

We have grown from a few hundred graduate students in the early 2000s to a population of nearly 1800 graduate students at the beginning of 2021, our 20th anniversary. Graduate students now can choose from 50+ different programs, while bringing their unique backgrounds and interests to campus.

Within the last decade, the growth of the graduate student population has been truly expansive, doubling our complement since 2011. In reflection of this growth, it has become critical that the GSA respond to the needs of our members, and in turn the association, by charting a path forward that identifies who we are, where we are going and what we seek to accomplish. As we continue to grow, the GSA knows that we will continue to face complex challenges that continue to evolve and must be prepared to encounter them.

Present day, the GSA is a student organization that **represents the interests of approximately 1800 graduate students at Brock University.** The GSA is the independent voice of graduate students on campus and is recognized by Brock University as the official representative of Brock's graduate students.

Our purpose is to:

- promote academic, professional and social student development.
- facilitate interaction between students from all departments.
- provide opportunities for interaction amongst students and the internal University community (including faculty and administration).
- enhance the profile of graduate students in the external community.
- advocate and lobby for student representation and meet student concerns; and,
- promote equity of access for student opportunities.

In 2021, the GSA presented its inaugural Strategic Plan (Document 007) to the membership at the annual Special General Meeting. While this document expands and grounds itself within the three strategic pillars of the GSA – leadership, community, and service – it is also a document that brought forward a newly envisioned mission and vision of the organization, as well as values.

Mission

Enhancing the graduate student experience through holistic representation and advocacy.

Vision

An equitable and sustainable graduate community where all students feel supported, engaged, and empowered to succeed.

Values

Equity
Beyond inclusivity, we see an opportunity to address systemic concerns across the institution in a way that benefits all graduate students. Inclusion can be passive, but we believe in an active role for the GSA in upholding the principles of fairness and equality.

Community
Graduate students form a collective of interests at Brock University, and we believe in furthering those experiences for the benefit of all our members. Creating a space that feels warm, inviting, and supportive, a home away from home.

Holism
Seeing the value of the whole, graduate students are more than just their contribution to the university - we live the complex intersections of research, employment, academics, and personal lives. Constantly at a crossroads, we are unique and should be seen as such.

Empowerment
Graduate students have unique identities, and they should feel that they are acknowledged while their academic and non-academic choices are supported. Igniting a passion of self-exploration within the graduate community where students can thrive rather than survive.

Sustainable
Growth with the future in mind, reflecting the consequences of decisions and minimizing footprints while maximizing effectiveness. We understand that we need to be effective stewards of the GSA for upcoming generations of graduate students.

Organizational Structures

GSA Membership

The general membership of the GSA is divided into three groups:

- Full Member – current, full or part-time graduate student who has paid the designated membership fee (GSA Membership Fee).
- Associate Member – current, full or part-time graduate student who has not paid the designated membership fee (GSA Membership Fee).
- Honorary Member – persons offered membership by the Executive Committee, on recommendation by the Board of Directors.

The privileges afforded to each group of the General Membership are detailed in the following legislative documents:

- Document 011 (Full Membership)
- Document 012 (Associate Membership)
- Document 013 (Honorary Membership)

Members are welcome to bring any issue before the GSA Executive and/or Board. Issues must be submitted in writing to the GSA (execdirector@brockgsa.ca and chair@brockgsa.ca), at least seven (7) business days prior to a Board meeting.

A member whose business has been placed on the Board agenda will have five (5) minutes to present their business at the meeting. For details on bringing business to the attention of the Executive or Board see *GSA Bylaws, Article* 14.I.e.

Board of Directors

The Board is involved in making decisions that define the vision and mission of the GSA, its strategic objectives, priority populations, organizational values, strategic priorities, and the future course for the GSA. It establishes the legal, ethical, and financial boundaries within which the Executive and Staff must operate to achieve the mission and strategic goals.

The voting Board is made up of the President and sixteen (16) current GSA member graduate students, two from each of the six faculties, who have applied and been selected to act on behalf of graduate students from their Brock faculty, as defined in GSA Bylaws, Article 11. In addition to the twelve (12) faculty representatives, there are four (4) at-large seats open to all faculties. These seats are for faculties with full representation who have interest in surpassing their voting director complement, as further defined in GSA Bylaws, Article 11.

Recruitment for the Board of Directors positions is primarily undertaken during the Winter semester each year, following the Executive elections, with the term of office running from May 1 to April 30 of the following year. The Board's Governance, Elections and Nominating (GEN) Committee or the Executive Committee may hold ongoing

recruitment throughout each term on an as-needed basis to fill any vacancies as they arise.

Board of Directors must be available to attend the monthly GSA Board meetings and communicate regularly with their faculties. Directors must be a full member of the GSA and must remain a member of their respective faculty for the duration of their term.

Executive Officers

The Executive Officers are responsible for assisting the Board of Directors in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities in relation to overall management and direction for the GSA, as well as providing goal setting, general support and guidance. Elections for these positions are held in the Winter semester.

The Executive Officers of the GSA are:

- President
- Vice-President, External and University Affairs (VPEUA)
- Vice-President, Student Life & Equity (VPSLE)
- Past President (*when filled*)

Officers must be a current registered graduate student at Brock University and Full member of the GSA at the time of their election and maintain any membership in the corporation for at least one following term of office (Spring/Summer or Fall term). Officers must commit to the term in its entirety and must be available and able to fulfill their duties for the entire 12-month period. Co-op students, who are not able to commit to a 12-month continuous term, are not eligible to apply.

Staff

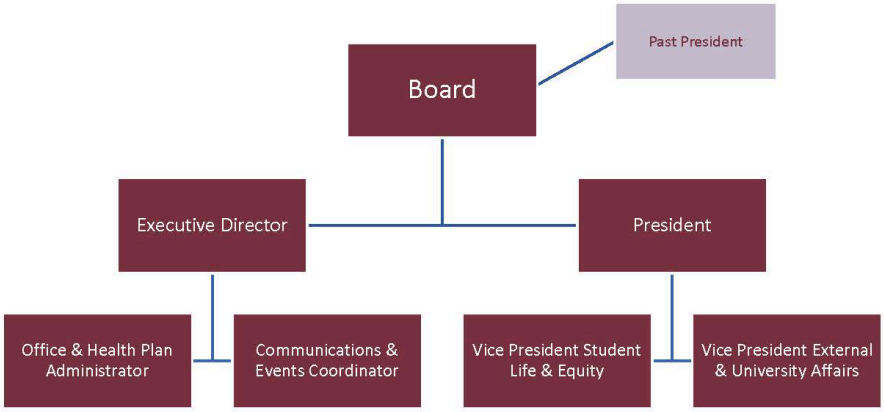
The GSA is supported by three full-time employees: Executive Director, Office & Health Plan Administrator and Communications & Events Coordinator. The Executive Director can field inquiries from the Board regarding the GSA Executive, the Board of Directors, GSA management or financial matters. The Office & Health Plan Administrator can field inquiries about the Health and Dental Benefits Plan, and general inquiries about the GSA. The Communications & Events Coordinator can field inquiries regarding the GSA newsletter, website, social media or GSA-hosted events.

Further information about the Executive Director can be found in Document 030 – Executive Director Policy.

Note: Anyone wishing to meet with Staff and/or Executive are asked to book an appointment by emailing the GSA Office (office@brockgsa.ca).

Organization Chart

Further information about the organizational chart can be found in Document 034 – Organizational Chart Policy.



Governing Documents: Bylaw, Policies, Procedures

Document 001 - Bylaw

The overarching document of the association is the Bylaw, which provides high-level guidance for the organization in support of its mission, vision, and values. This document is enacted by the GSA membership through either a campus-wide referendum or a General Members meeting, both mechanisms allow every graduate student the opportunity to vote on potential changes.

Document 007 – 2021-2026 Strategic Plan

Committed to Students, Connected to Community is the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan of the Brock University Graduate Students' Association. Also known as Document 007A, the Strategic Plan is the first in the GSA's history and represents our commitment to members on several issues that we want to address over the next five years. This plan is the product of conversations, consultations, and deliberations over the course of eighteen months during 2019-2021.

Document 004 – Schedule D: GSA-Managed Ancillary Fees

The GSA Membership also can approve additional ancillary fees, as well as amend existing fees. These changes can be enacted through either a general election (known as a referendum) or through a General Meeting of the membership. Such a vote by the membership binds the association to operating within the parameters of the related documentation, in this case, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for each fee respectively.

The GSA also has additional schedule-based policies which outline additional graduate student fees: Document 005 – Schedule E: Ancillary Fees Managed by the University and Document 006 – Schedule F: Ancillary Fees Managed by External Partners.

Policies

In addition to the Bylaw and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), the foundational documents of the organization, we also have legislation that expand and support what is specified by members through the Bylaw. These documents are known as Policies and outline various aspects of our governance and operational structures.

Policies are documents that expand on stipulations outlined in the Bylaw, they are approved by the Board of Directors after two affirmative readings. Additionally, while they are reviewed on a rolling four-year basis, they remain active until the Board authorizes their amendment or removal.

The GSA policies can be divided into the following frameworks:

- Documents 010 – 019: Legislation, Organization, Board of Directors and Governance
- Documents 020 – 029: President, Vice-Presidents, and Associate Vice-Presidents

- Documents 030 – 039: Staff and Employee Operations
- Documents 040 – 049: Elections, Referenda, Recruitment, Appointments and General Meetings
- Documents 050 – 059: Board Committees and Faculty Communities

Position Policies

Unlike Policies, Position Policies are stances taken by the GSA in response to issues that may arise on an ongoing basis. They are approved by the Executive and expire automatically on the designated dates within each Position Policy. They inform lobbying priorities and support the GSA's advocacy efforts. These are inclusive of Documents 070 – 099.

Procedures

Procedures are internal-facing documents that are not made accessible to the greater membership of the GSA. Procedures are normally operationally focused and create further specificity and clarity to organizational activities that the Bylaws or Policies may be unable to provide (i.e. Confidentiality & Compliance Agreement Policy).

These documents are created, under the premise outlined in Document 010, by the Executive Committee and are reviewed every four (4) years. They are easily identified through their triple digit coding (i.e. 100 – 999).

Document Versions

All governing documents shall be accompanied by a letter (i.e. A) to indicate their version. Upon review by the appropriate body, if the document in question should have any changes its letter must change to the next letter, in ascending order (i.e. a reviewed and modified document ending in A would now end in B).

About the Board of Directors

Board representatives govern as Directors for the GSA but are elected to represent their specific faculty and are jointly responsible for governing the organization, as well as serving as liaisons between the GSA Executive and the graduate students in their faculty.

Sitting on the GSA Board of Directors and various committees, they represent the GSA within their faculty and represent students by using their vote in the GSA. This is an opportunity to bring issues or concerns from their faculty to the attention of the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee, and the larger graduate community.

Roles and Responsibilities

- Strategic Governance
- Operational Oversight
- Board Self-Governance
- Community and Partners Relations and Advocacy
- Resource Development

Board Structure

Elected Voting Directors

- Faculty-Based Directors (2 per faculty)
    - Applied Health Sciences
    - Education
    - Goodman School of Business
    - Humanities
    - Mathematics and Science
    - Social Sciences
- Directors-at-Large (4)

Ex-Officio, Voting Director

- GSA President

Ex-Officio, Non-Voting Directors

- VP, External & University Affairs
- VP, Student Life & Equity
- Past President
- Executive Director

**Referenced from Document 001*

Meetings of the Board of Directors

Board Meetings

The Policies regarding Board meetings are detailed in Article 14 of GSA Bylaws. We encourage all Directors of the Board to review this section of the Bylaw.

Board of Directors and Executive Officers are expected to attend all Board meetings.

The Board typically meets once a month during the year, according to a schedule set out in advance and approved by the Board. Meetings are typically held the fourth Thursday of every month, from Noon to 2:00 p.m. (Eastern time) and are mandatory. Regular meetings are typically held in a hybrid format, with the option to attend in-person in MC-C300, or online via Zoom. The meeting schedule of the Board can be found in the appendix of this handbook. Special meetings may be called, if necessary.

Board meetings are open to any GSA member to attend and contribute to discussion, or request to view the minutes following a meeting; however, only the Board of Directors and President, designated as the Ex-Officio Voting-Director, may vote.

The GSA Board follows *Robert's Rules of Order*, which provides widely accepted guidelines for conducting meetings. The important segments you will need for GSA Board meetings are summarized below; however, additional details can be found at the following resources:

- *Robert's Rules of Order—Summary Version* http://www.robertsrules.org
- *The Official Robert's Rules of Order Website* http://www.robertsrules.com

Preparing for Meetings

The agenda will be set by Board Leadership (Chair and Vice-Chair), in consultation with the President and Executive Director, taking into consideration written requests from Directors or members that are received by email no later than seven (7) business days prior to the Board meeting.

The Board meeting package, containing the agenda, previous meeting minutes, and other relevant meeting documents will be sent out prior to the upcoming meeting. Directors are asked to review these as soon as possible and note any errors, omissions or conflicts of interest. Have the meeting package accessible to you for the Board meeting so you may refer to any matters arising from the agenda, minutes or reports.

Board meeting packages remain in a confidential state and are for Board and Executive viewing only. Members wishing to view the contents of meeting packages can do so by visiting the GSA office after meetings conclude. At no point do members have access to in-camera meeting information and minutes unless they were in attendance during in-camera sessions.

From time to time, the Executive may ask you to solicit the opinions of your colleagues on particular issues and report back to the Board. These topics will typically be raised through Generative Discussion(s) in the Board meeting.

Attendance & Participation

As per Document 015, if a member of the Officers or Directors is absent for:

- two (2) unexplained absences (i.e. without sending regrets to the Chair in advance) from Board of Directors meetings, that person shall cease to be a director, and the vacant seat shall be filled;
- three (3) consecutive Board of Directors meetings, regardless of whether they have presented valid excuses that person shall cease to be a director, and the vacant seat shall be filled;
- four (4) total Board of Directors meetings, regardless of whether they have presented valid excuses, that person shall cease to be a director, and the vacant seat shall be filled.

The attendance and participation of all Board of Directors and Executive members is imperative for the Board to function properly, so please be aware of meeting dates and times. Be sure to RSVP in a timely fashion to indicate your attendance at the Board meeting. When quorum (one half of all voting officers and directors plus one) is not reached, the Board cannot conduct business and no decisions can be made that month.

If you do need to miss a meeting, please email your regrets to the Board Chair (chair@brockgsa.ca) or Executive Director (execdirector@brockgsa.ca) in advance.

Meeting Operations

A Board meeting package will be emailed to you prior to the meeting and may include other items required for the meeting. Please bring these with you to the meeting.

The Board Chair is the leader of the Board and is responsible for setting meeting agendas, running Board Meetings effectively and reviewing the effectiveness of Board processes in carrying out the fiduciary mandate. The Board Chair's opinion carries no more weight than the opinion of any other Director of the Board. If the Chair wishes to speak to an issue during the meeting, they can hand over the role of Chair to the Vice-Chair.

The Deputy President officially serves as Board Secretary and may designate Recording Secretary duties (attendance and recording minutes) to the Communications & Events Coordinator). Minutes are sent out in the next meeting's package. Directors are expected to review these and, if necessary, provide any corrections or omissions.

Directors of the Board are the real decision makers. While the Executive will bring up matters for your consideration, it is ultimately up to the Board to decide what action the GSA will take. Therefore, it is crucial to come prepared with having read the necessary documents and with questions, comments or concerns you would like to raise during the meeting.

Meeting Agenda

The meeting agenda follows normal protocols of Robert's Rules of Order and typically groups routinely discussed items into categories for meeting information, general reports and other business. Examples of items for meeting information are the agenda and minutes from previous Board meeting, and in-camera minutes. Executive and Committee reports are routine updates and normally do not require motions to approve. The remainder of the meeting contains Other Business to be addressed, and motions for approval if required, for such items as Strategic Action/Annual Plans (SA/AP) updates, Bylaw/Policy updates, Budgets, etc.

Motions and Voting

A motion is a proposal on which the Board makes a formal decision, takes a specific action, or takes a stand on a topic. While motions can come from any Director throughout the meeting, they typically will stem from the agenda and whoever is presenting a current agenda item.

When the Board agenda is circulated, items that have a motion/actionable item are indicated by having the "Decision" column selected. Typically, in a meeting, these agenda items will be presented to the Board first through an introduction of both the motion and the item's background or motivation.

This presentation of the agenda item typically concludes with a clear indication of the motion. An example of this would be "I am looking to move for the approval of the Strategic Action/Annual Plan Report for May". At this time, the Chair will lead the Directors through discussion on the motion. Directors are encouraged to seek further clarity on the topic and motion, ensuring that they have no questions prior to the vote. Once the Chair feels that discussions have concluded or that no new, relevant information is bring brought forward, the Chair can lead the Board into the voting process.

The Chair will call for a mover and seconder on all motions. The mover (normally the individual who created the motion) is in favour of what they are presenting. To second a motion is to publicly agree that the motion should be considered for a vote. If no one seconds a motion, there can be no vote on the motion, and the Chair would be led to progress with the next agenda item.

Once seconded, the Chair can call the question (put the motion to a vote). They will ask, in no particular order, for those in favour (voting yes), those opposed (voting no) and for any abstentions (those who may have conflict of interest with the motion or choose not to cast a directed vote). Alternative to this vote, the Chair may also ask for general consensus where no formal call for voting is made, but rather the Chair will ask for any opposing views to the motion. If none are stated, then the motion will pass.

Sample Motion Script

Director 1: I move that….

Chair: Is there a second to the motion?

Director 2: I second the motion.

Chair: It is moved and seconded that… The floor is now open for discussion.

**The mover of the motion has the right to speak first. During this time the motion is considered pending. Directors, under the direction or call of the Chair, will take turns speaking to the motion.*

[Discussion]

Chair: Is there any further discussion?
I will call the question.
All of those [in favour/opposition/abstention]

***It is up to the Chair to identify how Directors can indicate their vote. For in-person meetings, this is typically done through a show of hands. For online meetings, this is typically done with a show of a raised hand on video or the use of hand-raising options on the presenting platform. For hybrid meetings, dual methods of accepting a vote can be accepted by the Chair.*

[Vote]

Chair: The motion has [passed/failed]

GSA Contact Information

GSA Office

The GSA office is located within the Mackenzie Chown Complex (302) and is accessible in-person :

Fall and Winter Term Office Hours: (September to May)
Monday - Friday: 8:30 am – 4:00 pm
(Please note that our office is typically closed daily from 12 Noon - 12:30 pm)

Summer Term Office Hours (June to August)
Monday & Friday: Virtual Office
Tuesday - Thursday: 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

You may also reach the office by phone at 905.688.5550 (extension 4094).

Executive Officers – 2025-2026

President, Mario Berro: president@brockgsa.ca
Vice President, External & University Affairs, Philip Akoje: external@brockgsa.ca
Vice President, Student Life & Equity, Ibrahim Adefolu: studentlife@brockgsa.ca
Past President, Rakha Zabin: pastpres@brockgsa.ca

Board of Directors – 2025-2026

Chair, Eric O'Neill: chair@brockgsa.ca
Vice Chair, Daniel Krowchuk vice@brockgsa.ca

Office Staff

Executive Director, Katarina Chataway: execdirector@brockgsa.ca
Office & Health Plan Administrator, Francesco Amodio: office@brockgsa.ca
Communications & Events Coordinator, Jenna Kemp: creative@brockgsa.ca

Online Presence

www.brockgsa.ca

Instagram: @BrockGSA
Facebook: @BrockGSA
Threads: @BrockGSA
LinkedIn: Brock GSA – Graduate Students Association

Appendix A – Board Meeting Schedule 2025-2026

GSA Board of Directors Meetings will normally take place on the fourth Thursday of every month, from Noon to 2 p.m. The meetings for 2024-2025 will be offered in a hybrid model, with a virtual meeting link set up for those who are unable to attend in-person.

The GSA meeting room (MC-C300) will be available for those wishing to attend in-person.

Thursday May 9, 2024	Board Orientation (Noon to 3:30 p.m.)
Thursday, May 23, 2024	
Thursday, June 27, 2024	
Thursday, July 25, 2024	
Thursday, August 22, 2024	
Thursday, September 26, 2024	
Thursday, October 24, 2024	
Thursday, October 24, 2024	Annual General Members Meeting (2:30-3:30 p.m.)
Thursday, November 28, 2024	
Thursday December 12, 2024	
Thursday January 23, 2025	
Thursday, February 27, 2025	
Thursday, March 27, 2025	
Thursday April 17, 2025	
Thursday, April 17, 2025	Special General Members Meeting (2:30-3:30 p.m.)