

Annual Report

2024
MAY
09



College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

cgps.usask.ca

Navigating the complexities of higher education at the University of Saskatchewan is a collaborative effort. We draw insights from diverse sources at all levels of the graduate community.

This year marks our first year the new CGPS bylaws were passed by University Council March 16, 2023. We benefited from the reformulated Graduate Faculty Council as a representative body of USask's graduate community including members of the student body, the GSA, the SPS, graduate chairs, graduate administrators, and executive leadership. The college leadership appreciates the strong engagement of our council providing **strong governance** and supporting the changes to improve our programs and the student experience.

Outgoing Associate Dean Walker led the work to reframe doctoral milestones – shedding outdated language of comprehensive examinations in favor of a more formative process of candidacy assessment – a change that enjoyed strong support by council.

This past year as generative AI technology continued to evolve, rather than be outpaced, we developed a framework to support **integrating Gen AI** into graduate student research without sacrificing the expectations for originality and adhering to the principles of academic integrity.

Looking forward to 24/25, our objectives are to evolve in tandem with the dynamic higher education ecosystem marked by a commitment to rearticulating CGPS's **degree learning outcomes** to reflect the full range of competencies we want our graduates to develop and that resonate with contemporary society.

To support realizing these elements within graduate programs, we soft-launched a suite of **professional skills** training resources for faculty designed to prepare graduate students and postdoctoral scholars for the contemporary job market, ensuring their relevance and competitiveness.

Robust funding support is critical to student and postdoctoral researcher success. For the 23/24 year, the college implemented the changes to how funding for students is distributed making it more flexible for units to respond to their recruitment and retention objectives. We welcomed the news in the recent federal budget for stronger funding for graduate students and postdocs and we are committed to continue to lobby for more provincial and federal funding.

CGPS remains unwavering in its dedication to excellence, equity, and the ongoing process of decolonization. We strive to meet the needs of graduate students as **global citizens**, while simultaneously prioritizing the creation of supportive networks specifically tailored to address the unique requirements of students with Indigenous ancestry.

Our goal remains fostering a more **inclusive and equitable** academic environment where all students and postdoctoral scholars thrive.



Image 1 CGPS Staff September 2023

Advocacy Matters

Together with leaders from graduate organizations and the funding agencies, Dean Debby Burshtyn made an appearance in Ottawa's parliament on June 1, 2023, delivering a clear message:

"Now is the time for new investment to enhance the value of scholarships and fellowships. We must: Ensure fairness and prevent exclusivity: access to research training should not be limited to those with financial privilege."

The federal budget was announced on April 16, 2024. You can read the [key highlights and the full document here](#). CGPS welcomes the new investments in Canada's research ecosystem, including the increase of the annual value of master's to \$27K, and doctoral student scholarships to \$40K, and postdoctoral fellowships to \$70K. More information will be available when it is released from the government.



Image 2 Federal budget announcement and student townhall, April 2024 From L-R Terry Duguid, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Hon. Seamus O'Regan, President Stoicheff, Hon. Randy Boissonnault, Dean Debby Burshtyn

Through an extensive nomination process Una Goncin, PhD student (Health Sciences) was selected to serve as USask's graduate student representative on the Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Student Council. During her one-year term Una engaged with the Ministry of Advanced Education providing feedback on a broad range of topics related to postsecondary education.

Skill Development

CGPS has introduced a Professional Development Specialist role aimed at developing a robust PD framework for graduate

students, postdoctoral scholars, and new faculty. In collaboration with the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching & Learning, CGPS unveiled the [Professional Skills](#) suite. This suite offers strategically crafted resources to aid graduate faculty in equipping students with essential professional skills, enabling them to maximize the value of their degrees both within and beyond academia.

Comprising six distinct modules, each designed for standalone utilization or seamless integration into program curricula, this initiative underscores the commitment to comprehensive professional growth.

Building Allyship

CGPS was up for the OYR Challenge. Our team's name was âhkamêyimok [meaning don't give up, keep trying, persevere]. Facilitated by the College of Kinesiology, CGPS eagerly embraced the opportunity to further our learning journey and are on the healing road of (re)conciliation toward an understanding that supports an inclusive future for all in response to TRC Call to action #10 iii.

Connected Community

CGPS has deployed a revitalized communications strategy that focusses on student success and just-in-time information. We leverage a variety of channels and targeted tailored information. [\[CGPS special features\]](#)

Annually, CGPS hosts the 3MT competition where graduate students are challenged to present their thesis to a lay audience in just three minutes. The [3MT](#) helps students hone their communication prowess and equip themselves to effectively share their research with broader audiences outside their disciplinary realms. CGPS was selected as the host for the Western Regional Finals in May 2023 where over 1500 individuals tuned in worldwide as 17 universities from across Western Canada participated.

Over the past year, CGPS collaborated with Alumni Relations to connect with PhD graduates to learn how their careers have progressed since completing their programs at USask. The new [Alumni Study](#) report can be read here.

As an institution and a graduate studies community, we can take pride in the high employment rates of our PhD graduates with a notable proportion of our PhD alumni who move into faculty roles – 25% overall. In addition to those who move into faculty positions an additional 39% of USask alumni are employed as either researchers within university settings or working in industry. [\[People of USask Feature\]](#)

In February 2024, we welcomed new Associate Dean Academic Excellence and Innovation Dr. Jaswant Singh. As part of Jaswant's role, he is leading resource development and training for graduate chairs and junior faculty members and postdoctoral scholars.



Image 5: 3MT Finals (2024) L-R Back Row: Craig Eling, Matt Chapelski, Victor Towobola, Jeremiah Odiketa, Yashmilan Kaur, Samantha Carley, Marin Habbick, Andrew Hartman, L-R Front Row: Cassidy Guy, Runli Yuan, Mariel Bonilla, Ramesh Kalagnanam, Martin Farina



Image 6: GSA Gala (2024) pictured here from L-R Abbas Fazel Anvari-Yazdi, Lauren Aubrey, Sristy Sumana Nath, Ramin Mohammadi, Adam McInnes, Elder Norman Fleury, Angela Jaime, Kayla Benoit Photo credits: David Stobbe

The [Graduate Student Research Showcase](#) (October 2023) featured a combination of fifteen masters, PhD and postdoc scholars who presented their research for Saskatchewan's Minister of Education demonstrating how unique and diverse USask's research landscape truly is. These trainees had the opportunity to show, through their research studies and training, how they contribute to our province's [growth plan](#) while tackling issues such as climate change, public health crises, and socio-political unrest.

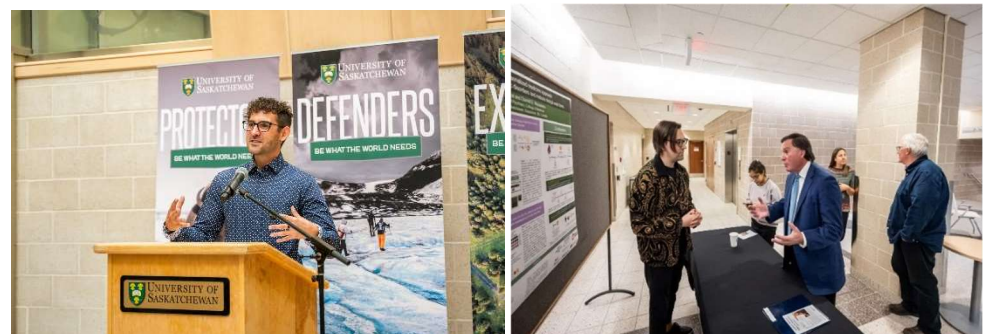


Image 3: Cody Koloski, PhD Candidate and Vanier Scholar Veterinary Microbiology discusses his research the Showcase Photo credit: Matt Smith

Image 4: Postdoctoral scholar in Psychiatry Dr. Tyler Wenzel (PhD) discusses his research with Hon. Gordon Wyant Photo credit: Matt Smith

CGPS aims to facilitate a nuanced understanding of ethical boundaries and responsible usage of GenAI in graduate studies, fostering a culture of integrity and ethical conduct. While guideline development is underway, the Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies released their preliminary report [Generative AI and Graduate and Postdoctoral Research and Supervision](#) in November.

Dr. Steven Rayan, representing CGPS' Interdisciplinary Program, organized a distinguished guest lecture featuring Dr. Aimee van Wynsberghe, Alexander von Humboldt Professor for "Applied Ethics of Artificial Intelligence" from the University of Bonn, Germany and set a new record for attendance for INTD 990 seminars.

We were thrilled to sponsor the GSA Gala again this year where graduate students celebrated for their research, scholarly and artistic pursuits.

Sponsoring [student-led conferences](#) is a fantastic way for CGPS to engage with graduate students at USask and promote their research. In 2023-24 CGPS sponsored seven student led conferences.



Image 7: From L-R Dr. Steven Rayan, Dr. Aimee van Wynsberghe, Luis Duarte Corredor

Graduate Program Services

As part of our continued emphasis and focus on service delivery efforts we are working with colleges and programs to revitalize recruitment, enrolment, and retention strategies in partnership with USask's Teaching & Learning teams (TLSE). Based on program feedback we are also refreshing and rethinking the graduate credential evaluation process and returning the position supporting this work to CGPS from TLSE. In the coming year, we will renew our focus on admissions policy and process.

In 2023/2024 CGPS received 10,918 applications, processing 1,867 program admission recommendations. Of these, 1,037 LOAs to international applicants were issued. Also, this year, units have had to adapt to several new federal government policies were introduced early in 2024 impacting admissions and study permit application processes for incoming international graduate students, namely the requirement to verify with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) all letters of admission (LOA) issued by CGPS.

Also new in 2024 was the introduction of the Provincial Attestation Letter (PAL) requirement for all students applying for a Canadian study permit. While students entering Master's or PhD programs are exempt, Post Graduate Diploma, Non-Degree, Certificate and [Visiting Research Students](#) (VRS) who require a study permit will need a PAL going forward. CGPS worked with TLSE to secure 60 PAL endorsements per year to support the continued mobility of incoming VRS who wish to spend more than 6 months at USask. We developed the guiding principles in partnership with College Deans and Associate Deans Grad to ensure these VRS-specific PALs are allocated strategically including their alignment to signature areas.

CGPS has also changed its VRS admission process to ensure alignment and compliance with the new federal policy on [Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations](#).

In collaboration with Student Information Services (SIS), after months of planning and refinement, the deployment of Banner 9 Student Services went live on May 1, 2024. Enhancements such as the capability to copy and paste advisory committee reports, among other improvements, will greatly benefit those of us who rely on these systems in our daily work.

In December 2023, Shakiba Jalal joined the college as the new Director, Graduate Programs Services.

Celebrating those who serve and mentor students.



Image 8: Dr. Erika Dyck, Professor of History, Distinguished Graduate Mentor 2023-24



Image 9: Alison Kraft, Kelly Clement Memorial Employee Services Award 2023-24



Image 10: Dr. Julia Boughner, Professor of Anatomy, Physiology & Pharmacology, Distinguished Graduate Mentor 2022-23



Image 11: Linda Nemeth, Kelly Clement Memorial Employee Service Award Recipient 2022-23



Image 12: Dr. Daniel X.B. Chen, Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Distinguished Graduate Mentor 2022-23



Image 13: Susan Mason, Kelly Clement Memorial Employee Service Award Recipient 2022-23

Scholarship & Award Services

As part of our efforts in EDI, In January 2024, CGPS announced the Parental Leave Benefit for CGPS scholarship and fellowship holders valued at up to \$20K. [Get more information.](#)

On May 1, 2023, the majority of PhD programs at USask offer newly admitted students a funding package of at least \$20,000 annually for 4 years. In the 2023-2024 academic year, 45 out of 54 eligible programs chose to participate in this minimum funding guarantee. Effective May 1, 2024, 49 out of 54 programs have opted in.

Entering its second year of the multi-year commitment format, the Student Support Fund (SSF) derived by enrolment numbers, and 75th Anniversary Recruitment Scholarship which leverage Tri-Agency success aims to support units with their strategic enrollment management planning by providing multi-year commitments and flexibility. Allocation notices covering the period from 2024-2025 to 2026-2027 were sent to programs in March.

Our focus remains on enhancing the student experience and our operational efficiencies. As part of this ongoing endeavor, we are collaborating with colleagues on the IT and Student Information Systems (SIS) teams to develop a specialized system for graduate scholarship and award applications. We anticipate the launch of this system in the 2024-2025 academic year.

In October 2023, Heather Lukey retired after 34 years of services at USask. For over three decades Heather helped graduate students feel supported, safe, and capable during the critical early days of their studies as the Director of Scholarships & Awards. Jody Lepp was recruited as the Director of Scholarship & Awards Services following Heather, and since April, Leah Johnson has taken on the role.

USask has fulfilled its CGS-M Tri-Agency quota! Awarding 11 CIHR, 17 NSERC, 21 SSHRC. On the doctoral side of things 10 NSERC, 17 SSHRC scholarships plus 3 Vanier's have been awarded (one from each agency) – this is just over a 60% success rate.

Watch for a variety of news stories about the scholarship winners to be released this summer. [\[awards stats\]](#)



Image 14: Jeremy Irvine, master's student in Plant Sciences will receive the prestigious SK Lieutenant Governor Indigenous Scholarship from his Honour, the Honourable Russ Mirasty at CGPS' June 4th celebration event.



Image 15: Dr. Scott Dos Santos (Veterinary Microbiology), will be awarded the Governor Gold Medal in June 2024 (currently a postdoc at the University of Western Ontario)



Image 16: Dr. Keely Shaw (Kinesiology), will be awarded the Governor Gold Medal in June 2024 (currently a postdoc at the University of Calgary)

EDI in Action

As a result of a thorough Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) review, [framework](#) was approved by Council in May 2023.

Through campus-wide consultation, student focus groups, and staff and faculty surveys throughout 2022-23. This framework guides the mission and vision of CGPS and underpins a comprehensive and evolving plan to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity in graduate and postdoctoral studies at USask.

After several years and significant collaboration, CGPS introduces [candidacy assessment](#) replacing the traditional and scary term “comprehensive exams” for PhD students.

Building a closer partnership with education and researchers is just one benefit of PhD candidacy assessments [Nature 627, 244 (2024)].

Recognizing that the landscape of graduate studies is changing, and the needs of students evolving, a number of other [CGPS policies](#) have been revised including: time in program, thesis and dissertation committee composition, conflict resolution, accommodation and support and several others.

A Focus on Indigenous Student Success

Developing a strong sense of community guided by CGPS' Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator underpins the framework that we are developing that celebrates collective success, shares personal narratives, embraces mutual learning, includes families, and offers mentorship from a diverse range of Indigenous community members who have travelled similar paths before.

Every grad student's journey is different, but no one is on that journey alone. By integrating CGPS' strategic pillar of [kiskêyimisowin](#) [meaning that one is cultivating the knowledge of yourself, building identity, and elevating who you are], with the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous strategy [ohpahotân](#) [symbolizing growth, journey and relational teachings that guide and strengthen our lives and work] and the intersection of the [oyateki](#) [meaning leaving no one behind] our focus is on inclusivity and equitable advancement.



Image 17: Ian Worme participated in the FSIN youth science fair in Saskatoon. As an alumnus of JSGS and Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator at CGPS, Ian is actively engaged in forging connections with today's and tomorrow's brightest minds.

In 2023, 7% of USask's graduate students self-identified as Indigenous.

In September 2023, we launched the Cousins peer-to-peer network where students can and support each other in real time digital environment that is safe, facilitated by CGPS, and completely supported by ICT.

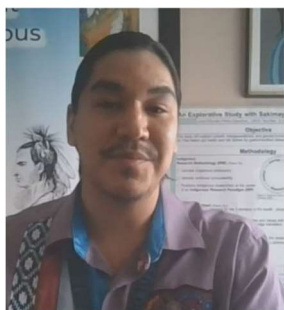


Image 18: Nathan Oakes, PhD Student, Community Health & Epidemiology IAW Award Recipient 2024

Through visual expression we are bolstering the ideology and strength of Indigenous spirit. We have recently released the monthly student spotlight, unveiled a curated showcase in one of USask's highest foot traffic areas, created new webpages and are developing unique events like a family movie night and the upcoming living library within our [mâmwawi pimohtêwin initiative](#). The Living Library is open to everyone eager to delve into the diverse world of graduate education, this unique gathering invites participants to "borrow" a human book and immerse themselves in the captivating stories of Indigenous perspectives navigating academia. [Find out more.](#)

One Tri-Agency workshop was completed in October 2023 with several more planned. We are finding more ways to get scholarship information to students and guide them in their application writing to achieve higher success rates. This June, seven Indigenous scholars will be awarded Tri-Agency scholarships.

In October, a focus group was held with students to get their opinions and insights on how the Indigenous Graduate Leadership Award could be revised to better support their needs. More of these sorts of focus groups are planned.



Image 19: Doris Wesaquate, PhD Student, Kinesiology IAW Award Recipient 2024

Following Chris Scribe's first oral dissertation in 2022 (supervised by Dawn Wallin), in October 2023 Linda Young (supervised by Debbie Pushor) earned her doctorate through conversation. The innovation dissertation format was comprised of 10 videos, four bookworks, a glossary of terms, and a gallery show all of which followed traditional Indigenous protocol, a connection to community, and a lifelong relationship with education.

[The Journey of a kêhtê-aya \(elder\): kiskisi sôhkisiwin, tâpôkêyimoh, sôhkitêhê, nâkatohkê: Memorize the Strength, Have Faith, Have a Strong Heart, Pay Attention.](#)

Image 20: Linda Young being presented with a buffalo robe/blanket as a gift from supervisor Debbie Pushor's family. Photo credit: Michael Olson

