



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

## College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

CGPS.USASK.CA

# ANNUAL REPORT

## MAY 2025

Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are central to the university's research mission, driving innovation, discovery, and artistic excellence or training as future professionals. Their contributions enhance research across disciplines and strengthen the university's global impact. Over the past year, CGPS responded to external changes in the graduate student landscape. While certain changes were positive, such as the increase in federal scholarship programs and new programs developed to address the Human Health Resource needs of the province, others required we take strategic action to minimize impacts. The report highlights these activities, student accomplishments and select initiatives CGPS undertook to foster a collaborative and supported graduate community.



The **Governor General's Gold Medal** recognizes outstanding academic achievement at both fall and spring convocation ceremonies.

Above: Dr. Jaris Swidrovich Fall 2024 Recipient (PhD, Education, Supervisor: S. Murphy)



The **Lieutenant Governor Indigenous Scholarship** is a prestigious Provincial award that supports Indigenous scholars pursuing advanced studies in Saskatchewan.

Above: Jeremy Irvine Spring 2024 Recipient (M.Sc., Plant Sciences, Supervisor S. Prager)

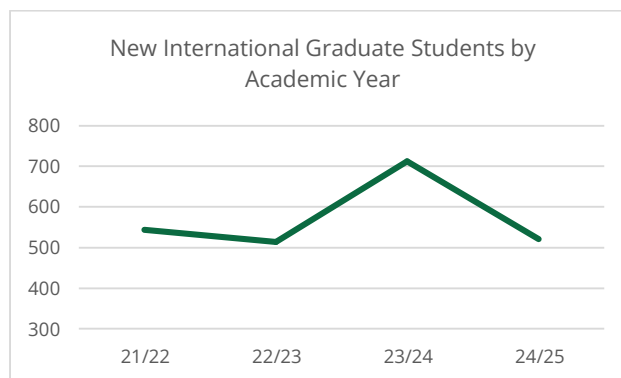
## Adaptable.

### Mitigating impact of study permit caps

At the time of this report, international applications to graduate programs were down by 51% partially offset by an increase in domestic applications (+ 26%).

A **drop-off in application pressure** from many countries this year is likely due to the introduction of PALS. While early trends still indicate a large pool of highly qualified international applicants, at the time of writing this report, offers to international students dropped relative to last year by 14% (135 offers) offset by 52 more offers to domestic students. We are closely monitoring the rates that these applicants are accepting their offers and introducing new touchpoints to encourage students to come to USask.

Overall, graduate enrollment remains stable, with a slight dip in new international students in the current year, bringing us back to numbers similar to prior years.



CGPS proactively adapted to the new Provincial Attestation Letter (PAL) requirement for international graduate students to apply for study permits. We worked with deans and departments for a transparent way to allocate and track the graduate PAL quota that was implemented as soon as the quota was provided and supported programs [with information](#).

To ensure CGPS processes international admissions as efficiently as possible we:

- Improved turnaround times by reintegrating international credential evaluation from TLSE to within the CGPS program services team.
- Increased admissions staff resources to cover the added steps for PALS and offer verification.
- CGPS is providing stronger leadership for graduate-targeted activity by Student Recruitment (TLSE). With UR, developing new recruitment resources such as a graduate viewbook for use abroad and templates for programs to produce recruitment material.

*We invest resources to promote our reputation in different countries and to develop international agreements that bring sponsored students. The first student under a recent Filipino government agreement will arrive later this year. Last fall, CGPS participated in a delegation to Sao Paolo, Brazil. In March, the VPR went to Vietnam in conjunction with a Government of Saskatchewan delegation with other provincial PSE institutions where he met many prospective graduate students.*

## Celebrating researchers and improving financial supports

The 2024/25 academic year marks a significant expansion in scholarship opportunities, with the launch of several new awards: [Heather Lukey Graduate Student Bursary](#), several new donor-funded scholarships including the Mehr, Kalagnanam, and aligned with Institutional priorities, [10 Indigenous recruitment awards](#) were created with a \$100,000 increase to the scholarship institutional funds.

In January 2025, CGPS held its first scholarship recipient reception and welcomed a full house in recognition of academic excellence. The names of major scholarship recipients are curated on the CGPS website. In 2024, three outstanding PhD students were awarded Vanier Scholarships - Krishna Kolen (CIHR), Morgan Flemming (NSERC) and Gwen Rose (SSHRC). In the final year of the Vanier and Banting programs, USask will receive three more Vanier awards (names embargoed at the time of this report).

We are very encouraged by the long overdue increases and changes to the Tri-Agency funding for research trainees.

- New values of \$27,000 for master's and \$40,000 for doctoral provided an additional \$1M for the 100 recipients with active awards.
- International students eligible for doctoral funding and an additional 1200 doctoral awards added for this year.

## IMPROVEMENTS FOR POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS

We welcomed the increase and harmonization of Tri-Agency postdoctoral fellowships at \$70,000/annum.

As part of Postdoctoral Scholar Appreciation Week (Sept 2024), CGPS provided two well-attended career planning panel discussions and hosted a windup reception, celebrating the contributions of postdoctoral scholars.

The 2024 **Misiwêskamik International Postdoctoral Fellowship** recipient Salvador Osuna Caballero is working on a project funded by Genome Canada called ACTIVATE, led by Dr. Kirstin Bett and Dr. Curtis Pozniak (PhD). The goal of the project is to reduce synthetic fertilizer use and greenhouse gas emissions by developing more resilient crop varieties.

A refreshed [website](#) houses many new initiatives for postdocs this past year including:

- The Society of Postdoctoral Scholars established travel awards using their budget provided by CGPS.
- Creation of a new MS Teams channel where postdocs can directly communicate with each other.
- A dedicated section was created in the CGPS newsletter.
- First entrants to Falling Walls Edmonton Lab with Albin Joseph (PDF, Mechanical Engineering) and Priyanka Tirumareddy (PhD student, Chemical and Biological Engineering) travel to Edmonton for the finals.

## Flexible.

## PEDAGOGY AND INNOVATION FOR GRADUATE STUDIES

In Feb 2025, a panel discussion on Reimaging Arts Graduate Programs catalyzed by a recent book coauthored by Dr. Loleen Berdahl provided a forum to improve student outcomes and challenge the graduate education/training status quo in response to our country's evolving needs.



CGPS improved the college's annual [Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Scholar Report](#) with enrolment demographics and measures of student progress. The 2023/24 year saw a 14% increase in student applications, increases in entrance GPAs across all degree types, and continued enrollment growth concentrated in Master's course and project programs. Self-declared Indigenous student enrollment was at 9% overall – significant growth at the PhD level (+ 27%) but a slight decline in Master's thesis programs (- 2%).

New in programming, University Council approved the Master of Public Health Nursing, Master of Occupational Therapy, Master of Speech Language Pathology, Certificate in Financial Management and the restructuring of JSGS certificates. The MPAS program admission cycle opened for fall 2025 starts with very strong application pressure.

To provide a more student-centred, EDI-informed and up-to-date approach to providing access and laddering into graduate credentials, CGPS Faculty Council approved admission policy updates (See PPM [Section 1](#)).

Certificates were incorporated into the Credential Descriptions and further work is underway to transform the former Degree Level Learning Outcomes to align with the frameworks for national and USask competencies.

## NEW INITIATIVES AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

To promote dynamic interdisciplinary studies, CGPS and the College of Education have established an MOU for collaboration between the SOTL Centre and CGPS's InterD program enriching research and training.

The InterD program took an open and innovative Ted-talk style approach to their seminar requirement showcasing nine students whose work intertwined diverse disciplines, reshaping how we approach critical questions and advancing new perspectives in research.

Supporting USask's graduate supervisors and graduate chairs is a high priority for CGPS. Initiatives this year focused on improved communication and effectiveness and included:

- Graduate Program Guidelines [template](#) provided for programs (Nov 2024)
- Workshops on Emotional Intelligence (April 2025) and Conflict Management (October 2024) were attended by over 70 graduate faculty participants.

- Collaboration with the [DARE](#) program in support of new faculty onboarding (Oct 2024).
- Responding to the ever-shifting abilities of generative AI and various disciplinary needs, CGPS requested graduate programs to include [GenAI guidance](#) in their program guidelines based on the principle of transparency in usage.

CGPS remains committed to fostering [an Indigenous graduate student community](#) that nurtures belonging and success and harnessing the richness of diverse viewpoints and wisdom.

In the **Stitching Stories project** designed by CGPS' Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator, [Aurora Wolfe](#) and supported by local knowledge keeper Gabrielle Lee, a third-generation Cree Métis quilter from Pelican Lake, students and staff created a hexagon quilt with each piece representing a USask Indigenous graduate student and their discipline. The quilt is now on display by the CGPS office.



A swatch of the Stitching Stories quilt coming together.



Aurora featured above wearing the porcelain teacup jacket she created as part of her MFA **coyote dreams of easy prey**.





Other new initiatives launched in 2024/25:

- Refreshing our unique Cousins brand to capture our Indigenous graduate student community-building approach.
- Holiday Rations project (Dec 2024): pantry items delivered to >40 student families as far away as Rankin Inlet and Northern Manitoba. Thanks to the *oyateki* Partnership and Saskatoon Coop for their sponsorship.
- Establishing a routine of start-of-term info sessions for Indigenous graduate students, sessions with undergraduate students (ISAP) and visits to high schools.
- Hosting tailored scholarship application workshops.

The [Grad HUB](#), a premier resource at USask, provides onboarding support for graduate students. A range of onboarding sessions—both virtual and by invitation—engaging over 600 new students in 2024/25. The Virtual Spring Welcome is designed to help students navigate the Grad HUB platform.

The CGPS sponsorship program that funds [student-led conferences](#) and initiatives sponsored 14 events, engaging several thousand graduate students supporting conference organizing skill development and hands-on experience.

CGPS increased efforts to create smoother career transitions for graduate students and PDFs with:

- The new [LevelUp](#) dashboard launched Sep 2024.
- The [Beyond the Professoriate](#) platform, renewed Feb 2024, granting free access to career transition materials and the annual career symposium.
- A [mentorship program](#) connecting current students with outside mentors launched in May 2025 with incredible interest from students – 50 applicants for just 20 spots. The program leveraged the relationships established through the [PhD Alumni Study](#).

In conjunction with our flagship event, the [Three Minute Thesis \(3MT\) Finals](#) (Apr 2025), CGPS provided a formative experience for participants through a series of workshops on presentation skills, audience engagement, and the art of condensing complex ideas into a concise three-minute talk.

**This was my last chance to be on stage as a PhD student. The 3MT was a great experience.** I'm incredibly grateful for this chance, it was an unforgettable experience that I will always cherish.

**really struggled during the first year of my Master's, and the 3MT ended up being a turning point.** It was the first time my

communication skills felt truly validated, and that experience opened the door to so many meaningful connections and opportunities. It also deepened my love for my project and confirmed that grad school was the right path for me. So thank you again for the incredible effort you put into making the 3MT happen—my grad school journey would look very different without it.



CGPS staff were on deck to volunteer and support the competitors at the 3MT Finals (Apr 2025).



3MT finalists (Apr 2025) with Judges Chelsea Cunningham, Bram Noble, and Joelena Leader.

