



Graduate Student Assembly

Welcome Document 2020-2021

Authors: GSA Executive Committee

Assembled by: Executive Vice President Luz D. Sotelo

Letter from the President

September 2020

Welcome to the Graduate Student Assembly, and thank you for your leadership in representing your departments and colleagues. Although the pandemic has created many hurdles that the campus community must be cautious of, it is more essential than ever that graduate and professional students' voices be heard in shaping campus policies and improving our experience at UNL.

The welcome materials will help you get familiar GSA and how business is conducted during our meetings. It also outlines the responsibilities expected of all GSA members. Each officer and committee has a role, which we will illustrate here. We also provide some basic information on how bills are submitted and the process we follow.

There is so much that is accomplished outside of the Assembly meetings themselves, and your roles and opportunities for leadership are not restricted solely to them. GSA represents graduate and professional students on a wide range of university-wide committees. This representation has far-reaching consequences, such as for academic freedom, compensation, course offerings, healthcare, student fees, access to technology, access to campus facilities, and many other areas that affect our experience at UNL. GSA executives are in contact with UNL administration and our counterparts in ASUN Senate to ensure a voice for graduate and professional student perspectives and experiences.

GSA also has many initiatives to improve the experience for graduate and professional students. Our GTAP and SPGP programs award thousands of dollars in grants each year for graduate student conference travel and professional development. We also organize, sponsor, and promote numerous events throughout the year. These events provide opportunities for networking, professional development, advocacy, and social activities.

We hope this inspires you to seek further opportunities to become involved in campus leadership, or motivates you to spread the word to others who might want to be involved. GSA is always here to advocate on your behalf. Don't hesitate to reach out to me with questions or to bring forward any concerns you may have. We look forward to working with all of you this year.

Sincerely,

Eric Rodene
Graduate Student Assembly President 2020-21
gsa@unl.edu

What is GSA?

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) as an institution practices [shared governance](#) that is the belief that governing board members, administrators, faculty, students, and other stake holders share responsibility and cooperate in the decision-making and actions at the institution. At UNL, the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln ([ASUN](#)) administrates student governance. The Graduate Student Assembly ([GSA](#)) is a branch of ASUN crated to exercise student governance of affairs specific to graduate students. From ASUN's [Bylaws](#) (Section 9, A):

“As a unique population with roles as students, teachers, researchers, and/or staff, graduate students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln require a special representative body that is tailored to their needs. The Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) will exercise the student governance of affairs solely involving graduate students at the University, as well as collaborate with the ASUN Senate, executives, and committees on issues affecting the entirety of the University’s student body.”

Why does GSA exist?

Graduate students are likely the most vulnerable academic population in higher education. Issues such as: being overworked and underpaid, experiencing mistreatment and abuse, and even having their livelihood threatened are common for graduate students in institutions of higher education, and are exacerbated for international graduate students and graduate students from minoritized backgrounds. In 2016, GSA originated as a group of students seeking avenues to serve and advocate for graduate students at UNL. GSA partnered with ASUN and became a legitimate branch of student government in the Spring of 2016. Since then, GSA has been the voice of graduate students on issues including:

Student Health Insurance. In the summer of 2017, the student health insurance policy was changed abruptly and without student input. GSA hosted a town hall, gathered concerns and complaints from graduate students, and were promised that any future changes to our health insurance would be discussed in a committee which would include GSA representation. However, such a committee was never formed and did not meet. In the summer of 2019, another abrupt change was made to student health insurance without forewarning. GSA and graduate students at UNL responded strongly, and UNL negotiated a better insurance rate as a result of this backlash. Also, this time a committee was formed and included the GSA president.

Academic Freedom. In 2017, Courtney Lawton, a graduate student at UNL, made a political protest at the Union Plaza. As a result of this protest, Lawton was notoriously reprimanded by the University, removed from her teaching duties, and ultimately had her funding cut off. The fact that these decisions were made unilaterally and without following due process led to UNL being censured by the American Association of University Professors. 3 years later, we are still in this censure list. GSA wrote a letter to the administration condemning these acts against a graduate student, and held informing sessions for graduate students on their academic freedom protections.

Living Stipends. Graduate student stipends at UNL are as low as \$10,000 per year, which is well below the poverty line in Lincoln, NE. In 2018, GSA hosted listening sessions and advocated for a living stipend for all students. Unfortunately, this effort was interrupted because the Executive Vice Chancellor left the University. We hope to continue these conversations now that the University has a new Executive Vice Chancellor.

Executive Officers

GSA is led by an Executive Committee that comprises the President, Executive Vice President, Vice President of Student Affairs, Vice President of Representation, Vice President of Finance, and the chairs of every committee. A brief description of the President and Vice Presidents positions is given here. Note that any of these five officers cannot concurrently serve as department representative and cannot vote with the assembly.

President: Eric Rodene, gsa@unl.edu

About me: I am a Ph.D. student in Agronomy and Horticulture with several years of experience in both ASUN and GSA.

- Represents GSA to wider university community
- Coordinates meetings of entire assembly and executives
- Meets with [Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs](#) and [Dean of Graduate Studies](#) at least once per semester
- Serves on the [Academic Planning Committee](#), [Graduate Council](#), and [ASUN Executive Committee](#)
- Represents UNL GSA at the [National Association of Graduate-Professional Students](#)
- Elected by entire graduate student body in March ASUN elections

Executive Vice President: Luz D.R. Sotelo, vicepresidentgsa@unl.edu

About me: I am a Ph.D. student in Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics, and I do research in ultrasonics and additive manufacturing. I have served in GSA since the Fall of 2017.

- Appoints representatives to standing committees
- Serves on [Graduate Council](#)
- Represents GSA in the [ASUN Electoral Commission](#)
- Elected by entire graduate student body in March ASUN elections
- Supports the president in their duties.

The VPs of Student Affairs, Representation, and Finances are each elected by the GSA at the first meeting after the installation of new President and Executive Vice President. They may lead GSA meetings or take minutes in the absence or request of the President and Executive Vice President. They must all have served at least one semester in GSA and cannot serve concurrently as department representatives.

Vice President of Student Affairs: Tamayo Zhou, vpstdaffairsgsa@unl.edu

About me: I am a second-year graduate students, studying Educational Administration with a specialization in Student Affairs. I am an international student from Tianjin, China. I moved to Lincoln since 2014. I have my assistantship at OASIS (Office of Academic Success and Intercultural Services). I have served in ASUN since the 2016. Please feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn!

- Records minutes at every GSA meeting

- Coordinates activities with other graduate student and professional student organizations, including those at other campus (UNMC, UNO, UNK)
- Serves on [Faculty Senate Diversity and Inclusion Committee](#), [Parking Advisory Committee](#) and [Executive Vice Chancellor's Student Advisory Board](#)

Vice President of Representation: Maia Behrendt, vrepresentationgsa@unl.edu

About me: I am a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology, studying racial and ethnic identity formation, critical race theory, and disparities in healthcare for marginalized populations.

- Maintains list of members and ensure attendance of representatives
- Nominates graduate or professional students to university-wide committees
- Nominates all at-large GSA representatives

Vice President of Finance: Nicholas Harp, vpfinancegsa@unl.edu

- Maintains current ledger of GSA finances and balances budget within allotted ASUN budget
- Provide monthly financial reports at assembly meetings
- Coordinates with ASUN Treasurer and all budgetary committees and officers
- Coordinate funding opportunities within and external to the university

Meet the Committees

Every GSA representative is required to serve on a committee. After the first assembly meeting of the academic year, once the Executive Committee has solicited your preferences on where you'll do your committee service, you'll be assigned to a committee. Once assigned to a committee, you are required to attend meetings of that committee, and to help the committee fulfill its mission. Each committee will have one or two chairs or co-chairs, and these chairs serve on the GSA Executive Committee. Committee chairs are typically elected in the first meeting after the election of the GSA President and Executive Vice President, but are occasionally elected at later meetings. Committee chairs will choose when and how often their committees meet, and will coordinate with committee members to ensure that the committee accomplishes its mission for the academic year.

Social Events Chair: Timothy Hackett, thacket92@huskers.unl.edu

About Me: I am a third year graduate student in the department of biochemistry. This is my second year as the social event chair of GSA.

The Committee for Social Events plans, coordinates, and executes social events for all graduate students, including those for Graduate-Professional Student Appreciation Week (GSAW), and organizes and staffs all GSA activities during new graduate student welcome. The committee helps increase graduate and professional student work-life balance, as well as increases engagement and networking opportunities. The current social distancing guidelines present this committee with opportunities to be creative in the organization of social events such as online trivia nights or hangouts and grab-and-go lunch or food events.

Graduate Travel Award Program (GTAP) Co-Chairs: Natalia Gutierrez, nguti@huskers.unl.edu, and Rosalba Rodriguez, rosalbarodriguezp@hotmail.com

The Committee for GTAP oversees the promotion and process of awarding travel grants to undergraduate and graduate students of good academic standing who are presenting original work at an academic conference or performance. Grant applications are reviewed by faculty members and graduate students, and the process is competitive; about 10% of applicants win GTAP awards each cycle. Given the current circumstances, GTAP awards are unlikely to be given out this Fall 2020, however, the GTAP committee and the GSA will discuss updating the award definition to include online conferences.

Quality of Life Chair: Vacant

The Committee for Quality of Life seeks to improve and draw attention to graduate and professional students' quality of life. In the past, the Quality of Life committee has organized campaigns against legislation that would negatively impact graduate students, such as the taxation of graduate students' tuition waivers. This committee has also partnered with other GSA committees and hosted a series of coffee hours to connect them with graduate students.

Academic Affairs Co-Chairs: Youra Moeun, youramoeun@gmail.com, Venn Jemkur, vjemkur@huskers.unl.edu

The Committee for Academic Affairs seeks to ensure fair academic practices for graduate students. In previous years, the committee successfully circulated a survey to graduate students to gain better

insight on graduate students' roles, experiences, support and compensation. Furthermore, the committee has collaborated with ASUN's Academic Affairs committee on booth events and created the first version of this welcome informational packet for new GSA members.

Diversity and Inclusion Chair: Mark Selzer, mark.selzer@huskers.unl.edu

The Committee for Diversity and Inclusion encourages and promotes the participation of graduate and professional students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, income levels and geographic locations in the university community. It ensures that GSA is accessible and relevant to the diverse graduate student community. In previous years, committee members were involved and organized events to celebrate Women and LGBTQA+ people, as well as to raise awareness of sexual violence in higher education. This committee collaborates closely with the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion and with the ASUN Diversity and Inclusion committee.

Professional Development Co-Chairs, Katie Mowat, kmowat2@huskers.unl.edu, Xavier Wood, xavi.wood@hotmail.com

About Me (Katie): I am a second-year environmental engineering master's student working on research related to bio-trickling filters and ethanol plants. A few of my favorite things are cooking, crocheting, baking, and spending time with my husband Andrew and my pet cat named mouse.

About Me (Xavi): I am a 22-year-old international student from New Zealand who is in his second year of his master's in construction management. I like to spend my free time hiking, snowboarding, and playing hockey (let's go Vegas!). If there are any professional development events that you would like to see happen this year, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me.

The Committee for Professional Development helps extend professional development opportunities to graduate students at UNL. The committee helps coordinate the Special Projects Grant Program (SPGP), which funds unique and creative professional development projects implemented by graduate students. The committee also organizes and hosts events to prepare graduate students for the academic and non-academic job markets and connect students with potential employers. Last year, the committee worked closely with the office of graduate studies and with Career Services to host networking event during the STEM career fair.

GSA representatives are the most important part of GSA. Without the representatives' input and commitment, GSA would not be effective in our job to represent and serve graduate students at UNL. Following is some relevant information about GSA representatives, more details can be found in the [GSA Bylaws](#).

Serving Term

All representatives serve a renewable term of one year, starting the first day of September and finishing the last week of August.

If a department or program has not elected a representative by the first GSA meeting of the academic year, the previous year's representative or their alternate must attend this meeting.

Eligibility

1. Full-time graduate or professional student of represented department or program.
2. Cumulative grade point average greater than or equal to 3.0.
3. Not on academic or disciplinary probation.

Duties

Duties of representatives include, but are not limited to:

1. Attending all GSA meetings, unless excused by the VP of Representation.
2. Attending all meetings of your assigned GSA committee, unless excused by committee chair(s).
3. Assisting your GSA committee in fulfilling its mission.
4. Disseminating information about GSA meetings, events, and other opportunities.
5. Meeting with your department's GSA, graduate chair, or Director.

Neglecting assembly and committee duties or committing any action unbecoming of an officer or representative of GSA may result in removal of the representative and vacancy of their department, subject to a disciplinary hearing and assembly vote.

Absences and Alternates

1. 2 excused and 1 unexcused absence allowed per academic year
2. Refer to [Attendance Policy](#)

When a department's primary and alternative representatives miss two assembly meetings without an approved excuse, the department is declared vacant.

Vacancies

A department's failure to appoint and maintain a GSA representative during the previous and current academic years will render **all** graduate student members of the department ineligible for:

1. ASUN-GSA Special Project Grants
2. ASUN-GSA Graduate Travel Awards

Notifying GSA of Absences

Direct all of your absence requests the VP of Representation, at vprepresentationgsa@unl.edu no later than 24 hours prior to the scheduled GSA meeting.

- The VP of Representation will let you know she's received your question and whether your absence is excused.
 - If you request an excused absence less than 24 hours before the scheduled GSA meeting, the VP of Representation will consider the request on a case-by-case basis.
- If the VP of Representation doesn't grant you an excused absence, you may appeal to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee's decision is final.

Maximum Absences Allowed

- GSA representatives are only entitled to two excused absences per academic year.
- GSA representatives (both principal and alternate) will be informed of their first unexcused absence no later than 48 hours after the absence takes place.
- A second unexcused absence will be reported to both the representatives (principal and alternate) and the Graduate Chair or Program Director. The VP of Representation will then request the appointment of a new individual to serve as that department's representative. The graduate chair may choose to re-appoint the current representative.
- If a department or program fails to appoint a representative, the Graduate Chair or Program Director will be notified of their department's lack of representative after two assembly meetings during which their department lacks representation.
- If a department or program accrues two unexcused absences (either by actual absence of the representative, or failure to appoint one), and does not rectify this situation by appointment or re-appointment of a representative, the department or program seat shall be considered vacated. Vacated department seats will be replaced by at-large representatives.
- Departments or programs that vacate their seats are ineligible for SPGP and GTAP funding in the following academic year.

Parliamentary Procedure (i.e. how to speak during a meeting)

As most large institutional governing bodies, GSA follows parliamentary procedure as outlines in the [Robert's Rules of Order](#). In general, ***we request the floor during a meeting by raising our placards***, and once given the floor we speak during meetings through ***motions***. These motions are calls for the Assembly to do something. At GSA there are two types of instances in which we use motions differently:

1. When directing the flow of the meeting
2. When discussing the approval of a document, such as meeting minutes or bills.

Meeting Flow

The meeting agenda is set by the president and distributed to representatives with reasonably enough anticipation, typically the week before the meeting. In general, a meeting will be structures as follows:

- Call to Order.
- Approval of the Minutes.
- Open Forum.
- Executive Reports.
- Committee Reports.
- Old Business.
- New Business.
- Announcements.
- Adjournment.

Representatives may speak freely during Open Forum and Announcements, provided they have raised their placards and given the floor by the president. Representatives may also use the following motions during a meeting:

- ***Motion to Add Item to the Agenda***. When the president announces moving to New Business, a representative may request the floor, and make a motion to add an item to the agenda. This is typically used to add emergency bills. The representative must justify why this item must be added and cannot wait until the following meeting.
- ***Motion to Table Item***. At any point during the meeting a representative may request the floor and make a motion to table an agenda item, such as approving the minutes or a particular bill. This may be used when the meeting is running unnecessarily long, a discussion on an item is not being productive, or representatives believe they did not have enough time to review documentation.

Approval of Documents and Legislation

When approving documents, such as the meeting minutes, or legislation (i.e. Bills), the structure is the following:

- The president moves to consider approval of the document.
- If legislation is being considered, it will be presented by the member(s) who introduced it.

- The president will move to **questions**. At this time any Assembly member may request the floor and ask a question.
- The president will move to **discussion**. At this time any Assembly member may request the floor to make amendments.
- The president will move to **vote**. At this time, representatives vote Yes, No, or Abstain on the item considered and the tally is counted.

Specific motions to consider during the introduction and approval of bills are given in [How to Pass a Bill](#).

Guidelines and Standard Procedures for Bills

Purpose of GSA Bills

Bills are crucial to carrying out GSA's mission. Practically everything that GSA does is accomplished through bills. The GSA passes three kinds of bills:

1. Appropriation Bills / Internal Affairs:

These bills approve the appropriation of funds from the GSA budget. Spending bills are also often related to particular events organized and run by the GSA. Internal affairs bills might not concern the allocation of funds, but might create an ad hoc committee, or an event with no funding. Both appropriations and internal affairs bills pass with a simple majority.

2. Resolutions

Resolutions are bills which declare a policy position. They may concern external affairs, such as a resolution in support of hurricane victims or national tax policy. More often, they should concern internal university affairs, such as graduate students' academic freedom. These bills often set the stage for further GSA advocacy on an issue. They pass with a simple majority.

3. Bylaw amendments

Bylaw amendments change the GSA bylaws. They must be submitted in writing to the GSA Executive Committee, which votes on whether to bring the proposed amendment to the assembly as a whole. If the Executive Committee votes to bring the proposed amendment to the assembly, they will electronically disseminate the proposed amendment and the accompanying bill at least one week before the assembly meeting. Passing a bylaw amendment requires the approval of three quarters of the assembly members. Once passed by the GSA assembly, a GSA bylaw amendment must be presented to the ASUN Senate, which can approve or kill the bylaw amendment, but cannot introduce any modifications. A two-thirds vote of ASUN Senators is needed to kill a GSA bylaw amendment.

Bringing a Bill to the Assembly

Most bills originate in a committee. If you want to bring a bill to the assembly, we recommend you first propose the bill to the relevant committee, and the committee chairs can help you draft the bill. If that committee does not want to sponsor the bill, you can still bring it to the floor as an individual. For help drafting bills, please reach out to Eric at gsa@unl.edu for formatting help.

Timeline for Introduction

In order to honor respect representatives' time and make sure the parliamentary process runs as it should, you must submit a near-final copy to Eric at least seven days before the GSA meeting. If you do not submit a copy of the bill at least seven days before the GSA meeting, it will not be included on the agenda.

If a bill could not have been submitted seven days prior to the GSA meeting—for instance, if it is a resolution on an event that happened five days before the scheduled GSA meeting—you may submit a bill to be introduced under emergency status. To do this, e-mail a copy of the bill to the President, and they can circulate it to the assembly, although it will not appear on the meeting agenda. You should also

bring enough hard copies of the bill to circulate to the entire assembly. Then, at the assembly meeting, a representative can introduce a motion to bring the legislation to the floor through emergency status. If the assembly approves this motion through a simple majority vote, the assembly can then question, discuss and vote on your bill.

Debate on Bills

Once at the assembly, bills are submitted to debate following [Robert's Rules of Order](#):

- First, the sponsor of the bill will provide a short introduction outlining the rationale and goal of the bill.
- Next, the sponsor will hold the floor and take questions from the assembly.
- Finally, the assembly will debate the bill and perhaps introduce amendments. Amendments are made by saying, "I move to amend..." and outlining the change or addition precisely. This requires a second, and then debate and a vote on the amendment before returning to the bill as a whole. One of the executives will make changes to a projected draft of the bill in real time.
 - Please bear in mind that stylistic (non-substantive) changes to wording are not the point here. To accommodate a variety of views and use our time together well, we aim for language that's acceptable, but perhaps not ideal, to all. Assume the bill has been carefully written, and has been reviewed by many eyes.

Once passed, the bill is signed by the President, goes into immediate effect, and is posted on the GSA website.

Detailed Parliamentary Procedure for Bills

- When a Bill is introduced, the Chair will recognize the individual who submitted the Bill. This individual will then explain the rationale behind the Bill and state what it is intended to accomplish.
- Following the introduction of the Bill, the Floor will then be open for questions. Anyone who wishes to ask a question will indicate they wish to obtain the Floor. The Chair will recognize each speaker in turn.
- When there are no further questions, the Floor will then be open for discussion and debate. This is an opportunity for individuals to state their opinions of the Bill, such as why they think the Assembly should or should not vote in favor of it. This is also an opportunity to make Motions regarding the Bill. Most Motions require another member to second them, after which the Motion will be considered officially declared, and the Assembly will then take the appropriate action. Normally, each member may only speak twice during discussion of a specific Bill, unless someone else yields their time to them.
 - A **Motion to Amend a Bill** is made when one wishes to change the wording of the Bill in some way such that it adds to, removes, or modifies the content of the Bill. Following a Motion to Amend, the Floor will then be open to questions over the amendment, followed by discussion and debate. Following discussion and debate of the amendment,

a vote will be held. Should the vote pass, the amendment will then be incorporated into the Bill. The Floor will then move back into discussion and debate of the amended Bill as a whole.

- A **Motion for a Friendly Amendment** does not require a second. This is a motion made when there is an error present in the drafted Bill that the person making the Motion wishes to correct, but which does not make any substantive changes to the content or meaning of the Bill. Following the Motion, the correction will be automatically incorporated into the Bill. No vote of approval is required.
- A **Motion to Call the Question** is made when discussion has gone on for some time and the person making the Motion wishes to suppress further discussion and vote on the Bill itself. Following a Motion to Call the Question, the Assembly will then immediately move to a vote on whether or not to suppress further discussion. If the vote fails, discussion will proceed as normal. If the vote passes, discussion is immediately ended and the Assembly then moves to a vote over the adoption of the Bill itself.
- A **Motion to Table** is made when the person making the Motion wishes to postpone voting on the Bill until a future meeting. This can be because of several reasons, usually that additional information not currently available is needed regarding some aspect of the Bill in order for the Assembly to make an informed vote, or that the meeting has already gone on significantly longer than expected, and it is deemed best to postpone the vote until a later time when the Assembly can reconsider the Bill with a fresh perspective. Following the Motion, the Assembly will immediately vote on postponing the Bill. If the vote fails, discussion will proceed as normal. If the vote passes, discussion is immediately ended and the Bill is postponed to a future meeting.
- A **Motion to Pass by Acclamation** is made when the person making the Motion wishes to pass the Bill by Acclamation, rather than a formal vote. This means that the entire Assembly is considered to be in unanimous agreement that the Bill should be adopted, and no vote will otherwise be taken. However, any member of the Assembly may raise an Objection to overrule such a Motion if they wish to go on record as voting against the Bill or Abstaining.
- A **Motion to Vote by Ballot** is made when the person making the Motion wishes the vote to be by secret ballot, as opposed to a voice vote or show of hands. This preserves the anonymity of each voter, if they do not want their position on a Bill's adoption to be known to the Assembly at large. Occasionally Bills of a sensitive or divisive nature may come before the Assembly, and voting by ballot enables each Assembly member to vote their conscience anonymously.
- A **Motion for a Roll Call Vote** is made when the person making the Motion wishes for each member to be called on in turn to state their vote. This is usually only done in cases where the member making the Motion suspects the Assembly to be more or less evenly divided on the Bill, and is not recommended to be routinely called for, as this effectively slows the meeting down for the Roll Call. This also has the effect of advertising each member's position on the Bill.

- When there is no further discussion or debate, the Assembly will move to a vote on the Bill. Unless it is otherwise moved, this is usually done by a voice vote or show of hands. Most Bills pass by a simple majority vote, but occasionally a Bill will require a greater majority, usually 2/3 or 3/4, to pass. Each member may vote Yes, No, or Abstain for a Bill's adoption. A vote of Abstain means that the member does not wish to vote one way or another and instead is withholding their vote. This is occasionally done in cases where an individual feels too conflicted over whether or not to support a Bill, or if they are not personally in support of it, but believes that the Bill will still be adopted regardless. This may also be done in cases where a member does not wish to go on record as openly voting against the Bill.
- Upon voting, the Bill is either adopted or rejected. Adopted Bills go into immediate effect upon approval.