

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

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Lynne Alexandrova (President Candidate)

Dear UTGSU Members,

I have full confidence – thanks to lessons-learned experience – in my preparedness to fulfill the role of President of by far the largest Graduate Students' Union (GSU) in Canada, with its 105th anniversary just around the corner, in December, 2023! My experience comes from a good number of years at all levels of student and university governance in a wide range of roles, specifically at UofT, and a multidisciplinary background from (under)graduate studies and some teaching at 5 universities in 4 countries, paired with government of Canada employment and K12 international teaching since age 19.

I state – loud and clear – that my dearest desire throughout the years of (oftentimes 24/7) work on Council/all its Committees remains, unwaveringly: for those at the Union's helm and all the way to the grassroots to continually, co-operatively optimize how best to achieve an exemplary *academic citizenship* community of memorable student-life moments. As the world comes out of a multiply trying Global Emergency, let us focus on RE-OPENING the UTGSU – in many beneficial ways and senses!

In Voting and Non-voting roles, i have never stopped earning your wellbeing/trust, and will be at your Q&A disposal during Campaigning (April 8th – 21st) via email and Zoom/in-person group or one-on-one sessions about long-pending UTGSU projects upgraded to Presidential 2023-2024 Programme (Bylaw: IV, #4.8 & VII, #7.6)

UTor: lynne.alexandrova@mail.utoronto.ca.

Neelofar Ahmed (Vice-President External Candidate)

Neelofar Ahmed is a doctoral student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Neelofar has served as the VP – of Finance for the year 2022-23. During her tenure, the UTGSU finance department offered several awards, grants, and bursaries to the University of Toronto membership and organized workshops to improve financial literacy. This year, Neelofar is running for the role Vice-President External which has been vacant for the past few months. As a strong advocate of equity and inclusion, Neelofar believes that the role VP-External is central to enhancing the UTGSU visibility and better partnerships with external organizations could bring more resources and connections for the general membership. Neelofar commits to supporting advocacy initiatives and student activism at provincial and federal levels with a strong representation at the Canadian Federation of Students. Neelofar undertakes to play a key role in creating bridges with campus-based, local, and international

organizations to generate opportunities for its membership at international organizations and advocacy platforms. Neelofar feels that there is a strong need for UTGSU to strengthen and create external linkages and as the Vice-President External, she would work hard to ensure student mobilization and engagement within and outside the University of Toronto.

Walter Suarez Garcia (Vice-President External Candidate)

Hello everyone! My name is Walter and I am running for the Vice-President external position. I am a second-year OISE doctoral student and, I am looking forward to the opportunity to be part of the University of Toronto Graduate Student Union 2023-2024 term. Serving on the Executive Committee of an institution such as the University of Toronto Graduate Student Union would be an honour and a privilege were I elected to serve on the Committee. In such a capacity, I would hope to advocate for an even greater role for the graduate student community as a shaper of graduate programs, promoting and highlighting the many different graduate student opportunities on and off campus, continuing the UTGSU's role as a central hub for our community!

Jesse Velay-Vitow (Vice-President External Candidate)

The UTGSU has been poorly run over the last few years, with a revolving door of staff and the same people in elected positions for many years in a row. Low turn out and participation has led to a sclerotic union that most students barely know exists outside of their healthcare.

If elected, I will try to get an answer to the following questions:

What purpose, if any, does the Union serve for the average student?

Would a much smaller union that costs less and does less be preferable?

Do students even want a Union?

I would then try to reform the Union in that direction. A few major points I'd want to address are our Bylaws, they are a mess and not completely aligned with the Canadian Not-For-Profit Corporations Act. I'd want to add term limits for Students in Governance, and establish a more arms length relationship with the University.

Right now the University is withholding a portion of student fees because our Policies were found to be in violation of the Ontario Human Rights code. If elected I will fix this.

Willis Opondo (Vice-President Finance Candidate)

My name is Willis Opondo, a third-year Ph.D. student at the Department of Social Justice Education. I am thrilled to announce my candidacy for the position of Vice-President Finance in our graduate student union. As a passionate and dedicated individual, I believe I possess the skills, experience, and motivation necessary to excel in this role and make a positive impact on our student community.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to participate in various student-led organizations and activities, which have allowed me to develop a strong understanding of the financial management process. I'm the outgoing SJE DSA president having served a successful 1-year term where we achieved massive results for the students. Through this role, I have gained extensive experience in budgeting, expense tracking, fundraising, and financial reporting, which I believe would be of great value in fulfilling the responsibilities of the VP Finance.

Furthermore, I am highly motivated to take on this role because I am committed to the principles of transparency, accountability, and effective financial management. I believe that the VP Finance position plays a crucial role in ensuring that our student union's resources are used efficiently and effectively, and I am eager to contribute to this effort. If elected, I will work tirelessly to ensure that our student union's finances are managed responsibly and that our resources are allocated in a way that benefits all members of our community. I will collaborate closely with other members of the executive team and our members to develop and implement innovative solutions that support our goals and aspirations.

Thank you for considering my candidacy for VP Finance. I look forward to the opportunity to serve our student union and work towards making our community stronger and more prosperous. This will be an era of accessibility, accountability, and equitable representation at UTGSU. Trust me to be your voice, vote Opondo.

Zoya Tawhidi (Vice-President Finance Candidate)

Hi! I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology and am very excited to be running for Vice-President Finance. As a graduate student myself, I am well aware of the financial challenges that we face and the importance of responsible financial management.

As the VP of Finance, I will strive to ensure that our finances are well-managed and used effectively to benefit all graduate students. My goal is to prioritize transparency and accountability in all financial decisions. I will work closely with the executive committee to create a comprehensive budget that reflects our values and meets the needs of our graduate community. I will also work to ensure that our finances are accessible and understandable to all members of UTGSU.

My experience serving as the President of the St. Michael's Hospital Student Research Association has equipped me with skills in both leadership and financial management. In this position, I have been responsible for managing our budget, allocating resources and seeking out external funding from multiple avenues. By bridging across different departments at UofT, I was able to build a network between different off-site student associations at the hospital to promote a more inclusive environment. This role provided me with the opportunity to be an advocate for graduate students to other leadership bodies at both the hospital and university. My team and I have been successful in providing trainees with free academic and professional development resources through securing grants and collaborating with different organizations.

Moving forward, I am passionate about representing the needs of students and giving back to our graduate community. I will prioritize inclusivity in all financial decisions, ensuring that funding is distributed equitably across departments and organizations.

Furthermore, I will advocate for the implementation of grants and bursaries dedicated specifically towards disadvantaged student groups. If elected as the Vice-President of Finance, I will be committed to representing student interests and ensuring our finances are optimally managed with integrity and effectiveness. Thank you for your consideration and I hope to connect with you soon!

Aanshi Gandhi (Vice-President Internal Candidate)

Hello! I am a a third year PhD Candidate in Biomedical Engineering and I am excited to put my strategic and organizational skills to work as the Vice-President Internal of the UTGSU. With my extensive experience in leadership roles, strategic planning, and communication, I am confident that I can excel in the responsibilities outlined for this position.

First and foremost, I understand the importance of effective communication and organization in any leadership role. As a former VP Internal during my undergraduate studies, I have been responsible for scheduling meetings, creating agendas, and ensuring that proper minutes are taken and distributed. I have a keen eye for detail and have been commended for my ability to keep meetings on track and productive. I am confident that I can apply these skills to the responsibilities outlined for the Vice-President Internal, ensuring that all meetings are productive, and that proper records are kept.

In addition to my organizational skills, I am also comfortable taking on leadership roles when necessary. As we collaborate on projects in the lab, I have been responsible for overseeing the cohesion of my team and ensuring that everyone stays on track to working towards our common goals and meeting our targets. I am confident that I can represent the interests of the UTGSU at meetings and conferences.

I am also committed to keeping the Board of Directors informed of external issues affecting Members. I understand the importance of staying up-to-date on issues that affect our Members, and have experience in monitoring and analyzing external issues in my current role. I am confident that I can bring this expertise to the position of Vice-President Internal, ensuring that the Board of Directors are informed and able to make informed decisions that benefit our members. As someone who understands the importance of adhering to established regulations and procedures, I am confident that I can ensure that the Union is compliant with all relevant regulations and is operating in the best interests of our members.

Finally, organizing an orientation for the UTGSU Board of Directors and related skill-building efforts is a responsibility that I am particularly excited about. As someone who understands the importance of training and skill-building, I am committed to ensuring that our Board of Directors have the knowledge and tools they need to succeed. I am confident that I can create a comprehensive orientation program that covers all relevant topics, and that helps our Board of Directors develop the skills they need to lead the Union effectively.

In conclusion, I am confident that I have the skills, experience, and passion necessary to excel in the role of Vice-President Internal. I am excited to take on the responsibilities outlined in the job description and am committed to working collaboratively with the Executive Committee and Board of Directors to achieve our shared goals. Thank you for considering my candidacy.

Noa Chazot (Vice President Academics for Divisions 3 & 4 Candidate)

Hi! My name is Noa Chazot, I am a MSc candidate in the department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology and am excited to put my name forward for Vice President Academic Division 3 and 4! As graduate students, we face unique challenges and opportunities in our academic and professional journeys. It is crucial that we have strong representation at all levels of our institution to ensure that our needs and concerns are heard and addressed. If elected, I will work tirelessly to: - Advocate for graduate student welfare: I will strive to improve our access to mental health resources and advocate for increased mental health coverage. Additionally, I will try help secure better funding opportunities to those looking, and support initiatives to increase diversity and inclusion in our academic programs. -Foster strong relationships with faculty and administration: Effective communication and collaboration with faculty and administration are essential for achieving a better experience for all graduate students. Advocating for healthy peer-supervisory relationships is something I think is fundamental to graduate students having a positive experience during their degree. I am committed to serving as a strong advocate for graduate students at UofT. Together, we can create a more supportive, inclusive, and enriching graduate school experience. Ultimately, even though I will be new to the role I am determined to make a positive impact and feel this role will help me do so! Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me with any questions!

Mohammadmir Ghasemian Moghaddam (Vice President Academics for Divisions 3 & 4 Candidate)

Dear fellow graduate students,

As a second-year PhD student, I am honored to be running for the Vice President of Academic Division 3 and 4, and I am excited to share with you my vision for enhancing the graduate student experience at our university.

Firstly, I strongly believe in advocating for increased graduate funding packages and emergency relief funds. As graduate students living in Toronto, we face many financial challenges, and it is important that we have access to the necessary resources to support ourselves while pursuing our academic goals. Therefore, I propose that we work together to negotiate a better bargain for our funding packages and emergency relief funds, ensuring that they are adequate and provide support when we need it most.

Furthermore, I believe in advocating for a reduction in graduate student tuition costs and an increase in teaching assistant opportunities, especially during summer. This will not only help us financially but will also provide us with valuable teaching experience that will benefit us in our future careers. Secondly, I believe that it is important to expand mental health resources for graduate students. Pursuing a graduate degree can be challenging and stressful, and it is crucial that we have access to the support we need to maintain our mental well-being. Therefore, I propose that we work to improve mental health services on campus and provide access to mental health resources that are tailored to the unique needs of graduate students.

Thirdly, I am committed to supporting professional development and career internships for graduate students. As we pursue our academic goals, it is important that we also prepare ourselves for our future careers. Therefore, I propose that we work together to create opportunities for professional development and career internships that will help us gain valuable experience and advance our careers.

Fourthly, I believe in expanding funding and health supports for international graduate students. International students face unique challenges when pursuing a graduate degree, including language barriers, cultural differences, and financial challenges. Therefore, I propose that we work to create a more inclusive space for international students by introducing more grant opportunities for targeted events to increase community engagement. This will help international students feel more welcome and supported on campus, and it will enhance the overall graduate student experience for everyone. Finally, I am committed to advocating for marginalized voices and ensuring that the board prioritizes

the needs of our members for more equitable and inclusive union spaces and policies. We are a diverse community of graduate students, and it is crucial that we work together to create a welcoming and inclusive environment where all voices are heard and valued. Therefore, I propose that we work to ensure that the needs of marginalized groups are prioritized and that we advocate for policies and initiatives that promote equity and inclusion on campus.

In conclusion, I am committed to enhancing the graduate student experience and advocating for the needs of our members. By working together, we can create a more inclusive, supportive, and vibrant graduate student community, and I would be honored to serve as your Vice President of Academic Division 3 and 4.

As I campaign for the position of Vice President of Academic Divisions 3 and 4, I am eager to engage with the members of our community and hear your thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Your input and suggestions are valuable to me, and I welcome the opportunity to connect with you throughout this process (please see my LinkedIn profile address below). Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you all.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mogmoghadam/>

Friedemann Krannich (Board of Directors Division 3 Candidate)

Hello fellow grad students, my name is Friedemann and I am a first year international PhD student in the math department. After I was a member of the General Assembly of the UTGSU in the last year, I realized that I want to become further involved. I am running for Board of Directors of the UTGSU, because we need a strong and functional graduate students union. When elected, I will always be open to the concerns and problems that graduate students have. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at f.krannich@mail.utoronto.ca.

Rohankrishna Harikumar (Board of Directors Division 4 Candidate)

No statement provided with nomination form.

Jady Liang (Board of Directors Division 4 Candidate)

No statement provided with nomination form.

Vida Maksimoska (Board of Directors Division 4 Candidate)

Hello everyone, I am Vida Maksimoska. As a graduate student who has spent a lot of time at the University of Toronto, I am deeply committed to advocating for graduate students, I have sat on the graduate representation committee advocating for increased student stipends to the Faculty of Medicine. I have sat on many other committees throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees at UofT such as the TRP anti-racism committee and various social committees. Throughout my academic and professional career, I have gained valuable experience in various leadership roles. It is through this experience; I have developed strong communication which would be essential in the board of directors' role. I have worked and continue to contribute to teams that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the community. I am committed to being a strong and effective advocate for the graduate students within Life Sciences at UofT and I hope to be able to do so with this opportunity. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Chris Rodgers (Board of Directors Division 4 Candidate)

Having served on the UTGSU for several years, I wish to use my expertise to improve the graduate student experience for division 4 (Life Sciences Students). As one example of an action I wish to take as a BOD member, I would like to improve the summer gym bursary to cover the entirety of the costs incurred from purchasing a summer gym membership at the Athletic Centre and Goldring Centre, among other such helpful initiatives.

Bikechain Referendum (Yes Committee)

Bikechain is an educational bike repair shop that has been serving the U of T community since 2005. Located in the Student Commons building, we offer a diverse array of services with a focus on financial accessibility and community building. Our key programs include:

- A Do-It-Yourself shop, where we teach students how to fix their own bikes with the support of experienced staff and volunteers. This is offered on a pay-what-you can basis 4 days/week
- Free two-week bike rentals for U of T students
- Pay-what-you-can bicycle repairs by our team 1 day/week
- Free workshops on mechanical and cycling related topics
- Organized group rides and public social events
- New and used parts sales
- Volunteer and job opportunities for students

We are seeking an increase in funding so that we can continue to offer our services at a low cost while our material expenses continue to increase. This funding will also allow us to increase wages for all staff, build new partnerships in the community and to run more of the programming that our customers love.

Learn more about our services at [instagram.com/bikechainut](https://www.instagram.com/bikechainut).