Strategic Plan 2015-2016
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VISION STATEMENT

Our goal is to create an organization that is not only effective but regenerative and sustainable. The unfortunate reality is that despite our effectiveness now, the GSA lacks both regenerative and sustainable qualities. That regardless of how effective we've ever been as an organization, the GSA is largely a cyclical organization. There are a combination of factors that explain this. On one hand, graduate student groups tend to routinely deal with incredible turnover. The lack of institutional structures obstructs the progress of new administrations as the day-to-day operations have to constantly be re-invented as these cycles play out. And finally, the time required to run an effective organization is simply something that graduate students do not have.

What is more, these factors will likely not change in the short or long run. Solutions then must consider these factors and work around them. For this year, while much of what we do will simply be a continuation of what we've done in the recent past, we are making a conscious effort to find solutions to the cyclical nature of graduate student organizations. This requires addressing both the regenerative and sustainable qualities of our organization. We will use the strategies of social permaculture to guide our plans and agendas. For those not familiar, these strategies include:

**EDGE EFFECT**: Also known as ecotones, the principle governing the region where two ecosystems come together to form a third, which has greater fertility, productivity and diversity than either of the other two alone.

**REDUNDANCY**: Known as functional redundancy in ecology, in which every critical function in a system should be satisfied in more than one way.

**DIVERSITY**: Known as biodiversity in ecosystem studies, indicates that you cannot have a diversity of functions and services without a diversity in the landscape and conditions. This leads to biodiversity (or diversity of biological life) as individuals occupy the diverse niches.

The following are examples of how these principles can be applied to the functioning of the Graduate Student Association.

**STRATEGY 1**
Expand and strengthen the GSA’s network and use these intersections with other groups and entities to achieve mutual goals. This is based on the principle of Edge Effect in which the intersection of two ecosystems yields higher biodiversity, productivity, and fertility than either of the two alone.

a. Actively find ways to expand the presence and influence of the GSA. This can be done by being knowledgeable of the nature of the university community at large and identifying groups that can work with us in mutually beneficial
relationships (For example, collaborating with the Writing Center to establish a regular program to help students write their dissertations/theses. The Writing Center can provide the staff and expertise to run workshops, and the GSA can reach out to the graduate student body to increase attendance).

STRATEGY 2
Satisfy every critical need of the GSA in more than one way. This is taken from the idea of functional redundancy in ecosystems and can be related to leadership in this organization in multiple ways.

a. Every task should be taken on by more than one individual so that there is always a back-up person to cover the responsibility. Additionally, this provides at least two different skill sets and perspectives for a particular task, which can allow for higher productivity.

b. Every person in a leadership position should be sharing their responsibilities with their committee/RGSO E-boards/teammates/colleagues etc. in order to retain institutional memory and ensure the sustainability of their position and the GSA as a whole.

STRATEGY 3
Use and value diversity within the GSA. Taking from the definition of diversity above, we know that there is a complex landscape that the GSA has to navigate (diversity of the landscape). What we need is diverse individuals/perspectives taking leadership in all aspects of the GSA to affect positive change. This also means staying accountable to all of our members, especially those who are affected by inequities in the current system, and using those individuals to expose those inequities. We need to ensure the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority students.

Using these strategies in a general sense throughout this plan, in addition to some standardization and institutionalization of policies and procedures will make the GSA more than just a collection of individual graduate students, but a permanent plank in the culture of the University at Albany for years to come.
PRESIDENT’S STRATEGIC PLAN

GOALS

1. Build the GSA Constituency
2. Build a strong effective GSA Assembly
3. Continue the advocacy work of the previous administration

BREAKDOWN

1. Build the GSA constituency – The GSA needs to represent ALL graduate students at the University at Albany. Each officer has a portion of their plan dedicated to this goal. By increasing the number of students we reach, the GSA will become a more receptive organization that can address a diverse range of issues.

STRATEGIES

• Work with entire executive board (through committees) to reach out to more students and to identify and address their needs, regardless of their involvement in the organization. Recruitment and retention is supported by giving students the ability to be invested in the organization’s goals.
• In part, we should guide recruiting efforts toward filling future positions. Give students (as vice chairs on committees or co-organizers of GSA events) familiarity with the organization and build that institutional memory.
• Recognize that “institutional memory” is never enough to assure smooth transitions. Recognize too that the biggest obstacle working against the above two strategies and its attached goal is the need to reinvent the day-to-day administrative tasks from year to year. To free up new administrations to connect to graduate students from day one, by developing tangible policies (job descriptions, paper trails, bylaws flowcharts, archiving event plans and budgets).
• Creation of a Public Relations Coordinator – the goal is to have a person dedicated to public relations. Will work primarily with Programming but will work with all GSA folks to create and maintain connections with on and off-campus entities.

2. Build a strong and effective GSA assembly – By becoming a true deliberative assembly, the monthly meeting will become a powerful tool for graduate student voice on campus.

STRATEGY 1

• Create information to share with new assembly members and develop orientation and training procedures to smooth the transition to new assembly representatives.
• Continue to share information in advance of each meeting with the assembly through the website and through the work of the Assembly Speaker (as a liaison between the assembly and executive board).

STRATEGY 2

• Hire a parliamentarian, solidify the role of the assembly speaker and secretary. These will go a long way toward streamlining the meeting by embracing time-tested procedural frameworks and we will stop wasting time in assembly and use our time more efficiently.

STRATEGY 3

• Enhance the GSA committee structure, encourage more important items be handled in committee and not during the meeting. Far too much of our time in meetings is wasted on inefficient debate over minor points, committees are designed to smooth out finer points so that major issues can be debated in assembly meetings.

STRATEGY 4

• Work with the Vice President to incentivize additional service by re-thinking our RGSO committee requirements and develop ways to appeal to broader student involvement
• Identify GSA committee chairs and create vice chair positions. Develop future leaders from vice chair positions
• Facilitate the creation of new, and the resurrection of moribund RGSOs
• Encourage logical meeting practices (Email chains, Discussion Boards etc) – Meetings should not depend solely on the ability to coordinate schedules
• Allow Electronic meetings for committees in governing documents
• Integrate committee charges into the meeting
  1. Regular Committee Reports (online) & during the meeting
  2. Refer pending motions to committee
  3. Utilize Ad Hoc System
• Use the meeting to respond to grad student concerns – for too long, the assembly meeting has been an information session, a true deliberative assembly creates action. Assembly members should guide the advocacy of the GSA, not merely rubber stamp initiatives developed by E-Board members.

STRATEGY 5

• Create the 5-Year GSA plan – with a committee in the GSA, chaired by an assembly member, and involving key constituencies within our structure to further legitimize the GSA Assembly as a permanent fixture in University culture.
3. Continue the work of the previous administration – By building a strong foundation with plank one and two, the GSA can be in a much better position to accomplish its goals, and see the great work of the previous GSA administration through to its conclusion. It will take more than one or two terms.

**STRATEGIES**

- Work with the Public Relations Director and Senate team to build coalitions with other campus entities – GSA work does not end with the monthly meeting, graduate students face uncertainty and crisis, we can only accomplish our goals by working with, not against, other campus groups.
- Work with the Lead Senator and other GSA advocates to create a Legislative Action RGSO to lead our state-level advocacy efforts and provide support for additional legislative action.
- Work with the Senate team and other GSA representatives to streamline our reporting procedures. These reports should be used to guide Senate work, but also must be shared with the assembly so they are informed and can guide our advocacy efforts.

4. Other pending business- These are not necessarily “strategic plan” elements. But these are issues that require some sort of action during this current term.
   - Renegotiate our relationship with UAS – Our contract is up this year
   - Locking up new office space during the campus center expansion – We’ll hopefully be moving to a new office space in 2017. We want to be in the best position for prime office space when that happens.
   - Acquire a new printer and negotiate a new printing contract – Our current contract will expire in November 2016
   - Possibly restructuring the GSA (incorporation) – Currently we are in a fairly ephemeral position within the University structure. We simply want to consider our options in changing our position and what benefits it might confer.
VICE PRESIDENT’S STRATEGIC PLAN

GOALS

1. Improve the RGSO Experience
2. Increase GSA Reach & Effectiveness
3. Develop a strategic affiliation with the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) aside from simply membership, which will raise the profile and increase the power of the GSA’s voice.

BREAKDOWN

1. Improve the RGSO Experience and Encourage Collaboration

STRATEGIES

• Develop RGSO Transition documents to assist in turnover and officer change
  a. Help RGSOs be sustainable organizations and help them understand the concept of Sustainable Leadership
  b. Hold focus groups to find out what would help them
  c. RGSO Committee does research into transition tips and tools
  d. Use research from RGSO Committee research and focus groups to create a Transition Document for RGSOS/GSA
• Continue to improve and refine RGSO Training
  a. Make it more effective - focus on what the officers really need to know (processes, application, committee service)
  b. Give the officers a copy of the RGSO Guidelines and a Welcome Packet of information they need as officers (rights and responsibilities, etc)
  c. Try to establish a mid-year alternative training for groups that have the same officers to ensure the training they receive is beneficial and not unnecessarily redundant (not covering the same processes and rules they already have been using and operating under)
• Facilitate opportunities for RGSO knowledge sharing, growth, and collaborative planning with the Programming Chair
  a. Speed Programming Event(s)
  b. Knowledge sharing Networking Events/Workshops
• Explore Alternative Payment Options
• RGSO Data Collection & Rewards (with Public Relations Director and Programming Chair)
  a. Create cards for RGSOs to give out at events for people to fill out
  b. Data will be compiled and tracked for two purposes
  c. RGSO competition - most cards returned over the course of the year, RGSO wins a prize
    i. Encourage healthy competition between the RGSOs
    ii. Reward RGSOs whose events are well attended
d. Track what events draw grad students in, what portion of the graduate population we are reaching (and what parts we need to reach out to more), what communication mechanisms work, and feedback on events

2. Work with the President and Programming Chair to Increase the GSA Reach & Effectiveness

**STRATEGIES**

- **Get more Graduate Students Involved & Increase RGSOs/RGSO Membership**
  - a. Talk to Graduate Students at Department Orientations so we can ensure they know about us and learn about what they want/need
  - b. Work with the Webmaster and Public Relations Officer on developing a GSA Mobil Application in order to communicate better and more effectively with constituency
  - c. Disseminate information about the GSA to Departments for Listservs to gain new interest and ensure graduate students are aware of what the GSA and other graduate student groups on campus are doing
  - d. Host graduate student mixers/networking events with the Programming Chair

- **Empower Committee Members**
  - a. Give the GSA Committee Vice Chairs a role in coordinating the Committee and its activities (RGSO – have Vice Chair coordinate the creation of NAGPS internal mechanisms for choosing who attends the events)
  - b. Delegate tasks to committee members for them to complete then report back to the full committee

- **Develop an Inclusive Consolidated Resources page with the Programming Chair and Grants Chair**
  - a. Consolidate University and Community resources that can aid graduate students in school or in their move to Albany (i.e. library resources, campus services, numbers people new to the area will need such as National Grid, etc)
  - b. Gather and present information for students about internal and external grant opportunities (with the help of the Grants Chair)
  - c. Link to information about visas in the US and when traveling abroad
  - d. Ask RGSO Committee and Graduate students (via listserv) about what information would have been helpful for them or would be helpful now

3. Develop a strategic affiliation with the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) aside from simply membership, which will raise the profile and increase the power of the GSA’s voice.

**STRATEGIES**

- Ensure we attend the NAGPS LADs to gain lobbying skills to bring back and use to make the UAlbany GSA the focal point of graduate student advocacy in New York State
• Ensure we attend the National and Regional conferences to influence the legislative and advocacy platforms through participation in the business meetings to influence the ratification of NAGPS strategic plan, the re-structuring of their advocacy board, the content of the NAGPS Institute, and the future of the organization through the election of officers
• Establish internal mechanisms to determine who will attend these conferences and LADs and how the allocated money will be spent on those attendees
  a. Create a form for application to attend
  b. Decide who makes the final decision and what metrics are used
  c. Expand the budget for these events?
  d. Decide how budget will be utilized specifically – fully cover students who go or offer partial funding so more students can go
• Ensure information gathered and skills/tools learned at conferences and LADs are communicated to and shared with the GSA at large
• Help orchestrate presentations or white papers by attendees
• Disseminate information to the GSA membership
  a. Reach out to the Director of Relations of the NAGPS to come design and execute a plan to get as many GSA members as possible access to member benefits of the NAGPS (Hertz, Geico, etc. discounts)
  b. Work with the Northeast Regional Chair and SUNY SA to get more SUNY schools to join the NAGPS to solidify our own state network
• Orchestrate letter writing by UAlbany GSA members to other SUNY Schools
• Presentation at SUNY SA meetings by UAlbany GSA & NAGPS
  a. Support GSA members to participate on NAGPS committees such as the Legislative Concerns Committee calls and the Advocacy Board Calls (Employment, International, Social Justice) so they can gain insights and offer input into national advocacy efforts
TREASURER

GOALS

1. Create Finance Committee
2. Improve Financial Internal Controls

BREAKDOWN

1. Create Finance Committee

STRATEGIES

- Give students from various departments input on GSA financial matters.
- Analysis of the GSA monthly budget
- Periodic evaluation of the organization’s annual budget
- Create structures to ensure the organizational funds are spent according to our rules
- Analyze long term assets decisions
- Create an updated version of our financial guidelines to be approved by the assembly

2. Improve Financial Internal controls

STRATEGIES

- Make sure that expenses are properly reported
- Reduce the chance of late payment and Over payment
- Ensure that internal controls are working properly
- Adjust the internal controls if needed to get better results
EQUITY AND INCLUSION

GOALS

1. Educate more students, faculty, and staff about the GSA
2. Work with more departments and students to get them involved in the GSA
3. Serve as a liaison and advocate for all students in matters involving equity and inclusion
4. Generate more programming

BREAKDOWN

1. Educate more students, faculty, and staff about the GSA

STRATEGIES

• Talk with more departments and students and educate them about the GSA by attending orientations and departmental events.
• Also, send emails to departmental listservs to spread the word about the GSA and, specifically, the Equity and Inclusion Committee.
  a. If they are already aware of the GSA, encourage these groups/students to become involved.
• If these groups/students choose not to be involved, remind them that there are still resources they can use

2. Work with more departments and students to get them involved in the GSA

STRATEGIES

• Work on equity and inclusion issues in all departments
• Increase the diversity of the GSA by inviting previously unrepresented and underrepresented groups
• Include active and non-active GSA departments

3. Serve as a liaison and advocate for all students in matters involving equity and inclusion

STRATEGIES

• Let students, faculty, and staff know that I am an Equity and Inclusion resource
• Create a write-up of general information concerning what I do and can do

4. Generate more programming

STRATEGIES

• Use the Equity and Inclusion budget to generate more programming for students
• Extend funding (as appropriate by the bylaws) to RGSO’s for programming relating to Equity and Inclusion issues
• Work on SUNY Albany Diversity and Inclusion conference for Spring 2016
PROGRAMMING AGENDA

GOALS

1. Effective outreach to the graduate student body and supporting entities to enhance participation in the GSA and further GSA goals
2. Foster a culture of activism and advocacy within the GSA
3. Provide supportive programs for graduate students

BREAKDOWN

1. Effective outreach to the graduate student body and supporting entities to enhance participation in the GSA and further GSA goals

STRATEGY 1
Raise awareness about existence and supportive services of GSA.

- GSA Orientation for incoming or existing students that want to learn more about resources that are available on campus.
- Provide daily programming in the GSA office (Free coffee on Mondays, Ted Talk Thursdays).
- Pizza with the senate team.
- Recognition Banquet in the spring

STRATEGY 2
Enhance RGSO interaction.

- Speed dating for RGSOs
- Collaborative flash programming.
- Graduate student mixer.
- RGSO Office Olympics

STRATEGY 3
Utilize newly appointed Public Relations Chair to more effectively reach out to the graduate student body as well as support and expand the GSA network.

- Increase social media presence.
- Promote GSA events through social media, flyering, tabling, etc.
- Promote events of entities within the GSA network: Sustainability, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, UAlbany Food Pantry, Library Services, etc.
- Taking photos and videos at events.
- Reporting out on each programming event to show who is coming and why.
- Assist in creating an app for the GSA
2. Foster a culture of activism and advocacy within the GSA

STRATEGIES
• Forum once during both the fall and spring semesters.
• Guerilla programming to support initiatives as they come up.
• Hold Legislative Action days to teach about graduate student issues.
• Coordinate Call Congress days to take knowledge from Legislative Action Days and use it to advocate for graduate students at the State and Federal level (coinciding with national Call Congress dates – GradsHaveDebt2).
• Bring in a speaker from the Black Lives Matter campaign to bring the topic of inequality to light and to show how a grassroots campaign becomes a worldwide movement.

3. Provide supportive programs for graduate students

STRATEGIES
• Plan a “dissertation boot camp” in conjunction with the Writing Center and Career Services to help further graduate students academically.
• Ted Talk conference at UAlbany centered around the theme of careers outside of academia.
• Hold a seminar on graduate student finance planning to help students cope with tight financial situations during and after graduate school (Emily Roberts?).
• Provide a program on Mindfulness in collaboration with the Counseling Center to help students cope with stress during the semester and to raise awareness about the services offered by the Counseling Center.
• Hold a Sexual Harassment seminar in response to new legislation and provide a self-defense class.
• Provide a program on social permaculture with the Office of Sustainability.
• Food drive for food pantry in collaboration with the Interfaith Center, UUP, and UAlbany Food Pantry (Maybe we can get the Capital Roots Food Truck to come to campus).
**Tentative Timeline**

**Fall 2015**
August: Orientation  
September: Pizza with senate team  
   - Speed dating for RGSOs  
   - Social Permaculture program  
October: Graduate Student Mixer  
   - Sexual harassment/ self-defense program  
   - Speaker from Black Lives Matter  
November: Food Drive  
   - President’s Forum (goal, very tentative)  
   - Legislative Action Day  
December: Call Congress day

**Spring 2016**
January: Orientation (dependent on incoming student numbers)  
   - Graduate Student Finance Seminar  
February: Pizza with senate team  
   - Mindfulness program  
March: Graduate Student Mixer  
   - Ted Talk Conference  
April: President’s Forum (goal, very tentative)  
   - Speaker  
May: Recognition Banquet

**Dissertation Bootcamp throughout Fall semester**
GRANTS AGENDA

GOALS

1. Revamp the grants system, expanding types of grants and moving towards a more competitive process
2. Improve grant communication and information awareness

BREAKDOWN

1. Revamp the grants system

STRATEGY 1

• Greater responsibilities from grants committee
  a. Face-to-face meetings, so we are not simply reading text off a computer screen, but dialoging and interacting in a less mediated fashion.
    1. Q for E-board: Monthly meetings seem appropriate to me. Any objections or other thoughts?
    2. Train committee members in evaluation
  b. Retention of committee members through both semesters (and if possible, Summer.)
  c. Gather feedback from committee as to the current methods and purpose of GSA grants. Ask why the number of applications is 3% of GSA members, and ways to improve this number.¹

STRATEGY 2

• More competitive process
  a. Increase number of application periods from the current 3 (Fall, Spring, Summer) to 5 (2x Fall, 2x Spring, Summer).
    1. This would require increased effort from the committee members and quicker turnaround, but as it is the majority of committee work is finished by the middle of each semester.
  b. Redesign evaluation process

STRATEGY 3

• Diversify types of grants
  a. Expand upon idea of team-orientated grants
  b. Perhaps separate line item for these grants

2. Improve grant communication and information awareness

STRATEGY 1

• Information for Grants

¹ Rough estimate: 120 applications in Fall/Spring/Summer 2014-15; divided into 4000 students.
a. Work with the office webmaster to ensure that the grants page lists helpful information.
   1. Alternative grants for grad students
   2. Solicit grant opportunities via the listserv
b. Edit grant letters and current guidelines (in conjunction with committee and other GSA entities.)

STRATEGY 2
• Advise students in prudential management of grant awards
  a. Create list of NYS conferences which are often attended by GSA students.
  b. Solicit feedback from prior grant recipients—what worked best for keeping down costs?
     1. Without offering free carpools, suggest various means to stretch the dollar.
     2. List hotels or organizations in major NYS university towns, with contact info.

Tentative Timeline

Fall 2015
Restructuring of Grants Committee
Information (Guidelines etc.)/Website Changes
Creation of Competitive Process
The Above Goes to Assembly for Presentation

Spring 2016
Continue Above Processes

Fall 20156
Implementation of Changes
LEGISLATIVE AGENDA/LEAD SENATOR’S STRATEGIC PLAN

GOALS

1. Increase the face-recognition of the Advocacy Team and turn it into a more solidified representation of our graduate student body.
2. Increase faculty relationships and awareness.
3. Help facilitate better voting competency for the 2016 local, state, and national elections amongst graduate students.
4. Create better relationships between other GSA representatives and the Advocacy team.

BREAKDOWN

1. Increase the face-recognition of the Advocacy Team and turn it into a more solidified representation of our graduate student body.

   STRATEGY 1
   • Increase Advocacy Team Assembly attendance.

   STRATEGY 2
   • Encourage Advocacy Team members to be active participants in their (recurring or newly joined) RGSOs.
     a. RGSOs are our most active population, while it’s important we reach our whole contingency this is one of the easiest ways for each and every one of us to reach at least a portion of the people we represent. It also gives networking opportunities to help bridge the gap between the involved section of campus and the section of our constituency that is harder for us to reach via event attendance and mingling with new departments or groups. (Work with VP and RGSO committee to better understand how we can facilitate this.)

   STRATEGY 3
   • Revamp the bylaws and constitution to better solidify the importance of the Advocacy team within the GSA’s structure.
     a. This is a long term goal, but something that is necessary not only for the evolution of how Lead Senator has changed over the last year and a half, but also so we can better represent such an important arm of our body that really has more direct university representation than our assembly itself. Solidifying the place of this team within our structure will ensure a more healthy working relationship between all branches of the GSA and is a good move forward for our organization as a whole. (Possibly assign a committee made up of more than just the Advocacy team and
previously involved individuals to provide a wider scope of opinion on this.)

2. Increase faculty relationships and awareness.

**STRATEGY 1**
- **Evaluate the faculty leadership**
  a. A big part of the platform I ran on for Lead Senator was an evaluation of the faculty leadership that make up the University Senate. This is an ongoing goal that is very much still in the works – right now, it is unsure of how formal or informal this process will be but we’re evaluating the possibilities of how best to approach this in a way that works for all parties.

**STRATEGY 2**
- **Increase relationships with graduate student faculty liaisons.**
  a. Many (if not more) of the departments on campus elect a graduate student to serve as a faculty liaison in their faculty meetings. Its really important that we utilize the existence of these positions to help us facilitate better relationships with faculty.

3. Help facilitate better voting competency for the 2016 local, state, and national elections amongst graduate students.

**STRATEGY 1**
- **Consult with other NAGPS institutes about how they tackle these issues.**
  a. Other NAGPS institutes (such as Mizzou) have voting competency initiatives on their campuses, this is a good opportunity for us to increase awareness of graduate student issues off-campus, as well as further relationships with other NAGPS institutes. Consult with the NAGPS Legislative Concerns Committee.

**STRATEGY 2**
- **Facilitate a relationship with the new Legislative RGSO.**
  a. While the Advocacy team and the Legislative RGSO are two different entities. It is important to understand that what we fight for on campus for graduate students can be directly influenced by off-campus politics, as well as can help inform legislative action.

4. Create better relationships between other GSA representatives and the Advocacy team.

**STRATEGY**
- **Facilitate involvement of Committee Chairs and other graduate student (non-Senate) committee reps across campus with the Advocacy team.**
  a. Many things we advocate for and work through in the Senate are much bigger than the Senate. We need to increase the reach of the team to E-board committees, and other GSA entities so the voice of the constituency is better heard through the Senate.