



## OISE GSA GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES 2024

### CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT



**AYTAJ PASHAYEVA**  
**LHAE**  
**PhD Full-time - Year 1**

As a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and with extensive experience in international educational development, I am deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and vibrant student community within the OISE GSA. My academic background, which includes a Master's in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) from the prestigious Erasmus Mundus program and an additional Master's degree in International Educational Development from Teachers College, Columbia University, has equipped me with a diverse skill set and a nuanced understanding of global higher education landscapes.

My engagement as a national higher education expert, where I regularly consult for institutions such as the World Bank, has provided me with invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing students, particularly in regions like Azerbaijan. I am passionate about leveraging this knowledge to advocate for the needs of all students within our community, ensuring that their voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

In pursuing an executive position with the OISE GSA, I am eager to contribute to the association's mission of enhancing the student experience and fostering a supportive environment for academic and personal growth. Drawing upon my background in higher education research and policy, I hope to facilitate meaningful dialogue and collaboration among students, faculty, and administrators to address key issues affecting our community.

Furthermore, I am dedicated to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the association, recognizing the importance of representing and amplifying the voices of marginalized students. Through my leadership, I aspire to cultivate a sense of belonging for all members and to implement initiatives that promote equity and social justice. In summary, I am excited about the opportunity to serve as an executive member of the OISE GSA and to contribute to the enrichment of our student community. With my multidisciplinary expertise and passion for student advocacy, I am confident in my ability to make a positive impact and to empower fellow students to thrive during their time at OISE.



**ZIAN ZHANG**  
**CTL**  
**PhD Full-time - Year 3**

Zian (Kelly) Zhang is a dedicated Ph.D. Candidate within the curriculum and pedagogy program at OISE. With a keen interest in education policy and leadership, Kelly's academic journey reflects her commitment to advancing educational practices and systems. Kelly is a Graduate Research Assistant for the SSHRC Creating Equitable Structures in Early Secondary School Mathematics project, demonstrating her engagement with cutting-edge research initiatives to promote equity within education.

Kelly's current leadership extends to her role as Co-President of the Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education (CCGSE), a significant position within Canada's national network of educational researchers, the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). In this capacity, Kelly demonstrates her advocacy for graduate student interests and her ability to foster collaboration and dialogue within the academic community.

In Kelly's vision, the OISE GSA is not only just a service-oriented organization for students, but also a powerful entity that amplifies the voices of those in need. She envisions the GSA as a bridge, fostering positive communication between students and faculty/staff to drive the development of the academic community. Kelly aims to facilitate constructive dialogue between students and professors/administrators, encouraging greater student involvement in various student service initiatives.

Beyond internal collaborations within OISE, Kelly plans to collaborate with student groups outside OISE to create more meaningful activities and enrich campus life for all students. She deeply understands the value of interdisciplinary academic collaboration and exchange for the richness of the academic environment. Therefore, she is resolute in promoting cross-disciplinary communication, providing opportunities for UT students to broaden their academic perspectives, and establishing more connections and collaborations across different fields.

With her diverse experiences and active engagement in both research and leadership roles, Kelly brings a wealth of knowledge and skills to the academic landscape at OISE. Her dedication to education, her collaborative spirit, and her equity commitment make her a valuable asset to the OISE GSA executive team. As a Ph.D. candidate, Kelly's insights and perspectives would undoubtedly enrich the association's initiatives, contributing to enhancing the graduate student experience and promoting a vibrant and inclusive academic community.





# OISE GSA GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES 2024

## CANDIDATES FOR VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC



**DAREEN FATIMAH**  
**LHAE**  
**PhD Full-time - Year 1**

As a second-year student in the MEd program in Educational Leadership and Policy (ELP) at OISE, with plans to commence a Ph.D. program (ELP) in September 2024, I am deeply interested in serving as an executive member of the OISE Graduate Student Association (GSA). With over a decade of experience in the non-profit sector and international education, coupled with my certification as a social worker, I bring a diverse skill set and a wealth of knowledge to the table. Throughout my career, I have been dedicated to advocating for the needs and interests of individuals and communities, and I am eager to apply this passion to support the academic pursuits of OISE GSA members.

Having personally experienced the challenges associated with funding and navigating academic pathways, I am committed to ensuring that all students within our community have access to the resources and support they need to thrive. My lived experiences have instilled in me a deep sense of empathy and understanding, which I believe will be invaluable in effectively representing the voices and concerns of our student body.

In this role, I hope to leverage my background in advocacy and community engagement to foster a supportive and inclusive environment within the association. I am committed to facilitating opportunities for networking, professional development, and mentorship, as well as advocating for policies and initiatives that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within our academic community. I am excited about the prospect of collaborating with fellow students and faculty members to create meaningful and impactful experiences for all members of the OISE GSA.



**MANDY NELSON**  
**LHAE**  
**MEd - Year 1**

My name is Mandy, and I am deeply motivated to pursue an executive position with the OISE GSA. I am passionate about fostering a sense of community and support within the graduate school environment. As a flex-time Masters student in the MEd SDSS program, I understand firsthand the challenges and isolation that many students face during their academic journey. I believe that by actively engaging with the GSA, I can contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all graduate students at OISE.

My diverse background in event planning, space booking, and administrative tasks, coupled with my current role at the University of Toronto's Office of the Dean of Students at University College, equips me with the necessary skills to effectively contribute to the GSA's initiatives. I have demonstrated my commitment to student development through my involvement in various committees and events, including the Muriel Fung Student Appreciation Award Committee and the Graduate Student Research Conference.

My recent presentation on event planning at University College's UConnect Conference, and my upcoming presentation on creating meaningfully researched student programming at CACUSS 2024 highlight my dedication to knowledge sharing and capacity building within the student community. I am committed to leveraging my experiences and expertise to support the professional and personal growth of my fellow students.

Furthermore, my active participation in OISE events, such as the OISE Care Collective gatherings, the OISE GSA Winter Soiree, and events hosted by LHAE, demonstrates my genuine interest in engaging with the OISE community and contributing to its vibrancy.

As a candidate for VP Academic with the OISE GSA, I aim to bring my passion for student development, my organizational skills, and my collaborative spirit to the association. I hope to facilitate meaningful connections among students, organize impactful events and initiatives, and advocate for the diverse needs of our student body. Together with the GSA team, I am confident that we can create a supportive and inclusive environment that enhances the overall graduate school experience at OISE.



**PAUL DOUGLAS II**  
**APHD**  
**MEd - Year 1**

Dear members of the Graduate Student Association,

I am writing to express my candidacy for a position within the Graduate Student Association. As a dedicated and enthusiastic graduate student, I am committed to serving the needs and interests of our student community.

Throughout my academic journey, I have been actively involved in various extracurricular activities and organizations. These experiences have equipped me with strong leadership skills, effective communication abilities, and the ability to work collaboratively with diverse groups of individuals. I believe these qualities make me well-suited for a position within the Graduate Student Association.

If elected, I will prioritize the following areas:

1. **Advocacy:** I will be a strong advocate for the rights and concerns of graduate students. I will work diligently to ensure that our voices are heard and that our needs are adequately addressed by the administration.
2. **Professional Development:** I will strive to provide opportunities for professional development and career advancement for all graduate students. This includes organizing workshops, seminars, and networking events to enhance our skills and expand our professional networks.
3. **Social and Cultural Events:** I understand the importance of fostering a sense of community among graduate students. I will organize social and cultural events that promote interaction, collaboration, and camaraderie among our diverse student body.
4. **Mental Health and Well-being:** Graduate school can be a stressful and demanding time. I will work towards implementing initiatives that support the mental health and well-being of our students. This may include organizing workshops, providing resources, and promoting a healthy work-life balance.

I am confident that my passion, dedication, and experience make me a strong candidate for a position within the Graduate Student Association. I am committed to serving the interests of our student community and ensuring that our voices are heard.

Thank you for considering my candidacy. I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the growth and success of our Graduate Student Association.

Sincerely, Paul Douglas II





## OISE GSA GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES 2024

### CANDIDATES FOR VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC (CONT...)



**SARA PAGLIARO**  
**SJE**  
**MA - Year 2**

I am interested in the Vice President Academic position with the OISE GSA. Most times, I find myself in awe of OISE students and their dedication to advancing knowledge in the field of education and developing professionally as budding scholars. In light of this, I am deeply motivated by the opportunity to contribute to the academic excellence and professional growth of our student body should I be elected for this executive position.

My interest in this position is rooted in a desire to advocate for the academic needs and interests of our diverse student population, especially those students in research-stream programs. Achieving academic excellence while balancing research-based responsibilities comes with its challenges, and I hope that I can support our graduate students who may be facing similar challenges. I am committed to ensuring that all students have access to resources, support, and opportunities that facilitate their intellectual development and scholarly activity. As Vice President Academic, I aspire to collaborate with faculty, administrators, and fellow students to implement initiatives that promote academic success, research excellence, and professional growth. I aim to bridge the common gaps between program requirements, execution of students' scholarly projects, and mishaps with communication along the way, to ensure that students have a smooth and seamless experience.

One of my key strengths lies in my ability to facilitate meaningful dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. I believe in the importance of fostering a sense of community and inclusivity within our academic environment; therefore, I will maintain open communication channels and transparent decision-making processes for students to voice their concerns, ideas, and aspirations as it relates to academia.

I am driven by a passion for advancing academic excellence and supporting the scholarly pursuits of our graduate student community. With a collaborative approach, commitment to inclusivity, and focus on innovation, I aim to positively contribute to the OISE GSA and empower students to thrive academically and professionally during their time at OISE. I am here to offer my support, help, and guidance to students during my time in this position should I be elected. Thank you for your consideration!



**SAYEED NAQIBULLAH**  
**ORFAN**  
**LHAE**  
**PhD Full-time - Year 1**

I am interested in the VP Academic for various reasons. I will have the opportunity to work with GSA Team to advocate for graduate students' rights, particularly their direct involvement in the decision-making processes at OISE. I see GSA as a platform that will allow me to be a voice for graduate students within the OISE community and advocate for needs, interests, and concerns of various groups of students. Serving as the VP Academic will offer invaluable opportunities for my professional development as well. It will help me improve various skills including communication, teamwork, advocacy, which will help me in my future career. It will also allow me to connect with fellow students and faculty members with different backgrounds as well as other stakeholders at OISE. Developing these relationships are vital for my future career; they will open opportunities for collaboration and mentorship. One of my research interests is students' power in higher education institutions. This position will help me better understand students' roles in governing postsecondary institutions in the Canadian context. I will bring a unique worldview to the Association and the community. Living and studying in three different countries (i.e., Afghanistan, Canada, and the US) has offered me a wealth of experiences and different views. I have published dozens of articles in various academic journals. I have extensive knowledge of academic journals and their internal workings including peer-review processes. Moreover, I worked as a committee member of 2024 OISE Graduate Student Research Conference, which helped me realize the significance of such conferences for the OISE students, especially those in their early graduate studies. These skills will help me perform the VP Academic's responsibilities effectively and advocate for more graduate and conference funding for students at OISE.



**USHA SHARMA**  
**SJE**  
**Edd Full-time - Year 2**

I have been serving as a communications Coordinator at SJE DSA and Now would like to serve to OISE GSA. I will bring valuable student engagement and give priority to students' concern. I will coordinate all the departments of OISE and bring fruitful dialogue between students of all departments. Students' academic development is my priority and bring positive leadership.



# OISE GSA GENERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES 2024

## CANDIDATE FOR VICE PRESIDENT FINANCE



**WILLIS OPONDO**  
**SJE**  
**PhD Full-time - Year 3**

Re-elect Willis Opondo for the VP Finance position at OISE GSA!

As we reflect on the past year since the revival of OISE GSA, our focus has been on stabilizing the association and reinstating our cherished traditions. Collaborating with departmental student associations, program-based student associations, and our vibrant student community, we mobilized to reinstate UTGSU funding and MoU. While we've made significant progress, our journey is far from over. Now, as we look ahead, we are determined to continue our momentum and bring our vision to fruition. This year presents a crucial opportunity to build on our achievements and realize our goals. With your support, I am committed to ensuring that our financial resources are effectively managed and allocated to initiatives that benefit our diverse student body.

Together, let's make it happen. Let's work tirelessly to secure the resources we need and to foster an inclusive and thriving community at OISE. VOTE Willis Opondo.

## CANDIDATE FOR VICE PRESIDENT INTERNAL



**MATTHEW PLASKETT**  
**LHAE**  
**MEd - Year 1**

I currently work as the Associate VP Internal for the OISE GSA and I'm seeking election to the VP Internal position. I am interested in an executive position because I want to help advocate for students, support the growth of the GSA, and help develop a stronger student community at OISE. The OISE GSA has done a lot of important work this school year and I want to help continue this momentum and elevate the GSA and the work that the organization does for OISE students.

I've only been at OISE since September, but I hope to bring my three years of student government experience from my undergrad. I worked in several roles, including serving as the VP of Student Events for the students' council, where I managed a large team and created programming for over 3,000 students. I would also bring my experience as Associate VP Internal this past year, where I learned many of the inner workings of the OISE GSA and some of the work that the organization does.

I have also worked with the AECD Students on Seven team this year, where I have heard concerns and ideas that students in the AECD program, LHAE department, and greater OISE community have for how to improve the student community at OISE. I believe, if elected, I would bring a unique and informed perspective to the executive team, as well as lots of great ideas for the student community.

## OISE GSA GENERAL ELECTION

### CAMPAIGN DAYS

APRIL 15 - APRIL 30

### VOTING PERIOD

APRIL 21 - APRIL 30

### VIRTUAL BALLOTS

Voting will be held  
virtually using the  
'Simply Vote' platform.

If you have any  
questions, please email  
the Elections Committee  
at  
[elections.oisegsa@gmail.com](mailto:elections.oisegsa@gmail.com)