



Biology Graduate Caucus Meeting Minutes

Friday October 20th, 2006, 3:30 pm

In attendance: Keith Tierney, Suzanne Gray, Erica Jeffery, Jeff Joy, Jason Catterson, Sarah Jamieson, Heather Major, Scott Pavey, Dawn Cooper, Mathias Schuetz, Raul Ursic, Bradley Davis, Marc Travers, Adam Foster, Theingi Aung, Christiana Cheng, Agnes Kwok, Brad Kennedy, Gholamreza Babajani, Clea Moray, Nicole Tunbridge, Simon Goring, Lina Perez, Brendan Connors, Danny Duan.

1. Welcome

- Keith Tierney welcomes all, especially our guest Dr. Larry Dill from the Departmental Graduate Studies Committee (DGSC).

2. Claim our meeting expenses.

Motioned by Brendan Connors, seconded by Suzanne Gray.	Carried
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3. Talk with DGSC Chair, Dr. Larry Dill.

- Dr. Dill is here to talk to us about any major issues that we have as grad students. The DGSC is composed of our two grad reps (Suzanne Gray and Jeff Joy), and 5 faculty members (the departmental chair Dr. Williams, and 4 elected members; Dr. Gries, Dr. Lowenberger, Dr. Dill, and Dr. Silverman).
- The first issue that came up was funding. Current departmental regulations state that students are not guaranteed full funding, but that they should expect an average of \$18 thousand per year, half of which should be provided by their supervisor. Before a student is accepted, their supervisor is required to sign a piece of paper that says that they will support their student with an average of \$9000 per year for satisfactory work, as well as research support. The remaining \$9000 can be made through TA'ships. The \$18 thousand student salary is an average. One year you might TA for two semesters, another you'll have an RA for two semesters etc. No student can be considered for admission unless this paper is signed. The exception is MET students. With people on NSERC, all of this kicks in after the funding ends. Satisfactory progress is determined by your committee meeting. Every year your annual report is reviewed, and Larry looks at the part of how you were funded and how you will be funded the following year. If it looks like you are TA'ing too much, he goes and talks to the supervisor. As far as research funding goes, once you are accepted, it is expected that your supervisor will provide you with what you need to do your research. If something happens, the department may step in and provide the funds so you can do your research and finish on time. If you run into any problems concerning this you should go talk to Larry or one of the DGSC reps.
- There are some concerns about decrease in the number of Graduate Fellowships (GF's), and the increasing gap with the numbers of those receiving awards such as NSERC's and Michael Smith's. The number of GF's comes from the Dean of Graduate Studies Office. They have a formula based on graduation rates and size of

the graduate program. Last year we got fewer GF's than we were originally promised. The DGSC has the same concern. They keep representing the issue to the dean, who keeps pushing the president, but nothing has happened thus far. However, questions regarding scholarships might be better answered by those on the scholarship committee or Dr. Ron Ydenberg

- With regards to the UBC PhD tuition waiver, the dean has presented a case to the senior administration, however we don't know when anything will happen. The argument for a waiver in PhD tuition is not strong, however it is clear that we need something to compete with UBC. It should be noted that the PhD at UBC is not really free, since the money is taken from both departmental and supervisor accounts. In the end, this limits the number of students that can be admitted into the program. Someone asked if there was anything that we could do to help push this decision. Larry said that the comparison made by caucus a few months ago (see April 28, 2006 meeting minutes) was well done, and shows that students are in more need of financial support. It is now part of a proposal that the office of the dean has to try obtain more money for grad students. He mentions that we should get involved as soon as the consideration for more grad funding is made public. The DGSC will make sure that we know when that is.
 - There were some questions pertaining to the fact that there are no more conference funds available. The money for those funds came from money from people who finish their degree before they use up all their NSERC scholarships. Now that doesn't happen and all the funds are gone. The office of the dean might be working on it, as they are aware of how important conference travel is for grad students. He is currently trying to get money to help support students who are usually in the field and can't TA. The regulations for the previous travel awards weren't that good and they are trying to set up a new one. However, nothing is going to happen in the near future, and the dean has suggested that we look for alternative sources. Someone suggested maybe approaching the alumni association and use conference travel as a way to recruit new students to SFU?
 - Dr. Dill mentions that if anyone has any questions or issues, to feel free to talk to him or one of our grad reps.
 - We thanked Dr. Dill for coming before he left.
4. Logo contest update / grad directory update.
- Theingi Aung announces that we got one entry this year by Mathias Schuetz, who is the winner of this year's logo contest. The logo, which appears to be a leaf, was positively received by those in attendance.
 - The last day to submit information to the directory before it gets sent to the publisher is Friday, October 27th. Both new and old students should send their contact information to Theingi at tsa@sfu.ca, and please not all on the last day.
5. Treasurer's report
- Theingi Aung reports that we have \$1500 in trust.
6. Social activities report
- Update from Nicole Tunbridge on the Halloween Social:
 - The meeting for planning the Halloween social will be this Monday (October 23rd) at 3:30pm. Please bring ideas.

- It was suggested that different party duties should be done in shifts. In particular the serving of the beverages. Caucus passed a motion to fund 4 people to get their Smart Serve Certificate.

Motion for caucus to fund Nicole Tunbridge to get the full license (valued at \$48) and for Daniel Duan to get normal license (valued at \$24) by Clea Moray, seconded by Jeff Joy.	Carried
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- Please e-mail Nicole (ndtunbri@sfu.ca) if you have a Smart Serve so that she can compile a list of those who have one for future events.
- We have found out that apparently its against university policy to advertise for beer on posters, so Nicole kindly asks that if you see a poster for the Halloween Social with the word “beer”, if you could scratch out the ee’s please.
- Simon Goring also plugged the upcoming performance of his band: Simon’s band got booked for a gig at Pat’s Pub (located at around Commercial and Main) after the social. The event will feature other Vancouver bands as well. Simon’s band is on first at around 10pm or so, with the event lasting until midnight...you may wish to see the band after the social.
- There will also be TWO BBQ’s going, so come prepared :) .
- Update/info on the Christmas party from Nicole:
- The department actually starts planning for the party in November. We are in charge of entertainment. We shall need volunteers.
- Dawn Cooper and Simon Goring have volunteered to attend these meetings with Nicole.

7. SFSS Forum SGM events

- Update from Clea Moray:
- Recap: Late July Hattie Aitken (the Graduate Issues and University Relations Coordinator) was fired under suspicious circumstances, with no board approval, and computers taken off campus. Since then, at least 26 student groups (this caucus included) have passed motions of no confidence. No one has received any response. Several grievances against the SFSS Board of Directors (BoD) have been filed by CUPE. There is no grad representation on the hiring committee struck for the person who will be given Ms. Aitken’s job. The money used to pay the lawyer used for the investigation has not been approved by the BoD. This money is currently been taken from the fees we pay to the SFSS. The BoD has gone over its lawyer budget, meaning that the budget will have to be reshuffled and the money taken from other programs. A petition was sent around demanding a Special General Meeting (SGM). The bylaws say you need 5%, and there was a total of 9.8%. BoD wouldn’t acknowledge the petition, claiming that according to the Society Laws, you need 10%, despite the BC government saying that you only need the 5% stated in the bylaws. An SGM was finally called by forum, during a supposedly illegal meeting that was canceled by a person who had no power to cancel it. The staff member that would normally be present to take minutes was threatened with disciplinary action if he attended the meeting. Titus Gregory, who chaired the meeting, was threatened with a lawsuit if he did not stop the SGM (something that he has no power over). The SGM is valid and is still happening.

- The majority of the Common Sense slate (of which 6 of the 7 directors up for impeachment are members of, as well as our faculty rep) appears have conspired to keep the grad reps from being on the hiring committee formed to find a new Graduate Issues and University Relations Coordinator. According to Andrea Sandau (SFSS University Relations Officer), they believe that the grad reps will side with CUPE, and choose someone who will assist grads become autonomous from the SFSS. Currently, grad student fees make up 12% of the SFSS budget. We are one of 3 universities in Canada who don't have a separate Graduate Student Society.
- The 7 directors up for impeachment (G-7) have started campaigning and giving speeches in undergrad classrooms. In their speech, they have violated the confidentiality agreement that prevented them from telling us the details of the firing all of this late summer. Their attacks appear to be misleading and they say things that imply that our health plan may be at risk.
- The scheduling of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the same time as the SGM appears to be a deliberate attempt to thwart the SGM.
- There was a rumor that the SFSS president Shawn Hunsdale flunked out at the end of the spring semester and is no longer a student of SFU. This was confirmed by the registrar in a letter to Andrea Sandau. Shawn Hunsdale is not eligible to be on SFU committees. Andrea wanted new representation, but the BoD won't recognize SFU's position, and may have a lawyer go after SFU.
- Other shady doings include staff being instructed to remove the BoD meeting minutes from the SFSS website, and threats from the BoD to CUPE and other staff of firings.
- The SGM needs at least 500 people to make quorum (1/6 of the graduate student body). We need more since BoD refuses to recognize the SGM, and we may have to go to court.
- The SGM will take about 2 hours, maybe a bit more since everyone has to be registered, so go no matter what to help maintain quorum. Since there is a time limit to get quorum, GIC recommends for all the labs to gather people up and go to the mall together. Consensus for as many biology grads to meet at 1:45pm. TSSU and GIC reimburse you for child day-care for the duration of the meeting. Forms are available online, and talk to Raul if you have any questions. Keith Tierney has sent a letter to Tony Williams asking for amnesty for any student that needs to go to the meeting. Also, you can ask your professor to give you leave to go to the meeting if you're TA'ing, and please encourage undergrads to go.
- For more details and information, see the pamphlet in the mailroom talking about the SGM, or contact Clea Moray (cmoray@sfu.ca).

8. Search committee positions

- No updates.

9. Travel awards

- Lina Perez's update:
- There will be a lottery next caucus meeting for the 11 available travel awards (valued at \$100 each).
- There will be a new system for tracking the people who get/use the awards.

Motion to claim the \$1100 for travel awards by Nicole Tunbridge, seconded by Clea Moray.	Carried
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10. News from other committees

i. GIC rep

- Updates from Raul Ursic:
- SGM meeting is happening. Go to it.
- The provincial government has money for grad students. We need to decide how to use this money. We will probably use it for scholarships or grant money for funding students.
- GIC has \$800 left for a party. We will be distributing it across campuses for something fun.
- The health care working group will probably have a survey launched this year to find out how we like the Gallivan plan, what we want to pay, etc. It will go online and announced soon. The Gallivan plan is up for re-negotiation this year. There currently is a cap on what grad students voted to pay for. This was decided in a referendum so it can't go above that for now (\$300 per year max).
- Any questions please e-mail Raul (rursicbe@sfu.ca).

ii. DGSC rep

- Suzanne Gray's tenure as one of the DGSC reps is up as of December 2006. We will hold an election for that position at the November Caucus meeting. Please watch for an email in the next week for the official advertisement for the position. People interested in the position should email Suzanne (smgray@sfu.ca) with a blurb about why they should be elected. A compiled list of nominees will be sent out before the next Caucus meeting. There are some stipulations about who can be nominated for this position: it should be a senior PhD student who can commit to two years on the DGSC and who will not be absent for long periods of time (e.g. lengthy field trips must be completed). The position requires meeting once monthly with the DGSC, liaising between the Caucus and the DGSC, reading and assessing applicant files, etc.
- Any issues, feel free to contact Suzanne Gray (smgray@sfu.ca) or Jeff Joy (jbjoy@sfu.ca).

iii. Scholarship committee

- NSERC ranking meeting: The ranking is done by a departmental committee, who meet and make consensus on within departmental rankings. Then Dr. Ron Ydenberg goes to the university meeting, where he is allowed to bring a certain number of applicants. Out of the 120 applicants brought to table, 70 applicants are sent from the university to Ottawa. NSERC's are awarded to 70% of applicants at the national level. Students will know at the beginning of December if their application has been sent by the university, and will find out if they were accepted by Ottawa at end of March. It is really important that your application gets out of the department and is sent by the university.
- Someone asked if the grad student scholarship committee members are in the room during the ranking of their applications, and the answer is no. The reps help with the ranking, but they do not sit in on the meeting where their application is being discussed.

- Any questions please e-mail Erica Jeffery (ejeffery@sfu.ca) or Brendan Connors (bconnors@sfu.ca).

iv. TSSU rep

- Report from Paul Mages (via e-mail):
- TSSU will be providing a childcare bursary for those TSSU members who attend the SGM this Wednesday. Please contact Paul (pmages@sfu.ca) for more details.
- Every semester TSSU donates around \$500 to different groups and organizations on and off campus. If anyone knows of any environmental or any other organization that we could donate to, please contact either Clea Moray or Paul with ideas.

v. Faculty mole

- No updates.

11. Other business:

- The Ecology and Evolution Retreat has been announced. Clea Moray mentions that you should encourage good undergrad students in your lab to go. They might be able to get funding for the conference from the Biology Student Union. For more information, please contact the Retreat Organizer, Dr. Isabelle Côté (imcote@sfu.ca).
- The caucus website now has a Google calendar to post interesting events on.
- Someone mentioned that we should ask Dave Carmean to put a link to the caucus site and the SFSS homepage on the top menu of the biology webpage.

12. Adjournment

- Meeting was adjourned at 5:23pm.