



Biology Graduate Caucus Meeting Minutes

Friday March 26th, 2006, 3:30 pm

In attendance: Keith Tierney, Lina Perez, Lucy Harrison, Sam Franks, Jason Catterson, Jeff Joy, Heather Major, Lindsay Farrell, Mike Silvergieter, Sarah Jamieson, Suzanne Tank, Alex Chubaty, Melanie Hart, Raul Ursic, Rachel Mayberry, Nicole Tunbridge, Geoff Bradley, Simon Goring, Sam Quinlan, Sudip Ghose, Yin Duan, Larry Dill (guest).

1. Welcome and introductions

- Keith Tierney welcomes all. Today we have Dr. Larry Dill with us to talk about the future of BISC 800.

2. Session with Larry Dill

- Suzanne Tank and Jeff Joy gave an introduction to what is happening with the course. Four options have been suggested by grad students for the course: 1. turning the course into a 0 credit course that would be similar to the 1 credit course, 2. continuing with the course as is, 3. putting forward a concentrated 3-credit course (see attached outline), and 4. discontinuing the course altogether and letting the advisor cover what would be taught in the course as part of their training. The proposed 3-credit course outline was created after the external review in response to the recommendations of the grad students who requested the course in the first place, and went up for a vote at the last faculty meeting. The course did not get a lot of support and did not get approved in time to be offered this fall, although it hasn't been rejected.
- According to Larry, the faculty meeting wasn't well attended, and the criticism was made by a few very vocal individuals. He was surprised at the outcome of the meeting, because when the course was originally proposed, it was met favourably. The biggest problem in the course was the lack of feedback, because the faculty teaching the course weren't prepared to mark essays and such. However, with the 3-credit course, faculty would get teaching credit, and Isabelle Côte was prepared to teach it. Some of the criticism comes from some faculty saying that they don't want their students to take a course that is not related to their research when they can teach them the skills that they need. The best thing for us to do right now is to keep pushing for this course.
- Other suggestions that came up during the meeting was maybe making the new course mandatory but not to award credit for it. This way the socializing aspect is kept, everyone starts out on the same page, and you still have to take courses that are related to your topic to graduate. However, someone mentioned that there weren't a lot of courses to choose from in the first place. The only thing we can do is to show how important this course is to the grad students, and to attend the short non-credit seminars that Isabelle Côte has been offering. It was suggested that a petition be circulated and that we ask our supervisors to go to the departmental meetings and show their support for BISC 800.
- Larry was asked if the course should be mandatory; he expressed that this may be the only way to get sufficient enrollment.
- Larry advised us that he'll be chair again starting Tuesday. He thanked us for inviting him and leaves.
- Discussion on our options for BISC 800

- Someone mentions how important these types of courses are. Some expressed that this course should be optional for those with Master's training. There is a lot of variation in the involvement of supervisors and this type of course is too important for all of the grad students not to be on the same slate. In other countries, universities that do not offer these types of courses for their grad students do not receive funding. Someone else mentions that these courses help you to think of the question that you want to do your research on, and you have to hand in your proposal and do a presentation at the end of the course. Someone suggested looking at what other universities do. Because the 3-credit course will not be approved in time for the fall semester, it was proposed that someone look into this so that we can present various options for when we do decide to push for this course. Lucy Harrison has volunteered to look into this.

Vote to reject the 0 credit course option and the getting rid of the course option, and continue discussing the 1 credit course and 3 credit course options. Motioned by Sarah Jamieson, seconded by Suzanne Tank. Passed unanimously (21 total)	Carried
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- Those in attendance agreed that the course should continue and be worth some type of credit, even if it's just a pass or fail. There seems to be some vocal and serious faculty opposition, therefore we should think of plan b, such as a student-run paper group. Someone mentioned that that was tried before, but it ended up dying. It was agreed that BISC 800 needs to be credited, have structure, and graded properly so that it is worth everybody's time. The best that we can do now is to push our supervisors to go to the departmental meetings and vote in favour of the proposed 3-credit course. Suzanne Tank and Jeff Joy will write up a petition and start circulating it. We have a year until the 3-credit course can be offered, due to time restrictions. It was suggested that we push for a revised 1 credit course this fall, so that incoming graduate students can still meet each other, and to push for the 3 credit course in the spring. We will keep all of this going throughout the summer to get some support, and will talk about this in the next meeting.

3. Claim our meeting expenses

Motion to claim \$9.51 for the cost of chips by Jay Catterson, seconded by Jeff Joy.	Carried
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4. Treasurer's report

- Fundraising since our October event has been successful and we now have \$476 in cash. It was suggested that we use this money to buy a new BBQ. Brian Ma has given us a used one that will last at least another year. Someone suggested buying another used one. Raul Ursic has volunteered to ask his landlady about buying her old BBQ when and if she gets a new one. We would like to have a bigger unit than we presently have.

5. Succession planning

- A lot of people are leaving this year and the following positions will be open:
 - Chair, Forum rep, Webmaster, Treasurer, Scholarship Committee rep (1), Social Coordinator.
- The following positions might become open later in the year:
 - At-Large rep, Secretary, GIC rep

- It was suggested that we have one master's student and one PhD student as the two scholarship reps.
- Elections will take place the next meeting at the end of May. An email will be sent out with more information. Those wishing to either vacate their position or are interested in running, please email Keith (ktierney@sfu.ca).

6. Summer events

- Plans are underway to hold a pig-roast mid to end of August as a warm-up party to back to school parties. It was suggested that we hold it in the green space at the greenhouse instead of Marine Park. Mel Hart will ask Leslie about it and Nicole Tunbridge will begin planning it.

Motion to reimburse Nicole Tunbridge \$25 for the liquor license for the BBQ by Raul Ursic, seconded by Mel Hart.	Carried
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7. News from other committees

a. Scholarship Committee

- Erica Jeffery sends an email:
- A couple of very important things about the GF applications:
 1. Please read the directions carefully and make sure that you are eligible. A master student in the 10th+ semester or a PhD student in their 16th+ semester can't hold a GF.
 2. It is to your advantage to be considered an incoming student since you have a higher chance of getting a GF.
 3. Make sure you use the correct format when writing your scholarly contributions and indicate with a * those that stem from your degree. This information is put into a different format to help in the rankings. Do not send full abstracts.
- Money for the GF's has increased to \$6250 due to the money given to the university by the province. It was proposed that there be an increase for the top 50 incoming GF's as well as for the major entrance awards. The provincial money may start coming in for this round of GF's.
- Erica will send an email later this month with all of this information.
- Someone mentioned that they were encouraged to put things on their GF application (such as awards) because the committee does look at that kind of thing, but the guidelines say not to include them. Mel has volunteered to talk to Erica about this.

b. TSSU

- Mel Hart has nothing new to report.

c. GIC

- Raul Ursic reports that last Wednesday a motion was passed that legally authorized the formation of the new graduate student society. \$17,000 was allocated to get the society running, and 5 people were voted in to act as acting directors until the first election.
- The SFSS was recently allocated \$30,000 to be used for travel awards and other programs like the caucus funds.
- The university lost around \$2 million last year, and is therefore increasing tuition and other services by 2%.
- The health-plan working group has hired a consultant to help deal with negotiations. The health-care contract expires at the end of this summer, but we should have a plan by then.

- The new grad society is planning on having its first general meeting on October 8th. Please attend as the constitution and bylaws will be set up and voted on. Emails will be sent out closer to the date.

d. Search committee

- Geoff Bradley thanks everyone who came out to the lunches and met with the candidates for the biological control position. The search committee unanimously recommended to table two motions to be voted on by the faculty, 1) that Dr. Jenny Cory be offered the position of biocontrol chair and 2) If Dr. Cory declines the offer that it be extended to Dr. Matt Thomas. Faculty replies will be gathered this week and negotiations will start shortly afterwards.

8. Other business

- Barb would like to explain that the advance at the beginning of the semester that you can get is obtained by increasing your hourly wage at the beginning and decreasing it later on. This is because NSERC regulations don't allow payment for work that hasn't been done yet. In order to keep hourly rates within reason, these advances should only be used for tuition and not other expenses, such as rent. Because payroll questions unusually large hourly rates, please be careful and use the advance for tuition only. Remember, we never used to have larger cheques up-front. This was only started to help grads who aren't TAs when they were no longer able to deduct their tuition from their pay over the course of the semester.
- The fridge is stinky and dirty.

Motion to pay Mel Hart \$20 to clean the fridge by Heather Major, seconded by Suzanne Tank.	Carried
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- Mel plans to donate the money to BeerGarden, which is a non-profit organization.

9. Next meeting and adjournment

- Next meeting is scheduled for the end of May.

Motion to adjourn by Jeff Joy, seconded by Alex Chubaty.	Carried
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Proposed Course Outline for BISC 800

BISC 800- Basic skills for a career in science

12 x 3 hr sessions

1. The scientific method and asking good questions
- 2-6. Scientific writing
 - Research proposals
 - Abstract
 - Grants/scholarship applications
 - Reviewing papers
 - For lay audiences
7. Presenting seminars
8. Preparing posters
9. The student-supervisor relationship
10. Scientific ethics
11. Time management/conflict resolution
12. CVs and job interviews

Assessment

- 20% Abstract for research paper
- 20% 10-min research seminar presentation
- 20% Research proposal (NSERC Discovery Grant style) draft
- 30% Research proposal (NSERC Discovery Grant style) final
- 10% Participation