



Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus

September 24th 2015 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

In attendance: Dan Greenberg (Chair), Heather Coatsworth (Assoc. Chair), Tanya Procyshyn (Webmaster), Jennifer Bigman (DSC Rep), Rachel Walls (Events committee), Marinde Out (Events Committee), Lauren Macfarland, Josh Pol (TSSU steward), Marlene Wagner (International student rep), Michael Hrabar (Faculty Mole & GSS rep), Jayme Lewthwaite (Treasurer), Luis Malpica Cruz (DSC rep), Leslie Saunders (DGSC rep), Pascale Gibeau (Secretary), Fauve Strachan (TSSU steward), Fiona Francis (Member at Large), Nicola Smith (DGSC rep), Vinicius Covicchioli Cezevedo, Tina Johnston, Alannah Biega, Sarah Thomsen, Matt Holl.

Absent: Paul MacDonald (Events committee), Joyce Leung (GSS rep), Adrienne Berchtold (TSSU steward), Leon Li (TSSU steward).

1. **Welcome** -- meeting called to order at 15:00 by Dan Greenberg.
 - a. Introductions & welcome
 - b. Additions to Agenda
 - i. Grad Hosted speaker announcement

Official announcement: Jeff Hutchings will be the Grad Hosted speaker, and coming on the week of March 9, 2016. He will be hosting a workshop on communicating science to society and decision makers, and the weekly seminar. There is a sub-committee formed to organize the venue, and more updates will be posted when needed.

- ii. BISC logo/T-shirt contest

Starting over last year's contest: asking for contributions to design a logo for the BISC t-shirts. Hoping to get the t-shirt ready for Winterfest (Christmas party). Submitted designs will be posted online and voted on by the department over the period of Nov. 2 to Nov. 13, and the top two ranked designs will be chosen as our new designs for production. **Please participate!** The winners will get a 50\$ MEC gift card and free t-shirt.

Contest is open until October 30th. Please send submissions to Joyce at jpl15@sfu.ca.

Another logo selection will be coming, run by the BISC Department for the official logo for official purposes and merchandise. Some of the revenues will be received by grad caucus who will manage sell. More details will become available soon.

If anyone is interested in helping with T-shirt production please contact Dan (dgreenbe@sfu.ca) or Joyce (jpl15@sfu.ca).

- iii. Welcome BBQ recap

A head count made at the welcome BBQ yielded a total of 56 people. 35 people continued the event at the pub. There was plenty of food, was on budget, and the event

was a success. The new location was good, allowed more space for people to move around and chat.

iv. Motion for ancient photo contest

There was a photo contest to replace the photos in the grad lounge that has been running for 2 years. The pictures were selected; grad caucus just needs to print them.

Motion to reimburse Marinde Out for up to 70\$ to pay for printing the two pictures (2) from core account.

Moved by: Dan Greenberg.

Seconded by: Leslie Saunders.

Decision: Motion carries with abstentions from Marinde Out and Dan Greenberg.

v. Discussion: improving BISC grad studies

There has been an on-going conversation about gathering feedback from BISC grad students about ways to improve BISC grad studies, so that grad caucus can forward the recommendations to the department. Examples include better access to information (e.g. TAs (how many base units per TAs, job description for TAs), scholarship application details (deadlines, announcements)).

The idea is to get all the suggestions from grad students and hand over as an anonymous caucus letter to the department. There is also the possibility of having a sit down with the chair, Elizabeth Elle, after we hand over the letter.

Grad students are invited to send an email to Dan Greenberg, Nicola Smith, Leslie Saunders, or Heather Coatsworth if there are more issues they want to raise.

Also, the former representatives of the DGSC created a survey 2 years ago, and have collated the results into a report that will be released soon to the students and department. Nicola Smith and Leslie Saunders summarized three big findings from report, and want to coordinate a release of the report with the caucus letter (see more details below). They will get feedback from the DGSC in October, and discussion with grad students about the findings and the department's reaction could occur in the grad caucus meeting in November.

c. Motion to approve minutes from last month's meeting.

Motion to approve the minutes from the August Biology Grad Caucus meeting.

Moved by: Dan Greenberg.

Seconded by: Heather Coatsworth.

Decision: Motion carries with abstention from Dan Greenberg and Tina Johnston.

2. Treasury update

Jayne Lewthwaite did a budget to show where the BISC grad caucus spends most of the money (based on last year). Most of the funds go to events, and some to

sponsorships. 1800\$ a year spent, 2200\$ received, so the books balance with a bit of a surplus.

Grads need to do better record-keeping so that treasurer can keep better track of what is spent, and help in planning future events.

Collectively the caucus agreed to make the following changes to internal policy to improve transparency now and for the future:

1. Any grad student making a claim should send a copy to the treasurer (acting treasurer for 2015-2016: Jayme Lewthwaite).
2. No claim should be signed by the appropriate authority (Chair, Assoc. Chair, or Treasurer) without a copy of the reimbursement first being given to the treasurer.

This makes it easier to plan events in the future and allows us to perform internal audits in the future to ensure funds are being spent and budgeted accurately.

The GSS still doesn't know the exact numbers of enrollment so the numbers updated below are still approximate.

Core account: no update from GSS

Trust account: should be at 1637.24\$ (but waiting on confirmation from GSS)

Note from Jayme Lewthwaite: the receipts submitted by Paul MacDonald for the fees at the pub during the welcome BBQ did not include the tip, therefore Paul MacDonald was reimbursed the amount of 32\$ from petty cash.

3. Committee updates

A. DGSC (Leslie Saunders, Nicola Smith)

The reports collating the results of the survey of grad students done 2 years ago by the DGSC reps come in two forms: 1) long version, 30 pages; 2) short version (5 pages) with the main concerns. The goal of the short version is to make it easier for the DGSC to react.

There were 3 main areas for improvements raised by grad students:

1) Funding: there was a recent raise to a minimum funding of 21,000\$/year per grad student, but grad students still feel it is an amount too small for living in Vancouver, especially given that tuition fees have to be deducted from it. There were also concerns about having more graduate fellowships (GF) so that students rely less on TAing, and have more time for their research (and therefore, graduate faster).

2) Improvements on course offering:

- more diversity of courses offered;
- better scheduling (more rotation);
- better offerings in the summer;

- high demand for courses relevant to skills directly needed for grad students, like more statistics courses, specifically statistics targeted to biology, and more practical offerings (e.g. learning R, GIS, and cell biology).

3) Creating more transparent mechanisms to address issues with supervisors, supervisors-students relationships/conflicts. Some students felt they were not getting enough support from supervisors (limited meeting time, limited feedback to emails), and that they were not given enough support to address the situation within department. It highlights the need for something less formal, at smaller scales (rather than going straight to ombudsman) so that the situation doesn't escalate too fast but students get support when needed.

Also, the DGSC wants to see examples of directed readings from grad students to help determine the Departmental expectations, and try to standardize the requirements so that they become more consistent within the Department, and the students and supervisors responsibilities are more understood. Leslie Saunders is asking students to contact her and give her examples of what they did for their directed studies (tasks, hours spent, number of meetings, hours of supervision etc.). She will send an email explaining what they are looking for, and are hoping to receive feedback before the DGSC October meeting.

B. DSC (Luis Malpica Cruz, Jennifer Bigman)

There are only 2 current applications for Vanier and the President Award contest is also closing soon.

The reps have nothing else to report.

C. GSS (Michael Hrabar, Joyce Leung)

Laurélène Faye stepped down because of scheduling conflicts, so there is one position opened. Elections to be held at next caucus meeting in November. If you are interested in nominating yourself, please email Heather (hcoastwo@sfu.ca) before the next caucus meeting (week of Oct.19 – 23). If there is no interest the position will remain unfilled.

The GSS passed a motion to hold a referendum on the UPass in the Fall 2015; voting will be on whether to support or not a two year extension of the current U-Pass contract, with nominal fee increases.

Another motion was passed to adopt an official non-partisan policy as a new governing document for the GSS. This policy is consistent with the current spirit of the GSS, but would more clearly outline its non partisan status, and aid GSS staff in making decisions regarding future, student hosted, partisan events.

D. TSSU(Adrienne Berchtold, Leon Li, Josh Pol, Fauve Strachan)

There was a vote by TSSU this week, and results show strong support to reject the proposal by SFU. Currently, there are no negotiations. TSSU is approaching the university administration to negotiate, but the university is not sitting down.

TAs are still supposed to withhold grades.

E. Faculty Mole(Michael Hrabar)

There is a new position announced for an associate professor position in Terrestrial Ecology.

4. Others

a) APEX programs

APEX professional programs are to get extra curriculum skills (CV writing, management etc.), and consist of 4 core sessions of 3h each. The coordinator can be contacted for more info. <http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/professional-development.html>

b) Halloween party

The Halloween party will be held on Thursday, October 29th at 3pm (and on). The party will feature pumpkin carving contest, drinks, costume theme and contest, and also maybe baking contest and group costume contest, face painting.

Details to be confirmed at October grad caucus meeting.

c) Brackendale Retreat

The Brackendale retreat is held in Squamish on November 13-15th, and regroupes grad students from all the BC universities. Help is needed to organize the party -- free beer for organizers!

5. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the September 24, 2015 meeting of the Biological Sciences Graduate Student Caucus at 15:58.

Moved by: Dan Greenberg.

Seconded by: Leslie Saunders.

Decision: Motion carries unanimously.