



Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus

March 24th, 2016 – 3:00 to 4:00 PM

In attendance: Jayme Lewthwaite (Treasurer), Amanda Kissel, Gibeau (Secretary), Smith (DGSC rep), Mike Hrabar (Faculty Mole & GSS rep),, Pauline Deschecht, Joyce Leung (GSS rep), Leon Li (TSSU steward), Kirsten Wilcox, Dan Greenberg (Chair).

Absent: Leslie Saunders (DGSC rep), Marinde Out (Events Committee), Luis Malpica Cruz (DSC rep), Paul MacDonald (Events committee), Heather Coatsworth (Assoc. Chair), Fiona Francis (Member at Large), Fauve Strachan (TSSU steward), Marlene Wagner (International student rep), Tanya Procyshyn (Webmaster), Adrienne Berchtold (TSSU steward), Jennifer Bigman (DSC Rep), Rachel Walls (Events committee).

1. **Welcome** called to order at 15:06
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Additions to Agenda
 - i. Visit from GSS – Student-supervisor relations

We receive the visit of Persia Sayyari, GSS advocate and Policy Advisor for graduate students, to talk about students-supervisors conflicts resolution. She has an office in Maggie Benston Center by the lounge room where she is present 4 days a week to consult with students. She encourages students to come talk to her in detail, in confidentiality about any problems they encounter, whether or not with supervisor. Of note:

- Policies exist to protect students: e.g. supervisor may discourage students from pursuing program ("reconsider if grad school is good for you"); mechanism is to go to supervisory committee and committee's decision can be appealed. Supervisor can't decide alone the fate of the student.

- Most often, supervisors are negligent but not bad enough to be blatantly wrong. Supervisors not involved enough, non responding, taking too long to respond, etc. Often conflicts are coming from expectations of everyone: students are expecting too much from their supervisors, and there is a power imbalance between supervisors and students. Expectations create problems, mismatch; she can help communicate better with supervisor

- Supervisors are not rewarded professionally to be good supervisors, by university.

- Cultural issues also arise: e.g. there are often differences in how conflicts are resolved, level of emotions expressed, use of silence.

- Health issues: policies exist to protect students dealing with physical and mental health issues, mortalities, etc. (e.g. possible to redo tests, etc.)

Solutions for conflicts with supervisor:

1. Assess how bad is the situation with the supervisor

2. Switch supervisors: policy makes it simple, politics make it hard (finding another supervisor is supervisors' or department responsibility unless student is the one wanting to change, in that case, it is the responsibility of the student).

3. Try to deal with the situation: meet with Persia and get help to manage situation. Persia can be a third-party in negotiations between students and supervisors; help with writing emails, calls, preparing complaints, written documentation, attend committee meeting to witness, talk to supervisor.

Other resources at SFU

- Mary-Ellen Kelm at Office of Grad Studies: can exercise soft power, can talk to Department Chair (works for university; might not be confidential).

- Office of ombudsperson (<http://www.sfu.ca/ombudsperson.html>): Jay Solman's role is making sure the university is operating fairly. Acting as a "judge", can make recommendation to the university and they will take them seriously. Conciliatory

- Human Rights Office (Brenda Taylor): deals with Human Rights complaints (harassment, discrimination, etc).

- DGSC is one possible stop for BISC grad students, but not a formal step (especially if people on DGSC are perceived to have a bias).

ii. Grad Hosted Speaker Reimbursements

General feedback: everything was good, guest speaker was great and generous, good attendance. Suggestions: be a little clearer about what activity was capped and which one wasn't. One difference with previous years was order of events-- dinner with speaker was Thursday night so he could stay at reception on Wednesday night and engage with students longer, rather than go away early in the evening.

We should try to find a way to encourage people to show up if they sign up -- annoying for organizers when people don't show up, hard to plan attendance, and forbids other people who wanted to attend to do so.

Event was on budget. Breakdown of costs:

- 495\$ at Ilia (with 290\$ from DGS, 100\$ from caucus, 100\$ from Department).
- Lunch: 290\$ on lunch and coffee, covered by Faculty of Science
- Gift: 55-60\$
- Dinner with speaker: 235\$ (Department and caucus covered)
- 60\$ per diem from caucus
- miscellaneous: 30\$ from caucus.

Motion to reimburse Jayme Lewthwaite for costs associated with dinner and reception, and miscellaneous for a total of 331\$ from core account.

Moved by: Dan Greenberg.

Seconded by: Amanda Kissel

Decision: Motion carries with abstentions from Dan Greenberg and Jayme Lewthwaite.

Motion to reimburse Nicola Smith for the purchase of the gift to speaker for up to 60\$ from the core account.
Moved by: Dan Greenberg.
Seconded by: Pascale Gibeau
Decision: Motion carries with abstentions from Dan Greenberg, Nicola Smith and Jayme Lewthwaite.

iii. 2016 Grad Symposium Funding

Note: Strive to get funding from GSS in February for next year.

Motion to spend up to 500\$ for running the grad symposium on April 7th, 2016.
Moved by: Dan Greenberg.
Seconded by: Leon Li.
Decision: Motion carries with abstentions from Dan Greenberg, Kirsten Wilcox and Jayme Lewthwaite.

iv. 2016-2017 Caucus elections announcement

Next caucus meeting (April) is the last one for the current executive. Elections will be held, and many positions are opened. Interested grad students should communicate with Dan to volunteer for positions.

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

Motion to approve the minutes from the February Biology Grad Caucus meeting.
Moved by: Dan Greenberg.
Seconded by: Jayme Lewthwaite.
Decision: Motion carries with abstentions from Dan Greenberg and Mike Hrabar.

2. Treasury update

Core account: 1055.62\$
Trust account: 1147.26\$

3. Committee updates

a) DGSC (Leslie Saunders, Nicola Smith)

Discussed reorganizing students' funding so that more funds come in early semester to help pay tuition fees. Students and supervisors should talk to organize the front loading of funds if so desired by the student, at least a month before new semester.

Still running: establishing a procedure specific to BISC for student-supervisor conflicts resolution.

b) DSC (Luis Malpica Cruz, Jennifer Bigman)

April 15th: deadline for Graduate Fellowship application
TRMAs to be heard about soon

c) GSS Michael Hrabar, Joyce Leung, Alannah Biega)

There is a 3-day Instructional Skills Workshop being offered at Burnaby campus that is recommended for anyone who is thinking about going into teaching. The initial deadline was March 18th but students can still apply. Participants who successfully complete the three-day program will receive a Certificate of Completion that may be applied as credit to the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program.

There is a Certificate Program in University Teaching and Learning for Graduate Students. This is a four-month, 120-hour, non-credit certificate for SFU graduate students who are aiming for employment in post-secondary institutions. It will be run in the fall semester and the course itself is free but there is a 100 dollar fee that goes to cover your co-curricular activities.

The GSS is currently under budget for caucus spending and caucus grants (only 20% used), so if we want to apply for some funding for an event (usually has to be educational or professional development related), we can. The department MAY have to contribute as well though to get the money.

Remember to vote! Polling ends today (March 24) for the GSS elections and changes to by-laws.

Also, this doesn't affect all of us directly but the GSS is considering funding a study-space at the Vancouver campus which would cost around 17 grand. They want to know if this is a good use of money.

d) TSSU (Adrienne Berchtold, Leon Li, Fauve Strachan)

Students should be having a hard copy of contract before start of semester.

TSSU are bargaining still the final offer of arbitration.

e) Faculty Mole (Michael Hrabar)

Discontinued courses: BISC 304 and plant ecology.

Evolutionary medicine position cancelled.

Discussion about budget cuts to Department, and how funds are allocated. E.g. investment into grad students per faculty not considered, but BISC has a lot of grad students.

4. Extra

i. Meeting with BISC Chair, Elizabeth Elle

A meeting was held with BISC grad chair, Elizabeth Elle, on March 17, 2016 to discuss the cuts to the BISC budget. Summary of the discussion:

Funding for department is all about undergraduate students' enrollment. More money comes to the department if there are more undergraduate students. Graduate students do not count. Department and university have no control on tuition fees, that are set by province. BISC Department has about 2x more grad students than "supposed to have", based on province's estimates (grad students should be about 10% of all undergrads numbers). Province gives a target of undergrads students for each program. Of the budget brought in to BISC department from SFU (and province), 97% is salary of staff and teachers (70-80% of budget used to be salaries about 20 years ago). Province has not increased contributions per students in 20 years. Salaries are determined between unions (staff, faculty, TSSU) and administration. 0% rise in last round for faculty.

So money coming from province to SFU does not change, and SFU allocates money to departments. Needs of BISC Department increase. So what is happening now is a combination of flat revenues while increasing costs.

University/Department can't get into deficits or carry-over funds from one year to the next.

Faculty allocation model: used to be that Faculty of Science got a weight of 2 for each undergrad, because of labs run in science (which are more costly than for other Faculties). Thus Faculty of Science was getting more money for undergrads than other Faculties. That allocation model recently changed, and now the University is not anymore giving a weight of 2 for science students; therefore the budget for Faculty of Science is cut in half, which trickles down to cuts in each departments, including BISC. Budget will not change yet this year, but in 2018-19, it will be different. Still unclear how exactly the consequences will be felt by students.

There have been 5 searches for new Faculty cancelled across Faculty of Science (including ours), which represents a big hit to SFU's reputation. Dean of Science is asking department to pay renovation and start up costs for a potential new hire (but department does not have money for that. Elizabeth Elle is asking for potential to share space with current faculty members, for short-term at least). Supporting new hire salary is not too hard because someone else within BISC is retiring in summer, so that a salary would be available.

Dean of Science is asking BISC department to cut costs, but we don't know by how much. Elizabeth Elle is reassuring grad students that there will be no cuts to positions, or to TAs but may need to change some things. E.g. reduce the amount of tutorials per class without cutting into graduate students funding (i.e. cutting external TAs). Depends on rooms availability and safety issues.

Breadth courses with labs might need to change -- try to have breadth courses without labs so makes it cheaper. However, no changes to grad courses.

Faculty of Science brings the most overhead across all of university; BISC gets 50% of the overhead that BISC brings to Faculty of Science. BISC spends overhead money to infrastructures to be used by all members, for the greater good of Department. However, that money is not to be used for operational budget, because that is something that the university and Dean of Science should cover.

SFU gets 430 millions from tuition fees through the Province, and 8 million from overhead (Biology level numbers are not available)

Graduate Fellowship (GF): based allocation for student support is source of GF; BISC got 10% cut from Dean of Grad Studies this year, because fewer eligible students (students here longer than threshold) and high completion times. BISC Department has among longest completion times across the whole university (on average, Masters: 10 semesters, PhD: 20 semesters).

All BISC grad students should feel free to go to Elizabeth Elle to ask and discuss needs/ideas/desires.

5. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the March 24, 2016 meeting of the Biological Sciences Graduate Student Caucus at 16:22.

Moved by: Dan Greenberg.

Seconded by: Kirsten Wilcox.

Decision: Motion carries unanimously.