



Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus

November 17th, 2016 – 15:30 to 16:30 PM

In attendance:

Kyle Bobiwash (Chair), Heather Coatsworth (Associate chair), Marinde Out (Secretary and TSSU Steward), Adrienne Berchtold (TSSU steward), Kevin Hegeman (DGSC rep), Dan Greenberg (Faculty Mole and temporary DGSC rep), Jennifer Bigman (DSC rep), Pauline Deschodt (DSC rep), Kolitha Halangoda (Events Committee), Vanessa Guerra (Webmaster).

Absent:

Jayme Lewthwaite (Treasurer), Leon Li (GSS rep), Richard Johnston (TSSU Steward), Danielle Hoefele (Events Committee), Leslie Saunders (DGSC rep), Alannah Biega (GSS rep), Mike Hrabar (GSS rep), Nicholas Salcedo Porras (TSSU Steward), Tanya Procyshyn (TSSU Steward), Joyce Leung (Events Committee) Pascale Gibeau (Member at Large), Eveling Taverna Fernandez (International Student rep).

1. Welcome -- Meeting called to order at 15:31 by Heather Coatsworth

a. Attendance

b. Additions to Agenda

i. Halloween Party Recap

Approximately 30-40 people attended the Halloween Party on the 27th of October. The location (Chemistry atrium) was not perfect because the light could not be turned off, so it was too bright for a good party atmosphere. The keg and the ciders were received well. The budget was \$450 and \$200 was spent on alcohol. \$172 was made by selling alcohol. \$77 over budget. Some leftover alcohol was stored in the graduate lounge fridge, but this has miraculously disappeared...Do not store alcohol in the graduate lounge fridge!

ii. Winterfest Planning

Winterfest is going to take place on December 9th (Friday). Nobody has replied to the call for volunteers so far. Graduate students are expected to organize the entertainment, and the Winterfest organizers need to know what kind of AV equipment needs to be booked. This year, tickets are \$10, drinks will be \$6. There was discussion about whether the caucus would provide money to make beer cheaper. No decision was made yet.

Edit (on November 25th 2016: Winterfest entertainment has been organized: Karaoke!

iii. Usage of website calendar discussion

The webmaster asked for opinions about the use of the BISC caucus online calendar. Currently it is a Gmail calendar linked to the departmental calendar showing events like seminars and payday coffee. What else needs to be included? The caucus members advised that webmaster should only invest in the calendar if it will not take up too much time, because not many people use the calendar.

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

Motion to approve the minutes from the October Biology Graduate Caucus meeting.
Moved by: Heather Coatsworth
Seconded by: Adrienne Berchtold
Decision: Motion carries on unanimously.

d. Motion to bypass December meeting due to holiday scheduling

Motion to bypass the December caucus meeting due to holiday scheduling.
Moved by: Heather Coatsworth
Seconded by: Kevin Hegeman
Decision: Motion carries on unanimously.

2. Treasury update (Jayme Lewthwaite absent, update by Heather Coatsworth)

Core account: \$1148.74
Trust account: 1084.71

3. Committee updates

A. DGSC – Dan Greenberg and Kevin Hegeman

Update about student-supervisor relationship conflict solutions:

Potential improvements related to student-supervisor relationships were discussed again (see last month's minutes for more info). One suggestion was to attach the list of guidelines to the acceptance letter of new graduate students. It will not merely be an item to check off, but a list of questions the student has to go through with his/her supervisor. For example, making an agreement about how many times per month you are going to meet. Another suggestion was to add an action point to the Annual Progress Report to remind both student and supervisor to go over this list every year.

A caucus member requested to see the list of questions and The DGSC reps will bring a list next caucus meeting.

The DGSC is welcoming input on these supervisor-student relationships from the BISC graduate students, so please send comments to Kevin or Dan.

Other updates

- The DGSC is modifying the extension policy. They are cutting down on the number of semesters Ph. D. and M. Sc. students can extend their degree program. Master students can first extend up to three semesters. If more extension is needed, 1-3 semesters (up to maximum 6) is allowed. For Ph. D. students the maximum degree time is up to 8 years (24 semesters). After applying for extension, the student has to submit a progress report three semesters after the extension, to see if progress has been made.
- Caucus members want to know if these changes in policy are only for new students or if they are retroactive?
- The DGSC reps brought up the lack of statistics courses to the DGSC. To make a stand, we first need to create evidence that this lack is a real issue. A survey is going to be sent out to ask people's opinion about STATS 650 and if it provides students with sufficient statistical knowledge to complete their thesis projects. The survey results will help us to make the point that we really need more statistics courses (focusing on analyzing messy observational field data, but also genetic analyses).
- The caucus members (again) agreed that there is a lack of opportunities to learn advanced techniques like programming. There currently is a course about multivariate statistics more geared to non-statistics students (600 level, combining undergraduates and graduate students).
- In the short term, workshops have to fill the statistics gap.

B. DSC – Pauline Deschodt and Jenny Bigman

An email was sent out by Tony Williams on the 24th of October with a clarified and simplified overview of available scholarships.

C. GSS – Alannah Biega, Leon Li, Mike Hrabar

No representatives present.

It is now possible to get money from the GSS for clubs. This might be of interest for Stats Beerz!

D. TSSU – Richard Johnston, Nicholas Salcedo Porras, Tanya Procyshyn, Adrienne Berchtold, Marinde Out

- TSSU reached a settlement about the obligatory international student insurance called Guard.me. Because international students cannot get MSP during the first three months in Canada (enrollment period), SFU forces them to enroll in Guard.me, which is way more expensive than MSP. So now SFU is going to pay back 'an amount equivalent to the monthly amount for MSP premiums to each

member enrolled to Guard.me for the period before they were enrolled in MSP, up to a maximum of 4 months'. Additionally, the process to opt out will become more streamlined. More info: <http://www.tssu.ca/2016/10/25/guard-me-settlement-reached/>

- TA applications: a caucus member mentioned that the current application system does not provide a confirmation whether attachments (e.g. CV) are included or not. This is problematic. It would help if the system somehow showed a confirmation that all attachments are uploaded successfully.

E. Faculty Mole – Dan Greenberg

- The terrestrial ecology faculty position is being re-offered. Applicant reviews and interviews for the position will occur over next semester.
- The department got approved to start two large renovation projects. The Dill Lab will be renovated, and a new Meeting Room will replace meeting room B8253. Room B8253 will become the office staff lounge. This will happen in the next fiscal year.
- An update on the last department external review (from 2013) is set to take place (December 5th 2016).
- Six base unit TA positions now exist as a result of the new collective agreement with TSSU. One of the rights of TAs is that they should get at least 5 base unit TA-ships (unless they forfeit that right by writing this in the comment box on the application form). The department solves this by merging two 3 base unit courses to 6 base unit courses.
- There is going to be a new upper division course in biological modelling that may interest graduate students – Models in Biology – Movement, Molecules and Model.
- BISC 829 no longer exists.
- BISC 891 is going to be the PhD candidacy exam.
- New adjunct professor: Dr. Allen Gottesfeld (works on Skeena River, nominated by Dr. Jon Moore).

4. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the November 17th 2016 meeting of the Biological Sciences Graduate Student Caucus at 16:23.

Moved by: Heather Coatsworth

Seconded by: Dan Greenberg

Decision: Motion carries on unanimously.