



Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus

Oct 22nd 2018 – 3.30-4.30pm

1. Welcome – Meeting commences at 3.36pm

a. Attendance – 14 members present

Steering committee

Chair	Pauline Deschodt	Present
Associate Chair/Workshop Committee	Elana Varner	Present
Treasurer/GSS rep	Kari Zurowski	Present
Secretary	Rylee Murray	Present
Member at large	Kristen Walters	Absent

Officers

Events Committee	Allison Dennert	Absent
Events Committee	Asim Renyard	Present
Events Committee	Kevin Colemanares	Present
Webmaster	Catherine Villeneuve	Absent

Representatives

TSSU Steward	Rachel Canham	Present
DGSC rep	Jayne Lewthwaite	Absent
DGSC rep/Events Committee	Melissa Orobko	Present
DSC rep	Yonathan Uriel	Absent
DSC rep	Serena Wong	Present
Faculty Meeting Rep	Jenny Bigman	Absent
Workshop committee	Rachel Canham	Present

Other members present: Elijah Reyes, Sarah Johnson, Robert Gochian, Nicola Smith, Colin Bailey

b. Additions to the Agenda

i. Graduate Student Halloween Party

1. Update from Allison

- Asim emailed her and we have \$100 from the Biology Department for non-alcoholic purchases (food or extras)
- Pumpkins are in the Gries Lab for pick-up

2. Rachel will create a Facebook event about the Halloween Party, and will also post on the caucus website
 - a. Party to be held in the bottom floor of the Highland Pub
 3. Update from Melissa
 - a. Because pumpkins were cheaper than expected (\$40), we have extra \$110 (from original \$150 budgeted) to spend on more food and beer
 - b. Already budgeted \$250 – so would increase food and drinks budget to \$360
 - c. Motion to use remaining \$110 from pumpkins towards food
 - i. Put forward by Melissa
 - ii. Colin seconds
 - iii. Kari abstains
 - iv. Motion passes unanimously
- ii. Workshops
1. Update from Rachel
 - a. Confirmed David Schiffman for Twitter/Social Media workshop – Monday Dec 10th, 3.5-4hrs (12.30pm start) with pizza lunch
 - i. Cost so far uncertain – David usually charges around \$1,500 per workshop , for BISC grad students he said he could do it for \$400-\$500 (negotiable)– the caucus is putting forward an application to the GSS for a learning grant, and will petition the department for some funding, caucus will also spend money for it if necessary.
 - ii. General Discussion
 1. The social media workshop has been decided following the feedback received after the TA workshop
 2. Concerns were raised that David’s social media workshop may not be the focus that the grad students want – usually focusses on how to start a Twitter/Facebook account, and then his personal experiences in how to get lots of followers and what he tweets. So it would be good to negotiate content & price with him because that much money may not be worth it.
 3. We could think about doing this through the Library because they will set it all up, you don’t have to find funding, but then its open to everyone in SFU – but can flood the

sign up with Biology students – the trade off is that the content might be too general to be useful to Biology students for certain topics.

- b. Mental health workshop
 - i. Being organized through the library and expanded on from last year's workshop because the 1-off was not satisfying for a pervasive issue.
 - ii. Jan 7th is a preliminary date (Monday) – afternoon 1pm with coffee/tea – no charge
 - 1. Classes start on the 3rd, so good idea to get it going before classes do and so far it doesn't have conflicts with classes
 - 2. Open to just Biol grad students
- c. 3rd workshop
 - i. Thinking of running a scholarships workshop (Hosted by Yonathan Uriel – DSC rep) before private awards open up
 - ii. Tony Williams might be able to talk at it, and someone from the GA3 system
 - iii. Preliminary date: Late Spring semester

2. General Discussion

- a. Workshop ideas, ex. "What to do post-graduation" workshop
 - i. Apex series at the Library – post-grad workshops
 - 1. Nicola not impressed –example of library workshops having the potential to be too generic, lots of pre-/post- workshop homework
 - 2. Let's focus on Biol specific post-grad workshop
- b. Good workshop ideas people have, feel free to bring them forward (email workshop committee), and we'll keep a list and give it to people who organize workshops next year
- c. Recurring workshops, ie. "How to TA" and "Mental health" as their pilot versions this year were a success. We will gauge the usefulness and effectiveness of each pilot workshop going forward in the same manner based on the feedback and motivation of the caucus.
- d. Need to continue to find volunteers for hosting our workshops/panel discussions
- e. We could create an online whiteboard linked to caucus website where people can constantly add new workshop ideas

3. Motion to use \$250 of Caucus core funding for December Social Media Workshop
 - a. Put forward by Elana
 - b. Allison seconds
 - c. Kari abstains
 - d. Rylee not in favour
 - e. Motion passes
- iii. BISC 800 survey
 1. Melissa – Last caucus meeting we discussed lack of consistency of offering the BISC 800 – Skills for the successful scientist (aka “How to be a grad student”) and brought these concerns to DGSC
 - a. DGSC wants to work with grad students to get consistency across offering times and content
 - i. Needs a clear idea of what students want for the course
 - ii. Melissa went through several syllabi and found some consistencies and inconsistencies
 1. Going to make a survey and ask for core list of topics
 2. Get input from new and old students
 - b. Next caucus meeting: Pauline to advertise via email list (agenda) that the caucus will be discussing BISC 800 at the meeting and will solicit students to attend or send in concerns.
 - i. The caucus will write up the student’s ideas for offering times and content and send to DGSC
 - ii. See below for summary of discussion to be had Nov 2018 caucus meeting
- iv. Spring Grad Hosted Speaker
 1. Update from Pauline
 - a. Closed the nominations for speakers on Friday Oct 19th
 - b. Will send email for voting with list of nominees and short descriptions of work and workshops they could offer
 - c. Nominees:
 - i. Dr. Pamela Ronal – Plant Geneticist at UC Davis
 - ii. Dr. Stephanie Carlson – Ecology and evolution at UC Berkeley
 - iii. Dr. Elana Bennett – Managing ecosystems at McGill
- v. Meeting with new Biology Department Chair
 1. Pauline – in the Spring will set up Q&A between caucus and new department chair – similar to last spring with E. Elle (former chair of the Biol Dept).
 2. General discussion

- a. Faculty votes for new chair in 2 weeks
 - b. Students want to vote for the new chair
 - i. We won't have time to influence the selection for the chair this time around, but we can voice our opinions about department and moving forward with chair selection
 - c. Next caucus meeting: Caucus discusses the two candidates and then draft a formal letter about what the caucus would like to see from the new chair
 - i. Will also put into the letter: moving forward, students would like to be represented on the decision committee
 - d. Pauline – in next BISC grads email: suggest students talk to their supervisors about the new chair decision
3. Meeting with current Department Chair
- a. Pauline – Met with Tony: reminder that students will be making \$22 thousand/year starting this fall (2018) – totals to ~\$7333/semester to be guaranteed to each student – that means supervisor top-ups.
- vi. Election of new GSS alternates
1. Motion to elect Sarah Jensen to the position of GSS alternate for the 2018-2019 academic year
 - a. Put forward by Pauline
 - b. Rachel seconds
 - c. Sarah, Kari abstain
 - d. Motion passes unanimously
 2. Next GSS meeting is Nov 13th in Burnaby 4-6pm- \$50 per meeting, but none of our reps are able to go (including Sarah). Allison nominates herself to be a GSS alternate so she can go.
 3. Motion to elect Allison Dennert to the position of GSS alternate for the 2018-2019 academic year
 - a. Put forward by Pauline
 - b. Serena seconds
 - c. Allison, Sarah, Kari abstain
 - d. Motion passes unanimously
- c. Motion to approve minutes from September's meeting
- i. Put forward by Pauline
 - ii. Melissa seconds
 - iii. Elana, Pauline abstain
 - iv. Motion passes unanimously
2. Treasury update
- a. Core \$1807.22
 - b. Trust \$1385.67
3. Committee updates

- a. DGSC
 - i. Melissa – DGSC wants to have all the chairs of the Faculty of Science departments go to the dean and ask for an increase to the graduate fellowships – will happen in January
 - b. DSC
 - i. Serena - TMRAs and GIRTA are currently being ranked
 - ii. NSERCs have just arrived and are not yet ranked
 - c. GSS
 - i. Kari – Presentation from mySSP – can give talks to make people aware of mental health workshops – available if we wanted extra resources for mental health workshops
 - d. TSSU
 - i. Asim – no meetings since the summer.
 - e. Faculty Representative
 - i. Jenny – emailed Pauline – no meeting to update, next meeting Oct 29th
4. Adjournment
- a. Put forward by Pauline
 - b. Nicola seconds
 - c. Motion passes unanimously

BISC800: Skills for the Successful Scientist is the required course for all Master's students in Biology. There have been concerns by grad students about a lack of consistency in which semester it runs in and the content of the course changing between different instructors. The DGSC is willing to help improve these things but needs to know what grad students want for the course. We are seeking input from ALL biology grad students on what you would prefer, or would have preferred (if you will not be taking BISC800 in the future), for the course offering (i.e. which semesters) and core contents.

The grad caucus will be **deciding on recommendations** on the following points to put forth to the DGSC at the November meeting (date TBD). Please attend the meeting to provide input, or email your input to melissa_robko@sfu.ca and jayme_lewthwaite@sfu.ca if you will be unable to attend.

1. Should the course be offered
 - a) always in the same semester? If so, which one?
 - i) every fall
 - ii) every spring
 - iii) doesn't matter
 - b) rotating: e.g. Spring 2019, Fall 2019, [year gap], Spring 2021, Fall 2021, [year gap], ...
 - c) other _____
2. If the course ends up running in a fall semester, when should it start? It usually runs for 6-7 weeks. Is your preference due to being away for field work or other commitments?
 - a) 2nd week of September (e.g. Sept 11 – Oct 16/23)
 - b) 4th week of September (e.g. Sept 25 – Oct 30/Nov 6)
 - c) 2nd week of October (e.g. Oct 9 – Nov 13/20)
 - d) 4th week of October (e.g. Oct 23 – Nov 27/Dec 4)
 - e) no preference
 - f) other _____
 - g) Due to field work/other commitments?
3. If the course ends up running in a spring semester, when should it start? It usually runs for 6-7 weeks, plus a week lost to reading break. Is your preference due to being away for field work or other commitments?
 - a) 2nd week of January (e.g. Jan 8 – Feb 19/26)
 - b) 4th week of January (e.g. Jan 22 – Mar 4/11)
 - c) 2nd week of February (e.g. Feb 12 – Mar 25/Apr 1)
 - d) no preference
 - e) other _____
 - f) Due to field work/other commitments?
4. Core course topics: Below is a list of topics from past versions of the course. Note that not all of them require the same amount of time in the course. Which topics are the MOST important to cover in this course? Should anything be removed or added to this list of core content?
 1. writing abstracts
 2. writing introductions
 3. writing results
 4. grant and scholarship applications
 5. time management & working styles
 6. giving good talks
 7. student-supervisor relationships
 8. imposter syndrome
 9. student presentations + feedback
 10. publishing papers and responding to reviewers
 11. preparing posters
 12. creating an online presence