

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus

May 22, 2020, 3:30pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome

a. Attendance

Steering Committee:

Chair: Yonathan Uriel

Treasurer: Brett Hodinka

Secretary: Gwyn Case

Webmaster: Nancy Yang

Member at Large: Asim Renyard

Officers:

Events Committee: Elijah Reyes, Asim Renyard

Diversity Committee: Steven Brownlee, Joanna Enns, Elena Varner

Workshop Committee: Hayley Reekie

Representatives:

DGSC: Hannah Watkins, Sarah Johnson

TSSU Rep: Steven Brownlee, Allison Dennert

DSC Rep: Rachel Munger, Sarah Gravel

GSS Rep: Allison Dennert, Mason King

Faculty Mole: Danielle Ogilvie

Members: Adam Blake

b. Additions to agenda

- i. Territorial acknowledgement: delivered by Elana Varner (see the end of the minutes for information on how covid-19 is affecting Native American communities and how you can help).
- ii. Motion to approve April meeting minutes
 1. Motioned by Yonathan Uriel
 2. Seconded by Brett Hodinka
 3. Motion passes unanimously

2. Representatives updates

a. Treasurer's update (Brett Hodinka)

- i. Core account: \$1096.41
- ii. Trust account: \$1509.74

b. DSC update (Rachel Munger)

- i. Graduate fellowships due May 25. Be sure to get a letter you're your supervisor and include your CV in your application.
- ii. Many donor awards are also available, all due June 3. Email Rachel (rachel_munger@sfu.ca) or Sarah Gravel (smgravel@sfu.ca) with any questions.

c. GSS (Allison Dennert)

- i. Dean of Graduate Studies Dr. Jeff Derksen attended the last GSS meeting and answered many member questions and concerns.
 1. A new federal policy is in the works to allow international students to go on compassionate leave and work without affecting their visa status
 2. Students, including international students, have access to many services including My SSP.
 3. Spring emergency bursary just closed, another bursary closes May 22.
 4. Additional funding has been secured for MITACS and 100 new research positions will be available over the summer.
 5. Tuition reductions and waiving late fees are unlikely, but the GSS is working to prevent tuition raises.
 6. Reminder that tuition discounts are available after 8 semesters for PhD programs or 6 semesters for MSc programs.
 7. The dean acknowledges that covid-19 may result in more time and money required to complete degrees. At this time you can apply to extend your degree completion time but there is currently discussion of adding one semester to all student's degree clock.
- ii. Health fee increases announced last month are less than expected and will only be an additional \$10 dollars, not \$20-25 as originally announced. With the GSS covering half, students will only see a \$5 increase. Additionally, the GSS is negotiating for additional benefits, especially for counseling.
- iii. An additional 35k in covid-19 relief funds have been made available to graduate students. This is largely in the form of grocery cards, transit gaps, and family subsidies.
- iv. A Translink bursary fund is being created to help students affected by the UPass cancellation. The UPass program has been suspended is not likely to be renewed anytime soon. In the meantime, SFU Students Services and the GSS are partnering to provide a bursary, available June 1, to assist in covering transportation costs. Applicants must prove financial hardship and may require a note from their supervisor stating their need to come to campus in order to gain access to bursary. Applicants can apply via link on GSS website on the covid-19 relief page (<https://sfugradsociety.ca/information-on-the-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>).

- v. Refunds for the April UPass and lowered summer tuition should be automatic. Check you GoSFU account to make sure the refunds went through correctly.
 - vi. GSS has requested a survey to understand how the pandemic is affecting the biology department. Check your inbox, it will be coming your way soon. Please fill it out, the information will help the GSS advocate on your behalf.
 - vii. The Director of External Relations is attempting a targeted tuition reduction for students who are stalled in their degree due to covid-19. To assist forward movement in this attempt, grad students should petition their DGCS for tuition reduction.
- d. DGSC (Sarah Johnson, Hannah Watkins)
- i. There has been discussion of “regularizing” the BISC 869 stats course currently taught by Leithen M’gonigle. The current plan is to keep it as a special topics course. However, regularizing it or making it mandatory may be reconsidered at a later date.
 - ii. Graduate students have expressed concern regarding graduate course cancellations, as most discussion has been focused on undergraduate courses. Help for graduate students affected by cancellations will be considered on an individual basis, as small numbers of students are impacted.
 - iii. DGSC rep will attend next month’s caucus meeting to discuss student concerns regarding completion and covid-19.
- e. TSSU rep (Steven Brownlee, Allison Dennert)
- i. First TSSU meeting of the semester is on May 28 from 2:30-4:30, several important things will be voted on, including the composition of contract committee.
 - ii. A retroactive pay increase has been negotiated for spring.
 - iii. TSSU is encouraging everyone to keep track of hours and stay within their contracted number of hours.
 - iv. Applications for TSSU childcare for summer 2020 closes May 20. More money available is currently available due to the previous child care referendum.
 - v. TSSU met with SFU human resources department in April regarding the RA bargaining process. HR attempted to redefine RA to exclude all graduate students, undergraduate students, and work study students in order to strictly limit who qualifies for benefits. HR also attempted to push back bargaining deadline to November or December. TSSU is pushing back on this. Stay tuned but the upshot is that RAs are currently still not SFU employees.

- vi. A survey has been developed for RAs and grant employees to help understand what language should be used in the contract. Survey closes June 1, completion enters you to win one of five \$50 cash prizes.
 - vii. Due to continuing confusion over who is an is not a RA, some people have not been included on the TSSU email list. If you haven't been getting TSSU emails, sign up via researchiswork.com
 - f. Faculty meeting (Danielle Ogilvie)
 - i. Supervisors cannot insist that graduate students come to campus as long as the UPass is unavailable. Talk to your PI if you are having difficulty finding funds to make it to SFU.
 - ii. When developing return to work plans for labwork, fieldwork, etc., supervisors should keep in mind that students are not covered by SFU.
- 3. Committee updates
 - a. Diversity & Inclusion Committee (Elana Varner)
 - i. No updates.
 - b. Workshop Committee (Hayley Reekie)
 - i. Scholarship workshop had 25-30 people in attendance, and others watched the video on the blog.
 - ii. Previously planned workshop on preparing an academic CV has been on hold due to pandemic, but will be attempted digitally soon.
 - c. Events committee (Elijah Reyes)
 - i. There will be a game night on May 28 at 6:00 pm. An email invitation has already been sent.
 - ii. Everyone should join the Slack channel!
- 4. Chairs update (Yonathan Uriel)
 - a. The Biology department made special dashboard on the website where students can log in and access covid 19-related information and resources.
 - b. Yonathan has been meeting with Michael Silverman to discuss options for funding for student transit. One option to go to supervisor and ask to be paid amount needed to cover transit. Other options are still being explored, stay tuned.
 - c. Dean of Graduate Studies opposes the cancellation of the UPass program and is pushing hard for it to be reinstated.
 - d. Yonathan (our current chair) will be leaving in the fall and a replacement chair is needed. There will be a call for election in July followed by an election in August. It would be awesome to have candidate by then!
- 5. Adjournment
 - a. Motion to adjourn: Yonathan Uriel
 - b. Seconded: Allison Dennert
 - c. Motion passes unanimously

Gwyn Case – Secretary



Information on covid-19 in Native American communities, provided by Elana Varner:

According to [Indian Health Services](#), there are over 4,000 cases of Covid-19 on the Navajo reservation, home to 250,000 people across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. That's about 2,300 cases per 100,000 people. For context, New York state now has 1,800 cases per 100,000. [Making Navajo nation #1 in the States for Covid cases.](#)

Even worse, Native Americans have a higher risk of serious complications from Covid-19. They are 3-times more likely to have diabetes than any other group and have the highest rates of asthma. Also, Native Americans do not generally live in nuclear families but inter-generational homes, 30 – 40% of which do not have running water. Which makes constant hand washing impossible and puts elders at particularly high risk.

Native communities are experiencing a disproportionate impact to the revenues that would be used to take on the health crisis. Native American tribal governments depend on income from casinos, resort tourism, and other enterprises to fund public services like health clinics and social services. And now, when they need it most, Native American tribes' funding base has been cut literally to zero.

In normal times, the Indian Health Service is [underfunded and understaffed](#). Under the \$2 trillion Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, tribal governments are set to receive \$8 billion to respond to the public health crisis. But this has been slow to be dispersed, with bureaucratic steps required of organizations already overwhelmed responding to this Covid crisis.

If you know anything about Native American history, you know that they are incredibly resilient people. They are coming together in amazing ways to tackle this crisis, from tribal governments, to NGOs and companies. Many are delivering safe drinking water and food to remote communities under stay-at-home orders. The IHS is [working miracles](#) with what they have. But they can certainly use our help if you have any way to give.

What can we do? How can we support those efforts? Donate to Support Native American Covid-19 Relief:

[Donate to Indian Health Service directly:](#)

- <https://www.brighamandwomens.org/indian-health-service/donate-to-our-indian-health-service-outreach-program>

Covid-19 emergency relief:

- http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pwna_home
- <https://caih.jhu.edu/programs/emergency-relief-and-supplies>
- <https://nativephilanthropy.org/coronavirus-resource-center/>