

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus
June 26, 2020, 2:30pm
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, Ranah Chavoshi

Workshop Committee: Hayley Reekie

Representatives:

DGSC: Hannah Watkins, Sarah Johnson

TSSU Rep: Steven Brownlee, Allison Dennert

DSC Rep: Rachel Munger

GSS Rep: Mason King

Faculty Mole: Danielle Ogilvie

Members: Adam Blake, Manon Picard

b. Additions to agenda

i. Territorial acknowledgement: none this month, Gwyn will deliver next month's acknowledgement.

ii. Motion to approve May meeting minutes

1. Motioned by Yonathan Uriel

2. Seconded by Brett Hodinka

3. Motion passes unanimously

2. Graduate student survey results

a. Allison (who couldn't be here) put together short power point summarizing results of survey on how graduate students are affected by the pandemic, presented by Hannah Watkins:

b. Finances & affordability

i. Students are suffering from financial hardship overall, and from Covid-19 in particular.

ii. Many are concerned about future financial impacts due to slowed research progress.

c. Transportation

- i. Many students use public transit and have already been affected by suspension of the UPass program, and more will be affected in the future as work on campus resumes. Few students say they feel comfortable using public transit.
 - ii. Many students would like to see departmental support for transit and parking costs for students.
 - d. Academic & research
 - i. Most students say their ability to make degree progress has been impacted to some extent (slight to severe).
 - ii. Students lack access to productive working environments. Many have appropriate equipment (ie webcams) but poor environments (ie poor ergonomics).
 - iii. Students are concerned about lack of degree progress and the increased cost the delays may cause.
 - e. Health & Safety
 - i. The number of students who say their mental health is “good” has dropped significantly since the beginning of the pandemic. Many attribute this decrease in their mental health to Covid-19.
 - ii. Many students do not feel like they’re getting the support they need from their advisory committee, and many also feel information regarding support for mental health is not clear or well distributed.
 - f. Resources
 - i. MySSP app offers 24/7 mental health support.
<https://www.sfu.ca/students/health/resources/my-ssp.html>
 - ii. Emergency funding is available at go.sfu.ca to apply for fall bursaries from Department of Grad Studies.
 - iii. TSSU childcare fund has increased, more money is available.
<https://www.tssu.ca/childcare/>
 - iv. GSS Covid-19 resource page (bursaries, transit support)
<https://sfugradsociety.ca/information-on-the-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>
 - v. Report undue pressure to return to work (here: <http://www.sfu.ca/science/return-to-work-concerns.html> and also contact caucus execs).
- 3. Dr. Jenny Corey, chair of DGSC, joined this meeting to discuss and answer questions regarding how the pandemic will affect graduate students in medium- to long-term.
 - a. DGSC is aware that finances and research will be affected not just short-term, but long term (a year or more). This is being brought up and considered repeatedly. Here are some things the DGSC is doing:
 - i. Annual reporting form may be updated to include a way to report and quantify how the pandemic has affected academic progress.

- ii. The period over which students can apply for GFs has already been extended for one semester, could potentially be extended further.
 - iii. The graduate studies page is updated regularly with resources and news.
 - b. Individual issues should be reported to Jenny Corey, Isabelle Côte, and/or grad reps. Students shouldn't suffer in silence.
 - c. Question & answer session:
 - i. Q: Will there be a push to reduce SFU enrollment going forward? A: No, not at this time.
 - ii. Q: International students have fewer options regarding leave and employment and will likely face increased costs as a result. Can funding be shifted (TMRA, GRTA) to create an emergency fund for international students? A: The DGSC is aware this is an issue but it is not easy to address. Shifting funding may be an option but is not going forward at this time.
 - iii. Q: How would a tick box on the progress report actually work?? A: It will provide a way to document and record impacts of the pandemic and attempt to quantify the size of the impact.
 - iv. Q: How to follow up with problems regarding safety, being pressured to work, etc? Students are reporting these problems in anonymous surveys, but it is challenging to actually fix the issue, especially while protecting the reporter. A: There will be a "SWAT team" roaming BISC to do spot checks on labs for Covid-safety. Regarding anonymity, it is still worth it to report to graduate reps off the record, so that issues can be addressed at a general level.
 - v. Q: SFU released "diversity meter" and results and they were not encouraging. What is the DGSC's response? A: The lack of diversity at SFU and BISC specifically is known issue, and progress is slow but ongoing. There is pressure to take this issue seriously.
 - vi. Q: How will extensions be handled going forward? A: Extension system already in place, citing the pandemic will probably guarantee the extensions will be granted. Documenting Covid-19 impacts on APR will help with this in the long term.
 - vii. Q: Will there be support for obtaining equipment for working from home? What about vehicle mileage for commuting to transit? A: equipment will generally be considered a PI-level issue. Mileage should be addressed at the PI level first. Creative options are available for distributing NSERC funds.
 - d. Additional questions & comments can be sent to Dr. Jenny Corey. There will be a special DGSC meeting soon to address these issues.
- 4. Representatives updates
 - a. Treasurer's update (Brett Hodinka)

- i. Core account: \$898.97
 - ii. Trust account: \$1659.74
- b. DGSC updates (Sarah Johnson, Hannah Watkins)
 - i. No updates
- c. DSC updates (Rachel Munger)
 - i. 41 students will be receiving GFs, up from last year. Each GF also has higher value than last year.
 - ii. 5 faculty awards are on their way to compete at higher level.
 - iii. 15 donor awards. No donor awards went unclaimed.
 - iv. Questions about scholarships should be sent to Rachel or Dr. John Moore
 - v. Diversity & Inclusion Committee has pitched taking funding from the caucus budget (especially unused events funding) and placing it in an endowment or trust for black, indigenous, and students of color, potentially matched by the department.
 - 1. This would require a permanent, elected position to administer the trust/endowment. Could be folded into treasurer position or could expand D&I committee to include elected position.
 - 2. Even if going this route is not logistically possible, attempting it will send a strong message to the department that financially supporting black, indigenous, and students of color is an important step to take.
 - 3. More investigation and research is needed.
- d. GSS (Hannah Watkins)
 - i. SFU is standing firm on late fees on student tuition, citing that 50% of student budget comes from tuition and so university is reluctant to lose this source of revenue.
 - ii. Contract for mySSP has been extended, would have ended in August.
 - iii. GSS is in full support of TSSUs petition to recognize RAs as employees.
 - iv. GSS council has issued a statement condemning the systemic racism against Black people in Canada and the US and expressing solidarity with global movements in defense of Black lives.
- e. TSSU rep (Steven Brownlee)
 - i. SFU has finally agreed to provide a list of 1500 people defined as RAs. TSSU plans to re-survey the people on that list.
 - ii. Delays in bargaining are continuing and TSSU is considering options to force SFU to the bargaining table.
 - iii. Remember to log hours worked, even when working remotely. A time use guideline should have been filled out by your supervisor in consultation with you. If you have concerns about your hours, contact Steven or Allison Dennert.

- iv. As SFU works to reopen, TAs and RAs have had limited input in developing back to work plans. TSSU is pushing to make sure TAs and RAs are involved in the process.
 - v. Next TSSU meeting will be July 21 4:30-6:30.
 - f. Faculty meeting (Danielle Ogilvie)
 - i. No updates.
- 5. Committee updates
 - a. Diversity & Inclusion Committee (Elana Varner)
 - i. Brainstorming scholarship (see above).
 - ii. Will publish a set of tweets on July 25th to help hype LGBTQ+ students in STEM. Submissions due by July 2.
 - iii. A petition to change SFU mascot and name is being considered.
 - b. Workshop Committee (Hayley Reekie)
 - i. Workshop on prepping CV delayed to September due to availability.
 - ii. Workshop suggestion: Creating a more inclusive workspace, with the sexual violence support & prevention office.
 - iii. Workshop suggestion: how to do better online presentations, meetings, etc.
 - c. Events committee (Elijah Reyes)
 - i. Last month's online game night was a success, another one tentatively planned for July.
- 6. Chairs update (Yonathan Uriel)
 - a. Yonathan is leaving :(He will be calling an interim election for next month's meeting. Anyone interested in being chair (or nominating a gullible friend) should email Yonathan (yonathan_uriel@sfu.ca).
 - b. Meeting with Michael Silverman and other faculty chairs on Friday, overall theme was EDI efforts at SFU. Discussion of concrete actions to increase diversity and inclusion:
 - i. All new incoming grad students and faculty will have mandatory workshops from sexual violent prevention office and their obligation as TAs to create welcoming environment. (This will not apply to current faculty.)
 - ii. Not much can be done about "repeat offenders." SFU has little power unless issue is brought to human rights department and goes to court, otherwise responsibility falls to department chairs.
- 7. Motion to adjourn June meeting (4:07)**
 - a. Motion to adjourn: Yonathan Uriel
 - b. Motion passes unanimously

Gwyn Case – Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gwyn Case". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.