

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus
October 30, 2020, 1:30pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome

a. Attendance

Steering Committee:

Associate Chair: Tess Forstner

Treasurer: Brett Hodinka

Secretary: Gwyn Case

Webmaster: Nancy Yang

Officers:

Events Committee: Elijah Reyes

Diversity Committee: Steven Brownlee, Joanna Enns, Elena Varner, Ranah Chavoshi, Em Lim, Steph Cooper

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, Jayme Lewthwaite, Liz Stevens

b. Additions to agenda

i. Territorial acknowledgement delivered by Steph Cooper.

ii. For more info on Mi'kmaq fishing rights and conflict, see

<https://act.leadnow.ca/mikmaq-fisheries/>

c. Motion to accept meeting agenda as presented.

i. Motioned by Allison Dennert

ii. Seconded by Sarah Johnson

iii. Motion passes unanimously

d. Motion to appoint Steven Brownlee as speaker for this caucus session

i. Motioned Brett Hodinka

ii. Seconded by Allison Dennert

iii. Motion passes unanimously

e. Motion to approve September 2020 meeting minutes as written

i. Motioned by Brett Hodinka

ii. Seconded by Joanna Enns

iii. Motion passes unanimously

2. Representatives updates

a. Treasurer's update (Brett Hodinka)

i. Core account: \$2,000.00

- ii. Trust account: \$2,558.71
- b. Guest presentation (Liz Steves)
 - i. Liz offered a presentation on improving resources for TAs in BISC based on her research into the BISC TA experience
 - ii. Proposed improvements include short document for TAs and (especially) website containing information on training, mental health resources, important dates, etc.
 - iii. Solicited feedback from the caucus on what resources would be most useful for TAs. Thoughts include:
 1. Ensure website is in a place where TAs will be able to find it readily, i.e. hosted by BISC.
 2. A method to store or “bank” material from previous tutorials. Note that curating will be important.
 3. Guidelines for ensuring consistency among multiple TAs working on the same course.
 4. Possible things to add to the website: (1) Base units (what they are and how they are calculated), (2) bank of shared TA materials, (3) logistics teaching evaluations, (4) things to take into account during the hiring process.
 5. Currently looking for graduate students to help with website. Website most likely to be a part of the SFU official website. Logistics to be worked out.
 6. Funding on doing website work? To be worked out.
 7. Contact esteve@sfu.ca for follow-up or questions.
- c. TSSU rep (Steven Brownlee)
 - i. Please check in with Steven or Allison for the following concerns/questions:
 1. Some RA’s in other departments who are not in the country have reported being pressured to ‘renegotiate’ their funding offer letters because funding levels were contingent on ‘Canadian standards of living’. Check in with your international lab-mates who might be in this situation to make sure this isn’t happening.
 2. Reminder that you are not obligated to work more than your contract stipulates, and if you do decide to go over those hours you are entitled to compensation for that work.
 3. TA positions for Spring 2021 have been sent out so check your emails! Check requirements - if anything does not look right, please follow up with Allison and Steven.
 4. October Special General Meeting: Contract Committee passed a contract proposal in a vote by the general membership. Notice is given to SFU that we will intend to begin bargaining.

5. Stay tuned for updates.

- d. DGSC updates (Sarah Johnson, Hannah Watkins)
 - i. APR has been updated to have a COVID checkbox. Summer 2020 APRs are missing COVID 19 box. Please follow up with Sarah if you have any questions/concerns about this.
 - ii. An extra 1000\$ stipend increase will take effect next September.
 - iii. Some faculty members have voiced concerns about the \$1000 increase; they cannot afford it and some are already paying beyond the minimal stipend level.
 - iv. Suggestion to join other caucuses to increase bargaining power so we can better negotiate for reduced tuition and stipend comparable to living wage.
 - v. Proposal to have discussion on additional stipend increase has been vetoed at faculty meeting.
 - vi. Students who are looking to get course credits for taking online classes at other institutions may do so, permitted the courses fulfill established requirements.
- e. DSC updates (Rachel Munger)
- f. NSERC Postgraduate Scholarships: Doctoral program Applications are under review; 45 applications will be split into 4 departments across SFU to be reviewed.
- g. Committee meeting in November to rank applications. Applications will be sent straight to the university level and DSC reps have not been given an opportunity to vote. Additional follow up is needed.
- h. Next – CGSM application open now. Workshop on November 4. Apps due by December 1st 2020.
- i. Faculty mole (Danielle Ogilvie)
 - i. Stipend increase – contract needs to be resolved by Spring. Faculty have expressed concerns that grants are hard to get; lab overhead costs are high, so it may be challenging to get the stipend increase.
 - ii. Alternatives to stipend increase: (1) accept less students into each lab so each student gets more funding, but there is the disadvantage of less students getting into desired lab if competition is high, (2) restructuring the department of Biology so that Ecology/Evolution/Cell& Molecular Labs are reorganized.
 - iii. Upcoming mandatory sexual violence workshop for people who do field work.
 - iv. Teaching matters is happening Monday – come join! Link here
 - v. For meeting with Mary-Catherine this Monday at 3:30
bit.ly/teachingmatterszoomroom
- j. GSS (Allison Dennert)

- i. Presentation of SFU's 5 year sustainability plan
 - 1. slides:
 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oBxLSxhZuJO1F5BEAt9VDPVvq5i8KcDU/view>
 - 2. 5 year plan:
 - https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/sustainability/About/Publications/SFU%20Sustainability%20Plan%202025_v1.0_date02282020_digital.pdf
 - ii. GSS Office Space Updates: As the new SUB is finished, the SFSS has moved to the new building. SFSS had a master lease on MBC, and we had a sublease/space arrangement with the SFSS for our offices. Since they have moved, the GSS had 30 day notice to negotiate with SFU on where the offices could remain. The GSS has negotiated a reasonable 3 year lease with SFU, which gives us some time to sort out new space. SFU is unfortunately charging commercial rent for all spaces on campus, but the directors have negotiated a tidy new agreement. The new rent is approx \$25k per year including cleaning, which is roughly similar as before minus some amenities.
 - k. Council voted to allocate 123 extra hours to Director of Academic Relations for her extra efforts during COVID.
 - l. Outstanding safety issues? The GSS has done a lot of work since the beginning of the pandemic to bring safety concerns to SFU admin. Current challenges: Worksafe concerns with fieldwork and ergonomic concerns working from home.
3. Committee updates
- a. Diversity & Inclusion Committee (Elana Varner)
 - i. Statement against transphobia:

We wish this would go without saying, but we are now at the point where we must address this head on. There was a transphobic youtube video anonymously posted to the Graduate Student Survey draft that we had made public to everyone for feedback and for edits. We deeply regret that we did not notice and remove it quickly, and want to acknowledge and apologize for any harm that resulted from students coming across this transphobic.

This committee, and I am confident in speaking for the caucus at large here, unequivocally state that we will NOT TOLERATE transphobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia. The events that have transpired are absolutely not acceptable and are not open for discussion. This caucus and D+I committee are committed to making our department a safe space for all of its members. The Department will be notified of these events and if

these actions continue, we will immediately take the matter to higher authorities and involve the University.

If anyone would like to talk about this approach or would like to know what the D+I committee is doing, we would like to re-state that we have an open door policy and are very open to talking with anyone about D+I issues, and providing education.

Furthermore, we are drafting an open letter to the faculty, calling for them to establish a Faculty level EDI committee and would greatly appreciate all of your support and signing this letter. In that letter we will call for the Faculty EDI committee to establish a department-wide code of conduct to make it even clearer that instances like these will not be tolerated.

We will no longer make our documents public but instead set up a google form where people can submit their emails to gain editing privileges that will not be anonymous.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfyJkj5P9MzUi9hwTt4DmM3sVq1vO9xYbMIVWwu-e_RVz-bYQ/viewform

1. Google docs will now need email permission to edit docs (link above).
 2. Hope to have landing page up middle of November for BIPOC scholarship. Option for people to make gift donations.
 3. Plans to establish departmental faculty-level EDI committee.
 4. Undergraduate & graduate survey draft still work in progress. People will have the opportunity to look at it & approve it later.
 5. Open letter to address concerns about seminar speaker.
- b. Workshop Committee (Nancy Yang)
 - i. CV Workshop a great success! Had a turnout of 15 people. Plan to have similar workshops in future
 - c. Events committee
 - i. Election of event committee officers underway. There is only one officer left on the committee. Election of Event Committee officers will be combined with the other elections.
4. Chair/Speaker update
 - a. **Be it resolve that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus announces the opening of the nomination period for elections to the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Events Committee and Caucus Chair, starting today and ending one week from now, whereupon the election period of one week will begin and voting will be ended at a Special General Meeting. Be it also resolved that**

the Caucus nominate the Associate Chair, Tess Forstner, as pro tempore Chair and administrator of these elections.

- i. 10 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions
- ii. Motion passes unanimously
- b. **BPK Trivia Night (Nancy Yang)**
 - i. **BPK is planning an online Trivia Night with other faculty of sciences. Details to come. Most likely two trivia nights in November and one in December. Plan to have e gift-card as prize. Please contact Nancy if interested.**
- c. **Be it resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus re-open the nomination period for grad-hosted speaker for a period of one week, with a new separate email reminder sent out to the graduate student body.**
 - i. 9 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions
 - ii. Motion passes
- d. **Be it further resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus discard the results from the previous poll and start a new poll commencing the next business day after the nomination period closes and lasting for 5 business days. The method of voting shall be ranked choice of any number of candidates.**
 - i. 11 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention

5. Motion to adjourn October meeting (3:57)

- a. 9 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions
- b. Motion passes

Gwyn Case – Secretary



Nancy Yang - Webmaster

