

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus
December 15, 2020, 1:00pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome

a. Attendance

Steering Committee:

Chair: Brett Hodinka

Associate chair: Tess Forstner

Acting treasurer: Brett Hodinka

Secretary: Gwyn Case

Webmaster: Nancy Yang

Officers:

Events Committee: Nancy Yang

Diversity Committee: Melissa Orobko, Ranah Chavoshi

Representatives:

DGSC: Hannah Watkins, Sarah Johnson

TSSU Rep: Steven Brownlee, Allison Dennert

GSS Rep: Allison Dennert, Mason King

Members: Pauline Deschott, Elijah Reyes, Cole Rankin, Hannah Roodenrijs,
Em Lim, Griffin Dare

b. Additions to agenda

i. Motion to approve November meeting minutes.

1. Motioned by Melissa Orobko

2. Motion passes (9 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions)

2. Guest Presentation (Liz Stevens)

a. Liz presented an update on the TA resources website project (introduced at the October caucus meeting).

i. A Canvas shell has been launched and will hopefully be ready by end of January. Canvas was selected as the platform due to its easy of editing and updating (relative to a SFU-hosted page on the departmental site).

ii. Liz always welcomes more feedback! At the February meeting Liz will be back to solicit more feedback on the project, so join us then! You can also always get in touch with Liz at esteves@sfu.ca and Vinny at vcavicch@sfu.ca.

b. Liz would like to see a new position created for keeping the website updated, potentially along with other duties such as organizing TA workshops and promoting teaching opportunities. This position may be paid, but the details of the position still need a lot of working out. Position would be filled by caucus.

i. Discussion ensues. Several members voiced their support of seeing the position be paid, to ensure continuity in website maintenance and as fair

compensation. Options for wrangling employment and payment were discussed.

- c. Forthcoming TA workshops. Most are still in planning stages, so stay tuned for official announcements!
 - i. Workshop for new TAs, focusing on developing tutorials and generally learning the ropes. Likely Jan 13, more precise date and time details to come. Hopefully this workshop will grow into a twice-yearly caucus-sponsored event.
 - ii. Two workshops on online teaching platforms, one focused on Zoom and one of BB Collaborate, will also be in early January.
 - iii. Workshop on marking, time management, and other issues that come up around the middle of the term is tentatively planned for late February.
- 3. Representatives updates
 - a. Acting treasurer's update (Brett Hodinka)
 - i. Core account: \$1860.00
 - ii. Trust account: \$2,558.71
 - b. DGSC updates (Hannah Watkins)
 - i. No meeting this month, so no updates.
 - c. DSC updates (Sarah Gravel)
 - i. CGS-M NSERC were due on 1 December. The DSC will rank them sometime around January 18.
 - d. GSS (Allison Dennert)
 - i. There are many changes in the GSS as incoming directors come in and outgoing directors go out following fall elections. If you're interested in learning the details, check out the GSS website.
 - ii. The GSS annual general meeting is on February 23 at 4:00pm. Please come!!
 - iii. Now that international students are being allowed to enter Canada, the GSS is looking for ways to support them in the required self-isolation period and generally supporting them as they try to get settled during a pandemic. SFU has already created the [CARES program](#), which will pay for hotels and food. **Please spread the word about this program.** The GSS also requested the caucus to brainstorm how extra caucus money might be used to support these incoming students. (Brainstorming ensues.)
 - iv. Discussion also ensues regarding international students who are unable to get TAships because they cannot get a SIN because they cannot enter the country. This problem first cropped up in August and various possibilities were haphazardly suggested or applied at that time, but no real solution was developed within BISC or within the wider university. TSSU and the department will be contacted/followed up with to see what the current status is.

- v. UPass updates. Three options were available to the GSS: Status quo (everyone pays, everyone gets UPass), dependent on class registration (people taking in-person classes pay and get UPass), or cancel altogether (you're on your own for bus fare, no one gets UPass). The GSS voted for option two, in-person class dependent. The justification for this is that only 40% of students even activated their UPass this semester, so not enough people appear to be using it to warrant keeping it. Under this scenario, there will be an in-person thesis section and a remote thesis section, and which you register for determines whether you qualify for the pass. This scenario has not been finalized yet and is still dependent on SFU and TransLink, and it would be effective for Spring semester only.
- e. TSSU rep (Steven Brownlee)
 - i. *Last* payday is December 18, even though last work day is December 24, so double-check your last paycheck to make sure it's appropriately front-loaded.
 - ii. *Next* payday in January 15. If this is a worryingly large gap between paychecks for you, there are government programs available.
 1. One option is employment insurance benefits. You will need your record of employment from SFU, which you can request from payroll@sfu.ca. You may qualify if you:
 - a. were employed in insurable employment (RAs paid scholarship/stipend are currently excluded from this, but all other work at SFU should count)
 - b. lost your job through no fault of your own (which includes having a temporary contract end)
 - c. have been without work and without pay for at least seven consecutive days
 - d. have worked at least 120 insurance hours, with some specifics on timelines (this number has been greatly reduced due to the pandemic so almost every worker qualifies)
 - e. are ready, willing and capable of working each day; and
 - f. are actively looking for work (you must keep a written record of employers you contact, including when you contacted them).
 2. Another option is the BC recovery benefit. Full eligibility info is here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/economic-recovery/recovery-benefit>. This provides payment of up to \$500 for individuals or \$1000 for families/single parents who have low-moderate income and:
 - a. are residing in BC on Dec 18, 2020;

- b. are at least 19 years old (or meet other specific criteria);
 - c. filed a 2019 Canadian income tax return;
 - d. have a valid Social Insurance Number, or individual /temporary tax number
 - f. Faculty mole (Danielle Oghlive)
 - i. Diversity
 - 1. Participation in the "Diversity Meter" for BISC was 44%, hope to raise participation up to 80% by Sprint 2021 with an EDI Strategy
 - 2. Discussed about an inclusion audit for professors
 - ii. Training
 - 1. Workshops for disclosure of sexual violence
 - 2. Short workshops required for anybody required to go in the field for the next calendar year
 - iii. Department
 - 1. 6 "mostly younger" profs getting together to discuss whether or not it makes sense to separate the department
 - 2. Has been mentioned before so there was not a lot of commentary on this
 - iv. SFU (General)
 - 1. University is running at a deficit
 - 2. Students on campus should do the COVID assessment, but students have no obligation to tell you if they have passed the assessment *BUT it is ASSUMED that you are "clear" and have passed the assessment on campus
 - 3. Working on a site that will streamline a process for this, which may (?) be the one currently in use.
4. Committee updates
- a. Diversity & Inclusion Committee (Melissa Orobko, Ranah Chavoshi)
 - i. BIPOC scholarship update. The scholarship was all set up to begin fundraising this month but received a cease and desist order from SFU. The committee has been in contact with SFU and will hopefully renew work in January, but for now fundraising is on hold.
 - ii. The committee is reaching out to the First Nations student association and the SFU Students of Caribbean and African ancestry to invite feedback on the scholarship to ensure it will be maximally effective.
 - iii. Last week there was a disturbing incident between campus security, the RCMP, and a black SFU alumnus which ended with the alumnus being tasered, pepper sprayed, and taken to the hospital. The committee strongly expresses its support of the statement issued by Giovanni HoSang (you can read it here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AcablEfMo_KPaXKpKLzd3vljcyQTE9OX/v)

[iew](#)) and suggests people add their signatures to an open letter written by staff and students at SFU:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ixOi7bSIWHSqIKiHpSjwVB-uj1HWI0J-LhaPbhkZM-Q/edit>

- iv. **Be it resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus condemns the unjust profiling and violent arrest of an SFU alumnus on December 11 2020 by SFU Campus Security and the Burnaby RCMP, and be it also resolved that the Caucus issues its support for the initiative of SFU President Joy Johnson in launching an external review of the incident.**

- 1. Motioned by Melissa Orobko
- 2. Seconded by Ranah Chavoshi
- 3. Motion passes with 13 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions

- v. There is a petition on change.org created by indigenous students at SFU, who have been largely excluded from SFU's reconciliation efforts. The petition is calling for increased consultations, greater transparency, and much more. You can view it (and maybe sign it) here:

<https://www.change.org/p/simon-fraser-university-let-us-speak-indigenous-students-deserve-to-have-a-voice-at-simon-fraser-university>

- b. Workshop Committee

- i. No updates.

- c. Events committee (Nancy Yang)

- i. The events committee has shrunk to Nancy alone, so if you're interested in volunteering get in touch!

5. Elections

- a. **Be it resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus ratify the nomination of the candidates listed below for Associate Chair and Treasurer (respectively) effective until April 30 2021, and be it also resolved that the Caucus acclimate them to their roles, as they ran unopposed.**

- 1. Griffin Dare, Associate Chair
- 2. Nancy Yang, Treasurer

- b. Motioned by Allison Dennert

- c. Seconded by Griffin Dare

- d. Motion passes 11 in favor, 0 opposed, 3 abstentions (Griffin Dare, Nancy Yang, Brett Hodinka)

6. Why we need more cat posters (Nancy Yang)

- a. Because people are bad at reading their emails, Nancy proposes the caucus purchase a paid Canva account to create visually appealing outreach materials to improve engagement with the student body and boost awareness and attendance of events.

- b. Be it resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus approve the spending of a one month (\$20 plus tax) subscription to Canva out of the core fund, subject to re-approval upon its expiry.**
 - i. Motioned by Steven Brownlee
 - ii. Seconded by Ranah Chavoshi
 - iii. Motion passes 9 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention (Nancy Yang)
- 7. Caucus webpage updates (Melissa Orobko)
 - a. Melissa proposes updating the caucus webpage to include wording regarding equity, diversity, and inclusivity; to remove wording regarding tasks no longer carried out by the caucus; and to update wording regarding chair position responsibilities.
 - b. Be it resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus approves the changes to the caucus website as presented here by Melissa Orobko.**
 - i. Moved by Melissa Orobko.
 - ii. Seconded by Elijah Reyes.
 - iii. Motion passes 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions
- 8. Motion to adjourn December meeting (3:00)**
 - a. Motion to adjourn: Griffin Dare
 - b. Motion seconded: Sarah Johnson
 - c. Motion passes in joyous unanimity

Gwyn Case – Secretary

