

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus
January 28, 2021, 12:30pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome

a. Attendance

Steering Committee:

Chair: Brett Hodinka

Associate Chair: Griffin Dare

Secretary: Gwyn Case

Officers:

Diversity Committee: Elana Varner, Melissa Orobko

Representatives:

TSSU Rep: Steven Brownlee, Allison Dennert

DSC Rep: Rachel Munger, Sarah Gravel

GSS Rep: Allison Dennert, Mason King

Members: Em Lim, Wade VanderWright, Sam, Elijah Reyes

Guests: Liz Steves

b. Additions to agenda

i. Territorial acknowledgement delivered by Brett Hodinka.

ii. Motion to approve December meeting minutes

1. Motioned by Brett Hodinka

2. Seconded by Em Lim

3. Motion passes unanimously

2. Representative's updates

a. Treasurer's update (Nancy Yang via Brett Hodinka)

i. Core account: \$1860.00

ii. Trust account: \$2321.27

3. Guest speaker

a. Liz Stevens has been working on a Canvas shell for TA resources. She joined us again this month for an update.

i. You can look at things so far here: <https://canvas.sfu.ca/courses/59565>

ii. After you've taken a look, Liz would love it if you would send her your feedback at esteves@sfu.ca

iii. The project has shifted from exclusively TA-focused resources to teaching resources in general, but Liz emphasizes that benefiting TAs is still a priority.

iv. A 1-credit TA-ship is in the works to create a sustaining position for site maintenance and, potentially, other tasks such as collecting new material for the and developing workshops. Stay tuned.

4. Representative's updates, continued

- a. DGSC updates (Sarah Johnson & Hannah Watkins via Steven Brownlee)
 - i. There was no meeting this month so there are few updates. However, Hannah has been looking into how to improve the zoom defense experience (such as link distribution and breakout room creation). Stay tuned!
- b. DSC updates (Rachel Munger, Sarah Gravel)
 - i. NSERC CGSM candidates have been ranked.
 - ii. The deadline for the President's PhD scholarship is February 15. Check the terms of reference on GA3 before you apply. Note that there has been some inconsistencies in the past regarding whether students can apply for this scholarship past their 12th semester; Rachel and Sarah are investigating.
- c. GSS (Allison Dennert)
 - i. SFU is considering the reintroduction of pass/fail grading. This has clear advantages for undergraduates but is more of a mixed bag for graduate students, so the GSS wants feedback from grad students. Should pass/fail grading be introduced, and, if so, should it be optional, and how should the option be communicated? If you have an opinion, pass it on to Allison.
 - ii. GSS financial statements were reviewed by an external accounting firm. If you'd like to hear more, come to the AGM on February 23 (see below).
 - iii. The Healthy Campus Initiative gave a presentation to the GSS, and if you'd like to learn more about them and what they do you can check them out here: <https://www.sfu.ca/healthycampuscommunity.html>
 - iv. The Annual General Meeting is Tuesday Feb 23 at 4:00. **THERE IS A PRIZE FOR THE CAUCUS WITH THE MOST MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE BE THERE OR BE SQUARE.**
 - v. The UPass drama continues!
 1. You have no doubt received many, many emails about this. To recap, if you are registered in a G100 section you are on-campus and will be charged for UPass. If you are in a G200 section you are off-campus and will not be charged. By this point it is too late to change sections yourself, but if you find yourself in the wrong section send an email to Laurie and she can fix it.
 2. The GSS is considering a proposal to bridge the gap for students who need transit but aren't on campus and so do not qualify for the UPass. The current Plan A is to create a web form where students can submit transit receipts at the end of the semester and receive a partial or full reimbursement for their transit costs.
 - vi. Previously, the caucus discussed how to support international graduate students who have started since the pandemic began and so find

themselves in unusual and complex permit/visa/work/benefit situations. Because only a small number of students fall in this category, Allison will get in touch with them directly to say hello and communicate how the GSS can help.

d. TSSU rep (Steven Brownlee)

- i. The deadline to apply to the TSSU childcare fund is January 31. All TSSU members have access regardless of current appointment status. The fund may have slightly less money available than usual, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't apply!
- ii. Make sure you apply to group MSP enrollment if you are a qualifying international student. If you are a TA, TM, Graduate Facilitator, or Sessional Instructor, SFU should be paying your International Health Fee. If you were previously enrolled but there has been a gap between appointments, you will need to re-enroll in the new year. Here's a little extra info:

You can verify that SFU is making these payments by logging into myinfo.sfu.ca and looking at your paystub. If you are enrolled, once per month you will see a line marked "Int'l Sdnt Health Fee" in the "Employer Paid Benefits," which is confirmation SFU is paying on your behalf. More information on your paystub can be found [here](#). If you submitted your group enrollment form and do not see this line on your paystub and are seeing overage balances in your ISHF, please email SFU Human Resources at tssu_bens@sfu.ca and cc us at tssu@tssu.ca. Once you confirm your enrollment, you can ignore the bills/balance owing. You may also contact [Health Insurance BC](#) to confirm your group enrollment status; however, in many cases their agents are not yet trained on the group enrollment process and may give incorrect advice. For months you confirm you are enrolled in the group plan, please do not pay bills sent directly to you as Revenue Services BC may not issue a refund.
- iii. TSSU members with an appointment and enrolled in classes may defer tuition by paying \$1 per paycheck. There is no deadline for enrollment in deferment but the deadline for tuition payment was January 25, after which late fees will begin to be applied, so move fast!
- iv. If you are eligible for BC Recovery Benefit (which you probably are) June 30 is the last date to apply. It's easy and it's free money. What's not to love?
- v. Update on RA bargaining: TSSU has engaged a mediator to try to leverage SFU to the bargaining table in the face of further delays.

- vi. The first TSSU General Membership meeting of the semester is today as of my writing, which means it will be too late by the time of your reading. Sorry.
 - e. Faculty mole (Danielle Ogilvie)
 - i. No major updates from a short meeting. Discussion covered the CARES program, professor stipends, and a memo from IT on cybersecurity.
- 5. Committee updates
 - a. Diversity & Inclusion Committee (Melissa Orobko)
 - i. BIPOC scholarship update – We are still waiting to hear an update from the SFU legal team regarding how to implement equity-focused scholarships. Hopefully that update should come in a month or two.
 - ii. New student engagement coordinator Thomas Leischner met with the committee to introduce himself. He primarily works with undergrads but is also happy to help graduate students, especially with EDI issues. He’s really friendly and available for a chat at sci_engagement@sfu.ca
 - iii. The previously-approved graduate and undergraduate survey stalled, but will be unstalled very soon.
 - iv. The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion hosts a lot of great webinars, which are free for SFU students. You can check them out here: <https://ccdi.ca/media/2509/20210107-events-webinar-calendar-and-descriptions-enfr.pdf>
 - b. Workshop Committee
 - i. No updates.
 - c. Events committee (Nancy Yang via Brett Hodinka)
 - i. No upcoming events, but volunteers would be very much appreciated! Send Nancy or Brett an email.
- 6. Chairs update (Brett Hodinka)
 - i. Back in December Brett passed along a questionnaire from the BISC 2030+ project, seeking input on what you think the department should look like in the future. If you missed the boat, you may still be able to sneak in a response if you send it promptly to Brett. If you have questions about the project, generally, you can also direct them toward Brett.
- 7. Motion to adjourn June meeting (1:22)**
 - a. Motion to adjourn: Brett Hodinka
 - b. Motion seconded: Allison Dennert
 - c. Motion passes unanimously

Gwyn Case – Secretary

