

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus

May 26, 2021, 3:00pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome

a. Attendance

Steering Committee:

Chair: Brett Hodinka

Acting chair: Allison Dennert

Treasurer: Emmanuel Hung

Secretary: Gwyn Case

Webmaster: Hannah Roodenrijs

Officers:

Events Committee: Brett Hodinka

Diversity Committee: Elana Varner, Melissa Orobko

Representatives:

DGSC: Steven Brownlee

TSSU Rep: Steven Brownlee, Allison Dennert

DSC Rep: Sarah Gravel

GSS Rep: Allison Dennert

Members: Em Lim

b. Additions to agenda

i. Territorial acknowledgement delivered by Gwyn

ii. Motion to approve April meeting minutes

1. Motioned by Melissa Orobko

2. Seconded by Em Lim

3. Motion passes unanimously

2. Representatives updates

a. Treasurer's update (Emmanuel Hung)

i. Core account: \$1,860.00

ii. Trust account: \$2,321.27

3. Chairs update

a. Brett, along with the chairs of the other grad caucuses, met with the Associate Dean of Science, Michael Silverman, to discuss grad students' concerns regarding the planned return to campus in the fall. Here's what went down.

b. Plans and timelines

i. The province is due to finalize guidelines, like university capacity, for higher education by the end of the month.

ii. SFU should finalize its own plans on May 28. There are currently two proposed plans. One is an 80% return to capacity and the other a 50%

return to capacity. Rumor has it that SFU is leaning toward option two, but there is no definitive decision yet.

- iii. There are still many unknowns regarding what a return to campus will actually look like. There's rumor SFU may employ grad students as hall monitors to enforce safety protocols among undergrads.
- iv. Science department guidelines will likely be more conservative than wider SFU guidelines. Lab safety protocols, such as spacing, capacity limits, and masks are unlikely to change.

c. Transit

- i. Translink buses have been outfitted with air purifiers and copper components in an attempt to reduce viral spread. TransLink seems amenable to increasing bus frequency to reduce crowding, but nothing is known for certain regarding whether bus capacity will be limited.
- ii. Ancillary services (like parking and gyms) will go back to normal. This means there will be no more free parking for grad students :(

d. International students

- i. Student visa applications submitted in May are being given priority by the government. This is in the hope of getting visas approved in time for students to come to Canada by fall.

e. Discussion ensues.

- i. Everyone is pretty astonished by the idea of hall monitors.
- ii. Because it is very, very unlikely vaccines will be mandated for students and faculty, a number of people on campus may remain unvaccinated. One suggestion is that people who won't/can't get vaccinated should be required to wear masks, even after masking requirements are generally lifted. Another suggestion is to get an accurate count of how many people on campus are vaccinated, so we can know when the community has achieved herd immunity.
- iii. Some international students may not be able to make it into the country by fall, or some students already in Canada may not want to come/return to Vancouver for a single in-person class. One suggestion is a blended delivery system for classes, especially since graduate classes can have more flexibility than undergrad classes.

4. Representatives updates, continued

a. DGSC updates (Steven Brownlee)

- i. No meeting, no updates. Steven intends to bring up the option of blended delivery (see above) when the next meeting takes place.

b. DSC updates (Sarah Gravel)

- i. Graduate Fellowships are currently being ranked. GF applications are due by June 4, so there's still a bit of time to get them in. If you've already applied, you should hear back by mid-June if you got one.

- ii. Donor awards are up and open for applications via GA3.
 - iii. A quick refresher on the thesis completion rewards, which have come up the last couple of meetings: the terms of reference for these awards are currently undergoing review and hopefully we will hear updates about that soon.
- c. GSS (Allison Dennert)
 - i. Fees freeze! Normally there is a regular increase in student activity fees due to inflation. However, this year the GSS has sufficient funds to absorb those fees and other increases, so you will not see any increase in your fees.
 - ii. Academic leave
 1. The Director of Academic Relations wants to hear from the caucuses about students' experience with academic leave, particularly with regards to the pandemic. The director would like to know if students have taken leave, or considered taking it, and what are the real or perceived benefits and issues associated with taking it.
 2. Discussion ensues. People generally feel that taking leave sounds like a wonderful idea, but there are many barriers to actually doing it. Because one does not get paid whilst on leave, it's very difficult to afford taking it. International students will lose their student visas if they go on leave. Bummer. There may be stigma surrounding taking leave, especially if it's taken for physical or mental health reasons. Finally, if one is taking leave for mental health reasons, dealing with the lengthy and difficult process of applying for leave is that last thing one has the capacity to deal with.
 3. If you would like to add something about your experience with taking (or not taking) academic leave, shoot an email to Allison (adennert@sfu.ca) and she can pass it along.
 - iii. The newly-elected Director of Internal Relations is graduating, so there will be a new round of elections in the fall.
 - iv. The GSS is contracting with the SFSS to provide services to grads from Out on Campus, the Women's Centre, the Legal Clinic, and other divisions of the SFSS.
- d. TSSU rep (Steven Brownlee)
 - i. Progress on bargaining has been slow and small, but is being made. SFU has repeatedly tried to walk back and soften the language used by TSSU in its proposed contract and still has yet to produce a full proposal of its own.

- ii. As negotiations continue, it's important to keep the pressure on SFU admin. If you haven't already, please sign the petition to demand SFU back-compensate international RA health fees here: <https://www.researchiswork.tssu.ca/rahealthcarenow/>. You can also contribute (anonymous) stories your experiences struggling with SFU's administration as an RA here: <https://www.researchiswork.tssu.ca/ra-stories/>.
 - iii. On behalf of BISC, the TSSU has added a section to the collective agreement that will create a working group between TSSU and SFU to create solutions for RAs experiencing bullying and harassment from non-SFU employees. This is especially relevant for those of us in the sciences, who frequently conduct fieldwork off-campus and partner with non-SFU organizations to do that work. To show your support and learn more, you can sign a letter to SFU expressing the importance of these measures: https://docs.google.com/document/d/14XqDMRNzYqglxDrOPi9crO6POnl1iMCYOpnv4AwT_us/edit?usp=sharing.
- e. Faculty mole ()
- i. No updates.

5. Committee updates

a. Diversity & Inclusion Committee (Melissa Orobko)

- i. The BIPOC scholarship saga continues, but has finally taken a turn for the better. The scholarship is moving forward in a big way and fundraising will launch next month (!). Mary-Catherine Kropinsky, the Associate Dean of EDI within Faculty of Science, went to bat for us and knocked the ball out of the park. *Thank you, MC, you're the best!*
- ii. The committee also discussed with MC other initiatives it is pursuing within the Faculty of Science, such as encouraging people to add pronouns to personal pages, creating resources for students conducting fieldwork on Indigenous lands, and more. MC offered words of support and encouragement for many of these.
- iii. MC is also very concerned about student-supervisor conflict and abuse. If you are experiencing a difficult relationship with your advisor, Mary-Catherine is available to offer support and assistance. Please do get in touch, she's an awesome person and a really great resource. You can reach out to her at sciadedi@sfu.ca.
- iv. The committee will be meeting with Isabelle next month to discuss its work so far and future directions.
- v. The committee is considering hosting a screening of the film "Picture a Scientist" to stimulate discussion around EDI issues within the department.

- vi. The grad student survey is launching soon (yes, for real this time)! Keep your eyes on your inbox and please fill it out when you see it.
 - vii. A reminder that the EDI committee would love to hear from you! If you have thoughts about EDI-related initiatives or issues the committee should be working on, please feel free to shoot them an email at bisc-diversity@sfu.ca.
- b. Workshop Committee ()
 - i. No updates.
 - c. Events committee (Brett Hodinka)
 - i. No updates.
6. Chairs update (Brett Hodinka)
 - i. No further updates.
- 7. Motion to adjourn June meeting (4:07)**
- a. Motion to adjourn: Allison Dennert
 - b. Motion seconded: Brett Hodinka
 - c. Motion passes unanimously

Gwyn Case – Secretary

