

Biological Sciences Graduate Caucus meeting

2021-09-10 @ 2:00pm

Virtual meeting via Zoom

1. Welcome

- Attendance (12 total)

Steering Committee:

Chair: Brett Hodinka

Associate Chair: ---

Treasurer: Emmanuel Hung

Secretary: --- (Melissa Orobko temporarily stepping in)

Webmaster: Hannah Roodenrijs

Member at Large: Melissa Orobko

Officers:

Events Committee: Brett Hodinka

Diversity Committee: Steven Brownlee, Ranah Chavoshi, Melissa Orobko

Workshop Committee: ---

Representatives:

DGSC: Steven Brownlee

TSSU Rep: Steven Brownlee, Melissa Orobko

DSC Rep: Sarah Gravel

GSS Rep: --- (Steven Brownlee temporarily stepped in)

Faculty Mole: ---

Members: Mason King, Hannah Jackson, Ramis Rafay

- **Motion to approve previous meeting minutes (June)**

- Motioned by: Brett Hodinka
- Seconded by: Steven Brownlee
- Motion passes unanimously

2. **Treasurer's Update** (Emmanuel Hung)

- core account: \$2150.00
- trust account: \$2181.27

3. **Representatives' Updates:**

4. **DGSC (Departmental Graduate Studies Committee)** (Steven Brownlee)

- *What is it?* → Any change to any of the grad programs in Biology goes through this committee, plus approving new grad student applications, and dealing with issues grad students have with their program (not meeting requirements). <http://biscqrads.blogspot.com/p/about.html> [bottom of page]
- Grad students struggling for grad course scheduling -- usually pick a time in the first week, but difficult if taking multiple grad courses to find times that work. For BISC 800 this semester, 3 students will never be able to attend 😞. Dept is asking our preferences.
- Students present haven't struggled too much this year with scheduling except BISC 800. How much of a problem is it? Unclear, hasn't seemed to be an issue in the past. Less of an issue for small grad courses.
- Idea: dept could show free times that don't conflict with the big TAing courses. Or could set the schedule definitively at first class, so the first class's times will be set first, then second class's times will work around that one, etc.
- Steven will ask around about how much of an issue it really is. Will bring to DGSC.
 - Send him your thoughts if you have any! sbrownle@sfu.ca

5. **DSC (Departmental Scholarship Committee)** (Sarah Gravel)

- *What is it?* → the committee that ranks scholarships/awards for grad students. We have two grad student reps on it who can vote.

- Ranked undergrad awards end of June.
- Info went out about GA3 system recently -- this is the system you need to use for any department scholarships & awards. Need to sign in and create a login there before applying, but only need to do this once.
- Email today from Mike Chen about awards deposits, ensure the money can get deposited.
- One DSC student rep position is unfilled currently -- need to elect someone else. Hold an election for that plus the secretary.

6. GSS (Graduate Student Society) (Steven Brownlee)

- What is it? → *Grad student governance, runs our healthcare program, distribute grad funding, provide advocacy if you are mis-treated/harassed/bullied.* www.sfugradsociety.ca/
- StudentCare concluded Request for Quotes to various insurance companies, the cheapest best will be Pacific Blue Cross, switched on Sept 1 2021 (previous was Desjardins). Administered still under StudentCare at www.ihaveaplan.ca, call 236-427-8210, or visit in Student Union Building 2301. Nothing really changes for us.
- Budget approved for next year. More funding for campaign & advocacy, committee stipends to \$50/meeting, office expenses (for health & safety equipment, conference call equipment). Goal for this year's budget is to account for return to campus plus people studying/ working at home. Want to minimize the surplus.
- Appointed an interim Director of Internal Relations, fill 4 month vacancy until election in December.

7. TSSU (Teaching Support Staff Union) (Steven Brownlee, Melissa Orobko)

- What is it? → *Union which represents all teaching-related staff at SFU (including TAs), some other types of employees too. Feminist, non-hierarchical, directly democratic.* www.tssu.ca
- You can go to any Biology TSSU steward or directly to the TSSU team
- RA Collective Agreement bargaining update:
 - SFU promised to respond to latest proposal and present updates to theirs to get closer to a collective agreement after two years. New SFU chief negotiator didn't like what the previous chief negotiator had agreed to and backtracked on very basic, previously-agreed upon points like including the number of hours of work in RA contracts and the location of said work (Burnaby campus, Surrey campus, etc) saying too "administratively burdensome". This is a BIG breach of the good faith that all bargaining has to be built on so TSSU walked out of meeting (via Zoom). SFU re-approached soon afterwards, agreeing to go back to their previous version. So no progress in that session.
 - Few more bargaining sessions planned in Sept incl. for important monetary items like RAs' access to benefits like paid sick leave, employer-paid MSP premiums, extended health/dental. If no good faith shown then might have to go to mediation.
 - Just a reminder that SFU agreed in Nov 2019 to recognize ALL RAs as employees (including if you have an RAship to work on your thesis, which is mostly the case for science grad students) and to start bargaining in May 2020, plus other stuff that they stalled for months. Bargaining only started earlier this year and SFU has delayed and stalled. All this means that SFU has delayed recognizing RAs' workers' rights that we deserve, including extra extended health coverage (which could mean saving \$100s a year).
- YOUR RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK: STUDENT MASK WEARING. Non-medical masks are now required in all indoor settings as ordered by the Public Health Officer. Masks must be worn in all indoor common areas and learning spaces on SFU campuses which includes classrooms. Unless someone has an approved exemption, everyone must wear a mask while indoors. Disposable masks will be available for students at Student Central in Burnaby and at the info desks in Vancouver and Surrey. SFU has provided the following guidance on mask wearing:

"Should students not wear a mask in your classroom, especially if there are more than you anticipate based on your understanding of exemptions, here are some suggestions for you. This suggested framework would be facilitated if you are able to send a message to your class in advance to set

expectations, and so students expecting an exemption can self-identify and you can organize a private conversation (e.g. via Zoom) with them.

- *Start by reminding students that we are all invested in staying safe, and there is a public health order requiring masks to be worn. Offer students a mask (these are available in most departments) in case they forgot or lost theirs.*
 - *If students say they expect to have an exemption, and there is room, they have been encouraged by Student Services to practice physical distancing. Thus you may ask them to sit 2 m away from others.*
 - *If students will not put on a mask and you have not been told a student has an exemption, you may ask students to please leave as they are behaving counter to the public health order.*
 - ***If students [without a mask] refuse to leave, instructors have the right to leave the class themselves.***
 - *If students should escalate and become abusive and you feel your safety or that of your other students is at risk, you should contact Campus Public Safety at 778-782-4500"*
 - As a TA or Sessional Instructor, you have the right to refuse unsafe work. If someone refuses to wear a mask and does not have an exemption, we would consider this to be an unsafe work environment due to the risks of transmission of COVID-19.
- YOUR RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK: VENTILATION. TSSU: TSSU and Health and Safety Reps have been requesting [data from the ventilation audit results](#) for many months now, however, we only just received this information today [Sept 7], less than 24 hours before classes begin. SFU Administration has stated on numerous occasions that ventilation would be upgraded in line with ASHRAE recommendations. The data shows otherwise. In some buildings many classrooms only have MERV 10 filters, which do not block airborne virus particles, and thus risk recirculating the airborne virus through classrooms — this [does not meet ASHRAE's recommendations](#) of MERV 13 filters. Further, thousands of spaces on Burnaby campus, including offices, remain unaudited and others didn't meet air exchange standards. We have attached three excel spreadsheets which detail classrooms and their status. We encourage you to look for your workspaces in the list and raise any concerns to your supervisor.
- As we have detailed above, SFU has failed to implement a verifiable vaccine declaration in advance of the start of classes, to ensure ventilation standards are met including MERV 13 filters are installed, to set occupancy limits for shared spaces and classrooms and label areas with problem airflow, and maintain physical distancing protocols. These failures present risks to you as workers, and ultimately **may lead you to invoke your health and safety right to refuse unsafe work.**
- IF YOU FEEL UNSAFE WHEN WORKING:
- If you feel AT ALL unsafe during this semester, or have any questions at all, reach out to Steven Brownlee (he/him) sbrownle@sfu.ca or the three other Biology stewards: Melissa Orobko (she/her) morobko@sfu.ca, Allison Dennert (she/her) adennert@sfu.ca, Sherry Young (she/her) sherry_young@sfu.ca. Or, directly to TSSU (emails, phone, location [here](#)).
 - From TSSU: If you reasonably believe that performing a job or task puts you or someone else at risk, you should stop working and report the unsafe work condition to your supervisor and notify TSSU (safety@tssu.ca). Your supervisor must immediately investigate and ensure that any unsafe condition is remedied as soon as possible. Once you have reported the issue to your supervisor, they can assign you other work without loss of pay. If the investigation demonstrates to you that it is safe, then you can continue work, but you continue to have the right to refuse as higher and higher levels of investigation (which includes either union reps or health and safety reps) get involved all the way to WorkSafeBC.
 - Another essential health and safety right you have as a worker is **the right to no retaliation** (including any discipline or being fired) for raising occupational health & safety concerns. First 3 steps of the procedure for refusing unsafe work:
 1. Stop working

2. Immediately report the unsafe work condition to your supervisor
 3. Your supervisor must immediately investigate and ensure that any unsafe condition is remedied as soon as possible
- International student health fee: if you are an international student and a TSSU member (i.e. TAing or TMing [tutor-marking] this semester), opt-out of the GuardMe health plan and enroll in MSP **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**, especially if you are not physically in Canada, so you avoid paying a bunch of money unnecessarily. Deadline is late
 - This page has all info [it's confusing we know]: www.tssu.ca/guard-me/
 - Healthcare for ALL NEW TAs / TMs: **enroll** in the group extended healthcare plan ASAP for lots of extra coverage for dental, vision, physio, naturopath, massage, etc. It's not automatic. This adds on to your GSS healthcare plan!! 😊
 - More info on how to enroll: www.tssu.ca/benefits/
- 8. EDI Committee (Equity Diversity & Inclusivity Grad Committee) (Ranah Chavoshi, Melissa Orobko)**
- What is it? → *committee of ~10 grad students working to improve the equity, diversity, and inclusivity of our department*
 - Indigenous and Black Graduate Scholarship in Biology is currently at \$ 35,935! Yay!
 - Working on the Terms of Reference with Rachel Lowry (SFU Advancement office)

"Motion/Request: The biology graduate student equity and diversity committee is requesting 2 x \$100 honorariums for two students from the SFU Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA) group who have provided valuable input on the Terms of Reference for the Indigenous and Black graduate student scholarship in biology. We want ensure that these two individuals are compensated as often in academia contributions to diversity equity and inclusion go unpaid. Request of 2 x \$100 dollar honorariums from the core account for SOCA President Balqees Jama and SOCA Grad Rep Tiara Cash for contributions to the Indigenous and Black Graduate Scholarship in Biology Terms of Reference. And motion to give a \$200 honourarium to Franki Katz for extensive work on the landing page for the Indigenous and Black Graduate Scholarship in Biology from the core account."

 - Motioned by Melissa Orobko, seconded by Elijah Reyes.
 - Motion passes unanimously.
 - Abstentions: Melissa Orobko, Ranah Chavoshi, Elijah Reyes.
- **Events Committee (Brett Hodinka)**
 - What is it? → *Organize events for*
 - Welcome Back BBQ -- usual courtyard (between Biology and Chemistry on 7000 level) is half in construction, go somewhere else? New courtyard by CWE?
 - Usually get a \$250 grant from GSS, \$100 from dept, \$250 from caucus.
 - Will help organize: Hannah Roodenrijs and Elijah Reyes.
 - Elijah: also consider a student symposium this year, was really great a couple/few years ago.
 - **"Motion to reimburse Elijah Reyes, Hannah Roodenrijs, and/or Brett Hodinka up to \$250 from the core account for a Welcome Back BBQ at some point this semester."**
 - Motioned by Brett Hodinka, seconded by Elijah Reyes.
 - Motion passes unanimously.
 - Abstentions: Elijah Reyes, Hannah Roodenrijs, Brett Hodinka.
 - Motion to adjourn by Brett Hodinka, seconded by Elijah Reyes. Motion passes unanimously at 3:02pm
 - Next month territorial acknowledgment: Brett Hodinka. Sarah Gravel in November.