

## **BISC graduate student caucus meeting**

### Attendance:

Brett Hodinka (chair)

Hannah Watkins (DGSC Rep and Faculty Mole)

Hannah Roodenrijs (Webmaster)

Wade VanderWright (General member)

Steven Brownlee (TSSU Steward, GSS Alternate, EDI Committee)

Em Lim (DSC Rep and ESI Committee)

Amelinda Firdauzy (DSC Rep)

Claire Attridge (Secretary)

Emmanuel Hung (Treasurer)

### 1) Motion to approve October meeting minutes

- Second by Hannah Watkins
- All in favor

### 2) Treasurer's updates

\$ 1850.00 – core account

\$ 2181.27 – trust amount

- **BBQ reimbursements**

- Amount for Hannah R (\$ 344.48)

- Amount for Balqees Jamas (\$ 100.00)

- There has to be an etranfer from a grad student to her (because she is an undergrad and cannot directly receive a cheque req)

- A selected grad student will send Balqees the honorarium money, then we will motion to be reimbursed for this amount

- **Brett Hodinka** will do this as the grad student

- Amount for Melissa Orobko (\$ 25.91)

*Motion to approve reimbursements to Melissa Orobko (\$25.91), Hannah Roodenrijs (\$344.48) for purchases made for the October 2021 BISC Grad BBQ and Brett Hodinka (\$100) for e-transfer to Balqees Jama for \$100 honorarium.*

- Second by Steven Brownlee
- All in favor
- Abstentions: Brett Hodinka

### 3) Grad-hosted speaker 2022

- Eirikur wants a name as soon as possible
- Send names & brief description to Brett Hodinka
  - Will send out a survey with individuals' information
  - 24-48 h turnaround time to vote

### 4) DGSC

- What is the DGSC? Deals with graduate student issues!
  - Anything that may improve the lives of / provide support for graduate students
  - Develop courses for graduate student and deal with the 'academic side' of the degree programs
- Mike Hart is doing a great job as chair!
  - Very responsive & putting in the work
  - Supportive of putting something permanent in place to ensure that graduate stipends increase every year to reflect the cost of living
- Soliciting calls for initiatives for the DGSC to undertake in the next year
  - They want feedback from the rest of the department about what may be useful to put work into

### 5) DSC

- GF awards
  - Committee finished ranking the applications
    - Only half GFs this year (\$3500)
  - Noticed some discrepancies on email threads...
    - GFs are typically supposed to be needs based (funding by individual student, international status...)
  - Bit of a debate between merit vs. needs based on these...

- Pressure to give the awards to the top ranked academic students rather than those most in need
- Travel & research awards
  - A lot of students applying for this money to go to conferences
    - Ridiculous debate happened about how this previously had a different name and different purpose and should only be used for active research
    - BUT, this is a different award now! Yes! Can be used for conferences.
  - If faculty members decide to stick to the merit-based award status, perhaps the criteria for GFs should be updated to better reflect a needs-based approach as well. Those with 30 k + should maybe not be eligible to apply for GFs as they already have above sufficient monetary support.
    - Overall, needs to be more clarity on the metrics for receiving these awards

## 6) GSS

- Candidates for the upcoming GSS Director Elections will be presented statements to Council. There are 5 positions that are being contested this semester: Director of Finance, Director of Academic Relations, Director of Student Life, Director of Access and Equity and Director of Internal Relations. Their statements are up on the GSS website: <http://sfugradsociety.ca/elections> and election will be held shortly.
- The newly formed 'No Cops on Campus' group made a presentation to the GSS Council about their goals and were hoping for the GSS to endorse their platform. After discussion it was decided to instruct councilors to discuss the idea within caucuses and then reconvene in December once councilors had a chance to gauge the opinions of their members.
  - <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/11AgbiawstPzV04T4XI5pXBNRWLsiqF-x/edit#slide=id.p4> (the presentation)
  - Draft motion:
    - Be it resolved that the Biology Graduate Student Caucus move to endorse the platform of the No Cops On Campus group, and instruct the GSS Representative to recommend that the GSS also endorse them.

- a. Second by Hannah Watkins
- b. All in favor – motion passes unanimously.
- o Allison will take the Caucus recommendation to the GSS

## 7) TSSU

Mostly updates on the RA bargaining front this time around: it has now been over two years since we originally won our voluntary recognition agreement and joined the TSSU, and over two years of neverending delays from admin in getting us an actual contract. We finally got admin's proposal for wages and benefits this month and they were just about as awful as you can imagine. They include

- **A minimum wage of \$17 / hr with no increases** for the life of the contract when the Metro Vancouver [living wage](#) is currently \$20.52 / hour. Compare that to our wages as TA's, which translate to about \$29 an hour - which a lot of us carry out in our own disciplines and using the same set of skills as in our research. \*
- **No benefits for RAs who happen to be students**, which means no MSP / International Student Health Fee coverage. Instead they offered an extra 7% (\$1.19 / hr) in place of benefits, leaves and vacation. The law, however, would require the vast majority of that to go for vacation and stat holiday pay, instead.
- A bare-bones benefits package of extended health, dental, paltry sick leave, and vacation but **only for select non-student RAs contracts of 20 hours / week or more and of duration greater than 4 months.**

We expressed our extreme displeasure with this attempt to both shortchange RA's as well as create two classes of RA worker, a dangerous attempt to try and sneak through language formalizing their position through all of this that us stipended RAs are a separate and lesser class.

The TSSU has launched a letter to Joy Johnson that is signable by graduate students here <https://bargaining.tssu.ca/ra-contract-now>. The negotiating team has previously complained about upper admin meddling when we protest too loudly and make them look bad so this is one avenue that we can use to exert effective pressure on them.

SFU Monetary Position: <https://bargaining.tssu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/211110-SFU-RA-Bargaining-Monetary-Proposal.pdf>

TSSU Monetary Position:

<https://bargaining.tssu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-11-10-Article-ZZZ-RAs-TSSU-Monetary-2.pdf>

#### 8) Faculty mole

- Department chairs have been asked to put pressure on people who are not declaring their vaccination status, but according to Mike Silverman (acting Dean of Science), no biology members are on that list (it was not clear if this is just faculty or other staff and graduate students).
- The faculty voted through changes to their constitution, most of which stayed in line with what the EDI committee had proposed to the chair.
- There was push back against the length of time a member could serve on a given committee (EDI had suggested 2, faculty voted on 3), as “some initiatives take many years to implement and continuity of committee members can help with that”.
- The faculty then approved the appointment of Dr. Ailene MacPherson from the Department of Statistics as an Associate Member of our department (basically adjunct status for other SFU faculty members).
- The DGSC asked that if there are students from other departments interested in transferring to BISC that they should be directed to Laurie Sutterlin and Mike Hart as they have the details on the process.
- The DSC explained that GFs were being opened to all students including major awards holders since many students with NSERC are still making below the departmental minimum and it did not seem fair to exclude them from the half-GFs which could top them up to the minimum.
- The newly minted faculty EDI committee will be asked to look into how to better incorporate EDI into the evaluation processes for GFs in the future. For the rest of the more boring administrative notes, you can contact Hannah Watkins ([hwatkins@sfu.ca](mailto:hwatkins@sfu.ca))!

#### 9) EDI updates

- Course development (Decolonization of Science)

- For context: one of our initiatives is to develop a decolonization of science course to offer to graduate students through the department - would be offered by an indigenous expert and focus on giving students the tools to decolonize their own research practices and work towards an ethical practice of science that honours other ways of knowing and centers the indigenous peoples on whose lands we all work.
- We met with I-Chant from the Centre for Educational Excellence in early November
  - Though they don't have funding for the course they have a wide variety of resources available for course development and pedagogical tools like helping to build Canvas modules.
- Next step would seem to be getting in contact with Mike Hart at the DGSC (this Monday!) to see what the next steps are in terms of launching the course.
- Legal names
  - Something that came into focus around Trans Day of Remembrance this past week - SFU's internal systems allow for people to declare their own preferred names, but many sub-systems like recreation, grad studies etc. all default to legal names, which is a major burden and harm to trans and nonbinary people at SFU. Em lead a wonderful shaming campaign on Twitter that got their attention and got an interesting email from the head of IT (?) sheepishly acknowledging that it would be an easy fix but hasn't been considered because it would be a burden on profs (?). So, stay tuned for updates.
- Scholarship fundraising (Black and Indigenous Students)
  - Going swimmingly - we raised \$6,000 more dollars through a telephone campaign run by Advancement
  - Now at \$39,405 total! We have a new goal of \$45,000 and we're hoping to re-launch a new appeal for donations soon (video campaign, get the university advertising it!)
- Please join us!

## 10) Events

- Winterfest 2021
  - Dec 9<sup>th</sup> – Halpern Center (on campus)
  - We got asked to plan games/activities or something

- BUT, is super short notice. So no pressure.
- Perhaps something with minimal planning effort? Hiring an external group to run trivia?

11) Motion to adjourn

- Second by Claire Attridge
- All in favor