

BISC graduate student caucus meeting

Attendance:

Brett Hodinka (Chair)

Emmanuel Hung (Treasurer)

Steven Brownlee (TSSU, DGSC, DEI, Faculty update*) *just for today

Em Lim (DSC, DEI)

Allison Dennert (GSS, TSSU, Associate Chair)

Only 5 members present, January minutes will be approved at March meeting.

1) Chair update

- 'Student version' of the department review document sent out by Brett Hodinka
- March 30th: Timeslot for talking to the committee is at 3-330 pm
 - o Location: Shrum B (B942)
 - Tentatively happening in person, but there is a zoom link in the email that was sent out by Melissa Stephens (Chair Secretary)
 - o Melissa Stephens wanted a list of names of people who will show up
 - It will be listed as 'Brett Hodinka and other grad students' so anyone is welcome!
 - o Purpose of the meeting is an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns about what was written in the review document
 - The document seems to have a fairly good representation of graduate student perspectives based on our prior meetings

2) Treasurer update

- Core account: \$1405.52
- Trust account: \$2181.27

3) DSC update

- Scholarship committee just reviewed the USRA applications
 - o Explanation of rankings: PIs are submitting a number of undergrads (1 or more) and are asked to personally rank these students in their order of preference

- If there are more awards than PIs, each PI gets their first choice (scholarship committee doesn't even look at these students, only will for the second choices and beyond)
- The other students beyond the first choice are essentially ranked by GPA, then each lab is awarded more students sequentially until all the awards are gone
- If a lab has only applied for one undergraduate student, they will very likely have funding

4) DGSC update

Scheduling defenses

- Concerns over the guidelines for scheduling defenses
 - What's required to actually complete this step? Very confusing! Different website pages contradict each other
 - Planning to meet with Mike and Laurie to sort this out (next week)
 - Goal: To create one central source of information that is correct

MSc proposals

- Are encouraged but not required to have a first draft proposal prepared for your first committee meeting
 - Helps to have started on this so that your committee can then provide input and guidance
- Must be sent to the department by your first APR (Annual Progress Report)
 - You attach your MSc proposal to this
- Overall, sooner is probably better.
 - A good idea to be starting on it by your 2nd semester.
- Our goal: To make this process clearer! There seems to be some confusion and contradictions on the SFU website.

Consensus: Strongly encouraged, but not officially required, to have draft prepared for your first committee meeting. The proposal must officially be sent to the department with your first APR.

Not meeting minimum stipends

- 4 or 5 people (of the 50 who responded to the survey, so 10%) reported not meeting their minimum stipends on the biology graduate student survey sent out
 - And this is only the number that are aware they've been shorted. There could possibly be more individuals who are not aware but are still being shorted.
- This is supposedly a 'complaints driven process'
 - Aka. Someone has to come forward (can't be anonymous)

- The DGSC will send out a survey to all the biology graduate students asking for details on how individuals are funded, if they have gaps, and where those gaps came from
- It may be difficult to convince people to come forward
 - Students might not feel comfortable 'outing' their professors

Possible solutions for this:

- Full audit at each APR?
 - Not very plausible. Would take a really long time to do, and the reporting of funding is confusing between all of TA/RA/scholarship...

Stipend increases

- **Option 1:** Actually increase as per inflation annually (most for us)
 - Every year stipend increases as per the inflation rate
- **Option 2:** Fixed 2-3% increase (mid range for us)
 - Every year stipend increases a fixed percent
- **Option 3:** 'stepped increase' (the least increase for us)
 - Every couple of years stipend would increase

Wanted to get the caucus feedback on these options, and then will make a decision at the next DGSC meeting. Will then provide a proposal for a specific increase that the faculty will vote on (by providing a single specific number/solution will avoid any lengthy or confusing discussions hopefully)

- Professors say that it may be difficult to use Option 1 in relation to planning for students
 - Tricky to plan how much grad students may cost over the time period (2 yrs, 5 yrs...)
- Option 2 could make for easier planning for the professors
 - The known/fixed number would allow profs to plan for their student costs
 - Option 2 is also currently happening at UBC
 - We will lose a competitive advantage unless we consider matching this

Consensus: We have a preference for the 2-3% fixed year increase (Option 2)

Course demand

- Some MPM field courses (601/602) will likely have large cohorts this summer
 - Students who were not graduating last year were told to delay taking them until this year

5) GSS update

- 2 meetings & 1 announcement

- Council meeting Feb 8th @ 4 pm
 - o Merged two funds to do with the benefit plan (Bursary & Contingency funds) – makes the accounting easier
- AGM meeting
 - o Finances need to be approved by membership
 - The financial documents approved by Allison in January, everyone votes on them at the February AGM
 - Can see the documents online at the sfugraduatesociety.ca
 - Doing well fund-wise (likely because GSS administers the graduate students benefits plan)
 - o Kickstart of the 'Demand your rights' campaign
 - May be some 'uprising' of graduate students as part of this campaign
 - Multitude of issues (pay, supervisors, ...) which affect graduate students
 - A campaign to address all of these issues together at once
- GSS is having nominations for their director elections:
 - o External Relations / Internal Relations / Graduate Services
 - o Term from May 2022 – Apr 2023 (\$4,600 per semester)
 - o Typically, graduate students who don't have RAships
 - o Nominations close Feb 28th

6) TSSU updates

- The monthly GM is happening Wednesday, Feb 23rd at 4:30 pm on Zoom
 - o Link: <https://sfu.zoom.us/j/67629363940?pwd=cERoc2dpdmZ5L29TMDRsd2JiY1dOZz09>
- Reminder that SFU should be paying the international student health fees for the term for TAs, TMs, Graduate Facilitators and Sessionals
 - o SFU is behind on paying these, so you may see notices from them
 - o If you have any concerns, please let us know! We can look into it for you
 - o Below are the instructions for how to enroll in the MSP group enrollment and extended healthcare plan:

To opt into SFU's group plan:

1. Complete the MSP Group Enrolment form.pdf

NOTE: A separate application form must be completed for the TSSU member and each eligible dependent. Do not list dependents on the same application as the member.

2. Scan as a single pdf document:

- the completed application form(s)
- a copy of the Study Permit for each individual

3. Email to SFU HR at tssubens@sfu.ca; include legal name of TSSU member and SFU ID number in the Subject line.

NOTE: If this is your first semester at SFU, you are likely enrolled in Guard.me, and should say: "I am enrolled in Guard.me" in the email.

You can also enroll in the Extended Health Plan (pdf attached in this email with info) by filling out this form and submitting it to tssubens@sfu.ca. Coverage will be backdated to the first of the month in which they receive your application, so if you are interested make sure to enroll by the end of February so that the month is covered. Once enrolled, you can also continue coverage if you have a break in work of up to 2 semesters (see continuation of benefits).

- Another note, if you're working as a TAs, TMs, Graduate Facilitators or Sessional you have up to 1 month of paid sick leave during each semester of your appointment
 - o To take sick leave, please inform your supervisor that you are sick and then take the rest you need to recover
 - o SFU has not been requiring a doctors note for employee absences related to COVID-19, including workers that are:

*sick with COVID-19
waiting for COVID-19 test results
needing to self-isolate or self-monitor
directed by the University to stay home due to exposure; and/or
following a public order*

- Instead, they ask that you fill out the COVID-19 Absence Reporting Form and submit it confidentially to the Wellness & Recovery office (rtwdm@sfu.ca). If you run into any issues with this form or have any sick leave request limited or declined, please get in touch with chief_steward@tssu.ca.

7) Faculty meeting

- There has not been one yet this month: Stay tuned!

8) DEI

- No word on any updates yet.
- Indigenous and Black Student Scholarship
 - o A good amount of money has been raised so far!

- Terms of reference still have to be finalized by the Office of Advancement and Alumni Engagement
- There's a procedure for rating candidates and more details to sort out

9) Events

- No big updates to share right now.
- Will try to plan something outdoors for next month – The upper courtyard is finally done!
 - Holding off on picking any dates until closer to (to make sure that covid restrictions don't change and affect the planning)

10) General

- Lots of caucus execs have field seasons coming up which will make meetings tricky
 - Execs can fill in rolls for each other if need be
 - Typically, the associate chair (Allison) will take over for the chair (Brett)
- We will figure this out as the summer approaches!