

## **BISC graduate student caucus meeting**

May 19, 2022, 2:00 pm

*Hybrid Meeting (In-person at 7000-level Grad Lounge and on Zoom)*

### **1. Welcome & Intro**

#### **Attendance:**

Brett Hodinka (Chair)

Steven Brownlee (TSSU Steward, DGSC, EDI Committee)

Allison Dennert (GSS)

Hanna Roodenrijs (Webmaster)

Claire Attridge (Secretary, DGSC)

Emmanuel Hung (Treasurer)

Hanna Jackson (member)

Em Lim (member)

Elijah Reyes (member)

#### *Motion to approve the April meeting minutes*

- Proposed by Brett Hodinka
- Seconded by Allison Dennert
- Motion passes unanimously

#### **Payday Coffee**

- Payday coffee is officially back on, payday Fridays at 10 AM. All in the department are welcome to attend for free coffee and treats

### **2. Representative updates**

#### i) Treasurer's update (Emmanuel Hung)

- Account updates:
  - o Core account: \$1,405.52
  - o Trust account: \$2,181.27
- **Using core account funds**
  - o We have a substantial amount in the caucus core account, and the end of the fiscal year is approaching. At the end of August, 50% of the annual total we were allotted ( $0.5 * \$2,150 = \$1,075$ ) will go to our trust account and the remainder will go back to the GSS if we leave it unused.
  - o Proposed a summer bbq in July or late August to use up the would-be remainder

#### ii) DGSC update (Steven Brownlee)

- **Wage subsidy**

- The department received a one-time wage subsidy, totaling \$13,000, from a government wage subsidy program meant to cover money spent on TAs. For the next DGSC meeting, Mike wants ideas on how grad students would like these funds to be used sooner rather than later (so that the funds cannot simply sit and be “redistributed” by university admin)
- Donation of funds to BIPOC scholarship was suggested but cannot be done because it is an endowed reward
- In lieu of donating it, the caucus has agreed that the first priority would be to give every BISC grad student a small portion (e.g., \$100)
- If feasible, the remainder of the subsidy could then be spent on acquisition of common equipment (e.g., new microwaves, coffee machine, bbq grill, etc.) for communal spaces

iii) DSC (Em Lim)

- TARA awards have been disbursed
- Rankings for GF awards have been finished
  - Planning on giving out 38 GFs (having considered 50 applicants). People on the B-list may still get one later on
  - There was lots of debate concerning how to officially communicate the GFs are not 100% merit-based awards (e.g., you are ineligible if: (a) you would be receiving NSERC funding during the time you would be receiving a GF, (b) you are making over \$60k per year). It seems widely known that they are partially needs-based but there should be a place where this is stated more explicitly
- Vicki is the new chair of the scholarships committee
- Ranking of the donor awards and president’s PhD scholarship applicants will begin soon
  - It is worth noting that new students (those submitting applications for the first time, even if it is not their first semester) are put in a separate ranking pool than other students. In total, there are three separate ranking pools: PhD, Masters, and first-time applicants

iv) GSS (Allison Dennert)

- Strategic Research Plan
  - Dr. Dugan O’Niel, the SFU Vice-President Research and International met with the GSS council to hear graduate feedback on SFU’s Strategic Research Plan (SRP) following his sharing of SFU’s progress report ([https://www.sfu.ca/research/sites/default/files/2022-01/SFU\\_SRP-Progress-Report\\_Jan2022\\_Final.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/research/sites/default/files/2022-01/SFU_SRP-Progress-Report_Jan2022_Final.pdf)).

- There will be a formal consultation on May 26<sup>th</sup> for those interested – updates and info will be sent via email from the university
- Accessibility shuttle
  - GSS council voted to support the accessibility shuttle proposal created by the SFSS, which would provide permanent access around key elevator closures on campus
- GSS fees freeze
  - The GSS Benefit Plan fee and the GSS student fee will be frozen for at least one more year. During the last two academic years the benefit plan fee (for health & dental) was frozen (2020/2021, 2021/2022), and this will happen again in 2022/2023 using budget surplus. The GSS fee was frozen in 2021/2022, and this will happen again in 2022/2023.
  - The GSS is planning on absorbing the additional costs of the benefit plan for grad students as long as is fiscally possible
- GSS affordability survey
  - Help the GSS advocate for issues on affordability and take the GSS affordability survey! Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/GSS-affordability>

v) TSSU (Steven Brownlee)

- Nominations for TSSU stewards are being accepted (Link: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1D-yHqxrI\\_XOhWOHsOM-JzTybC3b7lpKaP-lsJWOFClg/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1D-yHqxrI_XOhWOHsOM-JzTybC3b7lpKaP-lsJWOFClg/edit#gid=0))
- Stewards do a bit of organizational work, attend rallies and the TSSU general meeting as well as two steward's meetings. Pay is \$250 per semester. We are entitled for up to 8 stewards in our department and currently have 4.

vi) Faculty Mole (Brett Hodinka)

- Tony gave chair's report welcoming two new limited-term lecturers
- The external review update will be talked about at the next faculty meeting at June 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Some courses that have not been taught in a good while have been removed from the course listings
- Mike wants to raise discussion of changes to the stipend
- Mike stressed that supervisors should use Annual Progress Report (APR) forms as a place to input critical, tangible feedback for the graduate student. APRs can be a useful means for identifying and working towards resolving issues but currently most have their comment sections left blank.

### 3. Committee updates

#### i) Diversity and Inclusion (Steven Brownlee)

- We are waiting for some final edits to the BIPOC scholarship terms of reference

#### ii) Events (Brett Hodinka)

- We will be sending out a poll to gauge availability, over the coming summer months, for a caucus event

### 4. Discussion of external review

- **Stipend problem**
  - o The DGSC will be meeting next week to discuss the graduate stipend problem raised in the external review more thoroughly.
  - o Current aim is to raise the stipend to \$30k, though the question is how to approach this in a manner that is realistic with regards to getting faculty to agree on this
  - o We propose an initial adjustment that brings the stipend to \$30k, followed by regular stepped increases to prevent things from continuously falling behind
- **Completion times and TAing**
  - o Average time to completion is “eye-wateringly long”: 7 years for PhDs and 3.6 years for Masters (for more fun figures of speech and depressing info, everything is available in the external review report sent out to everyone by Brett as well as Tony)
  - o Also from the report: “...**the number of hours expected in a one-semester TAship (210 hours) was almost 50% greater than expected at our institutions (156h at UA, 140h WU and UTSC), for similar money (no variation by degree program: \$8699 at UA, c. \$6600 at WU, \$6700 at UTSC; vs \$7390 for a PhD at SFU). The additional TA commitment for the basic stipend likely contributes to long completion times by reducing time available to work on research.**”
  - o We can talk to the department about changing the way courses are TA'd and look to find the difference between what amount people can TA while still making meaningful research progress
  - o We will be sending out a survey to grads to help pick apart the reasons that may be contributing to long completion times. The survey will cover broad overview questions, E.g.,
    - How many courses do people TA per year?
    - Do they think that TA time is slowing down their progress?
  - o The report also raised the pattern of students having very long theses. Review committee was curious why Masters students with multiple research chapters in their thesis aren't being pushed onto the PhD route
  - o It will be worth polling graduate students on these matters. E.g.,
    - Do you want to work in academia?

- If not, then where? (industry, non-profit, etc.)
- Has being in grad school changed your career direction/aspirations?
- How long would you like to take?
- How many research chapters would you want in your thesis if it was solely your own choice?
- Who needs money anyways?

*Motion to adjourn the meeting*

- Proposed by Brett Hodinka
- Seconded by Steven Brownlee
- Motion passes unanimously