

BISC graduate student caucus meeting

September 15, 2022, 2:00 pm PST

In-person at 7000-level Grad Lounge (SSB)

1. Welcome & Intro

Attendance:

Brett Hodinka (Chair, Events Committee)

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

Hannah Watkins (Member at Large)

Emmanuel Hung (Treasurer, Secretary)

Amelinda Firdauzy (DGSC)

Ramis Rafay (Events Committee)

Sam Meraj (member)

Elijah Reyes (member)

Hanna Jackson (member)

Raven Barbera (member)

Phoebe Grouse (member)

Motion to approve the August meeting minutes

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

i) Chair's Update

- **Terry Fox Run on Burnaby Campus**
 - o Tony Williams has registered a Biology team ("Ruff Penguins") for the run on Friday, September 23, 2022 at 12:30pm on campus. Feel free to [click here](#) to register or donate!!
- **Wage Subsidy**
 - o The department received a one-time wage subsidy, totaling \$13,000, from a government program meant to cover money spent on TAs.
 - o Options were to (a) distribute the money to all current biology graduate students (~\$100/student), (b) use the money for beautification of the 7000-level courtyard area, or (c) upgrade/replace the 7000-level lounge equipment (e.g., microwave, kettle, etc.)
 - o By popular consensus, the caucus has decided to champion option (a) to divvy up the funds. More information incoming.
- **Caucus Meeting with Mike Hart and DGSC**

- The October 13 Caucus meeting will be held in B9242 at 2:00 pm with the DGSC chair and other faculty to chat with grads about (1) completion times and (2) thesis lengths. This will be a longer than average caucus meeting where we will cover miscellaneous and typical caucus items before the arrival of Mike and faculty members.
- All BISC graduate students are welcome to join and provide their input! The department will also be providing food and beverages.

2. Representative updates

i) Treasurer's update (Emmanuel Hung)

- Account updates:
 - Core account: \$1,405.52
 - Trust account: \$2,181.27

Motion for the caucus to reimburse Hannah Hall from the caucus Core account with \$25.00 for the purchase of a BC Liquor Permit and \$36.75 for the purchase of a Serve-it-Rights certificate for use at the BISC grad caucus welcome party to be held on September 23rd, 2022.

- Proposed by Brett Hodinka
- Seconded by Hannah Watkins
- Motion passes unanimously

ii) DGSC update (Steven Brownlee)

- The DGSC have not met yet this term – Dr. Mike Hart (DGSC Chair) is currently relieved from teaching duties and is coming up with a plan to fix completion times, TA issues, and everything independent of the finances issue (graduate stipend) which has now more or less been put to bed.

iii) DSC (Amelinda Firdauzy)

- Major donor and special entrance awards were ranked in July and results have been out for some time now. There are no new scholarships to rank at the moment, though Travel and Minor Research Awards (TMRAs) should be coming out next week.

iv) GSS (Steven Brownlee)

- The proposal of the construction of a new library building, which includes dedicated graduate student spaces, was presented to the GSS. According to SFU admin, the plan was too expensive so it is now binned – awaiting potential external donor or government funding to be offered to pay for it.

v) TSSU (Steven Brownlee)

- **RA Arbitration Victory**

- SFU administration lost in arbitration (!)
- If you currently hold or have recently held a TA or RA position, you are now a member of the TSSU and will have access to regular TSSU membership benefits. E.g., tuition deduction, group enrolment for RAs (no more international student health fees), Work-Safe workplace safety standards, etc.
- As currently understood, stipend RAships (top ups), scholarship, and TA appointment income will be transferred into employment income starting January 1st – Meaning graduate students receiving these funds will now have employment rights as employees of SFU (so labor and tax laws must be abided by the admin)
- The arbitrator ruled that, due to SFU admin's actions throughout this process, there will be a monetary reparation paid by SFU to the TSSU (anyone who has been an RA or TA since May 2020 – should get retro-active pay back) and retroactive damages and costs to TSSU during this period should also be paid back.
- For much more (official) info and clarity, please refer to the information package that will be emailed out soon!

vi) Faculty Mole (Brett Hodinka)

- **Miscellaneous**

- The department building is still having issues with rooms not meeting HVAC standards – occupancy in those rooms will remain low until they figure that out.
- There is a new staff member, [Luisa Gomez](#) (Manager, Operational Support), who will be helping Maya with lab operations (e.g., renting vehicles, managing lab equipment, etc.)
- For the beautification of the department: (1) there are new glass cabinets by the biology main office which Tiia will be curating displays for and (2) the department found \$2000 which it will be spending on additional plants for the 7000-level courtyard area.

- **Field work risk classifications**

- Changes have been made regarding what is considered “very high risk” versus “high risk” field work. E.g., diving is now considered high risk.
- If you work at a field site that is considered “bear country,” it will be required that someone with a shotgun and a permit to carry it must be present on the field site. As we all know, guns make everything safer.

- **Stipend increase**

- This term the minimum graduate stipend amount has been increased to \$26,000. This time next year it will be \$26,000 + the tuition subsidy which will begin its pilot program.

- **Tuition subsidy**
 - There are two proposed sets of criteria being discussed (and which faculty will vote on at the next meeting) for what constitutes an “eligible” graduate student in terms of the new graduate fellowships (subsidizing tuition costs):
 - 2 years for MSc/MPM, 4 years for PhD
 - 3 years for MSc/MPM, 5 years for PhD
 - NOTE: MET is not part of this criteria decision
 - As currently understood, these will ultimately affect how much money is pulled from the BASS pot and how many regular GFs are available etc.
 - For reference, of the 50 PhD students in the department, 19 have been here for 6 years or more.

3. Committee updates

i) Diversity and Inclusion (Steven Brownlee)

- Tony and the current EDI committee are interested in kicking things back in gear as there are no next steps currently set out for the committee while it waits on the terms of reference for the BIPOC scholarship to be finalized by the Alumni and Advancement Office.
- EDI Committee is looking for new members! Interim elections for new EDI members can be held to bring in any interested individuals.

ii) Events (Brett Hodinka)

- The BISC Grad Caucus welcome party will be held at **4:00 pm - 10:00 pm** in the **SSB 7000-level courtyard area on September 23rd**! Please [RSVP here](#) if you have not already done so.
- The caucus will no longer be holding BBQ events due to the requirements for BC food certificates and liquor permits which are expensive and a pain to acquire. Moving forwards, we will opt for easier alternatives such as pizza orders or the SFU MECS catering team.
- We will need to find someone in the caucus who will be here long-term to hold a Serve-it-Right certificate for future events.
- Here on out, in order for the caucus to hold events, we must co-host with the department. The department chair must sign off on the event and a faculty member must now be present at all events... The alternative route is to go through GSS.

Motion to adjourn the meeting

- Proposed by Brett Hodinka

- Seconded by Hannah Watkins
- Motion passes unanimously