

BISC graduate student caucus meeting

December 8, 2022, 2:00 pm PST

In-person at 7000-level grad lounge

1. Welcome & Intro

Attendance:

Brett Hodinka (Chair, Events Committee)

Allison Dennert (Associate Chair, TSSU Steward, GSS)

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

Emmanuel Hung (Treasurer, Secretary)

Hannah Watkins (Member at Large)

Cole Rankin (member)

Sam Meraj (member)

Raven Barbera (member)

Motion to approve the October meeting minutes

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

i) Chair's Update

- **Cost of Living Survey**
 - (<http://websurvey.sfu.ca/survey/430551472>)
 - The GSS is very interested in how this turns out. They want to know how students financially rank between departments. The survey can take 20 mins but the more who fill it out the better!
- **SWPP - Wage subsidy**
 - The full subsidy amount has now come in: ~\$39,000 – everyone* will get ~\$300.
*only going to students who are still active in the coming Spring semester (no leave of absence or graduated students will get this).
- **PhD Course Requirements**
 - The current course requirements for PhDs is 6 credits – this is not a university requirement, so the department is aiming to get rid of this (6 credits to 0 credits required)
- **BISC Outreach & Engagement Committee – Student Rep. Position**
 - A student representative is needed to replace the prior rep (Katie Leonard). Meetings take place monthly and are generally about 1 hour.
 - Committee/rep position description: *“The committee develops departmental plans for community outreach and engagement. It also supports university and*

faculty of science initiatives. In addition, the committee promotes departmental engagements such as photo-competitions, poetry contests and biology related theme days. The committee facilitates those engaging in outreach and has established a departmental outreach award to promote outreach and recognize contributors. These efforts are intended to introduce the public to the skills needed to become a biologist, knowledge in both general and specific biology topics, share the passion and joy of scientific discovery, and what it is like to be a practicing biologist.”

- If you're interested in this position, reach out to Peter Hollman at phollman@sfu.ca!
- **BISC EDI Committee – Graduate Rep. Volunteers**
 - Faculty members on the EDI Committee are asking for grad rep volunteers ASAP as the committee has largely dissolved with most grads on the committee having graduated.
 - If you're interested in volunteering, reach out to Kevin Lam at klamf@sfu.ca or Isabelle Côté at imcote@sfu.ca!
- **7000 level grad lounge**
 - As the grad lounge remains under construction, we will likely relocate to B9242 for future caucus meetings if renovations continue (although the current update from Maya projects that renovations will finish by Dec 20th)

ii) Treasurer's update (Emmanuel Hung)

- Account updates:
 - Core account: \$2,050.00
 - Trust account: \$3211.35

2. Representative updates

DGSC (Steven Brownlee)

- Aiming to set standards of best practice regarding thesis completion time (Master's < 3 yrs.; PhD < 5 yrs.) and thesis lengths (Master's = 1 study; PhD = 3-4 studies organized in several chapters) and implement changes to how APRs and committee meetings work. Stay tuned for reaching out for more ideas on how APRs should work!
- The department has voted to limit PI's acceptance of new students if they surpass a hard cut-off of having 2 students who are over the thesis completion time limit
- Proposed changes are coming regarding course requirements for PhDs. The departmental requirement for 6 course credits is not a university requirement so they are aiming to get rid of this (6 credits to 0 credits required)

DSC (Information relayed by Brett Hodinka)

- **TARAs** (Travel and Research Awards) will be higher in value (increased from \$500 to \$700) for the most recent competition, but we don't know about future ones because of the unknown effect of the variable graduate fellowships.

GSS (Allison Dennert)

- The **emergency grocery card program** received a large anonymous donation . This donation should support up to 400 graduate students with two \$70 gift cards per semester. The total donation for the Spring 2023 semester amounts to \$56,000 (as compared to the previous total annual amount of \$25,000.) The donor has stated that they will renew this semesterly gift in the summer and fall if there continues to be need (which is highly likely).
 - o The donor is a non-profit, charitable foundation based in Vancouver, whose mission is to positively impact British Columbia by providing grants in the areas of arts and culture, education, and health.
- **Professional development grants** (\$500) to go to conferences are now back – the GSS previously shifted away from this due to COVID.
- GSS and TSSU are hosting a joint rally called **Time to Make Some Noise** on Dec 12th to raise support for the platform of demands brought forward by TSSU and GSS.

TSSU (Steven Brownlee)

- **RA bargaining** remains stalled as SFU continues walking back on the arbitrator's ruling that grad students RAs are employees.
 - o The administration has sent a survey out to PIs to check boxes on how much of their grad students' thesis work is "work" versus "learning" (see Faculty Mole)

Faculty Mole (Brett Hodinka)

- **Graduate students as employees**
 - o Paperwork from SFU admin was sent to out to faculty for them to "check boxes" about each of their grad students on whether the work they do is related to their thesis or is unrelated work.
 - o It appears there will be very few students (from the faculty perspective) who will actually have two separate appointments (RA or scholarship and employment separately)
 - o Kathryn Coukell suggested that paperwork should continue as always and retroactive actions will be taken when and where necessary (for students in the RA/scholarship AND employment position)
- Plans to update the courtyard "dinosaur path" to a "**Mesozoic arborium**" is now official and there is a shopping list for Mesozoic plants to put out.
- A new marine ecotoxicology faculty position has been approved but the plant biology position was not approved.

- Tony sent a survey out to faculty to get opinions on what the biology department should look like in 5 years + other related questions.
- A new grad course has been approved. Jane Fowler will instruct **BISC 633 - Environmental microbiology**. It will be taken alongside undergrads (an existing environmental microbiology undergraduate course) but the courseload will be inflated to reflect your degree.
- **Graduate student stipend update** – the department has voted to adopt the stricter criteria for who is eligible for the annual non-competitive \$2000 Variable Graduate Fellowship awards to start September 2023: MET, MPM, and MSc students with ≤ 6 semesters of enrollment; PhD students with ≤ 12 semesters of enrollment; limited to students not on leave of absence in Fall semester.
- Faculty voted to adopt a policy on norms and expectations for lengths of graduate theses or projects, graduate program completion times, and oversight of thesis lengths & completion times. This doesn't pertain to MET students because they are admitted into their program without a supervisor.

Motion to adjourn the meeting

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