



**GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES**

**Wednesday October 24, 2018
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm / EME 4116**

Meeting commenced at 2:03 pm

1. Dean's Remarks

The Dean outlined the topics for the meeting, including issues related to TA duties, graduate student funding, and increasing the graduate student voice on campus.

2. Graduate Student Association – Discussion

- a. Guests: **Ian Cull**, Associate Vice-President Students, and **Michelle Lowton**, Director, Student Development and Advising
- b. Guests: **Amal Alhuwayshil**, President, and **Maher Al-Hawarneh**, Graduate Students Representative, UBC Students Union Okanagan

The Dean inquired if any students were interested in forming a graduate student association. T. Witt explained that a working group of several students has formed and has started looking into associations at other institutions including UBC-V and U Saskatchewan. No formal steps have been taken yet, but a consultation and town hall will be planned before going ahead. T. Witt stated that graduate students have specific funding concerns which require a more centralized board of graduate students to advocate for their specific needs.

M. Al-Hawarneh (UBCSUO Graduate Student Representative) added that the UBCSUO does represent graduate students generally but mostly deals with the undergraduate population. A. Alhuwayshil (UBCSUO President) explained that there are Faculty representatives on the UBCSUO board which can bring graduate student concerns to the table. She added that historically, there have been difficulties engaging with a graduate student representative. Due to a lack of interest, the \$3000 annual allocation for graduate student use was removed from the UBCSUO budget as of 2017. She explained that it is still possible to add those funds back, and that UBCSUO could also support a Graduate Student Association under a club structure.

M. Harper stated that a Graduate Student Committee was formed under the UBCSUO some years ago and inquired if it was still running. A. Alhuwayshil confirmed that it is not.

C. Wallis said that a \$3000 graduate student budget would be very useful in meeting the goals of the Graduate Community Facilitators as this level of funding is not currently available to them. She suggested forming a partnership between the UBCSUO and the Student Experience Office (similar to how the student food bank is maintained).



Ian Cull (AVP Students) spoke to the processes involved to become an independent body under the University Act. A group would be required to be incorporated as a registered society with a board and would need to give the university permission to collect and disperse fees to the organization. Some of the benefits include a possible U-PASS and medical insurance, depending on purchasing power. He also suggested exploring an arrangement with the Graduate Student Society (GSS) at UBC-V.

Members discussed first forming a Council on the UBCSUO, then working towards an independent organization once there is capacity and possibly forming as a member under GSS. A. Alhuwayshil suggested forming a club and applying with the UBCSUO before November 22 in order to be ratified before year end.

The Dean asked Council if they would prefer organizing within the existing structure or partnering with GSS. Members responded that due to student turn over and completion times, restructuring the current system would be more feasible. He suggested that the UBCSUO find more roles for more graduate student representatives as the current structure is undergraduate focused.

Ian Cull stated that as the graduate student population increases, Student Services is willing to look at other service delivery options.

Ian Cull exits meeting at 2:30 pm.

The Dean asked for recommendations on what CoGS can do to help facilitate communication between graduate students. The Graduate Community Facilitators primarily use social and a mailing list to reach out to students. M. Al-Hawarneh reported that he has been scheduling 1:1 meetings with students and graduate student associations.

Students reported that they are no longer able to request to send emails to students through university systems. D. Roberts confirmed that University policy now states that any mail delivered through SISC must directly relate to a students' academic progress or be of urgent nature due to privacy requirements. Programs are not allowed to share student emails. A. Ahsan explained that the Graduate Community Facilitators have instead been using an opt-in mailing list which includes a students' program of study, and offered to share any program-specific notices.

Action item: D. Roberts suggested adding a mailing list sign-up option to the CoGS graduate student orientation RSVPs for incoming students. Michelle Lowton agreed that this would comply with privacy policies and that Student Services can retain the list for the next facilitators.

The Dean suggested that interested individuals (UBCSUO, Facilitators, student society reps) schedule regular annual meetings to touch base.



M. Harper requested that the names of GSAC members be published on the CoGS website so that students are aware of who their representatives are. She also suggested posting upcoming discussion themes.

Action item: D. Roberts agreed to post GSAC information on the CoGS website. This will include the Memberships, Terms of Reference, Agendas, and short form of previous meeting minutes.

M. Harper reported that the old UBCSUO Graduate Student Committee still has a live website, Facebook page, and email address and requested that these be removed if not in use.

In order to better reach the current student population, C. Vien offered to share information about the mailing list at her classes and forward these on to the Graduate Community Facilitators. Other Members were encouraged to do the same.

A. Ahsan confirmed that there is an online sign-up available for the mailing list at: https://ubc.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1zYzgXE4kUiiFz7
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UBCOGraduateCommunity/>
and in hard copy at the Graduate Collegium (ASC 460).

3. Faculty representative directory – C. Wallis & A. Ahsan, Info item

M. Al-Hawarneh discussed the difficulties in connecting with graduate students and societies across campus and the benefit of a campus-wide graduate student network. T. Witt replied that the working group is looking at putting together a list of graduate representatives across campus, including GSAC. A. Ahsan and C. Wallis also explained that they have a campus-wide graduate representative database in progress. C. Wallis inquired if CoGS would be OK with forwarding Faculty representative information back to the facilitators.

Action item: Graduate Community Facilitators will ask potential representatives to email CoGS via Marissa at Marissa.brown@ubc.ca and Marissa will send back information to the facilitators.

4. Graduate student representatives on Graduate Council – D. Tannant

The Dean explained that GSAC is an advisory to Graduate Council, which is composed of faculty representatives that determine the policies and procedures of CoGS. Currently, there is one student vacancy on the Graduate Council membership.

If the revisions to Policy O-4: Governance of the College of Graduate Studies are approved by Senate, the membership of Graduate Council will change to include three student representatives: One PhD, one Professional Masters', and one Thesis-based Master's student. These candidates cannot be from the same program. The vacancies will be open in early 2019. The Dean asked Council for suggestions on how to fill these



roles. Council members suggested a nomination process and online voting, or allowing GSAC to make the final vote.

The Dean asked for a volunteer to fill the current student representative vacancy on Graduate Council for the remainder of the year. Chantal Vien volunteered; no objections.

Action item: Marissa to send the Graduate Council meeting schedule and Terms of Reference to C. Vien.

5. Athletics and Recreation follow-up – D. Tannant

Action item: Marissa to send out email from Tom Huisman, Director of Athletics and Recreation (May 2018 GSAC) to current GSAC members.

As a recap: Students at UBC Okanagan currently pay a yearly Athletics fee on top of tuition and are also required to pay a drop-in fee of \$5 in order to access Athletics facilities. Fees are also required to book the sports field and ball courts. As a result many students are instead going to the YMCA, which is closer to town and cost-effective.

Members would prefer a minimum of one day or a few hours each month that is available at no cost, as well as graduate-student specific programming. Students also reported that UBC-Okanagan students are able to use the UBC-V aquatic centre at no cost. The Dean responded that CoGS is happy to bring these concerns to higher leadership if there is formal documentation provided.

D. Roberts provided follow up from several actions items of the September 26 meeting:

- Awards notification emails are sent via graduateawards.ok@ubc.ca
- Students will now be notified via email when an award application is received for those awards which require an application directly to CoGS. Unsuccessful applicants will not be notified due to the fluid nature of funding availability.
- The definition of 'Satisfactory' progress is available online on the CoGS Policy & Procedure Manual. Graduate Council has recently formed a working group which is now reviewing the annual progress report forms in order to improve and clarify what satisfactory means. Any changes will be reflected on the website.

The Dean encouraged any students with ideas for changes to the progress report forms to email Deanna Roberts: Deanna.roberts@ubc.ca. As Progress Reports are now part of the decision making process for allocating UGF's, the forms are being edited to better support this usage.

The Dean confirmed that UGF funding allocation decisions are made at the Faculty level, not at CoGS. Going forward, there will be a greater volume of students that are eligible for UGF's now that first-class GPA requirements have been removed. Any questions regarding UGF funding allocations or decisions are best directed to the supervisor. Each Faculty decides how its own funds are allocated. The Dean acknowledged that, at an



overall average, graduate students at UBC-O are funded much less than UBC-V on a per-student basis. This is partially based on a much smaller endowment fund on this campus.

The Dean reported that increasing graduate student funding is a work in progress but some new awards, including the International Doctoral Partial Tuition Award (effective September 2019 for incoming international PhD students), will help. It is possible that these increased funds for new students will mean that faculty could reallocate some funds to support current students, but this is up to individual faculty. D. Roberts added that funds for new awards are not coming from CoGS, but through the Excellence Fund.

Council discussed available base funding at UBC-V campus and minimum funding amounts for new student recruitment. The Dean responded that minimum required funding would mean a decrease in student enrolment. The current strategy is to raise base funding as much as possible in order to be able to offer more awards for more students. Graduate students make up only 10% of the student population at UBC-O – at a research intensive campus, this should be at 20%. Improvements in graduate student support, funding, facilities, and housing are expected over the next several years.

6. October discussion topic: Teaching Assistant positions

Members discussed the following regarding Teaching Assistant and Graduate Research Assistant positions:

- Concerns regarding the TA allocation process. The Dean responded that each Faculty is responsible for their own allocations. Members also added that this can change depending on available funding (Tri Council, research grants, TAships) and varies between supervisors. Some may balance TA positions depending on what other funding a student has.
- Concerns that students without TA positions are losing valuable teaching experience
- Concern that TA positions are used to “subsidize” research funds
- Acknowledgement that each School or Department has different teaching needs. Some programs (such as Chemistry), do not have enough Chemistry TA’s available and hire from outside the program. Education, for example, often employs Psychology and Social Work students. Others (such as Engineering) do not offer enough courses for every student to receive a position. Some programs hire undergraduate students to fill empty positions.

The Dean clarified that TA positions are ultimately beyond the scope of CoGS. As they are considered institutional employment, this is managed by the Human Resources department and budgeted appropriately. He encouraged members to collect data on any inappropriate practices and agreed to advocate for students with university administration if documentation is provided.



All students are encouraged to seek out and apply for other positions in other faculties across campus.

Action item: CoGS to look into locations where TA positions for each Faculty are posted on campus, and encourage Deans not to restrict access to postings and to better share these opportunities with students.

Regarding student funding, the Dean stated that he would like to see funds for entrance scholarships be reflected in student offer letters, and for the letters to be made available to students sooner.

Action item: As a reference for Council members, the Dean agreed to send out a document that details the high-level funding available across Canada's U15 universities.

7. **GSAC Scope** – D. Tannant

Committee members spoke to concerns regarding the value of Athletics and Recreation fees. They discussed the limitations of student health and dental benefits for students with spouses, children or dependents, whom are not covered under the current plan.

8. **Focus topic for November GSAC**

Members are encouraged to forward any ideas for November's meeting to Marissa: marissa.brown@ubc.ca

9. **Other Business**

None.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm