



GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
Minutes
Wednesday, September 28
1:15pm-3:15pm/ ZOOM

Attendees:

Al Ousi, Sahar	R	Nunes, Helena	X	Wale, Janna	X
Ahmad, Hammad	X	Paudel, Bhuwan	X	Wallace, Mandy	X
Amoh-Siaw, Felix	R	Piva, Larissa	X	Walsh, Monique	R
Awotwi-Pratt, Stephanie	R	Rempel, Kerry	X	Wiebe, Karin	R
Crampton, Kara	R	Rousseau, Camille	X	Woolgar, Lucia	R
Dizari, Nassim Zand	R	Singh, Shambhavi	X	Wiebe, Karin	X
Ganesh, Kirthana (2PM)	X	Shabir, Nadhiyya	R	Yang, Shirley (Sijie)	R
Hewitt, Michelle	R	Shatzko, Amanda	X	Zand, Nassim	X
Huggins, Madison	R	Shwed, Alanna	X		
Jarry-Bolduc, Gabriel	R	Sarkar, Debangsha	X		
Kumanan, Aswathy	R	Singh, Shambhavi	X		
Kooijman, Allison	R	Steele, Andrew	R		
Manrique Hernandez, Johanna Elizabeth	X	Tao, Sophia Hong Yang	R		
Monir, Rifah	X	Ueda, Yukie	R		
Kumar, Manish	X				
Lewis, Jennifer	R				
Shipley, Paul	X	Roberts, Deanna	X	Bandringa, Janie	X
				Meehan, Alicia	X

Meeting started at 01:15pm

1. Chair’s Remarks

Introductions:

The meeting began with introductions from attendees.

Discussion of the purpose of the committee:

The Chair then discussed the purpose of the committee, which is two-directional: to provide information on graduate studies that can be disseminated, but also to provide an opportunity to bring forward issues to the



College of Graduate Studies (CoGS). There was a reminder that a call for agenda items will go out two weeks before the next meeting. Attendees can contact Dr. Shipley via email or by phone (email is preferable).

Policy change and change to College of Graduate Studies Reception:

There has been a key policy change regarding transfer requirements from a Master's to PhD program. The policy used to be that the student required 12 credits for transfer, but there are some Master's programs with fewer than 12 credits required. The policy has now changed to allow either 12 credits or the coursework requirements for the program - whichever is fewer. Students should check in with their program coordinator for more information, but the policy can now be found in the Academic Calendar.

The Chair noted that CoGS now has a new, additional, Associate Dean, Dr. Margaret Reeves, and informed attendees that the CoGS' reception has moved to EME 2171 and will now be available for walk-in assistance.

2. Students' Union Report

There was no Students' Union Report given as the representative was unavailable at the time of the meeting.

3. Report from Senate

There was little new information to report from Senate, as meetings were not hosted over the summer. Senate meetings will be a hybrid of online and in-person moving forward. The representative did not have the full agenda, but will report back at the next meeting.

4. Preferred location for future meetings

The group discussed preferences for meeting locations, and it was decided that meetings will alternate between in-person, with an option for Zoom, and Zoom-only meetings. The next meeting will be hybrid, with both Zoom and in-person options available.

5. Okanagan Ombuds Advisory Committee's (OOAC) Graduate Student Member (attachment)

The Chair described the role of the Ombudsperson, which is a neutral party to show people pathways to conflict resolution. It was suggested that someone from this group could either be acclaimed or appointed to the role (if there was someone immediately ready to take on the role), or that members could apply. There were no immediate volunteers. A thumbs up/down as to whether there should be an open call for interest was mixed.

A member expressed that some of the hesitation in taking on the role may be because members don't have a sense of what the time commitment or workload would be. The Chair will seek clarification on the responsibilities of the role and anyone from the group can send an email if they're interested in applying.

6. Creating focused resources to support grad students who are writing their thesis in English as their second or third language

A member brought forward an issue based on personal experience from the perspective of a graduate student whose first language isn't English. The member stated that it is difficult in the first six months of the year, when students are beginning the year and their schedules are busy, to attend the available workshops for university writing skills. The member felt that it would be beneficial to get more precise or focused resources geared toward the specific needs of graduate students who speak English as a second language.

The Chair asked the member if they could speak to what the holes were in the way that the current workshops are run, and the member felt that many international graduate students are often not yet ready to write their theses when the workshops are run, which is primarily in the fall and winter.

Additionally, the member felt that it would be beneficial to have an interactive session where graduate students are asked what their needs are, instead of having scheduled workshops with a predetermined agenda. The member felt that disciplines mattered significantly and that workshops are often not geared towards, or appropriate for, university students needing assistance with technical writing skills. It was noted that it would be beneficial for students to have access to more technical writing courses. An attendee reminded the group that 1:1 support is available to graduate students if needed.

Another member expressed that one of the challenges of holding a more interactive session is that the needs of the student body are varied. They felt that it would be difficult to take the myriad student needs and experiences to construct one workshop that will adequately support this variety of needs. The member queried whether it might be possible to hold focus groups to identify common needs, and it was suggested that because attendance at workshops is typically only 10 or 11 people that it might be possible to integrate some of the students' individual needs at these workshops.

Finally, a member suggested a need for "soft skills" workshops for international graduate students, especially for those engaging in community-based research. The member felt that it would be beneficial for international graduate students to have access to "soft skills" workshops that would highlight skills that are specifically applicable to the Canadian context. The Chair agreed that this would be an important resource and stated that they would seek more information on the possibility of "soft skills" training.

7. Other Business

Housing:

One member brought up the issue of housing availability. They stated that students are complaining that they are on long wait lists for housing and that the housing that is available is very limited.

The Chair recognized this as an ongoing problem, stating that the housing market is very tough (close to zero percent vacancy in the Okanagan currently, and the cost of housing is astronomically high). The Chair agreed with the need to advocate for student housing and work with campus partners on finding ways to help students find housing.

An affordability task force is being set up with the Dean to discuss this issue. The Dean is working hard to make graduate student voices distinct and heard, which didn't happen the last time an affordability task force was set up. The Chair will include housing as a regular item on the agenda.

One member suggested that there should be at least a few housing spaces allocated for students who are on a tight timeline to find housing, especially for students who are arriving shortly and can't find any suitable housing. They queried whether there had been conversations previously about the possibility of having some kind of housing that people can stay in while they find a place to live. The Chair confirmed that there were a few of these places available during the Pandemic, but that these have since disappeared now that the isolation requirements are no longer in place.

Designated desks/tables for PhD students:

A member asked whether UBC Okanagan had plans to add buildings, so that they would be able to designate offices or tables for PhD students. They felt that it was very difficult to find space to work on campus.

The Chair agreed that it was unreasonable to expect graduate students to work without a desk space. They stated that the University used to have enough space for graduate students to have a desk, but that there is now not enough space. There is space designated in the plans for the future ICI building.

A member stated that remodelling was on the agenda to increase space, but it relied on each faculty to contribute a portion of funding to the project, and only one faculty (Education) responded. This has now been pushed off the agenda.

The Chair noted that individual programs can designate space, so they suggested that students should talk to their supervisors to see whether their program can designate a desk or office space.

Pending bus strike:

A member expressed concern about the pending bus strike, and stated that the University has recommended using alternative forms of transportation. The issue with alternative forms of transportation is that cold weather is coming. The Chair agreed that the bus strike would be tough on students.

The member asked whether the University would move back to a hybrid model of learning, and the Chair stated that this would depend on the preferences of each individual instructor. One member stated that a hybrid model would be preferable from an affordability standpoint, because students wouldn't have to pay to get to school and back.

A member brought up the availability of Lime and Spin e-scooters on campus, as well as an app for ride sharing and cycling valet service. D. Roberts sent a link to the message in the Zoom chat for attendees to view. Some concerns were brought up regarding the safety of Lime scooters, as the head of orthopedic surgery wrote an open letter to city council last year calling them "fracture machines", given the uptick in broken bones. A member thought that it was odd to see it as an official suggestion for how to get to class from UBCO.

The Chair concluded the discussion by stating that the Dean would bring this issue up at Deans' Council.



UBCycles:

A member brought up the issue of UBCycles being removed due to space constraints. A link was posted to a change.org petition in the Zoom chat.

Tuition affordability:

A member brought up the issue of high tuition for international students. The Chair stated that funding approvals were just put in place for international students, with a plan for the amount of funding to increase over the next couple of years. The Chair agreed that \$20,000 for international PhD students isn't a lot to address the affordability issue, but that more funding for tuition is in the works. There is currently no funding for Master's students, but this is also in the works. For minimum funding information, students can check the funding handbook.

Food service on campus:

A member brought up the issue of long lines for food on campus, and lack of access to affordable food options on campus. The Chair felt that this was partially due to the limited opening of stores on campus, and that finding enough workers to staff the stores is also an ongoing issue.

Parking affordability:

One member stated that fares for parking are very high, and that this poses an affordability issue for students. They asked whether students could access a discount for parking (especially in the winter), as gas and parking are a major drain on student finances. The Chair agreed, and added that it was hard to find parking in general on campus.

Meeting adjourned at 02:26:43 PM