



GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
Minutes
Wednesday, September 28
1:15pm-3:15pm/ ZOOM and EME 2124

Attendees:

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

Meeting started at 2:00 PM

1. Food Security for Graduate Students (Casey Hamilton and Stephanie Patterson)

Intro from Casey and Stephanie:

The representatives from Health and Wellness provided an introduction about their role at the University, stating that they are Registered Dieticians who work in campus wellness and education. Their role is to support and advocate for food security and food culture.

Casey stated that 42 percent of graduate students experience food insecurity, which was defined as concern over the ability to buy food. She said that there were a number of things that could be done to lessen the blow of food insecurity, one of which was providing emergency access through the Food Bank. The representatives from Health and Wellness expressed an interest in hearing from GSAC on their perspectives on food insecurity, as it can be difficult to get graduate student voices on the issue.



The representatives from Health and Wellness discussed the pantry, which is a space that provides fresh, frozen, and canned food to UBC Okanagan students. The space also includes information about how to access other food programs in the area, and includes a hamper program where students can request items and pick them up at a convenient time. Hampers can also be of benefit to students with dietary considerations that wouldn't necessarily be accommodated by the pantry.

Food Hub:

The Food Hub initiative was the result of a 2020 study on food security, which focused on learning from students about how they're coping with being food insecure. The study also sought input from students about culturally-sensitive food needs. The study found that students are looking for cooking and food budgeting skills, and that they want to cook together in a community kitchen space that's fully equipped. It also found that students are wanting to connect over food issues and advocate for those issues. The representatives from Health and Wellness stated that they're hoping to open the food hub space in the near future.

In the meantime, Picnic, which was previously open as a cafeteria prior to the pandemic, is now a space that is open for dialogue around food insecurity. Health and Wellness is also working on developing cooking workshops, grab and go breakfasts, relaunching the farmers' market and community garden project, and is working on a low-cost food box for students. These projects will be rolled out slowly, but work is ongoing.

Feedback from GSAC Members:

The representatives from Health and Wellness opened up the discussion to seek feedback from GSAC members.

A member asked for clarification about whether the pantry would be open to all students, or whether it would be open to only grad students, and it was confirmed that the pantry was accessible to all students.

One member suggested that one of the things that might apply to graduate students more than undergraduate students is that some graduate students are also supporting families. They also wondered whether it might be more difficult to reach graduate students, as they're more isolated and can be unconnected to other graduate students. The member suggested the creation of an awareness campaign with faculty advisors to ensure that graduate students were aware of the resources available.

Another member asked about the location of the pantry and whether there was an application process for using the service. The Health and Wellness representatives confirmed that it was located next to the Student Union front desk in the Student Union building, and is open from 10:00am until 4:00PM, Monday through Friday. Additionally, it was confirmed that there is no application process for students wishing to use the service. Students can take what they need and can use provided bags to bring their food home. There are guides about how much of each item students can take so that the pantry can feed as many students as possible.

A member expressed concerns about the limited hours of operation and asked whether there was a plan to increase hours, as evening and weekend times were likely to be most convenient for graduate students needing the service. The Health and Wellness representatives stated that they were thinking about solutions



for emergent needs, including providing access to hampers after hours and the creation of a pantry shelf that is accessible on evenings and weekends.

One member pointed out the lack of food options on campus, and stated that the portion sizes for meals purchased on campus were not as large as they were pre-pandemic. They asked how food services on campus were serving students: can students get a reasonable portion size at a reasonable price to carry them through their day? They felt that it was very important for students to know that even if they're on a marginal budget, they can access food on campus that's affordable. The member stated that something with "stick-to-itiveness" offered at a reasonable price would be very beneficial.

In response to the previous comment, a member stated that there is a reduced service offering because places on campus are understaffed, and that this is why so many food items are "grab and go". They stated that Food Services have put all of their energy into Pritchard Dining Hall, which has an "all you care to eat" model in which students can eat all they wish to eat while they're in the dining hall. The dinner option isn't cheap (\$18-\$19), and lunch is \$13-\$14, so there aren't any \$5 meals, but this is something that's available and there are some healthy options as well as some comfort food items.

One suggestion was that perhaps Food Services could hire graduate students to fill the employment gap, especially in light of the new laws that allow International students to work full-time. Another member countered that it doesn't make much sense for graduate students to work full time as they are also taking classes and teaching. However, it was agreed that this could present an option for increasing the available staffing for food services on campus.

A member asked whether a partnership with an organization like Urban Harvest would be possible, especially for their "leftover sales", which occur every Saturday or Sunday. The representatives from Health and Wellness agreed that this would be a good option to consider. They also mentioned a land-to-table model, stating that Food Service is working to procure more local food.

Regarding the pantry, one member felt that some students may not feel comfortable with free food as it could feel like begging for food. They felt that having cheaper food options on campus may be a better option for some. The member stated that many students are unhappy with the variety of food available on campus, and that especially during the summer, there are even fewer food options and those that are available aren't very affordable. They felt that this might disproportionately affect graduate students, who are often on campus in the summer to conduct research.

A member suggested partnering with GEO to see whether there could be opportunities to accommodate dietary and cultural food preferences. The Health and Wellness representatives stated that GEO was working on ways to facilitate these things.

Regarding the community kitchen, one member asked whether there would be separation between meat and vegetables so that they weren't being cooked on the same surfaces or with the same pots and pans. The member expressed the importance of maintaining separation between meats and vegetables, especially for those who cannot eat certain types of meat for cultural or religious reasons. The Health and Wellness



representatives agreed that the process should be tightened to make sure that there are separate areas for meat and vegetables, as well as ensuring that there were spaces free of common allergens such as gluten.

To conclude the discussion, the Health and Wellness representatives encouraged GSAC members to spread the word about the initiatives described above. A member asked whether it would be a good idea to bring a Food Services employee to the next meeting, and Casey stated that she would connect with Brad and Dani (Associate Director for Food Services) to see whether this would be possible.

2. Chair's Remarks

The Chair discussed Dr. Simpson's advocacy for increased student funding, stating that he has received an email from those in charge of budgeting and that Dr. Simpson will be asking for additional funds.

Dr. Simpson has also been pushing for graduate student affordability, and continuing to fight for graduate student research space in the ICI building. The Chair and Dr. Simpson are hopeful for considerable graduate research space in the new building. With regard to the Affordability Task Force, graduate students were omitted from the original Task Force and report. There is now a graduate student-specific Task Force that Dr. Simpson is on to ensure that graduate students are not left out this time.

During the bus strike, Dr. Simpson and the rest of the CoGS team advocated for people to move to a hybrid model of teaching, but were unsuccessful in making this a reality. Should transportation issues become a concern again, the majority of the lecturing team is ready to pivot to a hybrid teaching model.

3. Students' Union Report

The Students' Union Office Representative (SUO) discussed childcare on campus, stating that the University is considering a new childcare facility on campus which will increase available spots by 34. Childcare spots in the new facility would be available to faculty, staff, and students, but priority would be given to international students requiring childcare. The SUO Representative noted that the current wait time for childcare is between 2 and 2.5 years, and that the existing childcare facility is not currently operating at full capacity. The SUO is in ongoing talks with someone who may be willing to open additional childcare on campus.

The Students' Union Representative then discussed the need to establish a relationship with the Graduate Student Union (GSU) on the Vancouver Campus. They stated that GSS had not been fully aware that there was a Graduate Students' Union on the Okanagan campus, but that that now that they are aware, the GSS is willing to work with the Union here. The Vancouver and Okanagan Graduate Students' Unions will now meet once a month to keep up the relationship, and the Okanagan GSU is hopeful that they will be looped into conversations to create a united front.

The SUO representative spoke next about the BCGEU's lack of support for graduate students. They explained that there were two empty spots for shop stewards that have now been filled. The current collective agreement has not been updated for more than a decade, and it needs an update. Graduate student representatives are now involved in discussions related to an updated agreement, but the SUO representative



cautioned that the new agreement may not be ideal for graduate students because the seats for graduate students were empty for the majority of the discussion. The SUO representative felt that graduate students were a lower priority for the BCGEU and have been used as bargaining chips. One member responded by expressing the importance of having voices in the margins of the unions heard. The SUO representative will share an email with information about where to find the abbreviated agreement.

The SUO representative discussed the Tuition Engagement Report, stating that every published response from students was “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to a tuition increase, and at the end of the report, a 2% increase in tuition was recommended. There will be another report this year, but graduate students will no longer be asked whether they want a tuition increase because it “doesn’t provide any additional information”. The SUO representative encouraged graduate students to respond to the survey so that their voices could be heard. They felt that the worst thing would be if graduate students’ silence was cited as the reason for an increase in tuition.

A member expressed concern about some “unofficial” rules regarding how much students can work. They felt that there should be a common framework for the distribution of TAs as some students are receiving several courses in a semester. Another member expressed that CoGS should publicize the BCGEU agreement more so that people knew who to reach out to regarding issues. The SUO representative stated that the major issue is that the agreement is obscure, which makes it difficult for students to understand all of their rights. The Chair reminded GSAC members that CoGS is not in charge of TAs, but that they continue to advocate for student rights. The Chair felt that getting some graduate student eyes on revising letters of agreement would be beneficial in solving this issue.

The SUO representative informed GSAC that they will be holding graduate student committee office hours for an hour each week in the Collegium. The days of the week and times of office hours will vary, so the SUO representative recommended that students check the Collegium calendar for more information.

4. Report from Senate

The UBCOSU Representative announced a new \$5000 entrance award for Masters students in IGS, and stated that Senate is removing the SAT requirement for applicants from the US. They also provided a link to the Student Experience of Instruction report, which is a study of faculty and students to see how everyone is interacting. This link can be found here: <http://scs-senate-2021.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/20221027-Okanagan-Senate-Materials.pdf>.

With regard to the International Student representative on GSAC, it was confirmed that this space is still vacant. There will be a call out for an International Student representative shortly.

5. Theft of Student Property (Johanna)

A member brought up concerns related to theft of bicycles and scooters on campus. They stated that they knew someone who has had their scooter stolen and another person whose laptop was stolen. It was acknowledged that Kelowna has been consistently ranked as one of the most unsafe cities in Canada, and that



this is a known issue on campus. The issue has made students reluctant to bring personal items to the University.

One member proposed the need for more options for secure storage of belongings. It was suggested that lockers could be a good option for students to reduce the theft of personal items. One member asked whether it would be possible to have a system to track bikes and scooters which would link a student's ID with a number on the bike or scooter. The Chair suggested Project 529, which is a registration system used by the police. A member suggested the option of renting a locker at the gym, which cost approximately \$50 for the year. A member also mentioned some lockers on the third floor of EME that may be available for student use. The Chair concluded the discussion by stating that he will push for more accessible locker space.

6. Other Business

A member asked for information about budget cuts to student health care, as they felt that some of their benefits had decreased recently. Based on the member's understanding, coverage for physiotherapy, chiropractic care, and massage therapy had been reduced. The member stated that they had been approached by people saying that the cost of medications has also increased, but that they couldn't personally verify this. Another member asserted that dental costs had increased, and that the "old" information regarding coverage for various medical services was still listed on the website.

The SUO representative stated that they will email a contact from the Students' Union to confirm whether there have been any recent changes to the student benefit package.

Meeting adjourned at 3:49