

**GRADUATE STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**Meeting Minutes**

**November 6, 20234 | Zoom/OM2-138**

**Attendees:**

Shirley Lagman	X	Iana Bashmakova	X	Alec Dow	
Johanna Manrique	X	Sahar Sowdagar	X	Emily Rubooga	X
Mojdeh Rezaei-Khamseh	X	Jo Baranov		Dieudonne Nweke	X
Michael Sandler	X	Amira Ahmed	X	Amanda Shatzko	
Andrew Steele	X	Shavneet Thind	X	Mhamoda Akter Moli	
Brante Shelton	X	Carolyn Crawford	X	Elyssa Hunter	
Riley Eaton	X	Bronte Shelton	X	Lixin Tu	X
Lance Teng	X	Dominic (Zhongda) Huang	X		
Shipley, Peter	X	Roberts, Deanna	X		

*X – In attendance*

**Meeting started at 2:04pm**

**1. Chair’s Remarks**

Paul Shipley opened the meeting and introduced Dale Mullings, AVP Students.

**2. Services and Programs**

Dale thanked the Committee for inviting him. He indicated that he has attended GSAC meetings in the past and wanted to recap what he has heard before and listen to what the Committee has to say now.

Dale indicated that in his role as AVP Students, he supports all students on campus. Departments in his portfolio include: Academic and Career Development; Athletics and Recreation; Global Engagement Office; Indigenous Programs and Services; Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office; Student Engagement and Learning; and Student Wellness.

Last time Dale came to a GSAC meeting, a few major themes emerged. These were: affordability (housing and daycare), guaranteed PhD funding, space, and the grad student experience in general.

### **Student Affordability**

Regarding grad student affordability, the new downtown building will have over 500 housing spaces at market rate, targeted toward grad and upper year students first, then staff and others.

Dale indicated in January, the University will announce that it is going forward with government funding to build on-campus housing for graduate and upper-year students. This development will be located near the gym, and will be the beginning of a larger presence of grad student housing on campus.

The campus also runs the daycare, and just finished an extension on November 1. Ninety-one spots are reserved for students, faculty or staff. This month, the campus is putting in an application for 10-dollar-a-day daycare for all spots. This is similar to UBCV.

### **Graduate Student Space**

Regarding graduate student space, CoGS is now located in OM2. The campus also put aside 250k for grad student space renewal of grad student offices. This project audited all student space on campus and included analyzing sizing, common desk sizes and appropriate lighting. The project was a cost-sharing model with faculties to enhance spaces.

In WT2, there is a project rolling out with Engineering, which will allocate 90k to enhance space in that faculty. Dale continues to advocate for space renewal and new spaces, both on-campus and downtown.

### **Graduate Student Experience**

Last year, AVP Students introduced a new Graduate Student Advisor position that focuses on international students, which includes a student pathway program for international students. This position has seen lots of success and includes career preparation. Student Services partnered with CoGS on an Indigenous Graduate Student Advising position which supports Indigenous Grad students. The program is a real success in terms of mentorship and students served end up in grad programs across the country.

Dale's office also created a Learning Hub, and invested in a second learning strategist. They hear the most pressing topics for graduate students are affordability, space, and experience in

terms of student life. Housing is not part of Dale's portfolio, nor is daycare, but Dale has a seat at the table to advocate for these things and has been part of listening sessions over last two years. There is ongoing work by multiple teams across campus on these topics. Dale opened the floor to Committee members to identify what they see as issues or what they see as things that are going well.

## **Discussion**

One member indicated they have seen a lot of service improvements since they started their program, especially in terms of transit improvements to and from campus. One difficulty they have is finding study spaces downtown and with Internet connections downtown.

Dale indicated a lot of groundwork has been done on the new downtown campus. This location will include two types of study spaces that will be program-specific. The ground floor will be an open hall, and will have large study spaces for any students living downtown. UBCO is also trying to use the downtown campus as a hub to connect to other spots in Kelowna, like the Kelowna Library and recreation facilities.

A member asked if the H2O centre was going to be included in the access to recreational facilities agreement with the city. Dale indicated at this time, the H2O Centre and the Rutland YMCA are not included, as they are outside the downtown core, but UBCO is currently trying to get practicum partnerships in place with these facilities and hope to have future conversations on further partnerships.

Another member indicated that they feel introduction to the campus and mentorship has been positive and asked about future plans for international students.

Dale indicated the mentorship program is a pilot project they have just started and hope to continue.

One member indicated they are a Graduate Community Facilitator. They feel this is a great job and they work with a great team, but they don't have enough funding to cover events and have to charge and ticket for events. They relayed that the Grad Gala is a single event that takes half of budget for the entire year.

Dale replied that in a time of budget pressure, departments have to focus on their core mandates and prioritize work and budgets on where they can have the most impact. He appreciates the budget for facilitators is constrained. They used to have three facilitators, now have two. No further cuts are planned.

The Graduate Community Facilitator indicated the Grad Gala info is published on Instagram and will go out in the graduate student newsletter.

A Committee member mentioned that communication between faculties can be improved.

Paul indicated that due to privacy constraints, email lists of students cannot be shared, but that CoGS is happy to, and regularly does, share information to the graduate student body through emailed newsletters and social media posts.

A member commented that communications was a topic that came up during the recent CoGS External Review interviews, particularly the inability to get info from CoGS or their own department.

Paul replied that if anyone is not receiving replies from CoGS, please reach out to him directly. If we know where the gaps are, we are in a better position to address them.

Dale mentioned that Career Services and the Learning Hub are tailored to graduate students. They don't necessarily use their newsletters or socials for information that is unique to graduate students, but they are looking at best ways to communicate.

A member indicated that they think CoGS is doing okay with communications, but they would like to see improved oversight to ensure supervisors and others are communicating how and when they need to.

Paul responded that our approach is to guide supervisors rather than telling them what to do.

Another member indicated that generally, they think things are going well on campus, but that they don't like staying off campus, because in the winter it's really challenging, so they are grateful to hear that UBC is planning things off campus, and that future students will really benefit. The member wanted to know what powers and rights students have when they are having tough times with supervisors, making their programs take longer than they should, and how could supervisors be encouraged to give students reasonable workloads.

Paul responded supervisor relationships are part of CoGS mandate.

Dale mentioned even though this is not part of his portfolio, it is very helpful in terms of context and said that the Dean of CoGS has been part of conversations about affordability and funding.

A member asked if there is an opportunity to consent to having emails shared with CoGS so they can receive timely communication.

Paul indicated that CoGS does have student email addresses, but that we are not able to share those with others due to legal constraints. He reminded the Committee that there is a grad student online orientation module called UBC 501, available on the CoGS website.

A member mentioned that through the Student Union, there is an online calendar that you can link to your Google Calendar.

Deanna replied that we list our grad student events on our calendar on our CoGS site, but that at this time, there are restrictions in place that don't allow us to have a downloadable calendar.

Dale summarized that what he has heard from the group is that communication is important theme, along with resources, funding and supervisory support, and that in past, space was a driving issue.

A member raised that during the CoGS Review conversations, the main themes were space, communication, funding for grad events and initiatives, daycare, course offerings for grad students and access to professional development.

Dale offered that we could look at more collaboration with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and said this has been successful for the School of Engineering.

Another member said that regarding space, it would be great to have more cleaning supplies in reading rooms and grad spaces. During Covid, cleaning supplies were available in all spaces, which made them much more comfortable for studying.

Dale asked if there were any other issues the Committee wanted to discuss.

Paul replied that the availability of food on weekends and evenings and especially in the summer time is still an issue.

A member asked if there are any exit surveys for students that give insight as to why some students don't finish their programs.

Deanna replied that CoGS has been exploring this, but time and resources have hindered progress.

A member indicated that information provided by programs is not always up to date.

Paul responded that Program handbooks are compiled by faculties, but CoGS advocates to have them kept up to date. There is no central student handbook, but we do have the Policy Manual available on our website, which is always up to date.

A member mentioned that supervisors have a lot of power, and if you are having issues, professors have academic freedom, and students with conflicts sometimes have no option other than to leave program.

Paul replied that Policy O-9 covers supervision. It gives students several rights, including switching supervisors if another is willing to take them. There has to be a research fit, available funding and space. O-9 clearly outlines supervisor requirements. These have teeth in Senate. O-9 has a path to remove supervisory privileges. He said this is extremely rare, but steps toward this are not.

A member said that related to that, another problem is in severe cases that are more straightforward, there is a path, but that academic abuse is harder to navigate because graduate student communities are so small and we often feel there will be no consequences.

Paul responded that he and the other CoGS Associate Dean, Margaret Reeves, both work with supervisory pairs having issues. The majority can be worked out. Things that come through the pathway are treated seriously by CoGS.

Paul said the first step is to talk to your supervisor. He is aware this is challenging. The next step is to speak with the program coordinator, and if that doesn't work, it can go to department head but usually comes to CoGS. Margaret and he manage cases from there, with the goal of positive student outcomes. We want things fixed or changed. It is literally our mandate.

Paul reiterated how much CoGS values confidentiality.

A member raised that a piece of policy that seems to be missing is the ability to explore a supervisory relationship outside UBCO if one can't be found internally. Some research areas are quite small.

Paul replied that we have a route to co-supervision outlined in Policy O-9.

A member asked if we could add a line in progress reports – something like if you have confidential info you want to discuss with CoGS, you can approach them.

Paul said he was happy to work on that and that we are in the process of revising all of our forms, so this wouldn't be hard to add.

A member asked about guaranteed protection in supervisor evaluations. They see these as good tools as long as there are the right confidentiality assurances.

Paul said that he believes that Psych is one of the only programs that does a supervisor evaluation and that one of reasons other programs have not gone with supervisor evaluations is that the cohorts are too small so they can't be anonymous (ie. only two students in a supervisory group.)

A member commented that sometimes they feel there is a threat of cutting funding if a student works off campus.

Paul reminded the committee there is a formal policy against retaliation, and that PhD students can't have their funding cut below the minimum (\$24k) for four years. He relayed that GRAs are not employment. GRAs are scholarships and are taxed as scholarships. We also have supervisor training, though those who attend are not always the ones that need it.

A member said It would help if grad students are prepared with good advice and what to expect and how to handle difficulties and how to deal with conflict.

Paul replied that we offer a workshop on managing the supervisor relationship. Two or three times a year. The associate deans have worked hard to improve these.

### 3. Campus Planning

Abigail Riley and Carson Mackonka from Campus Planning joined the meeting to discuss the Campus Plan Update. Abigail relayed that they visited the Committee last winter, and are back to talk about where they have integrated feedback and to hear more from the Committee. They are hoping to bring this plan forward in June for Board endorsement.

The purpose of the engagement was to share and collect feedback on Campus Plan Update. How to address physical future needs. Are there any gaps?

UBCO is refreshing the University Strat Plan, this is separate but related to the Campus Planning project, to ensure our physical campus is responsive and adaptive.

This isn't a growth plan; the intention is to accommodate future amenities if and when we move ahead with those.

What we heard in first phase:

- Improving accessibility
- Desire for broader range of spaces and services
- Additional rec ops
- Protecting and enhancing landscapes
- Parking supply and improved transit options

More info is available in the PowerPoint included for the Committee.

There is an Engagement Strategy happening from Nov 5 – 29. An online survey is available at [Campus Plan Update](#)

There will be an Open House on November 20 at 10:30am in the ADM Foyer.

Drop by pop-up sessions are on November 22, 9:30am – 11am in the Fibke Foyer, and November 27, 11am-1pm in the EME Foyer.

A member asked how parking fits into the strategy.

Abigail said UBCO's land is constrained by topography and underground services. Parking strategy aligns with future buildings. We have a sustainable transportation plan, overall reducing the need to drive, even with growth, and have more efficient ways to accommodate parking, which may include a parking structure in the long-term.

A member commented that upper-year and grad student housing will still be limited and wanted to know how who gets these spaces will be prioritized.

Abigail indicated this is business decision by student Housing, but she does know this won't be family housing, these will be studio/individual units. The neighborhood to north is more flexible housing and market rentals targeting the university community.

Abigail mentioned they have longer community conversations scheduled with departments like the DRC to identify needs and interest off other groups.

Paul asked if Food Services are included in the plan.

Abigail said the plan itself is about space and will include more space for food in strategies around amenities. With every new building, they seek inclusion of food services. Business Operations have to come forward to support and use space. Campus has desire to be a 24/7 community with a larger variety of food.

Paul said the problem for food services is staffing for them. Need to be strategic about maximizing food availability without requiring more staff.

Abigail responded this is a physical plan that supports those business areas. It's not so focused on operations, but the provision of space for those operations. That would be a companion to this document.

A member indicated this is broad strokes presentation and asked if there will be opportunity on feedback throughout the process?

Abigail says this is a twenty-year plan and things shift. We hear a lot of things that bleed beyond what plan can deliver, so we work closely with other departments like infrastructure planning. Will need to have continued conversation with community.

#### **4. Other Business**

None.

**Meeting ended 4 pm**