

Society of Biology Graduate Students

March 3rd, 2016
Annual General Meeting

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Constitutional Amendments

New position: AAFC (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada) Representative

Rationale:

The Biology Department at Western University extends beyond the boundaries of the Western Campus. Approximately 25% of the Biology graduate students in any given year are primarily based at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) centre, a government research facility located about 8km from the Western campus. There are currently 14 supervisors of these graduate students at AAFC who are both adjunct faculty members of Western and government *research scientists* with laboratory facilities situated at the Centre. The distance from campus effectively isolates these AAFC-based graduate students from many of the campus-based activities and restricts access to many graduate student opportunities that would normally emerge from open dialogue, such as cross collaborative research or networking. To address these problems, an SOBGS AAFC representative will work to bridge the effective gap and help to provide an avenue for dialogue between the graduate students at AAFC and those of the main campus.

An AAFC representative on the SOBGS executive board will also speak for the unique needs of the AAFC Graduate students to the Society and the Biology Department. An SOBGS AAFC representative will also liaise with the SOBGS Research Committee Representatives and the relevant operations managers to spur cross collaborative efforts and to facilitate better access of the campus students to the equipment at the AAFC and vice versa. An SOBGS AAFC Representative would serve as a liaison between the Graduate students at AAFC and the Society.

The role of the SOBGS AAFC Representative would require leadership and commitment to change. A highly motivated Biology graduate student whose laboratory and supervisor are primarily located at AAFC, would be responsible for I) Creating and maintaining a Graduate society community at AAFC II) Helping to connect the AAFC students to opportunities and activities on Campus III) Act as official representative of AAFC Graduate students in all relevant SOBGS voting.

SOBGS Constitutional Amendments Required:

1. Section 5: The addition of "Section 5.1.12 SOBGS AAFC Representative"
2. Section 12: The addition of the following description for the representative position:

12.13 SOBGS Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Representative

12.13.1 Elected through the formal election process of the Society.

12.13.2 Must be a current Biology Graduate Student whose laboratory and primary supervisor are located at AAFC

12.13.3 Work to improve the Biology Graduate student experience at AAFC

12.13.4 Organize meetings with the AAFC Biology Graduate students (at least two/term)

12.13.5 Communicate concerns received from the Biology Graduate students at AAFC to the Biology Department or the Society

12.3.6 Liaise between Biology Graduate Students at the AAFC and the Society

12.3.7 Work towards addressing any unique needs that may arise for the Biology Graduate students at AAFC

That duty could include;

- Communicating with the TA instructors to consider the difficulties of commuting to campus and working to enable an effective solution
- Facilitating attendance at seminars, workshops and other departmental activities
- Informing AAFC students of social events held by the Society and coordinating access to these events

12.3.8 Facilitate the access of on-campus students to the facilities at AAFC and vice versa

12.13.9 Has voting rights at SOBGS Elected Representative Meetings (1 vote)

End of constitutional amendments

Budget Report

<u>Revenue</u>		
SOGS	956.00	
Biology Formal Tickets	3200.00	*Estimated 80 students \$30, 20 faculty \$40
Left Over Funds	1503.92	*Confirmed December 11 th , 2015
	5659.92	
<i>Fundraising</i>		
BGRF (Donations)	1225.00	
BGRF (Joint Research Fund)	1000.00	
Biology Formal	371.50	
	2596.50	
<i>Departmental Subsidies</i>		
BGRF	300.00	
<u>Total Income</u>	8556.42	
<u>Expense</u>		
BGRF		
Poster boards (biobooth)	320.00	
Catering	1742.00	
Photo printing	300.00	
Dinner with speaker	174.00	
	2536.00	
BioBall		
Venue	750.00	
Catering	3500.00	*Assumes 100 attendees
Insurance	0.00	*New venue doesn't require
Advertising & Tickets	150.00	
DJ	350.00	
	4750.00	
Social Events		
Halloween	103.35	
Gift Basket	200.00	
BBQ	100.00	
	403.35	
Miscellaneous		
Career Workshop Support	200.00	
Other – Discretionary	150.00	
<u>Total expenses</u>	8039.35	
Surplus	517.07	

Committee Reports

i) Chairperson Report

Biology Graduate Research Forum (BGRF)

This year's BGRF was held on October 16th, and featured a wide variety of posters, 3-minute-thesis talks, and long talks that showcased some of the department's high quality research. Along with formal research presentations, the BGRF organizing committee implemented a successful outreach component ("Bio-booths"). Bio-booths displayed accessible information on the different model organisms used by various labs in the department. After the conference, we sent out an extensive survey to all graduate students in order to better organize BGRF and make it a more valuable event in future years. Matheus Sanita Lima has been elected next year's BGRF Chairperson.

For next year's conference (and all future BGRFs), we now have help from the department *via* "The Laudenbauch Fund" to host a higher profile keynote speaker. This seminar will be publicly advertised as the Laudenbauch Lecture, and help finish off the conference on a high, exciting note. The overall goal for next year's conference is to make it more valuable for both students and faculty.

RARE Charitable Research Reserve Presentation

We were able to bring in Jenna Quinn from RARE to give a presentation to faculty and staff about some of the research facilities and funding opportunities that RARE has to offer our department.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me!

Thank you,
Jackie Lebenzon, jlebenzo@uwo.ca

ii) SOGS Representative Report

Dear Biology Graduates,

It has been a privilege for us to represent you as Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) councillors since October 2015. Our role is to participate in monthly SOGS meetings regarding graduate student advocacy and services. For the most part, this means voting on your behalf on a number of issues that affect all graduate students. Here is a brief overview of recent SOGS business:

1. Our attendance at SOGS council meetings determines the size of the departmental grant that SOBGS receives each year. We are pleased to report that attendance was very high in 2015, and SOGS received a grant of \$962 in January. We would like to thank former principal SOGS representative Morag Dick for her excellent work over the last year. Sasha Madhavji is thanked for serving as SOGS alternate members.

2. The SOGS 2016-2017 budget was approved at the Annual General Meeting in February. Notably, VP Finance Jill Veenendaal's budget emphasized the long term financial stability of the Grad Club. In November, Jill met with members of the administration to discuss the considerable occupancy fee for the Grad Club space. The meeting was a disappointment on all fronts, and the occupancy fee remains a considerable barrier to the financial stability of the Grad Club. Included in the SOGS budget was an increase in graduate student fees from \$24.93 to \$26.90. This increase includes a \$1.67 Grad Club levy fee to be used for long term capital investments (e.g., new chairs, tables, bar, etc.). This Grad Club is one of the few spaces dedicated to graduate students on campus, and SOGS believes this fee is important for maintaining, and increasing its use. The 2016-2017 budget also included an increase in the value of the departmental grant rate from \$2 to \$3/student/term. SOBGS can expect more financial support from SOGS in the coming year.

3. SOGS is in the early stages of **developing a comprehensive communications plan**. For now, communication to SOBGS members arrives in the form of the monthly email newsletter (from Olga Sauer) or update (from Kurtis Turnbull). I would like to remind members that current information about SOGS events and services can be accessed through the SOGS website (<http://sogs.ca/>), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Western.SOGS>) or twitter (@WesternSOGS).

4. In January, council approved a motion to **discontinue the SOGS graduate handbook/day-planner in 2016**. The orientation and social committee (OSC)

recognized that the handbook was an increasingly unused resource. This money has been reallocated towards increasing the size of the departmental grants, and providing a better orientation for incoming graduate students.

5. The referendum on the ancillary fee of \$4.89 to 'support entrepreneurship at Western University' failed. It was opposed by voting graduate students (81.3% against; 14.8% voter turnout) and by all students (68.4% against).

6. I encourage everyone to tune in to **GradCast**, the weekly official podcast of SOGS! The podcast highlights graduate research here at Western, including excellent work done in our very own department. You can listen in here (<http://www.gradcastradio.ca/>).

I hope some of these SOGS initiatives will improve the experience of the SOBGS membership in the coming year. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns related to accessing SOGS programs and services.

Additional events and SOGS information can be found on the SOGS website (<http://sogs.ca/>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Western.SOGS>).

Thanks,

Rosa Del Giudice (rdelgiud@uwo.ca)

Sasha Madhavji (smadhavj@uwo.ca, alternate)

Katherine Mathers (kmather4@uwo.ca)

Sarah Victoria Mcfarlane (smcfar3@uwo.ca)

Aditi Thakur (athakur3@uwo.ca)

Kurtis Turnbull (kturnbu9@uwo.ca, principal SOGS rep)

iii) Graduate Education Committee Report

The BGEC serves two primary functions within the department. The committee ranks applications for departmental awards, and contributes internal rankings of applications to university wide awards such as NSERC and OGS. In addition, the committee discusses and can bring changes to aspects of graduate education in the department. The committee is led by the graduate chair and includes faculty from across the streams, as well as two student representatives.

Committee Activities, September 2015-August 2016:

Awards and Applications:

- Departmental ranking of NSERC and OGS applications. Subsequently submitted to SGPS for integration into a university-wide ranking.
- Ranking of applications for Lumsden Fellowship & Award (February) and several donor awards in the Biology department (July).
- Ranking of travel award applications (March and November).
- Approval of committee selection for PhD defences.
- Review/approval of applications by prospective graduate students, many excellent applications have been received by the department.

Matters of Biology Graduate Education Policy:

- BGEC committed to **re-evaluating the mandatory milestones** and opportunities for student development in the Biology Graduate Program. We distributed 2 surveys:
 1. **Graduate course survey** (fall term) – this was used to evaluate student interest in particular courses and identify gaps in course offerings, both of which will be used to facilitate course planning in the future (pending discussion at the department retreat in April). This is important to address the problem of low enrolment in certain courses, as well as course offerings that are inconsistent/lack diversity.
 2. **Milestones survey** (winter term) – this was used to determine how students, faculty, and alumni viewed milestones, and to solicit comments on which components were most/least valuable, as well as ways the milestones/program could be improved. This information will also be used at the department retreat in April to determine whether any aspects of the graduate program should change. There may be some gaps in support for students that SOBGS can address (to be communicated at a later date).

- Due to financial constraints from the Faculty of Science, the number of international graduate students has been capped. The cap on MSc students is not restrictive given the size of our program, but the cap on PhD students is restrictive. As a result, **applications for international PhD students are now ranked** once per year, and only the top 2 or 3 are accepted into the program (with department support; faculty can always opt to fully support international students with their own funding). This ranking includes international MSc students who wish to transfer to a PhD.
- To facilitate ranking program applicants, and **to standardize the application process** in general, BGEC has generated a quantitative rubric to evaluate all incoming students. Currently (February 2016), the rubric is being tested on old applications to determine whether it is effective at predicting student success in the program. The application to the graduate program will also be tweaked to allow BGEC members to more effectively use the rubric. The new rubric will likely be ready for implementation on students applying for a fall 2016 program start. This should be an improvement over our current model, where admission to the program is based on somewhat subjective decisions.
- To normalize the **scores needed for proof of English proficiency** for applicants whose first language is not English, BGEC will be changing English requirements for incoming applicants (Master's and PhD) to the following:
 - International English Language Testing System (IELTS): Total 7, no less than 6 for any one component
 - Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) iBT: Total 93, no less than 20 for any one component.

Graduate Education: Making Life Better for Grad Students

- Once again, Brent Sinclair and Kim Miller are facilitating graduate professional development workshops for students interested in developing an academic/research career. Students are reminded that the Career Centre has excellent resources for those considering careers outside of research.
- BGEC now also celebrate graduate student successes in a monthly email, congratulating students who have completed milestones (proposal assessments, comprehensive exams, defenses) and won awards.

Mandana Miri (smiri3@uwo.ca)

Jantina Toxopeus (jtoxopeu@uwo.ca)

iv) Undergraduate Education Committee Report

Since coming into the undergraduate representative position in September, 2015, I have sat on the Biology Undergraduate Education Committee (BUEC) meetings and liaised with representatives from the Biology Undergraduate Society (BUGS).

BUGS and I have discussed holding a BUGS/SOBGS meet-and-greet pizza night at the grad club. The event was successful last year, and we would like to make this an annual event. I have made contact with the social organizer from BUGS, and the SOBGS social committee member Katie Woolfsen, and they are now in charge of organizing the event.

I have further connected with BUGS about an upcoming guest speaker, Jenna Quinn from the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve. I will send reminder emails to BUGS, and help with advertising the event.

The BUEC has started reshuffling a lot, and I gather adjusting courses happens frequently. I don't have a formal place at the meetings, but I make myself known as someone looking out for the graduate students. Especially since they are often talking about making changes to course content that would impact the number of TAs required.

The information I have gathered from the meetings are as followed:

1. Overhaul of BIOL 2290

- The BUEC committee would like input from the graduate students who TA this course about the proposed changes (I have been waiting for a copy of these changes since mid-December)
- The BUEC would also like to know from upper level (3rd and 4th year) course TAs about what they think should be added or changed in 2290 to better prepare the students for the upper level courses
- The BUEC are considering removing Trish's module on writing from 2290, and want to figure out where to put it. They agreed that writing needs to be better taught to students and have created an *ad hoc* committee about how and where the writing should be taught. Especially since they are toying with the idea of removing the labs from 2601 (an idea that has been proposed many times)
- Nowhere are they mentioning how this will affect the TA positions, but I noted that removing labs removes the necessity for TAs

2. BIOL 4410: Restoration Ecology

- This course was originally split up into 3 hrs/wk for lecture and hands on tutorial. Now it is 2 hr lectures, 2 hr lab for the week which will not affect the number of TAs required. The topic was tabled.

3. First year bio courses

- 1200 courses are gone, they are predicting that 1001 and 1002 will have increased enrollment
- The BUEC want to make a non-major's bio course for health sciences students who don't have lab courses in their department
- In the past, the students would have their lab experience in this first year class only, now they are considering eliminating the labs for these students from another department.
- This seems like the TA-ships will be in jeopardy, but they said it won't change the number of TAs they require. I will keep my eye out for more about this.

4. Although it is not directly relevant, I think it may have an impact when you talk with your undergraduate lab assistants, and when you are part of the process to bring in new graduate students.

- The BUEC are going to set up Specializations for non-majors students. This is for the students who are in a double major, or those unable to complete an honours during their 4th year (as a fall-back plan). Some Specialization are shared by other departments (such as psychology). The Specializations are: "Animal Behaviour", "Biodiversity and Conservation", and "Genetics and Biochemistry". Each Specialization will have different graduate requirements, usually from the upper levels. The students will graduate with a BSc with a specialization.

Other information doesn't greatly affect Graduate Students, but if you would like to know more about what is going on, please feel free to drop me a line, and I can speak on your behalf in future.

Cheers,

Susan Anthony, santho2@uwo.ca

v) Seminar Committee Report

Graduate student lunch

The format of the graduate student lunch is consistent with the previous year. Pizza is generally ordered on Mondays of the seminar weeks (no later than Wednesday) through Great Hall Catering email (great.hall.catering@uwo.ca). Full instructions of the ordering process will be made available upon request (email arayhan@uwo.ca). The current order does not take account of the vegan and lactose-intolerant students and speakers. Interestingly, the catering company does provide few non-dairy and vegan-friendly menu options albeit at a higher cost. Given the seminar budget constriction, it is recommended to keep these choices available to the speakers exclusively. At the moment, the speakers are responsible for bringing their own water. However, this is not of any significant consequence, as the seminar committee members are able to assist in the matter. Going forward, if the budget permits, it might be helpful to provide water or other means of refreshment. Nonetheless, the open pizza lunch has been largely successful with enthusiastic participants. The students and speakers seem to enjoy the platform to discuss various aspects of biology and scientific research as a whole.

Refreshments and snacks

The coffee and tea are a great success. The coffee is from Las Chicas Del Café, and has been shared with BioCafe. Although more expensive than the previous brand, Las Chicas Del Café is fair trade and has gotten good reviews. The snacks have been a bit more challenging. It was brought to the attention of the committee that Oreos contain palm oil, an ingredient that is harvested in an unsustainable manner. Unfortunately most commercially available cookies also contain palm oil (especially vegan-friendly cookies). There was also an issue of over-packaging. To avoid palm oil and excessive waste the seminar snacks are now bought from Bulk Barn. Usually two varieties are bought – one vegan option and one non-vegan option. Some of the previously explored vegan options were not well-received by the rest of the attendees at the seminar, so getting smaller quantities of two types of snack works well. Bulk Barn has been a cost-effective option and also takes into account the above concerns.

Weekly Emails and Speaker Set-up

Weekly emails have been sent out at both the beginning and the end of each week, with the first email requesting any recent news for the “This Week in Biology” slideshow

played prior to the start of the seminar and announce the speaker for the week, and the second one to remind the department of the seminar and the graduate students of the lunch. In terms of setting up for the seminar, the computer tends to be very slow at turning on so it is generally a good idea to show up at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the seminar to ensure enough time for the computer to turn on and the slide show to be set up. In addition, the person hosting the speaker should be able to assist the speaker with adding a copy of the presentation to the rack PC or hooking up the speaker's laptop to the projector, however sometimes assistance from the seminar committee is greatly appreciated.

Student nominated speakers

We will send out nominations in early spring again this year. We will again include the hosting guidelines in the nomination and election process. With each of the invited speakers, there is usually the opportunity for a few students and faculty to attend a dinner with the speaker on either the Thursday before, or the Friday evening. However, with the last two *student* nominated speakers, an alternative approach has been taken where a professor has graciously opened their home to an after dinner cocktail hour type event. As this gives a greater number of students the opportunity to meet with the speaker than a dinner, it would be great to advocate for this option in the future.

Caryn Dooner (cdooner@uwo.ca)

Ashyad Rayhan (arayhan@uwo.ca)

Trish Tully (ttully@uwo.ca)

vi) Outreach Committee Report

Fall Preview Day (November 15, 2015)

Planned departmental participation in this event with faculty, and the Outreach Committee suggested the use of Bio-Booth displays from the BGRF. These visual displays were successfully re-used to showcase Western Biology research to potential incoming students.

Let's Talk Science Lab Tours (December 9, 2015)

The Outreach Committee helped organize and orchestrate an event with Let's Talk Science where high school students came to campus and toured a diverse group of labs and the Biotron. At each location, students observed and participated in hands-on lab demonstrations.

SOBGS-BUGS mixer (March 15, 2016)

Along with BUGS, the Outreach Committee is currently planning an event for biology undergraduate and graduate students that will encourage undergraduate students interested in pursuing graduate studies to come speak to graduate students about their experiences in a relaxed setting.

SOBGS website updates with Cascade (ongoing maintenance)

The Outreach Committee underwent training on the Cascade server in order to update the SOBGS website. Ongoing updates include uploading meeting minutes and keeping the current representatives list up to date.

Katie Woolfson (kwoolfso@uwo.ca)

vii) Research Committee Report

Continuing the efforts of the previous Research Committee, this year's Committee has been primarily focused on identifying strategic research clusters across the faculty of the Biology Department. These clusters emerge from shared research interests within the Department, and identifying researchers belonging to one or more of these clusters will better enable collaboration, joint research activities and grant applications. These clusters span across all three research streams (C&M, E&E, P&B) and should better represent the research trajectory being taken by the department. Our methodology for categorizing each lab into a cluster is based on a questionnaire we developed and distributed to the faculty members of the Biology department. The grouping criteria of the questionnaire is based on NSERC guidelines and identifies the scope of each lab's research interests, capabilities and current collaborative networks. Examples of primary research interest clusters that might be expected include: 1) Climate Change 2) Plant Stress Responses, 3) Animal Behavior, etc. We are still in the process of data collection and anticipate analysis of these research clusters in the near future.

We are also developing a database identifying the key techniques used by labs in the Biology Department. This database will be available online to all researchers from the Department. The idea behind such a database is to foster cross-collaborative research by: 1) identifying what equipment/expertise is locally available to graduate students to potentially expand their project work and 2) advertising each lab's expertise to encourage collaborations. By improving knowledge of the technical expertise of each research group we aim to increase the research standard of the Department as a whole. This database is currently being revised for errors and will be made publicly available soon.

Before our tenure is over, we also are working on developing a department-wide blog that will showcase publications of our department. The idea is to improve accessibility of our research to a greater academic audience and to better showcase our achievements. These articles would be submitted and moderated by our own graduate students. This project is still preliminary but students interested in helping with this project are invited to respond to achinfat@uwo.ca.

We anticipate great strides in Research for our Department. If interested in hearing more, please feel free to contact the 2015-2016 Research Committee:

Adam Chin-Fatt: achinfat@uwo.ca

Matheus Sanita Lima: msanital@uwo.ca

Mirindi Eric Dusenge: mdusenge@uwo.ca

viii) Social Committee Report

The accomplishments this year are listed below:

- Halloween Party
 - Approx. 30 in attendance (faculty and students)
- Bake Sales
 - Had two bake sales so far this year (one in first semester, one in second)
 - In total, so far have raised approx. \$280 with no expenses
- Holiday Gift Basket
 - Organized a holiday gift basket to raffle off to faculty and students
 - Raised \$290 for the basket, making the total earned \$90
- Coffee House (in the process)
 - Organizing a coffee house in March for faculty and students at grad club
 - Grad club has been booked
 - Looking for performers (and getting karaoke machine)
- Bio Ball (in the process)
 - SOBGS chairperson booked venue
 - Contact DJs regarding pricing, waiting to hear back for confirmation
 - Organized theme and looking into making tickets/posters/decorations

Jalina Bielaska-Da Silva jbielask@uwo.ca

Kat Doughty kdought2@uwo.ca

Ebenezer Ajewole eajewole@uwo.ca

ix) Sustainability Committee Report

Dear SOBGS members,

As your Sustainability Representative I have actively worked with SOGS sustainability members and Facilities Management to advance a variety of initiatives within our department. I wanted to ensure that every decision made, while I commanded this committee, was done in such a way that its success would be assured to continue into the future. Over the course of my term I have been able to address various aspects of sustainability within the department and fulfilled (or am planning to fulfill) the goals I set out at the start of my term, including:

- 1) Start a comprehensive composting program within BGS
 - I worked with Facilities Management to acquire a compost bin.
 - Made a general awareness campaign consisting of e-mails and signage.
 - I have regularly taken the compost out and changed the bags.
 - The Biology department's compost bin will divert 600+ lbs of waste away from the landfill each year.
 - I am beginning to work with other departments within BGS (ie. Chemistry and Geology) to get their composting program started.
 - I continue to lobby Facilities Management to get a large green compost disposal bin near the BGS docks for the general ease of all BGS departments.

- 2) Lower the chief contributor to recyclable waste – paper coffee cups
 - Working on a fundraiser for SOBGS selling biology related travel mugs.

- 3) Promote sustainability practices away from UWO
 - A successful household item drive was completed in August, in which the biology department donated 15 large and many more small household items that they were no longer using. The donations went to helping International students.
 - Planning to organize a clothing drive and donate the proceeds to a local charity.

- 4) Promote energy sustainability
 - Made posters for each grad office reminding the last person out to turn off the lights at night.

5) Work alongside other committees to plan events that are as sustainable as possible

- Events such as the grad BBQ were planned to be more sustainable than they had previously been.

Thus far, it has been a pleasure working with all of you. Thank you to everyone who offered feedback and suggestions, which without would have limited the success I have been able to accomplish so far. Overall, I am proud of the foundation that has been laid in my first term as your Sustainability Representative.

Sincerely,

Justin Croft (jcroft3@uwo.ca)