

BioGrads Meeting Minutes

Friday, January 16th, 2009

General news:

- We welcomed our three new committee members
 - SGPS Reps: Ann McKellar and Catherine Dale
 - QUBS Rep: Cory Toth
- We discussed that we will be officially creating a position for the QUBS rep within the BioGrads constitution. This will ensure that we have an elected graduate student as part of the QUBS council
- Grace also suggested the creation of a Sports Rep in order to coordinate intramural sports teams for biology graduate students as well as BEWIC sports day
 - if someone does take on this position, the person to contact at the Athletics Facility is Dwayne

Faculty Rep (Matt):

- Report on news from the last staff meeting
 - Budget:
 - still discussing potential cutbacks, but no news yet on what the budget will actually entail
 - PhD curriculum changes:
 - Courses:
 - It was decided at the meeting that no changes to course requirements for PhD students would be considered given considerable amount of resistance among faculty
 - Grad student survey coordinated by Matt found that the overall opinion is against PhD courses, especially in light of the quality of courses currently offered
 - In general, grad students would be more in favour of courses if they were relevant and better developed
 - Another problem with courses is lack of hard deadlines for assignments and delays with assigning marks
 - Discussion at the BioGrads meeting highlighted the issue that overall, grad students at both the MSc and PhD level are unsatisfied with courses offered in the department and would like to see some important changes. We discussed the need to formalize our concerns so that it can be presented to the faculty. It was suggested that we develop a short survey to address these issues. Anneli volunteered to direct this initiative.*
 - PhD Seminar prior to defence:
 - This was suggested as a way to increase attendance at departmental seminars and highlight the work of doctoral students in the department
 - This was strongly supported and officially approved at the staff meeting
 - Results from Matt's survey found that grad students were also in favour of this new requirement

RTP Rep (Scott):

- Away, but no reports as there have been to RTP meetings

GC Rep (Grace):

- Report on news from the last Graduate Committee meeting
 - Virginia's proposed course (concerning the supervision of honours students) was voted down
 - Main concerns from the GC was that it seemed too easy and was probably more appropriate for PhD students
 - This had been a popular course idea among grad students
- Grace explained the process of getting a new grad course approved
 - Faculty member needs to present a proposal to the GC
 - The GC decides whether the proposed course meets appropriate standards
 - One major concern with approving new courses is that once they are created, they can't be removed from the curriculum

Academic Reps (Cheryl and Kyle)

- Update on course evaluations:
 - Early last semester they received a copy of a course evaluation that J. Smol uses for his courses. They modified the evaluation and handed it out to professors to get some feedback
 - Heard back from only 3 profs saying
 - Some thought it was a good idea, but one concern was that classes are too small for comments to remain anonymous
 - Next step is to try to formalize this process
 - One suggestion at the BioGrads meeting was to try and run the course evaluations directly through us
- Mentoring feedback:
 - An evaluation was sent out to those involved in the program at end of last semester
 - About half of them were returned
 - Overall, feedback was very positive

SGPS Reps (Ann and Catherine)

- Report on Monday's SGPS meeting
 - Two issues were raised which will be voted on in upcoming SGPS meetings:
 - Increasing athletics fees
 - University wants to increase Athletics fees in order to keep current level of services and improve on them as well
 - This will involve an increase in fees that are part of tuition
 - Appears that if fees do increase, there might be an option to opt-out of these fees
 - Details are still being sorted out and more information will be available later

- Awareness day concerning tuition fee increases
 - Tuition fee increases are taking place at the provincial level
 - SGPS wants to gauge interest in having an awareness day which would involve a graduate student walk out
 - Overall opinion of the BioGrads committee is against having a walk out
 - the benefits of a walk out would be limited especially since it isn't specifically a Queen's issue
 - it would seem more beneficial that a subcommittee be formed to address these concerns

Secretary (Anneli):

- Approving minutes
 - suggested that minutes be circulated among committee members for approval prior to updating website
 - everyone was in agreement with this

Treasurer (Trina)

- No report since we still don't have a budget

Social Reps (Ryan and Jeff)

- Away: no update
- Martin mentioned that there is still a plan for a winter QUBS trip
- BioGrads committee suggested that we should think about increasing the number of social events as well as considering various types of activities to increase inclusiveness and participation among grad students
 - Suggestions for events:
 - Bake sales (also a way to raise some funds)
 - Cook offs (e.g. Chilli contest)
 - Movies in BioSci
 - Organizing guided walks led by students in the department interested in sharing their natural history knowledge
 - Participating in the Kingston Field Naturalist annual Bio-blitz