

## **BioGrads Meeting Minutes**

### **Friday, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008-10-31**

#### **RTP Rep (Scott):**

- Committee is currently working on reviewal of Bruce Tufts as director of QUBS and would greatly appreciate comments from graduate students in the department
- It was suggested that it would be worthwhile to send an allgrads e-mail to solicit feedback
- Committee decided against supporting a QNS application
- no hiring will be taking place this year

#### **Faculty Rep (Matt):**

- Provided update from the last Faculty meeting:
  - as of yet, there are no concrete plans since the department has not yet been presented with a budget; however we know that we will be facing some budget cuts
  - it was unfortunately confirmed that outgoing professors' salaries will not count towards budget cuts
  - it was suggested that we should put pressure on the administration about this as this could make up for money needed to fund at least 10 TAships
  - Mel Robertson brought up the idea of offering courses for students in other departments as a way to bring money into the department

#### **GC Rep (Grace)**

- Committee is currently ranking NSERC and OGS applications
- Department has put forth some applications for the Vanier scholarship

#### **Academic Reps (Cheryl and Kyle)**

- working on creating standardized TA evaluation forms
- also working on creating standardize grad course evaluations and are hoping to perform a pilot evaluation this semester
- TA database is up and running and receiving good reviews
- grad student resource database is on hold for now

#### **SGPS Rep (Tony)**

- Provided update from last SGPS meeting
  - TAFAs presentation was given:
    - Richard and Tony complained on behalf of the biograds about TAFAs harassment within labs of Biosci
    - they asked that a formal presentation be made to the department instead (scheduled for after this current BigCOW meeting)
  - Presentation by the Muslim Student Association:
    - following the break-ins and robberies that have occurred on campus, they have initiated a campaign to increase awareness of islamophobia. Information can be obtained at [www.qumsa.net](http://www.qumsa.net)
  - Presentation by the Dean of Student Affairs:
    - promoted the new student outreach center

- talked about the Student Initiative Fund available for promoting/hosting educational activities on campus.
- the Coke Fund provides funding for similar events
- mentioned that funding for master's programs may be cut. This will not affect Category 1 research degrees (i.e., M.Sc), but will negatively affect other master's programs
- Announced that the grad residence will stay and that some AMS space will become SGPS space
- Three new student advisors have been hired for graduate students
- Trip to Ottawa being planned to protest increasing tuition fees
- Social Funds:
  - discussed how SGPS can provide money needed to host social events within departments
  - it was proposed that the SGPS would host a fundraiser which could be used to help fund events for department who were involved in helping with the fundraiser
  - as of yet, no one has expressed interest in this except us, so we can make an application for funding from the SGPS to help with funding the Holiday Party
- Daycare:
  - details of the daycare service provided were explained
  - if you want daycare service, you need to let them know the day you are pregnant if you want to be eligible since space is incredibly limited
- Richard has resigned as SGPS rep, Ann McKellar has expressed interest to replace him

### **Treasurer (Trina)**

- currently have no budget as we are still one beer keg in the hole from the fall fundraiser

### **Social Reps (Absent, but Martin spoke on their behalf)**

- QUBS weekend was cancelled due to weather
- they are talking about replacing the event with a winter retreat at QUBS in January
- Holiday Party:
  - they had a meeting with Mel Robertson
  - Mel is enthusiastic and supportive about it confirming that the department will be able to pay for half the event
  - expecting tickets to be 10\$ for students, 15\$ for staff
  - need to work on a budget for the event to submit to the SGPS
  - they are looking for ideas for activities and hosts for the event
- there is a house party being planned for sometime in November
- there are some plans to having activities surrounding Darwin Day in February

### **Presentation by Xu (from the Montgomerie Lab)**

- last year went to Ecology and Ethology Conference hosted by Guelph
- it is a student run conference in the Ontario region
- she agreed to host this year's conference and is looking for help in planning this event
- details about the event:
  - held annually in April
  - the conference is run by student volunteers

- Queen's hosted the conference 10 years ago
- expecting attendance to be ~150 people
- has plenary talks as well as student symposiums
- things that need to be done for this event:
  - set up a committee of people willing to organize the conference
  - need to book rooms for the conference
    - we need to contact Queen's Conference Services
  - tentative schedule needs to be made
  - fundraising
  - design a website and logo
  - select plenary speakers

### **TAFA Presentation**

Following the meeting, members of TAFA gave a presentation and answered questions put forth by biograds. TAFA (Teaching Assistant and Fellow Association) is the Queen's group that is leading unionization efforts on campus. This meeting was open to the whole department, but was unfortunately poorly attended.

- Presented the 6 main points of their campaign
  - pay security (maintain current salary)
  - benefits (maintain current benefits, but add to it)
  - grievance procedure
  - definition of work (across the university)
  - TA training
  - TA allotment procedures
- They have been hosting a number of events in order to increase awareness and involvement with the campaign
- An upcoming event will take place Wednesday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at the Tir Na Nog (evening)
- Explained that their choice to work with PSAC (Public Service Alliance of Canada) because they were the group most in support of keeping Queen's autonomy and localizing the functioning of the union
- Union drive
  - Requires 40% of eligible TAs and TFs to sign cards at which point they can put an application forward to the university and the Ontario Labour Board.
  - If the application is successful, then a vote will be held which will require 50% +1
  - If the vote is successful, then there will be a bargaining committee formed to develop the collective agreement
- Benefits of a union and of TAFA
  - can host a variety of committees that go beyond just improving working conditions
    - Examples: women's group, international students, students with disabilities, health and safety
  - venue within which to bring forward grievances
  - TAships would be protected/conserved and this would be important in light of upcoming budget cuts as we are the only "working" group on campus without union protection

-it was brought up by biograds that we know budget cuts are taking place in our department and that TAships will be lost...not sure how this unionization will actually be able to protect this...it will likely depend on the negotiation progress

Questions and concerns brought up by biograds

“How does decertification work (i.e. how to get rid of union)?”

-explained that the decertification process is essentially the reverse of the unionization process

“What is the likelihood of a strike and how aggressive would the union be in terms of encouraging a strike?”

-strikes can only occur during the collective bargaining process  
-once a collective agreement is reached no striking can occur  
-bargaining process will take place every ~4year  
-PSAC's record regarding strikes: 95% of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) have gone through without striking  
-CBAs are voted on by all members of the union  
-PSAC was chosen and has demonstrated that it respects our autonomy and has let Queen's make their own decisions all along...no pressure has yet come from PSAC

“If you are happy with your current situation, what is the point of getting involved with the union process?”

-with a union, you would have access to the university's financial picture...therefore, they need to be more accountable about where and how they are spending/allocating resources  
-allow fair and equitable conditions for everyone on campus

“What is deadline for union drive and how many signatures are needed?”

-TAFAs has one year to collect the 40%  
-university can't release information on names of TAs and therefore TAFAs does not know exactly how many signatures they need right now...they are working with an estimated number  
-have currently collected hundreds of signatures

“Why is it just TAs and TFs being unionized, and not graduate students?”

-there is a difference between a labour body and a student body  
-rights of the students body are in theory protected under the SGPS

“Is there room for departmental heterogeneity within the CBA?”

-there can be room made for this and it will depend on the language being used  
-best way to guarantee that interests of the biograds are represented and protected under the union is to be involved with both the campaign and the bargaining process