

Society of Biology Graduate Students

Annual General Meeting

May 24, 2022

Chairperson	Soren Coulson
Principal SOGS Representative	Celina Valvano
SOGS Representatives	Eileen Barac
	Andrew Cook
Treasurer	Emma Churchman
Local PSAC 610 Representative	Abbie Bechard
Graduate Education Representatives	Amalie Hutchinson
	Josh Isaacson
Seminar Committee Representatives	Lamees Mohammad
	Stefane Saruhashi
	Hossein Asgari
Undergraduate Education Representative	Brad Bork
Research Committee Representatives	Brynne Duffy
	Jorden Maglov
	Holly Deighton
Social Committee	Liz Copley
	Simone Miklosi
Sustainability Representative	Katarina Kukolj
AAFC Representatives	Carly Charron
EDI Committee	Kiana Lee
	Quintin Jarrett

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Treasurer

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AAFC Representative

Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Meeting Agenda

May 24, 2022
Virtual, 10:30am

1. Land acknowledgement and introduction
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Elected representative reports
 - a) Chair
 - b) SOGS Committee
 - c) Treasurer
 - d) PSAC Rep
 - e) Biology Graduate Education Committee
 - f) Seminar Committee
 - g) Undergraduate Education Committee
 - h) Research Committee
 - i) Social Committee
 - j) Sustainability Committee
 - k) AAFC Representative(s)
 - l) EDI Representative(s)
4. Other Business
5. Open floor

Elected Representative Reports

Chairperson

To the Biology graduate students,

The 2021-2022 school year is nearly at an end. What a year it has been! The covid-19 pandemic has and continues to impact many aspects of our day-to-day lives, but the loosening of social restrictions has inched us towards normalcy. Whether this was returning to in-person teaching, bench work or socializing at the Grad Club, we appear to be on track towards a post-pandemic world. With these loosened restrictions came additional challenges that affected
pus, in AAFC, the field and
everywhere in between. Despite these challenges, biology graduate students persevered, continuing research activities and passing career development milestones. I am proud to be one of your peers, and I look forward to your future achievements.

Treasurer

The financial state of the SOBGS budget is good with **\$6661.42** expected to carry over for next

Biology Graduate Education Committee

As student representatives of the graduate education committee, we ranked applications for entry into the Biology graduate program and worked with the grad chair and other faculty committee members to adjust and improve the current biology graduate program.

Contributions to the BGEC:

- Ranked and evaluated applicants to the Biology graduate program
- Updated the Biology Graduate Student Handbook to include more support resources
- Discussed ways to improve progression meeting procedures and advisor feedback
- Provided student feedback to guide BGEC policy regarding appropriate supervisor work expectations

Seminar Committee

Weekly Emails and Speaker Set-up

and faculty with information about the upcoming weekly seminar. Given all seminars were on

Posters were put in place in BGS, NCB and WSC for further reminder and information about the seminar.

Graduate Student Nominated Speaker

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-2023

Graduate Students have the option of two nominated speakers, one each term. This should be organized in the Summer of 2022 for those slots to fill before the academic year. Since 2022-2023 seminars will be in person, the department encourages nominated speakers to be within driveable distance to Western campus.

Helen Battle Lecture

The Helen Battle Lecture speaker was organized by BUGS; however, the speaker was not an appropriate choice for the department of biology. BUGS submitted a formal apology and the future SOBGS is encouraged to work with BUGS and consult on the selection of the speaker that

Graduate Student Engagement

There was concern with the faculty on the lack of graduate student engagement (low turnout and participation). To increase engagement, the faculty in charge of seminars will be implementing graduate student chairs from host labs for each seminar.

Important Notes and Future Directions

Biology Undergraduate Education Committee

The role of the SOBGS BUEC Representative is to aid in improving the biology undergraduate student academic experience on behalf of the graduate students.

Some changes to the Biology undergraduate program and policy include:

1. As the MedSci program plans to increase first year enrolment capacity from 800 students in Year 1 to a long-term carrying capacity of about 1400, this requires changes to core Biology courses. Additionally, the increased first year enrolment requires some preparatory changes at upper year courses.
E.g., 1st year Biology currently has enough space for the proposed increase in laboratory sections but will require an additional instructor per term for another lecture section.
2. With the retirement of Bio2290 instructors, there is an opportunity to revise the course to meet the increased demand from MedSci, but not change its core mission.
Students will meet once a week in-person for 3 hours and then have 3 more hours of online lab activities.
Including an ecology section in the rotation.
3. Mapping of quantitative skills across undergraduate curriculum to have a more holistic approach to stats within each course.
4. Housekeeping changes to course administration; for example, prerequisites.

Thank you,

2021-2022 BUEC Representative

Brad Bork bbork@uwo.ca

Social Committee

The role of the Social Committee is to organize major social events for Biology graduate students (and faculty) as well as fundraise for various SOBGS affairs. The events planned this year were limited for the social committee due to the restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The accomplishments this year are listed below:

Holiday Party (Cancelled):

- Type: Pizza Party
- Location: Grad Club
- Promotion: Email blast & Posters
- Cancelled: COVID-19 restrictions reinforced

Tumblers & Treats:

- Type: Fundraiser
- Location: NCB
- Promotion: Email blast & Posters
- Date: March 17th 1:30-3:30pm
- Total Earned: \$105
 - o Cash: \$101
 - o E-transfer: \$4

Bio Ball (Planned):

The main note here is that in previous Social Committee Reports money had been allocated for the Bio Ball from the department, as it is the most expensive event. When we

Sustainability Committee

As the sustainability representative for SOBGS, I act as a liaison between biology graduate students, SOBGS, and SOGS Sustainability by attending monthly meetings for both committees.

Specifically within the biology department, I organized and established a volunteer-based organics green bin program starting with a bin in the biology lunchroom, and am in the process of expanding it to an additional two locations on the third floor of BGS and fourth floor of NCB. If all goes well, I hope to expand it even further, to help make the green bins more accessible to other sections of the biology buildings. FOGS (Friends of the Gardens) contacted me to assist with making their pollinator garden planting event more sustainable, by including an organics bin station as well as by providing compostable cups and napkins for the food that was supplied (supplies funded by SOBGS).

On SOGS Sustainability Committee, I have participated in the discussion and attendance of several events/initiatives and made sure to advertise them to all biology graduate students as well. I was part of a sub-committee to establish a mask recycling program on campus, but due to timing issues, the program was requested by higher-ups to be revisited for the new school year. If masks are no longer mandatory on campus, a different version of the program will be implemented (different materials that are not currently recyclable on campus, e.g. plastic snack wrappers), which will be discussed again in July 2022. I am also one of the coordinators for the SOGS community garden where I am responsible for assisting with planting, building protective cages, maintenance, harvest(s) of the garden and

AAFC Representative

The role of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) representative is to work to improve the graduate student experience at AAFC. The responsibilities of the AAFC representative are as follows:

1. Liaise between Biology graduate students at AAFC and SOBGS
2. Communicate concerns to SOBGS and/or the Biology Department
3. Work towards addressing any unique needs that arise with AAFC students such as:
 - a. Difficulties with commuting to campus for TA duties
 - b. Facilitating AAFC student attendance at departmental events/activities such as seminars and workshops
 - c. Inform AAFC students of social events held by SOBGS and coordinate access to such events
4. Facilitate the access of on-campus students to facilities at AAFC and vice versa
5. Organize a meeting with AAFC students at least once per term

COVID Restrictions and Impacts on AAFC Student Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on research and degree progression for AAFC students, as AAFC has up until recently, imposed many restrictions on building access and research activities. Below is a timeline of the COVID restrictions imposed at AAFC.

March 2020 AAFC entered lockdown. Building access was only permitted for essential staff to maintain the greenhouses and insectaries. No research activities were permitted. Students were provided laptops with access to the AAFC network and any required software to work remotely.

July 2020 Each lab was permitted one lab technician to enter the building for either an assigned morning (6AM – 12PM) or afternoon shift (12:30PM – 6:30PM). Some AAFC students were able to work from their co-supervi

Graduate Student Office Space

When AAFC entered lockdown in March 2020, all graduate student offices were locked. Although all AAFC students are provided with laptops, AAFC does not have WIFI so an ethernet connection is required to perform most computer work. Because of this, once multiple personnel were permitted per lab, students were required to share their super to use their computers, which presented many challenges and inconveniences. In early March 2022, I reached out to the acting associate director about reopening student offices. I informed him of the challenges and impacts on research productivity that students faced by sharing their

have multiple students in the same space (despite masking and distancing between desks), student offices were opened shortly after in late March 2022 which greatly improved student productivity.

AAFC Student Attendance at Biology Seminars

The shift to virtual seminars via Zoom has allowed more AAFC students to attend as they no longer face the issue of commuting to and from campus. With more activities and events returning to in-person, I believe it would be beneficial, if possible, to have the seminars as a hybrid format so that AAFC students have the opportunity to attend via Zoom.

TA Duties for AAFC Students

One issue that many AAFC students continue to face is commuting to campus for TA duties. AAFC is located near Fanshawe and travelling between AAFC and campus can take upwards of an hour via bus. Therefore, many students are losing research time by having to commute to and from campus multiple times a week for their TA duties. This summer, I plan to discuss this concern with the TA coordinator to 1) make sure instructors are aware of the difficulties many AAFC students face regarding commuting to and from campus and ask them to take this into consideration when assigning duties to AAFC students and 2) if possible, reserve courses that require limited on-campus presence (i.e. one or two days per week) for AAFC students.

Social Activities for AAFC Students

The pandemic has made it very difficult to arrange social activities for AAFC students. Many students used to eat lunch together, however, social distancing is still enforced in the AAFC cafeteria with only enough space for 10 people. With the weather warming up, I plan to organize some outdoor social events (i.e. lunches, walks, etc.) to increase student interaction at AAFC.

2021-2022 SOBGS Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Representative

Carly Charron ccharro5@uwo.ca

