**MINUTES**

**Meeting of the GC Policy Committee**

**Wednesday, 25th November 2020, 12.30-13.50**

Location: Zoom

Present: Jolanta Aleksejuniene,Thomas Chang, Teresa Dobson, Brett Eaton, Bhushan Gopaluni, Michael Hunt, Yousry El-Kassaby, Karin Mickelson, Susan Porter, John Ries, Jennifer Shapka, Laura Sly (Chair), Mark MacLachlan,

**Staff:** Max Read, Angela Steinberg

1. **Introductions and regrets**

New members: Sean Smukler (regrets), Erik Frieling (New Student Representative)

1. **Adoption of the agenda**

* The agenda circulated along with one additional question posed by Susan – about PSI students

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| *All* | } | *That the agenda be approved.* |

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| Carried |

1. **Motion to Approve the Minutes**

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| *All* | } | *That the minutes be approved.* |

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| Carried |

1. **Business arising from the last minutes**

Not applicable

1. **Business**

**No new business to discuss**

**OTHER BUSINESS**

* Discussion about any new problems during COVID-19
* (Name unknown) PGWP are a big issue for our programs - Class of technologies – institute students to be able to communicate simultaneously with remote students – microphones and cameras to be installed in classes but it poses a challenge – very expensive – No alternative to Hy-flex found yet
* Susan - Are the PhD students doing okay?
* Yes – some instructors would prefer in-person. But the reports I get is that they are doing fine.
* Karin – we do have a number of students outside country – Time Zone biggest challenge – esp. students in Africa – Nigeria and Ghana – People dropping in and out frequently – may try to defer because of this
* Laura - I wonder if we can identify those places and expedite the invitation to come to Canada and be able to attend classes in person – like from a place where access is better
* Susan - For a while, the criteria for the necessity of being in the country was connectivity
* Thomas Chang – in-person lab-based courses have been postponed. Most of these are for 1st year – Susan asks if that is for 1st year graduate students – Thomas replies yes - 1st year MSc students
* Michael – mini-retreat among our grad program. Have asked them to come up with challenges – 4 main challenges –

1. Transition to online teaching

2. Upcoming changes in the Minimum PhD stipend

3. Not knowing how our students are doing developing personal relationships

4. Getting international students most up-to-date information so they can plan their lives

Susan asks if he would like anyone from G+PS to attend to these concerns?

* Laura - Let us know of the outcomes. We have to prepare for the worst-case outcomes just in case things get prolonged. Michael’s comment is a nice segue into the Minimum PhD stipends. As Julien explains very well that increasing PhD stipend from $18000 to $20000 is already happening.

1. **Minimum PhD Stipend**

* Susan – You should have received a lot of consultation documents from Julien. I have talked to some of the Deans individually to get their thoughts.
* Yousry – I have been in the Townhall but I was surprised that Julien faced resistance. Those are the people who are publishing papers. Putting resistance is out of place and when I look at statistics, some students are being paid more than $50000.
* Mark – In science things are going okay. Concerns about Intl students not getting back - Huge amount of our funding through TAships – A number of researchers are pressed because they are expected to cover the TAships and RAships - Grants are not large enough to do that. Few faculty members feeling stressed about it. TA positions – most of our students will be TAing in labs and we don’t have those physical positions available. Susan asks about the boot camp in the summer - Michael responds - Chemistry has pitched the idea of a boot camp in the summer but there is a pushback to that.
* Laura - Is it going to impact enrolment?
* We had a big recruiting event yesterday. Most of the questions were about Covid
* Bhushan – We tried to increase min funding – minimum is still below $22000 for some. Towards the end of their PhD, the students do not get enough funding. Susan sent me a spreadsheet showing that applied science students on average get $29000. We are in good shape but we do see some minor challenges.
* Michael – no one disagrees with the need to support student but it’s the uncertainty - & we don’t have enough TAs for some programs –
* Jolanta – about international students – one of the req. is that they have to have 3rd party payment in place – Some students who may be very good but may receive little stipend – Susan comments that it would be better to talk to Julien about that
* Laura asks if changes are for incoming cohort – Susan clarifies that they are for all. Policy states that it is for everyone. For everyone admitted since 2018
* Yousry – we are increasing the min standard for PhD. Not doing anything for MA. Optics are bad. It will look bad if the stipend is being increased for PhDs, ignoring the MA students.
* Susan – One of the issues is that MA is not created equally across university. It’s very different from dept to dept. Most of the science programs have a min stipend for MA programs but it’s challenging to implement it across the university.
* Laura – Programs are encouraged to set a minimum that are appropriate for their programs.
* Yousry – we have that. But I want to highlight that the Masters program are more demanding than PhD because PhD students are not required to take any courses but MA students are expected to take 18 units
* Susan- On the other hand, the fact that they are taking 18 credits of coursework argues against paying them for that.
* Yousry – the demand for MA students is quite substantial. Doing the coursework and doing research as well as doing TAship. Laura agrees.
* Susan – The current minimum after tuition – the net income is $12,000-$15,000. The poverty line in BC is $20,000 for singles.
* Teresa – Speaking on behalf of the Faculty of Education . They are concerned about min funding. Everyone agrees with the increase in min funding. They are worried how to put them in force in the Faculty of Education – Susan observes that a few programs have adopted part- time PhDs
* Teresa – My concern is that we don’t want to move to part time PhDs -
* Susan - If we thought it was going to be difficult, a second option was to increase it to $20k and then to $22k the next year
* Teresa – I think our folk would be happy with that – We want the language changed ‘anyone who is earning $30k outside the program would not be eligible for min”
* Susan – We can make it less restrictive than that. If you can make your own minimum by funding that is career relevant income, then that’s fine.
* Teresa – But the challenge is that the language is such that they think they can’t make that offer. Last year, someone who was making very good income and who availed the min. funding package as well and then they had to decline it to somebody else because the language is such.
* Susan – You want it stricter. So that the students who are doing relevant work outside would not take our min funding packages and prevent other students from getting positions. And this is for a unit which had over 700 app and admitted 7. They declined a v. good student just because someone else was getting the package
* Karin – I want to echo what Teresa said. Sometimes we continue to make handsome salaries, sometimes it is hard.
* Laura – relevant to a lot of health professionals. Some of them would like to continue working alongside pursuing their PhD just to fulfil their license requirements.
* Tom – In terms of making a comparison, our min is $25000 per year both for MA and PhD. University of Toronto – in many of their science-based grad programs, their min funding package is over $30k per year. Part of that package is the tuition. They get $30k including tuition. $30k is gross.
* Bhushan– Universities in Ontario, govt of Ontario provides a lot more funding for grad students. There’s an opportunity for us to lobby the BC government to increase the funding.
* Susan – one more question, for Teresa and Karin – would you vote for $22k increase or against it
* Teresa – I’ll vote for it, but speaking for my GAs I’ll have to vote against it (signal lost briefly).
* Karin – We’ll certainly be voting in favor. I am just concerned that it may reduce the number of offers we can make.
* Susan – A stepped increase would be easier? Teresa – Yes
* Someone asks about the status of the PAEIPA award and if it would be semi-permanent?
* Susan – I would take out the word ‘semi’ there. It’s intended to be permanent. There already is a big jump.
* Laura – Does that count towards the min funding package we’re talking about?
* Susan – Yes, there already is a big jump. Domestic years 1-3 would get $1300; intl $1480; and after year 4 for domestic $593, so they get that automatically more.
* Laura – Thank you v. much for your input. I’d like to take a step back and welcome Eric Freiling
* Eric introduces himself- On Grad Council for 3 years – PhD student in Physics for 3 years

1. **Taking courses from other disciplines**

* The next item on agenda – Policy ‘students should not take courses that are not part of their degree programs’ – it seems like a very harsh statement and not consistent with our Reimagining the PhD. The challenge is that very often students do not understand their program requirements. Register as unclassified student – you pay a lot of money.

Should we change the language in our policy statement? Do you anticipate any problems in changing that language?

* Max says that the calendar language says that a program of study as directed by a supervisor or the graduate program. (Reads from the Calendar) e.g. We’re talking about a student in Asian Studies taking Japanese. However, the problem arises when the students sign up for courses on their own and outside their program and that causes difficulties. When they come to the program for their graduation and they have an F on their transcript, the program may say we didn’t tell him to take this course. That’s the problem the language is meant to address.
* Susan – (Reads from a document) “The program of study will consist of seminars, directed readings, consultations, and such formal courses as may be deemed essential for the fulfilment of the requirements of the degree”.
* Karin - We often recommend that they audit it. Students should think before they take courses from other disciplines.
* Laura – I think we can soften that language and make sure that people are carefully taking additional courses that are not required for their program. Some education is required on the consequences of not succeeding in that.
* Jolanta – for fear of grades, few of my students ask the instructors if they can audit the course and that was a clear no. Either you take it seriously or you don’t take it at all.
* Yousry – I like what Karin mentioned. We should emphasize in the Calendar that there are ramifications and we could recommend auditing much better than taking the course. I have a case, I had a student just about to graduate from PhD, he was very ambitious and he took an advanced Japanese course and he failed miserably. His graduation was delayed by a semester. We need to make it clear that the students are taking courses outside their program at their own risk.
* Susan – One of the things we have talked about internally is the difference between a course that would benefit the student’s research and intellectual growth and one that is purely fun. Like music or underwater basket weaving. In those cases, one could argue they should be unclassified students. If it’s not really essential for your program, maybe you can pay on your own.
* Max – Some instructors know that the requirements for auditing are not the same as sitting in on the course and listening to all the lectures, they have to complete all the requirements except the final exam. If they drop out, they can’t get F.
* Laura.- I wonder if a support letter from the supervisor would help encourage the people to let students audit their course even if that wasn’t their policy.
* Karin – I had the same impression that an audit is something outside the instructor’s control. I had one student who was auditing my course. I wasn’t given any choice.
* Jolanta – Does auditing have pass or fail on your degree? Susan - It just says AUD on your transcript.
* Susan - Do you think it’s worth tweaking the calendar language? It says “and such formal courses as may be deemed essential for the fulfilment of the requirements of the degree” that seems a bit harsh, but if we don’t worry about it, it’s not a problem.
* Unknown - Maybe you want to add a red flag there, there’s risk for not passing
* Susan – I’d do that on our website but in order to change the calendar language, it has to go through senate - Laura – we can just add a couple of explanations to that - Susan – Maybe not the calendar.
* Susan – But I was complaining about the word ‘essential’ that it was too strong. It could be beneficial without being essential
* Unknown - For some programs, grad programs don’t require courses for their students. By definition, any course they take is outside their degree course.
* Susan – I wouldn’t even use the word ‘required’.
* Laura – I have written down a lot of buzz words. Maybe we can finesse the language and come back.

1. **Susan’s question about PSI**

* Susan – Just a quick survey – in my area it would be VERY unusual for PhD student to hire a Research Assistant but in some fields, it would not be so. Are any of you concerned about this? Undergrad RA might do grad work, translations etc. Is there any problem with that? Reason: We are thinking of dedicating a bit of money for that. Both to support PSI and to support the concept of undergrad research being improved.
* Yousry – We have to do it all the time. Having undergrad students to do ‘repetitive measurements’ and this is a very good way to bring them in the lab
* Susan – is this the mentor, the boss of the undergrad student, or the PI of the lab?
* Yousry – PI of the lab
* Susan – The PSI students receive research funding and some of them would like to use it for this purpose. So it’s an equity in the sense that people are allowed to have their own research funds. That’s the way it goes.
* Mark - I have not seen anything like this happening in Science before. I do worry that getting directly hired by PhD students may be a problem if it is any conflicts for example. I feel like you want to have a PI involved at least as a superficial … I don’t know what the word is
* Susan – The caveat is that work that the students are doing is not the supervisor’s work, it’s on their own. I mean the supervisors still are supervisors but it can be quite different than the supervisor’s area of expertise.
* Laura – How is that budget managed? Where does that money go? Who has the signing authority?
* Susan – For research expenses, it does go into supervisor’s research grant account but this has been stipulated for the sole use of this student who is meant to be the undergrad. So it’s built-in already.
* Michael – we have put in place a working group to share strategies to improve the student-supervisor relationship. One of the things that came up recently was this notion of whether we need some sort of healthy lab certification that people can say that I am certified to do XYZ. Two questions: are we allowed to do that? Do people think we should be considering this - Susan – Who will certify this?
* Unknown – we’ll certainly give unofficial certification but with UBC, anytime there’s some sort of recognition that is easier said than done.
* Susan – Off the top of my head, Is your Dean’s office willing to do that? You’ll have to put some effort in how to define that - One thing that the UK Council of Graduate Education is to certify universities for mentorship. If they offer certain things, if they incorporate certain things, they are certified. So I think you can do that unofficially. I really like the concept.
* Laura – Thank you everyone for being here today!

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50pm.