

# 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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# **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 biology graduate students working at Western's main campus, 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.

The Society of Biology Graduate Students continued its activities this school year, by advocating for biology graduate student voices in and helping execute the activities of the departmental standing committees in addition to working to improve the student experience for biology graduate students. All meetings of the elected representatives were held online throughout the year, with meeting minutes available on the SOBGS webpage of the Department of Biology website. I thank all of the SOBGS elected representatives for their hard work and dedication. Elections for new representatives will be held in September.

### **Biology Graduate Research Forum (BGRF)**

We held BGRF in November 2021. Due to gathering restrictions related to covid-19, we held BGRF in an online format. Despite the challenges of organizing an online conference, we were pleased overall with its execution. Attendance was strong among biology graduate students and faculty and the quality of the science and presentations were top-notch. We received an excellent keynote lecture from Dr. Kyle Bobiwash, an Indigenous scholar at the University of Manitoba. Thanks to the low costs of holding an online conference, nearly all the funds raised from sponsors went directly to biology graduate students as presentation awards. Keeping with the biennial scheduling of BGRF, the next forum will be held in the fall of 2023.

It has been my pleasure to serve as your SOBGS chairperson,  
Soren Coulson [scoulso8@uwo.ca](mailto:scoulso8@uwo.ca)

## **SOGS Representatives**

Dear Biology Graduate Students,

As your SOGS representatives, our job is to advocate on behalf of Biology graduate students at monthly council meetings. We then communicate SOGS council decisions to SOBGS and to Biology graduate students at large. A summary of what we do and some of the more significant council decisions that have been made since the last SOBGS annual general meeting are as follows:

- SOGS representatives attend council meetings to provide additional funding for SOBGS. This is an important source of income and aids in funding social events that are held throughout the year.
- On behalf of the Biology Department, we vote on council motions to improve the experience of our graduate students. This may include voting for the creation of graduate student clubs, similar to what the USC offers undergraduate students.
- This year, council was focused on the reallocation of funds to better equip administration for the aid of all graduate students, as well as adjustments to the Finance Committee to deal with surplus purchasing requests. Council also approved the use of a portion of the SOGS Health Plan reserve to fund StudentCare's *Empower Me* service for the 2022/23 year to continue supporting mental health resources and wellness services on-campus.
- SOGS also created four new committees to ensure all graduate students are properly represented and supported. These committees included gender concerns, accessibility, pride, and racial equity and inclusivity. To further provide assistance and guidance to various groups across campus, SOGS also created a non-executive officer position, the Sustainability Coordinator, to aid in the achievement of mutual sustainability goals.

Please feel free to contact your SOGS representatives if you have any further questions about council events, motions, or decisions. Information regarding previous council meetings and passed motions can be found at [sogs.ca/council](http://sogs.ca/council). Here you can see council packages and summaries of motions that were passed after each meeting.

Sincerely,

### **2021-2022 SOBGS SOGS Representatives**

Celina Valvano [cvalvano@uwo.ca](mailto:cvalvano@uwo.ca)

Eileen Barac [ebarac@uwo.ca](mailto:ebarac@uwo.ca)

Andrew Cook [acook85@uwo.ca](mailto:acook85@uwo.ca)

## Treasurer

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

<b>SOBGS Budget 2021-2022</b>			
<b>Event</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Net</b>
Carry over		5903	
BGRF	1837	1837	
Holly Jolly	n/a	n/a	
BioBall	n/a	n/a	
Green Bin Program	125.62		
Friends of the Garden	15		
End of Year Lunch	100		
Sponsorship		950	
Bake Sale		94.5	
SOGS		1654.54	
Honorarium	300		
Student Awards	1400		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1940.62</b>	<b>8602.04</b>	<b>6661.42</b>

Most social events this year were cancelled, and so any costs or revenue typically associated have been marked with an 'N/A'.

SOBGS treasurer: Emma Churchman [echurchm@uwo.ca](mailto:echurchm@uwo.ca)

Biology Financial Officer: Debbie Faulkner [dfaulkn@uwo.ca](mailto:dfaulkn@uwo.ca)

## Local PSAC 610

**Hello BioGrads,**

As your PSAC representative, I have been relaying PSAC Executive discussion and decisions to SOBGS throughout the year. This helps to ensure understanding of the collective agreement to us BioGrads to improve our experiences as TAs. Here are some highlights from this year from executive meetings and movements supported by PSAC:

- Established a new position on Executive: the Grievance Chair. The person elected for this position will look at trends in grievances throughout the year(s) as well as help to ensure that the process of creating new grievances goes smoothly.
- We have held many solidarity events this year including one for our department (run by Bio Stewards Jordan Vanderburgt, Carly Charron, Waliu Alaka, and Scout Thompson).
- We are currently establishing direct deposit for all members in lieu of cheques.
- Renewed and increased funding for summer support and Covid-19 pandemic relief.
- SOGS and PSAC have been working together to bring back the research completion fund. This fund provides financial assistance (up to \$500) to members experiencing financial precarity and who are past their funding eligibility for their program. PSAC will sponsor and help adjudicate this award. Applications are now being accepted through SOGS.
- SOGS and PSAC (previously just PSAC) are working to bring back the community volunteer awards for members who have high involvement in both internal and external community volunteering. Discussions are ongoing to develop the application, award, and adjudication. Currently, we are thinking of prioritizing volunteer work in racial equity, accessibility, anti-poverty, sustainability and indigenous initiatives.
- SOGS and PSAC are planning on hosting a joint TA appreciation event. Stay tuned for more details over the summer.
- We negotiated with the university to prevent the eviction of Bayfield Hall residents and ensure that those that had already been displaced were properly financially compensated.
- Elections for the 2022-2023 executives are this week: Thursday May 26 at 5pm. Check your UWO email for the Zoom link (check Spam box too!)

If you ever have questions about anything PSAC or TA-related, please feel free to contact your PSAC representatives (see: [psac610.ca](http://psac610.ca) for contact information). Thank you everyone for a wonderful year!

Cheers,

Abbie Bechard [abechar3@uwo.ca](mailto:abechar3@uwo.ca)

**2021-2022 SOBGS PSAC Representative**

## **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
- Proposed ways to help departmental NSERC award rankings better align with NSERC's expectations
- Discussed ways to ensure that graduate student stipends keep up with inflation.

Please reach out if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

**2021 – 2022 SOBGS BGEC Representatives**

Amalie Hutchinson [asaab4@uwo.ca](mailto:asaab4@uwo.ca)

Joshua Isaacson [jisaacso@uwo.ca](mailto:jisaacso@uwo.ca)

## **Seminar Committee**

### **Weekly Emails and Speaker Set-up**

Weekly “This Week in Biology” emails are sent out by Wednesday at noon to provide students and faculty with information about the upcoming weekly seminar. Given all seminars were on Zoom, the link was sent out the day of the seminar along with a “Seminar reminder” email. Posters were put in place in BGS, NCB and WSC for further reminder and information about the seminar.

### **Graduate Student Nominated Speaker**

There was no “Graduate student-nominated speaker” for 2022. However, for 2022-2023 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 aligns with the department’s programs.

### **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**

- Seminars for 2022/2023 will be in-person.
- Due to the ongoing COVID 19 Pandemic, lunches cannot be brought back to seminars for next year.
- Speakers are given the option to offer a \$250 honorarium or have it allocated to Graduate Student Travel Awards. For 2021/2022 most speakers chose to have it allocated to graduate travel awards.

### **2021-2022 Seminar Committee**

Lamees Mohammad [lmohamm9@uwo.ca](mailto:lmohamm9@uwo.ca)

Stefane Saruhashi [ssaruhas@uwo.ca](mailto:ssaruhas@uwo.ca)

Hossein Asgari [hasgari2@uwo.ca](mailto:hasgari2@uwo.ca)

## **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., 1<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:bbork@uwo.ca)

# Research Committee

Dear SOBGS members,

The role of the graduate research committee representative is to act as a liaison between the Biology Research Committee and the graduate student body. Each member represents their respective research stream: physiology and biochemistry, cell and molecular biology, and evolution and ecology. We participate in monthly meetings with the Research Committee to communicate needs of graduate students within our respective streams.

Your research committee members have been working alongside faculty representatives on the following objectives over the last 12 months:

1) **Biology Research Digest:** this committee typically publishes a biology research digest on a semester basis. This year we hoped to turn this digest into a monthly column, but due to high turnaround within the committee and slow progress due to the ongoing pandemic, we were unable to publish our first column. We are hoping to start fresh in the summer term by connecting with graduate students conducting field work to publish a special column dedicated to field research.

2) **Adjudicating Internal Awards:** As part of the committee mandate, applications for two internal faculty research awards were adjudicated this winter (Malcolm and Ruth Ferguson Research Grant and the Department Research Development Fund). There was a low number of applicants, so we hope to increase graduate student engagement in these applications next year through increased advertisement and email correspondence.

Other points of discussion:

- Check lab equipment for correct Electrical Safety Authority certification
- Work study students will be coming to labs to check for safety stickers (in co-ordination with Carrie Hamilton and the Research Committee)
- Delaying department equipment disposal initiative during safety checking

Your SOBGS Research Committee Representatives remained active during the 2021-2022 academic year and hope we continue throughout the summer months!

## 2021-2022 SOBGS Research Committee Representatives

Brynne Duffy [bduffy5@uwo.ca](mailto:bduffy5@uwo.ca) (P&B)  
Holly Deighton [hdeight@uwo.ca](mailto:hdeight@uwo.ca) (E&E)  
Jordan Maglov [jmaglov@uwo.ca](mailto:jmaglov@uwo.ca) (C&M)

## 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 contacted the Bio department, Debbie Faulkner, we were informed there was not money allocated this year.

- Ensure that money allocated from the department for events is established at the beginning of the year, so events can be planned accordingly (fundraising etc).

### **Potential Summer Events:**

- Bio Ball (email Bradley Stephen Bork, previously attended Bio Ball)
- Sustainability Event (email Kat)
- Barbeque
- Live Music Event
- Bake Sale #2

**Net Income:** \$105

2021-2022 SOBGS Social Committee:

Elizabeth Anne Copley (Liz) [ecopley@uwo.ca](mailto:ecopley@uwo.ca)

Simone Miklosi [smiklosi@uwo.ca](mailto:smiklosi@uwo.ca)

## 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 communications between volunteers and other community garden stakeholders.

In the coming months, I will continue to help with sustainable events/initiatives on campus within my role on SOBGS as well as with SOGS and other environmental groups on campus. This year a Western Environment & Sustainability Network (WESN) was established on campus which is a network of all sustainability related groups, clubs, and committees on campus at the undergraduate and graduate levels and is organized by UWO sustainability. There may be more opportunities for collaboration on different events/initiatives through this network as well. More specifically, I would like to organize 1-2 additional events for biology graduates such as a nature related event and an embroidery event to raise awareness on the harmful effects fast fashion has on the environment and to promote upcycling of clothing.

Katarina Kukolj [kkukolj@uwo.ca](mailto:kkukolj@uwo.ca)

## 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-supervisor's lab on campus, however, this was not the case for many students. Those working on campus continued to face difficulties and delays to their research due to limited access to supplies and/or equipment.
- **December 2020** → Labs permitted to have one person (staff or student) on morning shift and one person on afternoon shift. Many students from larger labs (i.e., with multiple staff and/or students) still required to work on campus/remotely.
- **June 2021** → Labs permitted to have two people per room with masking and social distancing in place. Many labs continued to work on shifts to allow more student access.
- **February 2022** → Labs permitted to have any number of people with masking and social distancing in place.

Pre-pandemic, AAFC students were permitted to enter the building on weekends. Limited access was allowed on a case-by-case basis for those nearing graduation. In summer 2021 this restriction lifted slightly as students were allowed to 'book' a timeslot on the weekend, with no more than five personnel allowed in the building at the same time (due to occupational health and safety requirements). This continues to impact student research.

### **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 supervisors' office space 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 supervisors' office space. Although my request was initially rejected as it was deemed unsafe to 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](mailto:ccharro5@uwo.ca)

## **Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

The role of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee is to increase equity, diversity and inclusion awareness, education and advocacy for Biology graduate students.

### **Liaising with campus groups**

- We have focused on liaising with campus groups including the EDI Action Network and the faculty-run EDI committee.
- Communicated with the SOBGS Social Committee to advocate for EDI initiatives.
- Attended Inspiring Diversity in STEM Conference in March 2021 to learn about current EDI initiatives in the sciences at Western.
- The SOBGS EDI Committee was newly established in the 2021-2022 academic year, therefore the committee is always looking for new ways to get involved.

### **Future plans**

- Organize a seminar and/or workshops to promote and implement EDI changes within the department.
- Establish bursary or award based on research contributions, given to a student from an underrepresented group (specifically Black, Indigenous, or student of color, student with a disability, LGBTQ2+, or a woman).

### **2021-2022 EDI Committee**

Kiana Lee [klee882@uwo.ca](mailto:klee882@uwo.ca)

Quintin Jarrett [qjarrett@uwo.ca](mailto:qjarrett@uwo.ca)