

PLB GSO Notes from Spring Semester 2012

Plant Biology GSO Meeting Minutes

February 6th, 2012

11:30 a.m.

Present: Dave, Chris H., Susan, Lisa, Matt J., Dani, Kristen

Committee Updates

Dave – Retreat Committee – Talked to Dr. Triemer about getting money from the department. He would like a budget ahead of time to see how much money they can give us. We still need to talk about what we want the retreat to focus on. One idea could be communication between scientists and non-scientists. Part of the day could be hearing from people who specialize in communication, including a workshop working on improving communication and simplifying things (like elevator speeches). Having it on campus would probably be the best. Speakers usually get about \$200 plus travel costs. Possible guests could be Detroit Free Press science journalists, a forestry sociologist, and MSU press release personnel. State legislature invitees would be interesting and possibly draw more people to attend. Local speakers and those from Detroit would probably be the most financially feasible. Other things on budget are space (room for the event) and food (lunch and refreshments). With 50 people, this would cost about \$500 for lunch. Depending on which room we choose determines if we're supposed to use MSU catering. Bringing in food from an outside source is also an option. Next step is to submit a budget, choose speakers and pick a date. We could do a poll to see availability. Shoot for first week of April.

-Possible locations: Look at lecture hall or space in the new PLB-PSS building, or Food Safety and Toxicology rooms from last retreat.

Dani—Chili Cookoff – Work on setting dates so that weekends don't overlap with retreat. Think it would be a good thing to do in the last week of April. Last year it happened on a Friday afternoon at 4 or 5 pm. Consider public groups to invite and perhaps getting prizes donated. Dani will work on application to COGS.

Kristen – Faculty Meeting (attending this semester because Lisa has teaching conflict) – Last meeting they summarized what was going on with the faculty search committee.

-Plant and Soil Sciences and Plant Pathology are merging in July to become Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences. Plant Biology gave them permission to use "Plant" in the name.

-Trying to get faculty to do case statements. PLB has to write a case statement for potential donors that highlights good things about our department and tries to make a convincing case for how we could grow and why we should get funding. They are supposed to be 1 page and general enough for anybody to comprehend. Dr. Prather wanted to do one on excellence in graduate studies.

-Update on the greenhouse: North Teaching Greenhouse (near Kedzie) is officially condemned. It used to be used for classes but now costs too much to maintain. Many people are talking about trying to build a new one for teaching. We used to have 25,000 sq feet for teaching and now only have 4,400 square ft, and soon there will be none.

-The grievance policy was updated (wording issues) for complaints about faculty.

-They've changed grad student interview weekends and now everything takes place in the Kellogg Center. This sacrifices one \$24,000 fellowship. Faculty are iffy about it –some like it because they aren't bothered, however others aren't happy that they don't get to spend enough time with the potential students and the prospectives don't get to see labs and our building, or much of campus. Grad students should consider talking to faculty about the future of interview weekends. Most of us seemed to enjoy the grad student potluck night they used to have, so maybe that could be brought back, along with

spending more time touring the PLB building, labs and facilities. Chris Hall suggested a plant movie night in the new lecture hall with current and prospective grads.

Kristen –COGS- We haven't applied for chili cook-off COGS funding yet, but we need to do that soon. COGS meets in the middle of the month and application needs to be in by then. This is one of the only events that gets the whole department involved. This has to be advertised to the public if we want funding. Kristen and Dani will work on this.

-They are implementing new graduate student health insurance. Any incoming graduate students without health insurance will have to pay for campus insurance. Current grad students will continue using Aetna and follow prior regulations.

-There is a 5k run coming up to save Chittenden Hall. The race is March 23rd and if you sign up two weeks before, you can get your t-shirt the day of the run. Chittenden Hall is an old building on north campus that they want to turn into a graduate student resource center. Many other universities have these, while MSU does not.

-There are two more grad student trivia nights - Feb. 21 and March 23.

-The medical school students are talking about making MSU a smoke-free campus. They are seeking input.

Lisa for Andrea -- DAC – Case statements for the department were discussed. PLB has to write a case statement for potential donors that highlights good things about our department and tries to make a convincing case for how we could grow and why we should get funding. Some suggestions were to focus on evolution, but some thought it was less fundable. Everyone agreed that conservation or sustainability would be a good area to highlight. Other suggestions were related to advanced personalized learning systems, and synthetic biology.

-Some people at KBS are interested in posting PLB seminars on the website so people across campuses could see them. KBS will do this for their seminars. Everyone likes the idea but logistics are complicated. Probably can't record them due to data ownership issues and permission from the speakers, but streaming may be a possibility.

-Last year there were many complaints about the quality of PLB seminar speakers. We discussed how to sort of screen them beforehand, although this would be hard. A better strategy would be to convince people to invite speakers they have heard before and know are good or have a lot of good references. Also, if you were really disappointed with a speaker, let the person who invited them know.

Lisa for Jeff --DSAC – Will go to meeting this week to let us know of any updates (see below).

Lisa for Sasha – Graduate Committee– There was no limit on the number of fellowships that we could offer to student candidates so we took advantage of this by nominating more candidates than we have in past years. All nominees were approved by the Plant Sciences Excellence Committee, who are in charge of organizing the recruiting weekends. PLB had the most nominees out of all other plant science related departments at MSU. There are five student candidates who were awarded CNS Fellowship Awards. Coincidentally, we had previously nominated these student candidates for UDF/UEF awards. We are waiting for the second recruiting weekend to determine who will accept fellowship offers and be admitted for the following academic year.

Lisa for Beth --KBS – Beth said there is a summer course called ELME that some people may want to enroll in (mathematics for biology). Beth emailed the graduate students about this. There are some really good

speakers coming up in the next few weeks - Brad Cardinale, Val Smith, and Andrew Gonzalez. They speak on Fridays at 10:45am at KBS.

<http://www.kbs.msu.edu/seminar-schedule>

Lisa- Plant Science Graduate Research Symposium – Posters and talks are presented by graduate students and there are awards and feedback from faculty. This year they asked if all the departments involved could donate some money. They are also considering a happy hour at the end. Students at the GSO meeting were asked if they would be fine with GSO providing the symposium \$50 from our funds if we have it available, and people agreed this would be fine. Lisa is waiting to hear from Jason, the treasurer.

Matt – T-shirts – 2/3 of shirts have been sold, and the rest need to be paid and picked up ASAP. Because of licensing fees, MSU took a large portion of profits. Looking at breaking even right now.

Jeff (update from after the meeting) - DSAC -

-Too many students chose to take their graduate scholarship funding all at the same time, so there is not enough money for recruitment fellowships. The college will dip into budget and the summer program to fill this void. There was concern that they don't want to take too much money from the summer program.

-University is modernizing its computer system for applying to graduate school. This should be implemented by August

-Proposal to increase tuition waiver for early students and decrease it for students who have passed their PhD exams because they will be taking less classes at that point. The grad dean is encouraging graduate directors to scrutinize their enrolled students and limit unnecessary enrolment.

-8 students who applied to Plant Biology were offered recruitment scholarships.

**Plant Biology Graduate Student Organization Meeting
March 5th, 2012**

Members Present: Dani, Lisa, Dave, Carina, Jeff S., Susan, Matt J., Colin (skyping in from KBS), Beth (skyping in from KBS)

Committee Updates

Retreat Committee – Carina and Dave

- Date selected: April 4th, 2012 (a Wednesday) from 9am-3pm
- Will take place in two rooms, both in BPS
- Fliers were created.
- Schedule for the day
 - first thing = keynote speaker, professor from dept of forest (forest sociologist)
 - forty minute talk
 - oral presentation and elevator speech workshop
 - Carina will be presenting on how to speak in a natural way while giving a presentation, body language will also be addressed
 - Time for work in small groups
 - Analogies for their research and other broad scientific ideas
 - Also time for work on elevator speeches
 - Panel of professionals
 - College of Natural Science communications manager, Michigan Environmental Council, working on getting a science journalist to come
 - Five to ten minute introductions of themselves then will be open to questions.
 - Lunch
 - Elevator speech competition
 - Sixty seconds or less, no prompts, panelists will act as judges
 - Poster and Powerpoint slide design presentation
 - Graphic designer will talk about accessibility
- Question about including post-docs
 - Ask Rich Triemer, since the program is funding this retreat

T-shirt Committee – Matt

- Still 150 dollars short because some people haven't picked up shirts and we purchased extras.

Graduate Committee – Sasha

- 2 of 5 perspectives that were offered one-year CNS fellowships will also be offered the one-year Plant Science Fellowship to fund their second year at MSU.
- Voted on who would be receiving 1 year Mericle fellowships

- Offered 5 TA positions to perspectives already
- Some discussion as to whether to keep PLB 800 in fall
 - Federica asked about moving her teaching courseload to the spring
 - No final decisions have been made yet

Faculty Meeting – Kristen

Faculty Meeting: Feb. 15

- Search committee updates
 - Have a favorite candidate across the board; There was a discussion about which person was the 2nd/3rd choice
 - Choices 1 and 2 would be invited back for a second interview
- Message from Dean Kirkpatrick
 - No surprise, but the University has been pushed to reduce their budgets and increase tuition rates to compensate
 - Good news: Governor Snyder is planning to put money on the table next year for public universities
 - The caveat: Money goes to schools that (a) have high graduation rates, (b) high freshman to sophomore transitions, (c) lower average time to graduation
 - Take home message: MSU needs to increase the graduation rate (but, as the faculty pointed out, they don't want to raise admission standards or lower graduation standards/requirements/academic expectations...a conundrum, no doubt)
 - The numbers: the university needs to raise grad rate from 77% to the low 80% range
 - The initiative: try to implement programs aimed at recognizing struggling students earlier on in the semester, as well as students struggling in their frosh/soph years in general
 - There is a new biology program being implemented that requires students to take chemistry first, before intro bio classes and more advanced classes. This is supposed to better prepare students for these classes.
 - Next piece of news: Apparently MSU is at the bottom of the Big 10 in terms of research
 - The provost and university administration is brainstorming about ways to increase research status (should be noted that one thing we have going against us is that we don't have a research medical school, which is a big part of research programs in other universities, and which brings in a lot of dollars.
 - There is mention of starting an organized URO (Univ. Research Org.) that would allow the university to be able to take research contracts that need to remain confidential.

- Main orders of business:
 - There was a discussion of the proposed ban on smoking on campus. The council voted to move forward with this discussion among the council as well as with other organizations on campus, and university administration
 - Graduate Academic Conference is Friday, March 30! This is the first year that the conference will be multi-university, with students from Univ. of Michigan and Wayne State participating. Check out the website for more information on presenters, and times/locations
 - <http://www.msugac.com/index.php/en/>
 - Also, we still need students to volunteer to judge on the day of the conference. Contact the GAC committee at msugac@gmail.com if interested in helping out.
 - The 2012-2013 COGs Exec Board was voted in:
 - President: Stefan Fletcher
 - Vice President for External Affairs: Suzanne Borkowski
 - Vice President for Internal Affairs: Patrick True
 - Treasurer: Chris Harvey
 - Recording Secretary: Jennifer Wray

Check out all the latest news from COGs by reading the current newsletter or by visiting their website: Newsletter can also be found online here:

<http://www.cogs.msu.edu/documents/Newsletter/COGS%20Newsletter%202-12%20V2I6.pdf>

Website: <http://cogs.msu.edu/index.php>

DAC – Andrea

- Still delays in moving labs to the new building.
- North Greenhouse will not be renovated, additional space will be allocated to house the teaching collection from the North Greenhouse. and are working on a proposal to setup the collection on South Campus
- Lots of discussion about the new faculty search, probably more current updates from the faculty meeting.
- Agreed to fund grad student retreat, were skeptical if we could pull it together in time for April, but thought it was a great idea.
- There was discussion on whether outside observers for exams are necessary. Andrea sent around a poll to grad students to ask their opinion.

DSAC – Jeff

- No updates

Treasury - Lisa

- Jason has moved on to a postdoc at U of M. Lisa took over the treasurer spot while Emily Dittmar was traveling for field work. MSUFUCU GSO account was transferred to Lisa and Dani (as social committee) also has access.

- If we keep money in the treasury set aside to order t-shirts each year, we have very little left to spend (<\$100) on the chili cookoff or anything else.

Chili Cookoff – Lisa and Dani

- Don't know if we'll get any COGS funding this year
- Such a small amount in our treasury that we could make it less formal
 - No aprons or oven mitts
 - Beth and Colin say make your own trophy to put on display somewhere and engrave each year's winners on it!
- Last year we were pretty successful getting donations from businesses
 - Could still consider doing this
- Would have to use our funds to reserve room
- Encourage donations more
- Last Friday in April would be a good idea
- Will submit COGS form just in case

KBS updates – Colin and Beth

- None really

Plant Biology Graduate Student Organization Meeting
April 2nd, 2012

Members Present: Lisa, Dani, Jeff S., Susan, Dave, Matt J.

Dani: Chili Cook-off Updates: Contacted Carolyn Fleck and Denise Elwart regarding reserving room 1425 and will wait to hear from her before reserving the atrium. Consider if we want to ask for donations from the community for prizes, etc... Undergrad Plant Bio Club is interested in getting involved and are already growing plants as prizes.

Update: Room 1425 is tentatively reserved for our use.

Jeff: DSAC - last meeting just talked about undergrad issues. No important information.

Kristen: Faculty Meeting: March 22

Search Committee Updates:

- Bob Schmitz and his wife came for the second visit and things went well"
- Maren Friesen is coming to visit in the coming week
- Julie Law declined the offer to visit

There will be a big push to get faculty to move their labs into the new building ASAP.

Good News! Although the north teaching greenhouse is officially condemned, PLB has acquired additional greenhouse space in the south greenhouses to be used for teaching. We negotiated with horticulture to get 4 greenhouses, each 1250 sq ft

- Dr. Telewski is in charge of revamping the greenhouses in the next year to make them ideal for teaching purposes. There will be an evolution exhibit, a tropical section, a desert section, etc...

PLB Recruiting Weekend Updates:

- 22 offers were made to prospective students, and we are awaiting their answers
- We were able to give out 10 CNS fellowships, 6 University Distinguished Fellows, and 5 Plant Sciences fellowships

Update on Candidacy Exams: Should we keep the requirement to have an outside observer in the room during the oral candidacy exam?

- The faculty voted to abolish the requirement, but current students can still make the choice to have an observer if wanted

Kristen: PLB Seminar Committee

There are a total of 13 slots available for the Fall 2012 PLB/PRL seminar series. The committee agreed to ask 6 PRL nominees to visit, and 7 PLB nominees to visit. We will hear later about who agrees to come to campus.

There was also a lot of discussion about how to make the seminar series better. The main points made were that, on the side of our departments we don't have a good showing at the seminars, but that on the other side we've had some pretty horrendous speakers.

To improve the quality of the seminars, many suggestions were made:

- Choose better speakers. Nominate speakers who you have seen present, and who you are confident will present their research clearly and to be able to communicate it to a general audience.
- Put more responsibility on the host to ensure the visiting speaker is aware of the broad audience of our department
- Suggestions were made to send a personal email, from the host, to the speaker a week or so before the visit to be like, "Hey, if there's a lot of jargon in your seminar, try to be cognizant of it and explain/define it"
- There was also a suggestion to create a seminar that is specifically defined as a true "Molecules to Ecosystem Integrative Seminar"
- This would ensure that at least one of the visitors did truly integrative work, and that representatives from both spectrums of the department would be excited to attend.
- Change the seminar time to Mondays in the morning (10:00/11:00), with the expectation that the grad student lunch would be immediately following
- Have a "social gathering" 10-15 minutes before each seminar that would provide an opportunity for people to mingle with the speaker, as well as with others in the dept
- There was talk of providing better snacks and coffee, fingers crossed!
- Create some sort of avenue for attendees to provide feedback after the seminar. This feedback would go to the committee, and to the host, and would be a way to gauge what works, what doesn't, and how we can change things for the better in coming years.

Andrea – DAC:

- The DAC wants student feedback for the 5 year review of the chair. I will be sending out a short survey I made with questions about Dr. Triemer for graduate students. Grad students are encouraged to participate in the review and it would be a good way to voice any opinions about the state and direction of the PLB under Dr. Triemer's leadership and suggest any areas for improvement.
- Still brainstorming on ways to improve the seminar series. They are considering implementing something similar to EEBB's guidelines for hosting a speaker and making more specific requirements for people who nominate a speaker to actually have to host them. Apparently this is often not happening.

Dave – Retreat: Retreat is Wednesday. Set-up seems to be minimal as of right now. In pretty good shape overall. Reimbursements are already taken care of. Issue would be finding speakers a place to park.

Matt - T-shirts: Sending one more email so that the last few stragglers pay for their t-shirts they ordered, because we really need the money to break

Plant Biology GSO Meeting May 2, 2012

Present: Lisa, Kristen, Dave, Susan, Andrea, Jeff S.

Event updates (added after meeting):

Grad student retreat in early April went well, but low student turnout (~10-15 people at various times of day, and grad students from any department working in PLB labs were invited (~85 people)). Focused on scientific communication, and invited speakers did a good job at presenting information. Prizes were given for the best elevator speeches, and advice on improvement was given on specific posters made and submitted by students.

PLB Chili Cookoff held last Friday went well. Next year we need to start getting volunteers and set everything up starting 2 months beforehand to encourage more participants and attendees. There was an issue this year with the people in charge of the BPS atrium not getting back to us for several weeks that delayed sending out announcements. We did not receive COGS funding this year, but the department let us use some of the extra retreat money we didn't spend on the cookoff, and supplied sodas and utensils. 7 grad students (all Plant Bio) entered chili, and Dani won for best meat chili and best name, Dave won for best vegetarian chili, and Kristen got a prize for being second place in best vegetarian and name. 3 top prizes were Target gift certificates, and all participants got small prizes of kitchen utensils and spices or seeds. About 50-75 people attended and ate chili, and we sold a few more t-shirts. We received \$23 in donations to put in our treasury. The undergraduate Plant Biology Club set up a table with tomato, pepper, herb and ornamental plants for sale, and made over \$50 in donations.

Committee updates:

Kristen - COGS

BBQ meeting - Susan went with Kristen. Elected new COGS representatives, all excited about working with COGS. President Simon came and spoke at meeting - no university money to renovate Chittenden Hall for grad student use. Could cost \$6-10 million to renovate, and she will look around for sponsors. -one grad student complained about having to teach on the other side of campus and paths there aren't very bikeable. President Simon mentioned shuttles, but they aren't very feasible because they wouldn't run often enough.

Kristen - Faculty Meeting

Maren Friesen was hired as the new Plant Biology faculty member. Her husband Scott will be a postdoc at MSU. Faculty at the meeting voted on what to do about fixed-term faculty. Robin Buell has many postdocs or visiting scholars that want to apply independently for grants, but technically can't do it because they aren't faculty, and she has to be listed as the PI. Fixed-term faculty means they would be given a title so they can apply for grants independently. DAC will vote on an independent basis on who can receive this title.

Case statements - to encourage donations to the department, funders can donate their money to a certain focus area. Promote how department is integrative. Doug and Lars wrote the first one on

sustainability and conservation. The statements say why department is good in a specific area but needs funding for it, also. Colleges request these case statements from each department and they are sent out to donors. Faculty volunteer to write them.

Chair review - Dr. Triemer was voted to continue as chair. One suggestion was that he comes to the first GSO meeting of the year to talk with grad students so we can get to know him a little better.

There was discussion about why more graduate students aren't involved in the GSO or the department, and some of it could be because they already have a lot of time commitments and can't make it to meetings or events, and they also might feel more a part of PRL or EEBC than PLB. Some faculty also thought grad students were not using our grad student lounge enough, but we disagreed - we see people using the microwave, eating lunch or holding meetings, etc. on a weekly basis, though the lounge might not be used every day.

Andrea - DAC

Overall, reviews on the chair were good from grad students, with a few comments. Suggestions for improving undergrad mentoring, wanted improvements in grad student retention. Andrea compiled results from grad students and presented them to the DAC.

Faculty think that molecules to ecosystems focus of department isn't working that well. Need to make it integrative so that people are actually doing it or get rid of it. Faculty are open to grad student opinions on this.

There might be additional surveys or grad student input requested on 800, 803 courses, and on other requirements for grad students - they were last framed in last 5-year plan, and next year new 5-year plan will be made. Retreat will be next fall, for faculty to discuss 5-year plan and where department is headed. Doug would like grad students to go to retreat because they want student opinion.

One suggestion is to possibly do a monthly brown bag or lunch where most faculty and grad students attend to have more grad student-faculty interaction.

Some labs moved into new building, but issues are arising. Internet and phone are not always working, no trash cans, lockouts, fire alarms going off, and problems with air circulation. Want to find space for Maren in new building.

Focus areas for case statements:

5 main areas - Synthetic plant biology, conservation, conservatory/teaching collection and new greenhouse, grad student fellowships, advanced personalized learning systems

Jeff - DSAC

Dean Kirkpatrick gave talk about funding. State has surplus, can increase university funding by 2-3% this year. Some politicians think research universities like MSU should get the funding increase while others think the smaller teaching schools in Michigan should get it. MSU might get 1.4% increase, but that doesn't cover all the normal costs of increase. No specific cuts asked from each department this year.

Students will see 5% increase in tuition (but for PLB grad students, this is still covered).

CNS offered 40 CNS fellowships for 2 years to recruiting grad students, and 15 accepted.

General comments:

-People on current committees should tell incoming officers what to accept, because they often don't know all the responsibilities that are included (such as the COGS representative also needs to be on a COGS committee). We can ask for a longer written description from each committee member to send out to new officers.

-President and social chair should be returning students, while other GSO committee positions can also include brand-new grad students.

-Lisa will send out email to grad students and faculty with available t-shirts left for sale. We have a lot we would love to sell left over, but most of the small sizes are gone.

-Next GSO meeting will be in the beginning of September to vote on new officers and committee members.