

Plant Biology Graduate Student Organization Meetings Spring 2018

**Most recent meeting at top*

Plant Biology GSO meeting 21/03/2018

Attending: Colleen, Christopher, Christina, Adam, Ravi, Jason, Teresa, Meredith, Emily, Shawna, Rebecca

- Faculty Meeting (Teresa)
 - 1st round of faculty candidate searches are done.
 - Undergrad Committee is reviewing courses offered last year in reparation for assessing the PLB curriculum
 - As discussed at the last DAC meeting, there is great interest in promoting inclusion and diversity.
 - An ad-hoc committee has been formed to develop statements for development and policy documents.
 - The ad-hoc committee is not exclusive—everyone is welcome to join in.
 - Ad-hoc committee chaired by Alan Prather (faculty), and includes Sarah Seloske (staff), John Tran (grad student), and Ash Zemenick (post doc). They are looking into recruiting an undergraduate.
 - A top faculty candidate from the PRL search is interested in having PLB as his home department.
 - Discussed overlap in his research, equipment use, and teaching prospects. There was enough overlap, so voted to accept him into PLB if PRL hires him.
 - Things we would like addressed at the faculty meeting (3/21 at 3:30):
 - MPS program: Speakers are asking what it is, what are the goals, etc.
 - More focused curriculum for molecular plant science students
 - Are there events? Seminars?
 - Schedule a Q&A session (Teresa will work on)
 - Email Teresa with any other additional concerns for the faculty meeting
- Graduate Committee (Christina)—working on scheduling a meeting
- What to do with profits from WAWK?
 - Some GSO-run professional development event
 - A new grad student orientation weekend (camping, etc.) to improve integration into the department
 - Might be too much to do a while weekend event
 - One-time free beverage at WAWK to incentivize people to come
 - Snacks for WAWK
- GSO positions will be opening up for next academic year
 - Listed in Constitution with descriptions; all positions are on the “Officers” page on the GSO website
 - President, Grad Committee, DAC, and Seminar Committee positions are definitely open
 - Need to advertise this, especially to the first years
- SPLS
 - Attendance is low—please go and volunteer to give a talk! It does not have to be a research talk—it can be ideas, a practice conference or job talk, a run-through of a lab meeting presentation, etc.
 - Better advertising to PRL and PRI, especially for post docs
 - The most effective emails are the ones sent out right before SPLS

- There is a GSO calendar with SPLS and all social events on it
 - In your Google calendar page, where it says “Add a coworker’s [or friend’s] calendar”, type plbgso@gmail.com to add the PLB GSO Google calendar to your account
 - Thursday 3/28, 5pm: Broad Art Museum trip to see the Andy Warhol exhibit
- CDC (Teresa)
 - The Development subcommittee is gathering information about what other universities require with regards to diversity support. The southern CA schools (esp. Santa Cruz) have been working towards including diversity requirements in the Tenure & Promotion process as well as hiring.
 - The Taskforce on Transgender Rights has several panels and meet & greets scheduled to improve relationships between medical professionals and the transgender community.
 - The interim CNS dean has approved the creation of a Taskforce on Inclusion Initiative.
 - Will include 4 members of the CDC
 - Will address:
 - Campus climate survey
 - Creating syllabi language that promotes inclusion, how to report incidents, and some key resources
 - Develop a mechanism to handle aggression, such as mediation or conflict resolution strategies
 - Increase collaborations between departments and the CDC to promote diversity efforts, such as requiring communication between the departmental chairs and a CDC representative
- Grad Handbook: Committee Meetings
 - Need to have year 2 & 3 committee meetings requirements that are separate from your exams—some committees hear your research ideas in your first year, then the next thing is your exam (by which point your research direction has likely shifted).
 - PowerPoints with research presentation, a course outline, funding, timeline, etc. are useful to present
 - Requirement to have a committee meeting by the end of your first year prior to submitting your Grad Plan in May of your first year
 - Grad Plan does have a line for topics to be covered by each committee member during your general knowledge oral exam
 - You do not have to schedule a committee meeting to keep your committee up to date on what you’re doing; you can meet with them individually.
 - Picking topics for exam
 - Meet with them one-on-one and coordinate topics among them (tell the others what area another committee members is testing you on so that they can carve out their own niche)
 - Remind them of their topic a few weeks before
 - Pick topics with your advisor and then ask your committee members if they are okay with that topic area (then follow up individually for more specific topics within that/reading lists)
 - You should have a committee meeting before or after your oral exam—sometime in the 6 months before your written proposal is due so that everyone knows your most current research direction
 - Should be either an annual committee meeting requirement (separate from exams) OR annual meetings with individual committee members (also separate from exams)

- For ecologists, a committee meeting before and/or after the summer field season is helpful
- One-on-one short meetings can be more productive and allow you to get more familiar with a committee member (which can lead to better letters of recommendation)
- How have people gotten help with non-academic career tracks from their committee members?
- What about gaining skills?
 - Your committee should help you pick classes that may not fit in with your research directly, but rather will help you fit into the job market (e.g., bioinformatics, statistics, computer programming, business, GIS, etc.)
- Food at committee meetings—seems expected but doesn't seem necessary (and some faculty care more than others—just ask). Caffeinated beverages are a good idea.
- Need to look into who updates the grad student lists on the PLB website

Plant Biology GSO meeting 21/02/2018

Attending: Colleen, Teresa, Shawna, Meredith, Christina, Joelyn, Ravi, Christopher, Adam, Brian, Jeremy, Emily, Brian, Rebecca

- GEU Update (Shawna)
 - GEU is joining the Reclaim MSU Coalition (a group of faculty, students and staff that works on broad cultural change at MSU, organizing against violence, discrimination, injustice, etc.).
 - Current activities: maintaining InfoHook activism website, recruiting volunteers, mobilizing action, drafting policy/recommendations for any group to use, working with investigations into sexual assault, violence, and discrimination
 - Need help with bargaining our contracts as a result of MSU money issues
 - UM set up bargaining units to distribute the jobs across teams of students (health insurance, anti-harassment, wage increases). Those people did the research and then went to the larger meetings.
 - This is a 6+ month process. Bargaining starts around May 2018.
 - Consider volunteering to help volunteer
 - There will be a bargaining town hall, if you want to bring up something you want
 - This year they are trying to get anti-harassment language (there is language anti-sexual harassment)
 - Also want to get more people covered under the contract (e.g., Teaching Exempt (TE) students are not covered by the union)
- COGS meeting tonight (2/21) in Engineering Building ~7:30pm
- Recruitment follow-up (Christina)
 - Game night well received (more interaction than hockey game)
 - Should make sure that other departments know about our Saturday social plans in advance
 - Lack of information about new MPS program for recruits—send someone to information meetings next year
- Special DAC meeting regarding Larry Nassar (Colleen)
 - Danny attended meeting with then acting president a few days ago that focused on damage control and introducing the new PR firm hired to represent MSU
 - Also met with Cheryl Sisk to discuss her plan to address the situation at the college level.

- Important to communicate to everyone in the department that we have a mission to fulfill & that we will provide an environment that is safe & inclusive to do that.
 - We will do everything in our power to make sure nothing like this ever happens again.
 - The deans are very disappointed that the board of trustees have chosen to ignore feedback provided by the deans.
- Danny will circulate a list of resources supplied by the deans.
- How best do we communicate with everyone in the department & give them an opportunity to speak and ask questions?
 - Planning on holding a departmental town hall to let people speak about the incident and take feedback on how the department should act going forward. Recommended to have a counselor in attendance at these sorts of meetings moving forwards.
 - While we hope that there have not been any incidents in the department, we want to create an environment where people are comfortable coming forward.
- Monthly DAC meeting (Teresa filling in for Colleen)
 - The College recognizes there is a need for cultural change to promote diversity and inclusion
 - It has been proposed that the Code of Conduct be evaluated and perhaps modified. KBS has been working toward this.
 - It has also been proposed that the Annual Review process start including an evaluation of conduct, but this may be complicated to judge.
 - Rather than treating inclusion and diversity efforts by faculty as a system of rules and punishments, a reward system may be more effective. For example, some departments give a reward for diversity efforts, such as allowing the recipient to use a reserved parking spot in a local parking lot for a length of time.
 - There have been changes to postdoc hiring system
 - Postdocs fall into the same category of jobs as faculty (“academic staff”) and therefore available positions must be publicly posted for at least 2 weeks and go through the MSU Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives (OI3) to ensure there is not bias in hiring practices.
 - While it is important to not exclude diverse groups, these changes will make some postdoc hirings more complicated. For example, it is common that after a grad student has graduated, their PI may hire them as a temporary postdoc while the (former) grad student searches for a “real” postdoc position. In order to follow national policy, the (former) grad student can only be hired after that 2-week public posting (plus the time it would take for the hire to go through OI3).
 - This open period might affect international hirings as well.
 - Departments have been looking into how to address these and similar cases. One method is to look at how diverse the existing postdoc pool is to determine if PLB is lacking in postdoc diversity and thus would need to take the new policies more seriously.
 - This new postdoc hiring process would not apply to postdocs coming in on a fellowship because they would not be considered a new hire at MSU.
 - At the last faculty meeting, it was proposed by the College that fringe benefits for postdocs, staff, etc. would need to be covered by the department and labs instead of by MSU. This change has been put on hold for now.
 - MSU should be getting a new water treatment system this summer, which would improve campus water quality.

- Water quality has been a concern not only for drinking purposes, but it has also led to clogged pipes and problems with air conditioning units.
- Faculty in the Engineering Department have requested that retirement benefits also be withheld when they are on summer salary.
 - Right now, faculty just get a check for a summer salary.
 - Summer salaries are often paid by grants, so this change would probably be of interest primarily by administrators.
- Updates on faculty searches
 - KBS Director search – in progress.
 - PLB search – seems to be about half done.
 - PRL GII search – The top candidate right now is Berkley Walker. PRL would be 100% funding this position, but the hire would need to have a “home” department. Walker is interested in PLB being the “home.” This would mean that if there are teaching requirements, they would be filled in PLB, and PLB would likely also evaluate the hire for tenure. Since no offer has been made yet, this is still in the discussion phase.
- The CNS Dean search has finished, but Danny hasn’t heard what the result is.
- Greenhouse renovations are still in the works
 - Phytotron costs and needs are still being investigated
 - There may be changes to how PLB greenhouses are currently managed that may be useful even if we can’t get approval for renovations to the existing spaces (still being discussed).
- Development long-range planning ideas may be resurfaced in March with the aim of having an outline of what these plans may include by the summer.
- Benning and PRL have volunteered to replace 168’s furniture (e.g., chairs, tables) in exchange for PRL and PLB co-managing the room.
 - This probably wouldn’t affect 168’s availability because PRL already uses it for various things (e.g., their Tuesday noon seminar series).
 - Things like faculty meetings and defenses would still have priority on the room.
 - Some of the “décor” (like the heads) would probably need to find a new home.
- Budget update and revenue generation
 - The budget this year is looking better than last year’s. Less expenses came in and the staff have been keeping expenses down.
 - It is still being considered to provide online courses, which would generate revenue and expand our outreach.
- Proposed Academic Affairs committee
 - This committee would look at faculty workloads and anticipated departmental needs, and then consult on faculty teaching appointments. This would increase transparency in research and teaching expectations.
- Follow-up on the department town hall
 - The goal is to promote an inclusive, diverse, and safe environment for all PLB members. The DAC thinks we should address this at a broad scale.
 - Town hall takeaways:
 - There doesn’t seem to be much mandatory reporting follow-up, so it’s difficult to know what decisions or actions have been made.
 - It is also unclear who people should go to in confidence to express concerns (or who to talk to in general).

- We need a stronger departmental community to empower people to be comfortable and willing to speak out when they have concerns. This seems to be largely due to the need to trust colleagues and superiors.
- One of the reasons WAWC was created was to improve departmental community by letting people get to know each other, but it's largely the same group of people at each month's WAWC.
- PLB could make a Code of Conduct diversity statement detailing how we value diversity and inclusion for research and other activities
 - This could open up conversations about these issues.
 - An ad hoc (and potentially permanent) committee was proposed to be formed to draft this statement and to brainstorm other ideas for departmental changes that could improve our culture.
 - In order to address concerns from across the department, it was proposed that the ad hoc (temporary?) committee be composed of individuals with different departmental roles (e.g., grad student, post doc, faculty, staff [secretary and lab tech]) to address diversity and other concerns in the department.
 - Some names were suggested for committee members and Danny will contact them on behalf of the DAC.
- Faculty Meeting (Teresa)
 - Marjorie Weber gave a short presentation
 - "Project Biodiversity" is an effort to compile a list of works by minority scientists that can be used to highlight minority contributions and increase their acceptance.
 - <https://whatbiologistslooklike.wordpress.com/>
 - <https://twitter.com/biodiversifying>
 - Topics will include all of biology and users should be able to search by topic keywords and diversity association
 - Will provide slides for teachers to use
 - The website will be designed to allow people to add examples of their own research with whatever self-identifiers they'd like included (e.g., race, sexuality, pronouns)
 - Will be presented at the next Ecological Society of America (ESA) annual meeting.
 - Future directions include allowing contributions about historical scientists and to recommend another scientist be asked to contribute
 - Interim Dean Sisk visited
 - Fringe benefits (e.g., health insurance) for employees (not grad students, but postdocs and others) are currently paid by the university, but that is likely to change in the near future.
 - It's been proposed that the university will give a lump sum to departments and departments will use that money to fund the fringe benefits.
 - One of the purposes of this change is to prevent department from using general funds to pay for employees that should be paid via other methods (e.g., is the employee works for an associated business instead of the department, such as in health care facilities).
 - Changes to the Grad Student Handbook
 - The Grad Committee proposed revisions to the Grad Student Handbook to address TA funding constraints (i.e., what happens after the fifth year). The faculty discussed these revisions and voted to approve the changes (though they acknowledge the faculty do not have the authority to reject these changes).

- The handbook will say that before 5 years, a PhD student just needs to fill out the TA request form. After 5 years, the PhD student will need to fill out the form as well as endorse a letter written by the major advisor that justifies the request.
 - Andy Jarosz will edit the TA request form so these instructions are clearly indicated.
- Recommendations to attend faculty candidate seminars and grad student recruiting events, and to give feedback
- Council on Diversity and Community (CDC) Meeting (Teresa)
 - Marjorie Weber and Ash Zemenick told members about “Project Biodiversity”: see faculty meeting notes
 - Transgender Rights taskforce update
 - They have been collaborating with the College of Human Medicine and have several events planned / being planned:
 - A panel of self-identified transgendered individuals directed toward MD and DO students (at least one panelist will be a CDC member)
 - A panel of local health providers for the transgender community directed toward MD and DO students
 - A seminar on related topics directed toward undergraduates and faculty
 - A FAQ is in the process of being made and a few undergraduates have express their interest in contributing
 - Implicit Bias Training for CNS members
 - The CDC has been looking into providing this, but there is a minimum number of people required to be at the training for it to be held. Plans are still in the works and an e-mail was sent to department chairs to advertise this opportunity.
 - Campus Climate Survey
 - A survey was done years ago and the CDC thinks it’s time for another to be conducted. This survey would ask students how they feel about the community at MSU. The Interim Dean is supportive of doing this.
 - Ideas for increasing diversity awareness and acceptance for faculty
 - Require CAN departments to have a CNS diversity coordinator service position or committee (these positions would fulfill the faculty member’s service need). By filling the service requirement, there is an advantage to the faculty doing that job.
 - For faculty applications to require a diversity statement (similar to a teaching philosophy statement). Some universities already do this.
 - For diversity work to be a component of faculty tenure and promotion processes
 - For syllabi to be required to include diversity information
 - For faculty to be required to have diversity training
 - It’s not yet clear how the CDC will respond to these ideas, but there was interest in many of them.
- Student Postdoc Lecture Series (Jeremy)
 - SPLS is now monthly instead of biweekly
 - Speaker slots are filled for the remainder of the semester
 - Please come listen to your peers in room 52 of the Herbarium on 3/7
- Midwest Ecology & Evolution Conference (Meredith)
 - Being held at KBS April 6-8
 - Registration ends March 17
 - \$40 for MSU students
 - We’ll be sending out volunteer sign-ups soon if you’re interested in moderating any sessions
- Comprehensive exam discussion

- Concerns about time to graduation
- MPS program is proposing a requirement for their students to take MPS exams (based on the Biochem exam, which is 1 step) rather than their home department exams—this is not supported
- First component: oral general exam
 - Harder to define because the 2 core PLB courses are broad—makes it virtually impossible to have a class-based exam—majority do not support a class-based general exam
 - Write a 1-2 page proposal of your research topics to send to a committee, from which they can come up with a topics/readings list
 - Goal to test general plant biology knowledge—reasonable to be less specialized (especially looking towards integration across the department)
 - Tailored broad exam—material that plant biologists should know and topics that you should know for your research (even if you haven't come up with a thesis proposal yet)
 - Assign topics that are like the name of a class and no more specific than that
 - Concern about super broad exams is that you will not enjoy learning/remember the material that is not relevant to you
 - Could get a topic list early and have a neutral party look over the topics to make sure plant biology is broadly represented in them
- Second component: proposal (written, public defense, oral exam)
 - Research theme, techniques, limits, timeline, contingency plans
- Proposal to combine exams: research proposal, seminar, and oral exam focused on both general and research topics (biochem model)
 - Would need to be explicit about fact that the questions will not just be specific to your proposal (i.e., you mention evolution, that makes that topic area fair game)
 - Concern about having too much to study for at once
- Set up a Google doc to put committee members in a database so students can contact grad students who have had particular committee members
- Make an advice file for people to compile advice on dealing with exams

Plant Biology GSO meeting 17/01/2018

- Department Advisory Committee (DAC)
 - Leonora has taken a job off-campus; she will not be replicated, and the department is in the process of redistributing her duties.
 - The CNS dean search is ongoing.
 - Fringe benefits charged on general funds accounts will be transferred to the department as of 1 July 2018. Currently, the department only sees salaries in their budget; when they see fringe benefits, the budget cut will also affect those benefits. This will likely affect hiring.
 - In the next few weeks, you will no longer be able to forward your MSU email to a Gmail account.
 - Tom Sharkey proposed building a phytotron (high controlled greenhouse space). This is a need, but the department wants to ensure that this does not come at the expense of renovating the rest of the greenhouse.
 - The greenhouse renovations have been taking a while.

- The greenhouse is not currently pay-per-use, and this will be changing when they remodel the greenhouse. The dept. should be aware of this affecting people in fields that don't have the resources to support these changes.
 - Update on time to finish (Lars)
 - If we can articulate outcomes that we expect of grad students when they finish, and the goal of comps is to evaluate the trajectory of grad students towards finishing, then the basis of comps should be the same as the expectations for graduation but at the halfway point. Discussion point for grad committee.
- Council on Diversity & Community (CDC)
 - Interest in special offering of the O13 "Understanding Implicit Bias" certificate program
 - <https://www.hr.msu.edu/professional-development/certificate-programs/understanding-implicit-bias-certificate-program.html>
 - Special offering would be geared towards CNS members. If we can get at least 25 people to attend, O13 is willing to schedule the training for us. The intent is to find a time that works for most interested CDC members and then invite others in CNS to participate.
 - Increasing inclusiveness in STEM classes
 - Refer to diverse labs/people who have made/are making a significant scientific contribution—name researcher(s) and university(s), or include names on slides (e.g., the anti-malaria drug artemisinin was discovered by Tu Youyou, a Chinese scientist).
 - The CDC will be compiling a Google Doc of examples of scientific diversity for professors to add to their lectures.
 - In classrooms using nametags, it would be good practice to include a line for students to indicate their preferred pronouns (and potentially require students to do so). Some instructors are hesitant, but the students would have the choice of what to put and this eliminates the student's need to bring up the topic.
 - The BioSci department wants to start having common exams at common times to help standardize the curriculum. They are currently planning on evening (not Friday) exams outside of normal class hours. CDC recommended avoiding Friday evenings (retail job concerns), to try to have the location near a bus stop so students can feel safe while leaving, and to follow the Chemistry department's lead and allow students to take a makeup exam the next day without needing to explain why (safety, family, other concerns or conflicts). This morning alternative exam may be at 6:30am, but it would be offered.
 - The CDC is continuing to work towards justifying a request for a CNS Diversity Coordinator by comparing our college with others at MSU. We are gathering information about what other diversity coordinators are responsible for and what kind of feedback students have given in different units.
- Graduate Committee (Christina)
 - Recruitment Weekend is Feb 2-3 for PSF. Email Christina (azodichr@msu.edu) if you would like to volunteer as a buddy (pair up with an individual recruit and take them to their interviews) or to attend/lead a Saturday activity (van drivers, housing tour volunteers, Sat night social activities, etc.)
 - Proposal to revamp the comprehensive exam system
 - Suggestion made at the retreat with a great deal of support
 - Would address both decreasing time-to-graduation and concerns about student mental health

- Input from students would be helpful
- Current suggestions:
 - One exam including a written proposal, public seminar, and questioning session by the committee. This is very similar to the current 2nd exam, but the questioning would include a mix of broad and proposal-specific topics.
 - Two exams, with the first being a common written exam taken at the end of your 1st year that covers content from PLB801 and 804.
- Seminar Committee (Ravi)
 - The Grad Student Invited Speaker winner was Christopher's nominee, who could not attend due to federal budget reasons.
 - The second close nominee (Christina's)—Todd Mockler was invited and accepted. His talk will be 20 April 2018.
 - Spring semester speakers include many internal PLB speakers, both to save money (PLB seminars have split from PRL) and to give postdocs a chance to practice talks.
 - Sign up for grad student lunches (pizza)—Leonora ran this, so scheduling will return to normal soon.