

SIGMAS Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, September 24, 2015, 14:30  
Grad House

President: Amanda Malloch  
Vice President: Jane Wodlinger  
Treasurer: Laura Teshima  
Secretary: Joseph Horan  
GSS Representative: Joseph Horan  
CUPE 4163 Representative: Jane Wodlinger  
Math and Stats Department Representative: Amanda Malloch  
Tea Chancellor/Poet Laureate: Joseph Horan  
Webmaster: Joseph Horan  
Peacekeeper (Acting or Otherwise): Vacant  
Safety Captain: Vacant  
Communications Scrabble Acronym: Jane Wodlinger and Laura Teshima

Present at the time the meeting convened (roughly 14:35), in rough order of appearance (excepting the first four): Laura Teshima, Jane Wodlinger, Amanda Malloch, David Collins, Joseph Horan, Mark Piraino, Charlie Watson, Hassan Al-Nasser, Dina Buric.

Late arrival (for a good reason): Joanna Niezen.

As participants filter in, Joseph asks if we have an agenda; the response is that the meeting will be run informally. The implication of this for the minutes is that they will not be nicely divided along item lines.

Jane calls the meeting to order, as informal chair. There is a quick round of introductions before getting down to important business: ordering Dark Matter, Bluebuck (the closest thing to an IPA, for Mark, that the table would drink), and a (non-alcoholic) Philips ginger beer for Joseph. Laura also notes that we don't have a Secretary, and suggests that Joseph be appointed Secretary. The table approves unanimously (even if it's an inanimate object), and Joseph starts formally writing notes for the minutes, instead of just taking notes for fun and/or curiosity. The drinks arrive, and due to a minor mishap, the ginger beer ends up being less than full, and thus is on the house (the perks of being a non-drinker!). Appies are also ordered at some point, and come at some later point (yam fries, nachos, and veggies with hummus).

The first non-administrative piece of business is put forth by Jane: does SIGMAS have any representation on the department meetings? The quick answer is yes, Amanda attends, and as a graduate student to boot, not in her role as AC Coordinator. Related files are sent out, as well, but they're always hidden in a `winmail.dat` file. [Aside: those require going to a website like `winmaildat.com`, uploading the file, having the website extract the file for you, downloading the file from the website, and erasing the files from the online server. Alternatively, there are free programs available for download that can do this for you without having to put files online where theoretically, the US government could obtain copies and plot the demise of the department without us knowing. Also, Joseph may have instigated a bit of change with respect to this; we'll see.] One of the things the department is looking at doing is an undergrad exchange program with a university in China, which doesn't affect us to a large extent.

Jane asks if a department meeting is a place where we can bring up grad student stuff. The answer is probably not. It'd be nice if we had a better handle on departmental policy, though. Mark suggests that SIGMAS put together a 'New Student Handbook', but that would require knowing more details than we do.

Changing tracks, Laura brings up some points that she wants to make sure are discussed. First, she proposes a \$50 per term honorarium for the Tea Chancellor, backdated to Fall 2014. Her

reasoning is thus: “He does a good job, and it’s a shitty job.” After verifying the motion, a vote happens, and everyone but Joseph approves the motion; Joseph abstains, for obvious reasons.

Next up is the Christmas party. Last year, SIGMAS subsidized grad student tickets to the event, 50% of the cost of the ticket, up to a total of \$500. Only nine students took advantage of this opportunity. This year, the ticket might be a bit more expensive, by a couple of dollars. Laura proposes the same funding, but also covering up to one guest per graduate student. The motion passes with unanimous assent, and we proceed to remark that in the case that we actually hit the cap, we should probably drop guests first. A rigorous algorithm should be devised, at some point.

The last of Laura’s points is introduced with an anecdote: in the Discrete group, grads are ‘heavily encouraged’ to go to certain conferences every year. The proposal follows: a \$150 per research group (Pure/Applied/Discrete/Stats) per academic year (Sept to Aug) discretionary fund for the grads to use go out and have drinks while at a conference, or have a small party, or whatever. The point is to encourage grads to hang out and be less miserable. The main comment about the proposal is whether it should be scaled by number of grads in the research group, since the groups have different numbers of grads. [Aside: a quick look at the department listings indicates that the groups have the following numbers of grad students: 10, 11, 13, 15, corresponding to Pure, Discrete, Applied, and Stats, respectively, though this is subject to change as some students are getting close to finishing (especially in Pure).] Eventually, the proposal is voted upon unchanged, and gets unanimous approval.

Amanda brings up the fact that we should have events! We have money to help fund events and stuff; we just need ideas and/or places to have parties. Charlie suggests rock-climbing; hiking is proposed; for the  $n^{\text{th}}$  time, Joseph says he thinks bowling would be fun. Turns out that Charlie can, on occasion, have a yard we can use, but unfortunately with little notice. We should be sure to tell people that yes, SIGMAS has money and should have events.

Charlie gets up to leave, prompting Amanda to remember that we should’ve talked about positions! She doesn’t mind stepping down as President, but no one offers to take her up on that. No positions are filled. [Charlie leaves.]

Mark brings up the idea of just hanging out at Grad House on a semi-regular basis. This idea is met with agreement, since who doesn’t like hanging out at Grad House? Laura notes that there is GSS funding, in case we want to have an event using GSS facilities, etc (like our Exam Solving party from a year and a half ago, or whenever that was).

Moving away from Events, it is noted that the department TAs were paid on time this month . Our pay will be distributed evenly throughout the rest of the term .

Moving on, Mark brings up the topic of candidacy/qualifying/comprehensive exams. Discussion ensues on the policy, and how there are a ton of new PhD students who will be writing comps. Joseph swears for the first time this meeting, and Jane comments that “this is a non-swearing meeting.” (Let’s ignore Laura’s comment from earlier, I suppose.) It is asked why comps like Real Analysis and Algebra aren’t offered regularly, and Joseph begins to explain that while Pure grads think that these are important things to know - “Discrete thinks you should get stuffed,” Laura correctly finishes. It is noted that as long as people are working with each other to not screw each other over by taking exams by themselves a term before lots of people are trying to take them, and getting some guidance from either Peter or someone coordinating which exams we’ll be writing, then the policy, however ‘wishy-washy’ or free-form it might seem, actually works quite well.

Other comps comments included where to get practice exams (instructors), and what the guidelines are for the Math and Stats comps, in general. There’s a document online that has policies, but it doesn’t specify things like who marks them, who writes them, what the formats are, if we’re allowed to have ‘one-off’ comps that have specialized topics, etc. UVic’s official policy, in the Graduate Calendar, is that the content and format of comprehensive exams is up to each department. So it

seems like there's a lot that isn't widely known. [Hassan leaves, after sitting through our discussion on comps, which is relatively impertinent to him, as the only non-PhD student left at the table.]

Joseph mentions that there is a "Grad Committee" of faculty members, made up of the grad advisor (Peter Dukes, currently) and one faculty member from each research group, but he can't remember who specifically sits on this committee at the moment. This information was presented at the department's New Graduate Student Orientation, on Sept 14, 2015. Maybe this committee makes important decisions? No one knows.

Joseph tries to remember what items he told Laura they should talk about; after looking at the e-mail on Laura's phone, he decides that there's nothing else from that list to talk about (completely ignoring how we've been thinking about changing quorum for over a year). Some previous topics are brought up again, and plans are discussed further. Amanda gives a brief report on this past summer's CMS Math Camp. [Joanna arrives!]

As Dina gets up to leave, Joseph brings forth a motion to adjourn the meeting! It proceeds straight to a vote, which is unanimous. Jane comments that "this was unnecessary," which is completely true. It's 16:30; not once did Joseph throw his hat during the meeting. Impressive, that.