

**School of Computer Science
Council Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 18th, 2019
1:00-2:30pm, REYN 1101**

Present –

Faculty: L. Antonie, D. Calvert, R. Chaturvedi, D. Chiu, R. Dara, A. Dehghantanha, D. Flatla, D. Gillis, M. Gong (Director), G. Grewal, H. Khan, S. Kremer, X. Li, P. Matsakis, C. Obimbo, S. Scott, F. Song, F. Wang, M. Wirth, Y. Xiang;

Staff: D. Byart, C. Hosker, G. Klotz, K. Gardiner (recording secretary), J. Hughes, K. Johnston, D. Rea,

Student Representatives: J. Fraser;

Regrets –

Faculty: A. Hamilton-Wright, X. Lin, J. McCuaig, D. Nikitenko, B. Nonnecke, J. Sawada, D. Stacey, M. Wineberg;

Staff: O. Adesina, L. Zweep;

Student Representatives: S. Modi;

1. Approval of Agenda for June 18th 2019

Motion: That the agenda for June 18th be approved

(D. Calvert, P. Matsakis)

In Favour: All. Abstentions: None. **MOTION PASSED**

2. Dean- Mary Wells

- **Funding requirement for graduate students**
- **Statistics on grad student funding levels within CEPS by Leonid Brown**

Mary Wells provided data on international master's students total funding (see Appendix A). She noted that there is an apparent equity issue across the colleges. S. Kremer asked for clarification on the chart provided. It was explained that the X-axis represents individuals with SoCS having about 12. S. Kremer also clarified that the funding in question was that from the University (i.e. for TAs). L. Brown explained that the information provided excludes students who have identified as self-funded or not requiring financial support.

P. Matsakis asked if this information included scholarships. It was explained that the information was sourced from the University HR system, so it would be included if the scholarship is on the student's payroll.

M. Wells commented on the inequity across the board. She explained that tuition is approx. \$23,000 and the university estimates tuition plus cost of living to be approx. \$36,000. The proposed minimum stipend would be \$16,000, starting in September to be ready for January 2020. D. Rea pointed out that not all students qualify for University funding and have no choice but to identify as self-funded, even if they would greatly benefit from financial support.

S. Kremer asked if the minimum stipend was for all students or just international. L. Brown explained that it is for all, however it is easier for domestic students to meet the stipend. S. Kremer asked the impact on the number students we would potentially lose in order to meet this stipend. C. Obimbo echoed this concern, pointing out we may only end up with three students left out of sixteen (for example).

The question was posed of how many students are truly in financial need and how many may just require a “top up”; those who are partially funded but not comfortable enough to identify as fully self-funded. It was asked if there was a third category to reflect this group of students.

L. Brown asked the council their first-hand experience on how students were managing financially. S. Scott shared that in her experience, her students saved money before starting their masters. D. Calvert pointed out that not all students are honest, they will arrange for the money to be in their account in order to be accepted but then have issues later when that money is not actually theirs. He also noted that students who identify as self-funded would be lower priority to receive TA positions, even if they may need that income. C. Obimbo agreed that while it doesn’t exclude them from TA positions, it creates a barrier for them to obtain them.

S. Scott expressed a concern about a lack of TAs with less grad students, since undergrad enrolment numbers are increasing. She noted that we can’t increase our undergraduate program but shrink the graduate one. She also asked for average number of graduate students per program. L. Brown explains it depends on what kind of grad student (i.e. research) but he estimates three to three and a half students per faculty.

It was explained that the \$16,000 figure for the stipend comes from engineering which we are using as a baseline. It was also noted that this number is higher in other units.

D. Calvert expressed a concern that this stipend will lead to having the same amount of money to be given to less students, which will lead to the University taking on more self-funded students which would create a barrier to entry for lower class students.

3. Approval of Minutes from April 2nd, April 11th and May 28th, 2019

Motion: That the minutes April 2nd, April 11th and May 28th 2019 be approved

(C. Obimbo, D. Calvert)

In Favour: All. Abstentions: S. Kremer, P. Matsakis. **MOTION PASSED**

4. Reports from SoCS Committees

M. Wirth reported an issue with students staying over in the THRN labs. He asked faculty to speak to their grad students and remind them they are not permitted to stay overnight on campus as it is against fire code and regulations. If the issue continues, the labs will be locked nightly at 6:00pm and campus police will be contacted to check on the labs.

5. Director - Minglun Gong

- **College Representative for the University NSERC graduate scholarships committee**

M. Gong asked if anyone wished to volunteer to sit on this committee. S. Scott asked about a timeline; M. Gong was not sure but will forward S. Scott the information once obtained.

- **Update on AI faculty position search**

M. Gong reported that the committee completed their initial screening as of May 31st which included filtering out candidates who are not a good fit. A more detailed evaluation of remaining candidates will begin shortly; the committee meets again on Thursday. M. Gong provided a rough timeline of July to invite the candidate to campus, however since many faculty are away in the summer, he asked the council for input on this timeline. S. Scott noted that while many people are away in July, waiting until September would not be desirable as faculty will be too busy with the start of the semester.

- **Update on first year enrollment**

M. Gong confirmed first year enrolment at 291. He noted that on June 6th he found out from Karen Gordon that our goal as a school was to cap enrollment at 200. The college's goal was 219 but with the current numbers we are now 40% over these targets. A meeting was scheduled and it was determined that the high enrolment was not intentional, rather a clerical error from the registrar's office.

M. Gong shared the plan on how this will be addressed, which was developed with D. Calvert. There is a plan to use larger classrooms for the fall term and for the winter term creating two additional sessional positions. He also requested additional TAs for the department. He note that if we can secure these resources, we should be able to support the increase of students for the first year.

He addressed the issue of beyond the first year in regards to supporting these students. He questioned whether we as a department push back and fight for the enrollment cap of 200, or accept the high enrollment numbers and focus on arguing for more resources to accommodate.

M. Gong explained that he asked Karen Gordon for historical enrollment data. He estimates that the registrar set our target to 240-250. Last year, we received fewer students not because fewer offers were made, but because fewer students accepted the offer. This year more offers were made and a higher percentage of students have accepted their offers. He also noted that our average cut off this year is higher than that of the engineering department.

P. Matsakis asked about an increase of number of coop students. M. Wirth noted that the problems with the coop program are external; we already have 30-40 coop students without placements.

It was noted that the software engineering program has also increased from 60 to double that for enrolment. This is not just students taking a software engineering course but are actually in that degree program. D. Calvert noted we are trying to do some damage control on this issues. He has been lobbying for more sections for courses that are taken after software engineering and possibly software engineering itself. C. Obimbo inquired about adding more labs. D. Calvert explained that more have already been added but CIS*1300 has severe restrictions and they do not want to have to split it into three sections.

D. Calvert also noted that the University is going to increase the numbers whether we want them or not, so we should be seeking long term support.

D. Gillis inquired about support beyond faculty and staff. For example, if money can be retained from SOCIS for events like CS games. M. Gong will inquire and follow up on this question.

G. Grewal wanted to address the point made earlier about comparing our entry average to that of engineering. He noted that in order to be accepted into a decent engineering school you have to have specific courses such as calculus, physics, chemistry etc. He asked what courses we require our Computer Science majors to take in high school in order to be accepted into our program. He further noted that 30-40% of our current students are struggling with technical courses and faculty spend a lot of time wondering how to get that 40% through. He isn't convinced that we are getting stronger despite that what the averages are. He noted that there is a big difference between 10-15 students failing and the current rate of 40-60 students. He explained that the quality of the teaching suffers with an increase of enrolment, regardless of enrolment averages; this is not being reflected in the classroom. M. Gong asked if this 40% of students struggling is increasing and G. Grewal confirmed yes, it is. G. Grewal also brought up D. Calvert's previous idea of an "off-ramp" program to help struggling students graduate.

D. Rea asked if C. Hosker had any insight on this in regards to the budget. C. Hosker explained that the Provost won't make any budget announcements until the fall term, but was able to confirm that we are in a deficit and is not expecting an increase of funds.

S. Kremer noted that it may be worth doing a calculation of additional students coming in and the revenue that comes from that, and using that information to convince the University to help us gain the necessary resources.

S. Kremer also noted that in regards to G. Grewal's observation of 30-40% students struggling, it is also a detriment to the rest of the class for faculty to have to cater to that 30-40%. He asked if there was something that could be done with first year courses to elevate the quality of students entering second year. D. Calvert explained that we have a new CIS*1300 course which is more advanced which may help with this issue, but it is yet to be seen.

P. Matsakis noted two non-financial issues with an increase of enrolment. First was how coop students will be managed and placed. The second issue is finding qualified TAs. D. Flatla agreed, noting that faculty have already received their pool of TA applicants which will not increase, and so eventually, less qualified TAs will have to be selected.

S. Scott noted she had considered how to better support first and second year students, for example why does the library have specific areas for some degree programs but not Computer Science? She wondered if we could ask for something like general purpose TAs to support specifically first and second years. D. Calvert said we have tried the general TA approach before without a lot of positive feedback, but that it could be attempted again in future.

- **Consultation on school's focus**

M. Gong explained an idea to introduce course based masters. He believes this will help, since thesis based masters will need to be financially supported by their supervisors. He also noted that course based could mean that students could do a coop term during their masters. It could also mean that we will get students that can be used as TAs. Additionally, it would bring in more revenue, allowing us to offer more graduate courses which in turn would give more variety of options for thesis-based masters students.

He explained that this is just an idea right now; he has consulted with J. Sawada (Associate Director, Graduate Studies) and S. Scott (Chair, Strategic Planning Committee) but wants feedback from the entire council. He explained the model would be to start small (5-10 students) as to not put pressure on faculty members for teaching resources etc. C. Obimbo asked if first years would have new courses, M. Gong responded likely not, as they are currently full.

D. Calvert noted that some master's students may not want the courses we offer. Students tend to want practical courses and if faculty don't want to teach them, they become assigned teaching tasks. M. Wirth suggested that in order to benefit from this, we would need to add additional fourth year undergraduate courses.

M. Gong explained that students in the course based masters would not be required to do a project, but could later swap two courses for a project if they are able to find a supervisor, however completing a project would not be mandatory. He also noted that if we introduce projects to course based masters, we would give teaching credit for the faculty and we would argue with the Dean to have this recognized.

G. Grewal noted that given the stipend, faculty would more motivated to take on this additional work (i.e. supervising students) if the funds were put directly into their General-Purpose accounts. M. Wirth and C. Hosker both explained that this is not possible as if it is supervision of a student, it is considered work and faculty must be paid directly as taxable income.

C. Obimbo noted that a business proposal may be beneficial for the course based masters. He believes the idea has merit but would like to see a plan that is more structurally sound. It was noted that in this business model, it should be ensured that revenue and cost sharing also goes towards staff, as that is often missed.

D. Calvert expressed his concern of graduate program enrolments also increasing beyond our resources and a lack of control we as a department have over enrolment in general.

One solution put forward was a one project course, which would constrain students and reduce the labour (since individual projects tend to be more labour intensive). M. Gong also noted a benefit of supervising a project as something that can be put into a CV. He also suggested allowing students to transfer to a thesis after several courses (maybe four after the first two semesters) only if they are doing well.

A. Dehghantanha asked about coop contracts and scholarships from outside companies. C. Hosker explained he will have to speak to L. Gatto.

S. Scott shared that at the University of Waterloo, the department pushed back on a course based master's program based on what they witnessed happening in other departments. When it was rolled out, they were very careful and selective.

C. Hosker shared a reminder regarding resources, in that the more students we have, the more workload there is for staff as well as faculty and that needs to be taken into consideration as well.

6. Any other business

C. Obimbo announced that Y. Xiang will be taking over T&P at CEPS. He noted that it is helpful when faculty are thorough, for example including page numbers on publications and conference papers. He also explained that we should include all funding one has applied for in the Sedona CV, whether awarded or not.

No other business

Meeting adjourned 2:27pm.