

Grad Forum March 14, 2014 with Mike Fryzuk and Mike Wolfe

Pre-written Questions

1. **Department-wide chemical inventory status.** **Fryzuk:** We are slowly moving toward a totally online mode of ordering. Part of the implementation of this new system is a module for a department-wide inventory. So far there hasn't been progress on that front but I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.
2. **Grad School Course Overhaul.** **Fryzuk:** Right now there is a complete overhaul happening of the curriculum, BUT focus is on the undergraduate courses. The grad course overhaul will come after the undergrad overhaul is complete.
3. **Cancellation of pure grad courses, forcing students to take courses very similar to undergrad courses.** **Fryzuk:** Again, once the overhaul of grad courses occurs, we should see the problem of having to take undergrad courses as grad courses or overly similar undergrad courses largely fixed/minimized. With regards to the cancellation of courses: we feel we need 5 people per course for the course to go forward as offered. Sometimes when we see that the numbers aren't going to get there, we try to advertise in other departments to see if there is outside interest. However, if we don't get to the 5 students, we don't see it as feasible to run the course. **Comment from Erin:** For me, the problem is that when my course was cancelled, I was forced to take a course outside my field. Given that I am trying to transfer into the pHd program, this makes it a lot more difficult for me to attain the grades I need. **Fryzuk:** I understand, but it's a balance. **Comment:** What are you talking about when you say "it's not feasible to run the course?" **Fryzuk:** I am referring to the professor's time and effort in implementing a course that will only be taken by say 2 students. Also, professors have to administer a certain number of courses each year. If a course is only taken by say 2 students, should that faculty get full credit towards their teaching duties? Another system we have thought about is allowing students to take courses over 2 years, but that isn't something we have too much control over currently. **Wolfe:** Also, we had a smaller than usual incoming class this year, resulting in more courses getting cancelled than is normal. I don't think we will see that next year. **Comment from Caitlyn:** Is there an option to do an independent study module? **Fryzuk:** We have discussed that and that is something that will come under review when we overhaul the curriculum, but as of right now that isn't an option. **Comment:** I think we need to do a better job

advertising the courses and having a central website page where there are better, concise descriptions of the course offerings. **Comment:** Is it possible to offer scientific communication and writing classes? **Fryzuk:** Well we have the 540 seminar course. Otherwise it's kind of a trial by fire. You learn when you have to prepare your first manuscript. **Wolfe:** That is definitely something we can consider. We're also looking into incorporating these "soft skills" into the undergrad curriculum.

4. **What makes a good comp? What happens if you fail?** **Wolfe:** We are testing whether you have good basic knowledge as well as the specialized knowledge relevant to your field. We have to be convinced that you have enough of the basic knowledge to continue in the PhD program. That said, we don't expect you to be able to answer every question. It's a bit of a fuzzy line, but that's basically what the comp is evaluating, and proving that to us I suppose is what constitutes a "good comp". What happens if you fail? You may be asked to redo certain parts of the comp or re-do the whole comp. If you fail the comp a second time, you will normally be asked to continue with a master's degree. We are allowed to ask the student to leave the program, but I can't think of a situation where that's actually happened. It's also circumstantial.
5. **Feedback system for improvements in courses in which grad students are TAs.** **Wolfe:** It's up to the individual instructors of the course. Most that I've spoken to said they'd welcome feedback from their TAs, but it's up to them if they want to hear/implement your feedback.
6. **Comments regarding the violation of TA regulations.** **Wolfe:** we are aware that regulations were broken in the last 121 midterm and we will try to avoid that happening again. **Comment from Erin:** we need better communication between the instructors making the schedule, and the reps. By the time that this infraction was noticed and brought up, not much could be done about it, leaving the TAs pretty much no choice but to go ahead with the schedule.
7. **Msc Students and PhD students take the same number of course credits – is this fair? Shouldn't this be weighted?** **Wolfe:** We implement the minimum number of credits that the university requires. Therefore we can't reduce it. We do feel it's possible to still finish a master's degree in 2 years.
8. **Seminars and topic classes for graduate students. Are there other lectures we can attend?** **Fryzuk:** Well, we have LMC, and we really work hard at getting good lecturers in. We have analytical/physics every Friday, IDG every two weeks, and then the 540 series given by the first

year graduate students. So my question for you is where are we going to get the time to go to more of these? **Comment:** Often the analytical/physical lectures are late in the evenings and due to my family obligations I can't go. I think it would be easier to attend them if they were during the day and not in the evening. **Fryzuk:** I can appreciate that that is an issue for some students. One thing we did try is having chalk talks given by faculty members - we had them on Friday afternoons and we even had beer but they just didn't gain traction.

Comment: what about after coffee time? **Wolfe:** I'm just confused about what you guys are looking for – what is it that you think you aren't getting from the current lectures that you want to see added? **Comment**

from Erin: Well like I think the chalk talk from faculty members would be really useful and informative. I would go to those. **Comment from Andrea:** I think the original asker of this question was looking for more specialized talks. **Comment:** We have an informal series between profs and students where it's more of a discussion between us rather than a lecture (I think in organic? Momose?) I always find them very insightful.

Wolfe: well this is something that you guys can push for and organize as well, this idea of more informal formats. **Comment from Hessam:** On that thread, I also find LMC to be not very interactive. **Fryzuk:** Well LMC is set up to be more formal. The chalk talks were set up to be more informal but again they didn't really take off. And IDG is meant to be more discussion based. Do you guys find LMC valuable? **Several:** Definitely yes.

9. **Resources for parental Leave.** **Wolfe:** we have not dealt with this properly to make it accessible for you guys, so we'll take responsibility for that. Within the next month, we should be at a point where all the resources are centralized.

10. **Cost of living in Vancouver vs stipend.** **Fryzuk:** We do not determine your TA stipend. Your grad stipend increases by 3% automatically each year, which you may not notice but we do implement. Keep in mind that our grants don't also automatically increase, so we have to do more with less each year. Also, being a grad student isn't a job, you are working toward your education and your degree. I'd like to remind you too that most people in graduate school (ie not in science) have to pay for their own education much like an undergrad degree. **Wolfe:** We're stuck in Vancouver and our grants don't reflect our location, so a person in Manitoba gets the same amount of money as you. We try to stay competitive but that's just how it is.

- 11. Policy of taking a part-time job.** **Fryzuk:** We don't actually have a policy that prohibits you from taking a part time job. The only policy that exists pertains to conflict of interest with regards to tutoring a course you TA. I would strongly advise against a part-time job say waitressing, because it takes away from your research and potentially lengthens the time of your degree, but you could do it. **Wolfe:** Now, in my mind, tutoring is different because you are practicing your science skills and using your knowledge, but other part-time jobs I would discourage. That's not what you're here to do.
- 12. There is only guaranteed PhD funding for 4 years and not 5, even though the average length is around 5 years. Why isn't it increased?**
Fryzuk: We are trying to decrease the time it takes to get the degree to 4 years, so it's more or less negative incentive to get you out of Here.
Wolfe: There is also an increase in your stipend in year 5 to compensate for the tuition that you have to pay. It is our expectation that you will be finished in 5 years, although our average is slightly over that currently, and we would like to decrease that. **Fryzuk:** I don't pay my students past 5 years, although some supervisors do. You really should be out before the 6-year mark, and again, we're working on making it closer to 4 years.
- 13. Some supervisors aren't alerting their students before they leave for conferences/vacation etc.** **Fryzuk:** This is totally unacceptable and is something I brought up and reminded the faculty about at the last faculty meeting. But if it's a real issue then come see me.
- 14. Transitioning from masters to PhD.** **Wolfe:** The requisite is that you passed all your classes with an average of 80%, with only 1 course allowed to be a mark less than 80%. Your research supervisor also has to agree that you are capable of doing PHD level research. **Fryzuk:** Yes, it really comes down to them and is something you should definitely discuss.
- 15. Implementing better ergonomics for graduate students, ie better desk chairs, etc.** **Fryzuk:** Sometimes we have partnered with faculty members who are buying new furniture for their students, but this is on an ad hoc basis and is not policy.
- 16. The number of people allowed in a given lab space at one time and whether there should be a capacity limit that is enforced.** **Fryzuk:** I'm sure there must be a limit, but I'm not sure what that is. We try to make sure that everyone has enough space in the fume hood and desk space.
Wolfe: It's really up to the research group leader to determine if their group has enough space and then make the case to the department

- that they need more space. **Fryzuk:** It's also up to you if you think there's a safety issue in your lab to bring that up with Helen or us.
- 17. Exchange of mercury thermometers for normal thermometers.** **Fryzuk:** We are making progress on the mercury front but there is no policy in place.
- 18. What is the department's policy on falsifying research? What are the expectations in terms of transparency of the discipline process?**
- Fryzuk:** Most of the process takes place at the university level, with further possible implications at the level of the granting agencies. Once it's brought to the department's attention, it will be brought to the attention of the university. In terms of transparency, the whole procedure is confidential. **Wolfe:** If anyone becomes aware of research falsification, it is their responsibility to bring it to the attention of their supervisor and the department heads as soon as possible so that situation can be rapidly dealt with.
- 19. NMR software inconsistencies/inconsistencies with training.** **Fryzuk:** I generally leave it up to the specific department to implement their instruments, software etc. I know that there are now committees that grad students can join to voice their input and suggestions with regard to this sort of thing. **Amanda:** Yes I am on one and we have talked about NMR facility issues extensively. **Comments:** Can we set up an e-mail list just for NMR users so that everyone else doesn't have to get them? **Jane Cua:** There is one, just no one uses it or it's mis-used. **Comment:** Also I find that all these grad students are in committees but we never hear about the outcome of these committee meetings. We need to have better communication on this front.
- 20. What is the department's plan to sustain shared instrumentation in the face of rising costs and reduced funding?** **Fryzuk:** So far I think that we have done a really good job of maintaining these kinds of services. For instance, we recently hired a research tech to help with instrument maintenance. So I think we're doing ok on that front.
- 21. How would you increase the efficiency of lab safety inspections?**
- Fryzuk:** Are they inefficient? **Wolfe:** I know Helen is aware that people lose fume hood time when the lab inspections take place and they don't happen when they are supposed to. **Fryzuk:** Building ops is often a problem too where they say they're going to come at a certain time and then they don't. So that's something we're constantly reminding them of.
- 22. Given that more lab manuals are being offered online and not in print, what will happen to the CGSS funding if and when almost all manuals are only**

offered online? **Fryzuk:** I think that I would encourage and remind the profs of those courses of the penalties of not offering hard copies. **Comment:** Ultimately, don't the students have to print the online manuals out anyway? **Comment from Andrea:** Yes, the big thing I heard from the profs who switched to online is that it allowed them to have shorter deadlines to get the manual together. **Comment:** Well, should the undergrads really be responsible for funding our drinking events? **Wolfe:** I would suggest that you approach those profs and see if you can work out a deadline that would better work for them and be acceptable for you. But we recognize that this is an important revenue stream for the CGSS. As well, the money you make has in the past been matched and deposited into the graduate student legacy fund, which now allows you guys to travel. So the CGSS funds do more than just allow for stressbusters and have other positive impacts on the graduate student population. We'd definitely keep an eye on that.

End of Forum