

**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
FACULTY COUNCIL**

These minutes have been approved.

A special meeting of Faculty Council was held at 11:30 am, Tuesday, June 7, 2011 in room 3089 of the Kenneth C. Rowe Management Building.

Present: S. Parcell, J. Bannister, S. Lucas, N. Schepp, M. Bliemel, A. Fenety, R. Singer, A. West (President, Dalhousie PDF Society), L. Bennett, D. Pelzer, S. Marche (Chair), M. Lee, B. Baldrige

Regrets: M. Cada, S. Faridi, D. Patterson, P. Gardiner-Barber, S. Guppy, R. Mopoho, H. Elliott, S. Tirone, B. Swerhun, G. Kipouros, T. Romanuk, D. Scott, P. Tyedmers

Present: Vickie Armstrong, Karen Gallant, John Newhook, Howard Ramos, Sinal Adl, Alemelu Bhonadwaj, Ryan Robski, Roisin McDevitt, Malcolm Heywood, Karl Dilcher, Yukiko Asada, Harm Rotermund, Deanna Foster, Tugce Balci

FC10/11.55 Call to Order

The Dean called the meeting to order.

FC10/11.56 Postdoctoral Minimum Stipend Policy

Dr. Michael Lee, Acting Associate Dean, opened the session with a presentation (attached). He reviewed the cost of the benefits (50:50 cost share) to both the PDF and the supervisor. Currently EI or CPP participation are not in place; these costs would be expensed to the PDF and the supervisor. PDFs have indicated they are interested in these benefits as many are starting families and would appreciate maternity benefits.

Following Dr. Lee's presentation and discussion Dr. Adrian West, President of the Dalhousie Postdoc Society indicated the treatment and working conditions of PDFs in Canada are the worst in the Western World. The stipends and benefits are the lowest of the developed countries. He indicated that Dalhousie would be taking big steps for the PDF community by putting the minimum stipend policy in place.

The training program that Dal offered, RSCH 5600, had been used to allow PDFs a tax exempt status until March of 2010 when the Federal Budget ruled all PDF stipends were taxable. This mobilized the PDF Society to strive to better the situation for their community. Their goal was to be treated like any other employee at Dalhousie. Through hard work they finally received a medical health plan. The minimum policy has been unpopular with some units, but there are many ways around paying the minimum, such as prorating salary or pooling grants together. This policy would be a large step in getting PDFs the respect they deserve from Dalhousie.

Faculty members had been invited to make brief presentations for and against the minimum stipend policy.

Harm Rotermund, Chair of the Department of Physics, spoke in favour of the policy. He stated various salaries of jobs that require far less education but were significantly higher than the average PDF was earning in Canada. He was surprised that there was opposition to the amount the Dal was putting forth as a minimum (\$31,500 for NSERC, \$36,750 for CIHR). He questioned what the motivation for PhD students would be to finish their degree, if they would be bringing in more money (tax free) as a PhD student. He indicated that faculty can find other sources to pay the PDFs they hire, and that in the best interest of the PDF community, the minimum should be set.

Dr. Yukiko Asada, Assistant Professor in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology spoke in favour of the policy. She came from Japan to do her PDF here in 2003. While she had an enjoyable experience, she talked about the risk of institutions using foreign graduates as “cheap labour.” She reminded those present that money is not more important than the person, and enforcing this minimum stipend would be a starting point to showing PDFs the respect they deserve. The PDF position is the first introduction these graduates have to academic life (outside being a student) and she felt it should be a positive experience.

Dr. Karl Dilcher, Chair of the Faculty of Mathematics and Statistics, spoke in favour of the policy. He raised the point that Math and Stat PDFs are in a different situation than science. There the research is very individually driven; they do not work in labs and there is not a lot of collaboration. The grants they receive are generally lower than most science grants. To ensure their PDFs are paid as well as possible, they are very creative and include teaching assignments and pool together grants to provide a respectable wage.

There followed general discussion. Dr. Sina Adl, the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Science, spoke against the wording of the policy and the amount. He stressed that there is very little money for faculty members and that imposing a minimum would harm researchers. He indicated situations can be very complicated and difficult to secure funding. He was also concerned with the wording and classification of a PDF. He indicated there are many at Dal who are not officially classified as PDFs because they are not being paid from a Dalhousie account. Dr. Adl felt this should be rectified in the policy.

Dr. Lee and Dr. Marche addressed the issue of classification as a PDF at Dal. The only way to track PDFs here is through payroll. There are no other mechanisms in place, thus can only include those who are paid from a Dalhousie account in this policy and other policies (such as medical benefits).

Dr. Adl was concerned this increase would push PDFs into the status of Research Associates because supervisors would not be able to afford them. Dr. West argued against this case as the current figures contradicted this. Currently, only 3% of the PDFs are paid below the \$31,500 stipend, and of these, by no more than \$1,000.

Dr. Singer raised the point that PDFs will usually go to the institution because of the researcher, not just because of the money. This policy ensures they are protected while here. Dr. Lee agreed, but also mentioned that many PDFs now have families and children, and their responsibility to their family is a driving force in where a person decides to work. Having this policy will make Dalhousie more attractive to potential PDFs with families.

Dr. Schepp raised some points on behalf of the Department of Chemistry against the policy. The department is not overly concerned with the amount of the stipend; they are more concerned with the fact that FGS is mandating it. They feel FGS has no right to do this. Dr. Lee explained that the PDF community has no one to represent them other than FGS, thus FGS is responsible for representing their needs and wants. As it is with any working body, this will undoubtedly include their salary. Being a researcher doesn't allow someone to pay whatever they want. Most positions in the working world are subject to pay scales. Ms. Lucas from the DAGS executive commented that as a grad student, she would not want to be at the mercy of a supervisor with no one to protect her rights and this is what this policy is aimed at protecting.

The discussion ended and a motion was put forward to the members of Faculty Council.

It was moved by M. Lee, seconded by L. Bennett: That the minimum stipend policy be accepted by Faculty Council as it stands. The motion carried.

Opposed: N. Schepp and M. Bliemel

The meeting adjourned at 1:30pm.

Sunny Marche, Chair

D. Foster, Recording Secretary