Present: Christine Peterson (CP), Sarah Pears (SP), Clare Crosby (CC), Jeff O'Donnell (JO), Bess Perry (BP)

New Business

CP - Mentoring program update: Bess and Christine are meeting to match newly-enrolled undergrads with grad mentors.

SP – The RGSA Research Internship Recruitment event was well-attended. Feedback from graduate student participants was positive. SP talked to eleven undergraduates. Robin Orr and Sarah Ford received numerous student e-mail addresses. RGSA should organize this as an annual event.

SP - Mini-grant update: Spring mini-grant decisions have been made. E-mails to applicants will be going out soon.

New UVM Business, Meals and Hospitality Policy

UVM rolled out a new policy last month. It changes the way we can spend money on social events. We should be able to provide refreshments for things like the Dean’s Forum, faculty breakfast and (possibly) social hours. However, we need to conduct some sort of official RGSA / Rubenstein business at each event.

SP – The new policy is online (link below), and the RSENR Business Office provided us with their interpretation of the new policy. The Exec. Committee is reviewing the policy and exploring options for future events.

https://www.uvm.edu/policies/procure/businessmeals.pdf

Faculty Breakfast

CC - We have reserved Aiken 103 on March 20th from 8:30 to 10:00 for the faculty breakfast. SP – We received a suggestion that in order to have people come and stay, we should organize it around a topic and invite specific faculty. SP proposed two potential topics, namely taking risks in research and pedagogy of grading. The RGSA Exec Committee will brainstorm additional topic ideas. If you have a topic idea, send it to rgsa@uvm.edu.

Social Hours

SP asked “What do we want social hours to be?” CC – The original intent was to have a time for grad students to get together and help form community. SP – Could be hard to justify purchasing food for a grad student get together under the new budget rules. Maybe our April social hour (with food) could be a time to nominate people for the Executive Committee and talk about elections? This could be a business purpose. SP will look into our options and see whether this could work in light of the new policy.

CC – The March informal social hour is tentatively scheduled for March 27th at 4:00 at Three Needs.
Proposed New PhD Credit Requirements (for non-M.S. holders) / Tuition Payment Procedures

Reduced Graded Course Credit for non-M.S. PhDs Proposal

SP checked in with Kimberly about the possible revisions to the PhD requirements. The faculty are talking about reducing the number of credits required for PhD students coming in without a Master's degree from 39 to 30. Nothing has been decided yet.

CP – Currently, PhD's without a Master’s must complete 39 graded credits and 45 research credits. The proposed change to the requirement would only apply to people coming in without a Master's. It would be 30 graded, instead of 39 graded. Those 9 credits could be used as research credits or non-graded course credits. Current Ph.D. students admitted without a M.S. would petition for this change to apply to them. The School is not changing the requirement officially, just having it be a new petition option. Current and incoming students would not be penalized, their situation would only be improved. It’s less credit money they’d have to spend and less time they’d have to spend in classes.

Method of Tuition Payment Proposal

SP – UVM Financial Services is looking to phase out tuition payroll deductions so RAs would have to pay their tuition bill in another way. The Grad College, GSS, our faculty, and RGSA are all monitoring this proposal closely.

CP – Currently, UVM hands money to students only to have students give it back. Would removing the payroll deduction for course credits require students to pay all credits up front?
SP – Possibly. A proposed change at the Grad College would require all future research grants would include a set portion to cover RA tuition, which would be paid in a lump sum automatically by the Grad College. This would essentially shift RAs to the TA model of the Grad College covering a specific amount of course credits up front, rather than having tuition payments deducted from paychecks over the course of the semester.

SP – This proposal seems to be a benefit to students. The faculty have said they are aware of the existing gap between grad student funding and the cost of living, and are hoping this change may help the situation.

GSS Update

CP – GSS has been talking a lot about the payroll deduction issue (discussed above). The word from GSS is that Financial Services is going to push this change through by next Fall.

CP – GSS is trying to get Grad College to cover all grad student fees, or require PI's to include funding for the fees in all grants. If paid by the Grad College, across the entire university it would cost $250,000. GSS is really pushing this idea.