**GEA Meeting 4 Dec. 2014**

1) The President called the meeting to order.

Members in attendance:

Tom Laughlin

Mitch Johnston

Veronica Litt

Nicole Birch-Bayley

Morgan Vanek

Matthew Risling

Chris Kelleher

Philip Sayers

Katherine Shwetz

Joel Faber

Elissa Gurman

Cristina D’Amico

Elizabeth Macklem, Evangeline Holtz, and Christina Turner send their regrets.

2) A motion to approve the agenda was introduced (Katherine) and seconded (Chris)

3) A motion to approve the minutes of Sept. 11 was introduced (Margeaux) and seconded (Chris)

4) There are no general announcements

5) Reports

i. President’s report

* thank-you to volunteers
  + a note for volunteers for the Grad English Council: if someone is unable to attend, please contact the President so that an alternate can be arranged
  + we still need an international student representative
* Update on GEA goals: faculty involvement
  + the Staff-Student Relations committee meeting wasn’t as productive as had been hoped; Chris is on that committee, and outlines GEA reps’ strategy going forward, which is to work for specific, tangible goals
  + question about finding allies among the faculty; two members have had encounters with newer faculty members surprised by their being the only faculty attendees to various events. Perhaps an open letter of some kind?
    - Reply: part of the issue is that the faculty are unwilling to take responsibility or acknowledge that this is a problem – despite having poor attendance at things like the Research Roundtable
  + comment: it’s a cultural thing that is difficult to change. Maybe it would be more productive to ask what **they** want to do with us. Failing that, an open letter might aim to appeal to an authority (*i.e.* to the Chair) rather than morality
    - comment: there are many new profs, whose arrival means that the culture **is** changing. Any open letter should target these.
  + comment: the grad conference this year has a couple speakers coming from outside, and it would be embarrassing not to have faculty in attendance
  + Margeaux invites volunteers to write or contribute to an open letter of some kind. Many of us come from schools with strong, engaged faculty, and it’s a shame that U. of T. culture is what it is, since students and visitors to our faculty don’t get that experience or receive those values.
* Update on GEA goals pt. 2: Transparency re. compsleft for Vice-President’s Report
* There are three sets of job talks upcoming: Old English, 19th-c. American, Contemporary British – be prepared for friendly e-mails soliciting participation at job talks and coffee hours for the job candidates!
  + OE: Jan 13, 20, 17
  + 19th-c. American: Jan. 12, 19, 26
  + Contemp. Brit.: Jan 16, 23, 30
* The Pre-Modern Research Symposium is a new event initiated by Jeff Espie and Sarah Star, and its two meetings this term have been quite successful – look for two more over the winter.
* Yoga is up and running again, thanks to Christina Turner, and is generating money for the GEA Karma travel fund, which we look forward to being able to provide this year.

ii. Vice-President’s report

* Some ongoing happenings:
  + the tutoring and editing list
  + MA to PhD workshop
  + 3 Brown Bag Lunches, with good attendance from both students and faculty
* some upcoming happenings:
  + Special Fields workshop Jan. 16
  + transition to ABD workshop Feb. 12
  + comps workshop Apr. 9
  + Visitor’s Day Mar. 20 -> volunteers on related committees should look forward to some e-mails from the VP in advance of that Day

iii. Treasurer’s report

* An application for money has been submitted to the GSU, and we should be received roughly the same amount of funds as last year, between $1600-1700
* A standardized funding proposal form will be introduced, and will be available by contacting him or on the GEA website. This form sets up accountability and good business practice for the management of GEA funds
* Budget for staff Christmas gifts: $75
* At this point of the year we are about $70 over budget, but things should be fine
* question: is there actually money for reading groups?
  + Reply: yes, there is a minimum of $50 available per group.

iv. Secretary’s report

* Nothing substantial to report
* question: TA room booking system is difficult to find and confusing. Can this be better?
  + Reply: yes, this is on my to-do list. I’m looking at streamlining this with the events calendar, so that booking Rm. 719 will be more straight-forward. Our online resources in general are confusing and need a systematic overhaul

v. GSU report: Matt Risling

* Charitable status continues
* The referendum about membership in the Canadian Federation of Students
  + 66% of those who voted, voted to leave, but the referendum was 7 votes short of quorum (1606 votes total), and the leaving side feels that the process was opaque. The legal committee will remain in place, to investigate that. This whole issue will likely be ongoing for some time
* A subcommittee of the GSU is collecting information from people who have had difficulty with faculty on their supervisory committee: postcards for this will be available in the student kitchen/lounge
  + comment: Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation has added support/instruction for prospective supervisors to their mandate, something that the GSU could collaborate with

vi. CUPE Stewards report: several members interested in this report are coming late, so a motion is made to postpone the CUPE report to the end of the scheduled reports (Margeaux) and seconded (Tom). It is realized that the EGM report has been omitted from the agenda, so a motion is made to add it to the rest of the scheduled reports (Margeaux) and seconded (Katherine)

vii. MA & MA CRW representatives were unable to attend, but have nothing significant to report.

viii. PhD 1 report: Nicole Birch-Bayley

* Texts, Theories, and Archives has been a good class bonding time, and provided an opportunity for Heather Murray to address many of their questions/concerns
* The Coffee Hours have also provided a good forum for conversation and bonding time
* The PhD 1 social event will be planned for the winter, since TTA has ended

ix. PhD 2 report: Mitch Johnston

* This has been an uneventful semester for most, aside from supervisory committee planning
* The PhD 2 social event will be held sometime next semester
* question: there have been a few issues with getting committees together – can you speak to that?
  + Reply: there seems to be a discrepancy between messages we received during the recruitment and what happens during the committee selection process

[At this point Mitch has to leave]

**Further discussion re: committee selection**

* Members in attendance are aware of a variety of issues concerning committee selection, spanning multiple years, including
  + e-mails ignored, various kinds of false advertising
  + outside committee members being denied without dialogue (leaving at least one student without a relevant committee, and wondering why they were accepted)
  + students being forced into awkward positions when faculty members can’t agree on their committee, or having their committees changed without prior discussion or notice
  + faculty members being ‘saved’ for incoming cohorts
  + general inflexibility far beyond the stated guidelines for committee selection
* this may be best brought to the Graduate Education Counsel, where the faculty might be prompted to address these problems in a larger forum – certainly not all faculty members are satisfied with the current process, for various reasons
* this might be material for another open letter. The phrase “gap between recruitment and experience” is a powerful one, because it captures the unethical nature of what’s going on
* could the GEA conduct a survey to solicit student experiences beyond those of the current year 2 PhDs?
  + The Secretary and VP will draw up a survey to move forward on this.
* the issue of committee selection is linked to faculty-student relations. Neither committee selection nor faculty involvement in student life match with recruitment language or experience

[Elissa Gurman & Cristina D’Amico arrive]

* Margeaux invites anyone to contact her with concerns or comments, stressing that any such conversations will be kept anonymous and confidential to whatever degree people are comfortable with
* The next GEC meeting is May 5; if this issue is on the agenda, it will be paramount to fill the room with concerned grad students – that presence will speak loudly and clearly
* Past exec members recall that it is possible to request a special meeting of the GEC, which would be necessary if the GEC is to address this issue before Visitor’s Day 2015. It may be politic to propose a meeting where only faculty have speaking/voting privileges and students merely attend: the message then is that this is a concern that students need the faculty as a whole to address, and not behind closed doors
  + If the faculty are unresponsive, the GEA could threaten not to cooperate with Visitor’s Day; it’s clear that this would be an aggressive strategy, but it recognizes the ethical dilemma felt by some students (possibly quietly shared by some faculty members) when prospective students ask for recommendations
* In her capacity as member of ACCUTE grad student exec, Elissa points out since part of ACCUTE’s mandate is to advocate for grad students, they could be a helpful ally.

The action arising from this discussion is that the President will oversee the drafting of an open letter to the faculty on the issue of open and ethical committee assignments; anyone concerned about the issue is invited to contact Margeaux with their comments.

x. PhD 3 report: Katherine Shwetz

* Not much to report, since everyone has been working on special fields – perhaps the PhD 3s will combine their winter event with several other years

xi. ABD report: Tom Laughlin

* Nothing to report

xii. Social committee: Elissa Gurman

* Things having been going well! Thank-you to the members of the social committee.
* Over the semester we’ve had two coffee hours and one pub night per month, which seems to be working well as a schedule. Other events:
  + Halloween pumpkin carving; Christmas holiday party (tonight!); Academics Read Things They Wrote As Kids
* Note that there will be many coffee hours next semester because of the job talks; any additional volunteers to help plan/set-up are very, very appreciated
  + comment: these are great professional networking opportunities!

xiii. Conference committee report: Matt Risling

* The CFP went out earlier this semester, but there haven’t been many submissions yet, so any publicity we can add would be great
* There will be a creative keynote speaker this year: Brecken Hancock, who is coming from Ottawa. She was called the “debut of the year” by the *Globe and Mail*
* So far the committee has received money from the GEA, and is waiting on the department; other sources of funds will be solicited in the new year. The goal is to double last year’s budget

xi. ACCUTE report: Nicole Birch-Bayley

* Nicole has the annual ACCUTE grad student survey, which is due at the end of the year, and will be getting in touch with GEA members for comments – this may be a place to bring up some of the issues discussed earlier in the meeting

xiv. English Department General Meeting report: Morgan Vanek

* At the most recent St. George Departmental Meeting, Chair Alan Bewell asked for feedback on a subject that the Faculty of Arts and Science has identified as somewhat sensitive: an increasing number of the undergraduate students on the St. George campus are now international students
  + Discussion: this is a wider problem for North American universities, and as English TAs we lack the time and skills to effectively respond – these students really need attention from Writing Centres, which are overbooked and underfunded at U. of T.
* The department is considering changing class size caps for 400-, 300-, and 200-level courses, which will eventually impact course instructorships at the 200-level . . . is this something the GEA should be looking into?
  + Discussion: the other concerns already raised are more pressing, and this seems like something more closely tied to CUPE’s role, since changes in course instructorships will impact the balance between Unit 1 (grad students) and Unit 3 (sessionals) appointments

xv. CUPE steward’s report: Tom Laughlin

* The vote to ratify a strike had a historic turnout, and a resounding Yes vote (90%); in a possibly correlated event, there has been some movement at the bargaining table:
  + 3 articles have been signed on, all dealing with non-monetary issues around language in the contract about *e.g.* evaluations, disputes – there has been compromise but nothing that the bargaining team considers concessionary
  + bargaining about financial matters is probably still a long way away
* The next thing to look for is a vote on a strike deadline, which will likely occur around Reading Week
* There have been a couple issues regarding progressive discipline in our department this year, so please spread the word that there are official steps to be taken. No penalties such as suspension can be applied by the department without formal steps, something protected by the collective agreement

6) New Business

i. Grad student directory

* Most departments have something like this, but we don’t; for various reasons the administration feels that this would be too difficult for the department to put together such a directory themselves – but we could host a basic one on the GEA website
  + comment: see the Cornell website for a great example of such a directory!
* The VP and Secretary will send out a survey regarding a student directory in January, asking for name, general field, research interest, contact info optional

ii. Survey re: comps transparency

* Margeaux has a meeting with the Director of Grad Studies (Lynne Magnusson) in February, and it would be helpful to have some data to support her concerns
* The survey will invite comments and experiences around the assessment of comps exams, failure, the process of re-taking, and the department’s language about all of these

iii. Academics Read Things They Wrote As Kids

* Scheduled for Jan. 16 at the Tranzac (292 Brunswick) – please participate! If you’re not comfortable reading, please come to show support, socialize, and laugh along with those who are reading
* Several readers have already volunteered but Margeaux is hoping for 16 total, so any advertising you can do will be very helpful

iv. Printers in the JHB

* They arrived in October and tech support was notified, so until this week Sangeeta was under the impression that they had been installed. She has placed a strongly-worded phone call and the printers should be installed shortly.

7) A motion to adjourn was introduced (Matt) and seconded (Katherine).