

Grad Forum 2026 Notes (09-July-2026)

Comments:

Form submissions/questions are in black and responses/discussions in blue. Potential action items highlighted in yellow.

Communication

- *Communication seems a bit slower than ideal, more advance notice would be appreciated when it comes to program requirements and departmental news*
- *Students feel there is no clear communication about requirements, standards, procedures or the state of the department itself.*
 - **Faculty proposes potential 1-1 once a month meeting with Parisa with a CGSS rep to rely on communication and updates from faculty to the rest of the student body.**
 - *Follow-up concern: CGSS reps have not allowed to sit in on Faculty meeting during grad matters.*
 - Haven't talked about grad matters since funding update.
 - **How to communicate with the whole student body? Reminders about CGSS meeting minutes being available.**
- *Lack of support from the advisor.*
 - *Response: Raise concerns about PI directly and identify them so it can be escalated properly. General comments unfortunately lead to nowhere.*
- *On the UBC Chemistry website, Parisa is listed as the graduate advisor to reach out to when a signature from the graduate advisor is needed. However, one must reach out to Lauren Koch instead, this has caused confusion for students.*
 - *Hard to keep track to all emails so please go through Lauren Koch.*
 - **Change website page or make it explicit as to when to contact Parisa and when to contact Lauren: <https://chem.ubc.ca/graduate-students-contact-and-advising>.**
 - *Note that the head cannot enforce professors to do anything, can only encourage.*
 - **Handbook: update website to include latest handbook.**
 - *Inform the students when new handbook is available.*
 - *Include note that the students can raise any concerns about the handbook and flag if it needs updating. Either to a CGSS Rep or Lauren Koch.*

Comprehensive examinations:

- *The situation with the comprehensive exams for the class starting in September 2024 is alarming, since a considerable portion of the class failed at least the first attempt. It would be good to know how this compares to previous classes and having a standard for expectations to determine if the evaluation was fair and properly conducted.*
 - *Nothing has changed in terms of how comprehensive exams are conducted. However, it is acknowledged that this year has been a worse year in terms of performance specially the first-try pass rate. Faculty is hoping to investigate it in the October meeting.*
- *Students would appreciate a clear document outlining what constitutes a pass or fail of the comprehensive exams, like a rubric or guidelines.*
- *What is being done regarding the number of students not passing their comp exams?*
 - **Change: Detailed written feedback will be provided to students by the chair after comp exam.**

- *A student requesting feedback from their supervisor leading up to their comp have been told “no” and did not receive much help during preparations and then were told by a committee member they were not adequately prepared. The student had to redo their comp. How can students in this situation get the support they need?*
- *What is being done regarding the number of students not passing their comp exams? I think more guidelines are needed for both grad students and professors. For example, I asked my PI for feedback on my presentation three times, and I was only told “no” and that my presentation is not important. However, after I gave my presentation during my comp, a committee member berated me for it, which made answering questions extremely difficult. I did not pass and had to redo my presentation.*
 - Reach out to committee members for support.
 - The perception of committees being intimidating – how to change that?
 - Lack of responses from faculty – need to know of faculty as to who is not responding so actions can be taken.
 - Know that if you fail or struggle in an exam, it does not reflect badly on you as a person. The committee wants you to improve and are more interested in your growth rather than a strict judgement. Sometimes it’s not your day and it’s okay.
- *Follow-up concern: how are the professors conducting exams so that students felt humiliated/afraid? Students not facing comp committee in certain cases. Only supervisors informing student that they passed/failed. No further communication.*
 - **Potential solution suggested: Pre-comp meeting to go over student challenges etc.**
 - Challenge is part of the process but the lack of communication regarding where the bar is for minimum and where the bar for challenge is an issue.
 - Suggestion: Reform comp exams, where PI is asked to leave and where the committee talks to the student.
- *Follow-up concern: trust-issues? No feedback from committee, only got feedback from own PI. No feedback on annual report.*
 - **You can go see professors.**
 - Mechanism to change committee members when no feedback/support is provided is unclear to students.
- *New: Language barriers for international students*
 - Not encountered at UBC so far, accent and grammatical errors are okay.
 - Advice: use board to draw and explain chemistry. Ask for the question to be repeated.

Imagine Day:

- *Why are all students required to present a poster on Imagine Day? Why were exceptions for students who recently completed their comprehensive exam or 4th year meeting removed?*
 - To keep students on track between comp and PhD defense and based on observation, it’s the time where students drop off.
- *Would there be a way for students to give feedback after Imagine Day? Students would like to give feedback and their impression of Imagine Day to the department. A discussion of the event’s overall productivity, pros/cons, availabilities, cost of printing, location, etc. would be appreciated*
 - Unaddressed
- *How can we make sure that students can meet their committee on that day? Many students do not get to see their entire committee on Imagine Day. How will faculty engagement be improved?*
 - *Follow-up concern: Hard to judge accurately, not everyone drops by. Not the right place to award people.*
 - Communicating it as a big bulk committee meeting, more relaxed.

- Plans to make 3 sessions, fewer posters and people have more time. New venue potentially to allow more space. Each student will have a sheet where committee members will sign for attendance
- PIs will be getting feedback forms for presentation to give students feedback – keeps track and accountability.

Research group culture (e.g. PI/student relationship, graduation timeline, etc.)

- *Seems very varied, some sort of standardization and expectation setting at the start of the program needs to be imposed.*
 - *Not all groups have a handbook or clear expectations at the beginning*
 - New onboarding document is available to set clear expectations about graduation that will be in-place for incoming students.
 - Required for Sep 2026, previous students will have it available as well.
 - Not communicated to the whole student body yet.
- *There needs to be a mechanism for students to be able to defend themselves from PI abuses of power, which is currently absent, or not communicated or not recommended by the graduate advisor.*
 - Connect with Parisa followed by G+PS. Also, can connect with Lauren to connect to G+PS directly bypassing faculty, but head needs to know (can be anonymous)
 - Information about G+PS is available in the graduate student mental health document -> Fragmentation of the information is an issue.
 - Add to handbook
 - If you have an issue, please report!
- *The graduation timeline must be a departmental requirement and only allowed to be extended under special circumstances.*
 - *What oversight is in place to ensure graduation timelines are followed?*
 - *Is there a way for grad students, even prospective grad students, to be informed of average graduation timelines in research groups and how funding is managed post-5 years by PI?*
 - Enforcement of graduation timeline is challenging. Checkpoints are already in place. Parisa meets with students in 5th years and beyond.
 - Committee meeting request is anonymous (by students or PI). Can be requested at any point to discuss student concerns.

Financial matters (e.g. stipends and funding, etc.)

- *A clear breakdown of what to expect from the stipend has been requested from many students. It is difficult for some who need to know in advance of the new school year what to expect from the stipend for their living situations*
 - Everything is in a state of flux now. Things will be finalized in October. Faculty of Science is determining it in September, and information will eventually be passed on.
 - Workday instructions document to outline how to access pay information?
 - New funding raise includes tuition.
 - Take home pay parity will be maintained. As a result, the: cost of hosting international students will be higher for PIs.
- *Are 5th-year and later PhD students included in any department-level support plan, or will funding after year 4 remain entirely dependent on individual supervisors?*
- *The UBC Graduate School Chemistry PhD profile reports an average completion time of 6.8 years. Given this, could the department clarify why the new stipend increase/minimum funding guarantee appears to apply only to students in years 1–4?*

- *Regarding the stipend raise in September, where is the funding coming from? Would there be a separate financial support for the 5th year and above?*
 - For chemistry, 5th years will have guaranteed stipend. The source of money is PI funding.
- *The departmental stipend claw backs when receiving a scholarship are unacceptable and they are not standard procedure in other departments.*
 - Unaddressed
- *We need either more communication or more transparency about the financial state of the department. Why is there a new charge being imposed on dry ice?*
 - It's expensive.

TAing matters (also GAAs)

- *Could there be more information on how students can request additional TA units? A more formal structure would be appreciated, while not having to disclose too much personal reasons for the request.*
 - Mechanism of requesting TA units is dictated by the union and CUPE.
 - For extra hours, PI approval is needed. Students should discuss with PI during onboarding.
- *The workload for CHEM 123 TAs is very heavy, especially for first-year graduate students. Marking weekly reports takes a lot of time and impacts research and academic performance. Is there a way to improve this, like reducing workload, increasing hours and pay accordingly?*
 - Unaddressed

Professional development (e.g. career-planning, internships, networking, etc.)

- Are there plans for more department run career development and networking events? Seem to mostly be organised by CGSS/CDI
- *The graduation timeline is unclear for students pursuing internships for industry experience. Can the department offer more transparent information and support for balancing internships with degree progress?*
 - Job fair creation is in progress
 - Student feedback needed, contact Parisa if interested.

Harassment (e.g. sexual harassment, verbal abuse, bullying, power harassment, intimidation, etc.)

- Students feel that it is unclear how much power their committee has over their graduation timeline. Some PhD students are in their 6th year, how can we make sure they can finish the program in 5 years?
 - See answers under Comp section above.
- Students have mentioned they received some unreasonable requests from a committee member (related to research and comp report) leading up to their comp, and were scared to speak up in case it may affect the outcome of their comprehensive exam. What can be done in such cases?
 - See answers under Comp section above.

Discrimination (e.g. xenophobia, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, etc.)

- *Support from supervisors for international students from countries affected by war has been dismal. The department has stepped it up and sent emails to support students, faculty and staff but what is to be done on a one-to-one basis with supervisors and students?*
 - Resources are not available at PI level; their job is to inform you of the resources.
 - However, please inform the department if any PI prevents access.

Lab safety matters:

- General safety structure breakdown:
 - Regulated by WorkSafeBC including all of UBC
 - Liability of going against WorkSafeBC is high
 - All JHOSC at UBC is at faculty level, so for us, Faculty of Science.
 - Glenn and Monica are reps.
 - CAIRS report is based on WorkSafeBC and needs to be filled out accordingly.
 - Please do CAIRS report in 48 hours to ensure you don't have to wait for reimbursement of medical expenses.
 - Contact Monica for help while filling it out if needed.
 - The departmental safety team is not official. Doesn't include departmental head so the reporting structure is odd. Especially regarding the right to refuse work under unsafe conditions.
 - JOHSC will need to be contacted if your PI refuses to update unsafe conditions.
 - If approved by JOHSC and still unsure, you need to escalate to WorkSafeBC.
 - If PI asks you not to report an incident, that is illegal.
 - Includes co-workers if they are doing something unsafe that impacts your safety.
 - Local safety team is there for safety; the only time you can get in trouble is if you refuse a request from them.
 - For workplace injury, call campus first aid.
- *The waste cage seems to fill up very quickly recently. Is there any way we can have another waste disposal location, or have the wastes collected more frequently? It will be great if the waste bags are available in D wing as well (like Main Office).*
 - Work order has been signed off for a new gas cylinder cage
 - The existing gas cylinder cage will become a new waste cage.
 - Another issue: not enough red bin waste cans, work in progress but please report.
- *New-concern: Lack of air-conditioning in E-wing which goes up to 35C in summer.*
 - Unsafe work environment. Leave if needed.
 - Good quality blinds/UV blocking film can be requested to be installed to control temperature.
 - Fans are allowed in office areas.
- *What is the policy for labs that have office spaces in the same room?*
 - Legal answer: If you have wet chemistry in the same room, you cannot eat at your desk, and you need to be wearing lab coats. Use lunchrooms.
 - A-wing: non-PPE in office area is okay, light food and drink is okay.
 - D-wing: use lunchrooms.
 - Looking for people to serve on the JOHSC! Gift cards are offered as thank you.
- *Fumehood situation:*
 - Issues with fumehoods not working in the morning
 - They are redoing it
 - Do not work in fumehood if it is not working.
 - If engineering/build ops dismiss your reports, let JOHSC know,