

The Science Society

Board of Directors

200 University Ave, Waterloo ON, N2L 3G1 | 519-888-4567 ext. 32325 | scisoc@uwaterloo.ca

22 March, 2017

RE: Board Decision on Biomedical Student Association temporary membership

To those whom it may concern:

Perhaps one of the most contentious decisions in Faculty of Science student government was made recently, which involved the dissolution of a temporary member society of the Science Society *Board of Directors*. On March 16th, 2017, by a vote of the six Yay to zero Nay to three abstentions, the Board resolved to “dissolve the membership of Biomedical Student Association (BMSA, 'the Association') and remove their voting seat from the Science Society Board of Directors”. Further the Board “encouraged the Association to become a Federation of Students club”, and “to request a non-voting seat on the Board in the future” in addition to “applying for external funding from the Science Society Board in the future terms.” This decision was not made lightly. Due to the impassioned nature of this matter, the Executive in conjunction with the Board has resolved to clarify the nature of the decision, the arguments that predicated its motion, and foremost to highlight the structure of the Board for those unclear.

To begin, it is necessary to understand the structure of the Science Society and its Board of Directors (BoD, 'Board'). The Board serves as the legislative tool and student government for UWaterloo Science Students from all backgrounds. It is tasked with oversight of the popularly elected Science Society executives who represent science on faculty and university boards as well as in the Federation of Students (FEDS). The Board is structured as an analogue to the Faculty of Science: Board seats are held by those representing each of the departments and the interdepartmental Faculty level initiatives. In this manner, the departments are each represented by a departmental society – eg. *Biology Undergraduate Society* (BUGS) representing the Department of Biology or *Physics Club* representing the Department of Physics – the Faculty or interdepartmental initiatives – eg. Science and Business Student Association (SBSA) or Biochemistry Student Association (BSA)– represent their constituents which do not fall into a department of their own. Hence, programs like Science and Business, Materials & Nanosciences, or Biochemistry which are interdepartmental in structure are able to provide representation for students to SciSoc.

The Biomedical Student Association (BMSA) was given temporary membership in the Fall 2016 term conditional on a performance evaluation at the end of their first term of operation (Winter 2017). On March 16th, the Science Society Executive under agreement with BMSA executives instructed the Board to evaluate the performance of the Association and provided their recommendations to the Board of Directors. The Board decided to remove BMSA as a voting Board member, effective Spring 2017, at the behest of the Executive. While many arguments were made in favour of and in opposition to the removal, major reasoning reaffirmed the standing observations of the Science Society over the past term: there is an overwhelming overlap with Biology's departmental society, BUGS, and the Faculty-level interdepartmental Biochemistry club, BSA. This prevents BMSA from truly distinguishing themselves and offering something beyond what exists for students already. After much deliberation, the Board resolved that BMSA over-represented life sciences on the board, yielding an unfair excess in spending on Biology Students (technically the Biomedical program falls solely under the Department of Biology) and set an unreasonable precedent for specific programs, rather than the departments and the faculty groups only, to have Board representation. It is especially noteworthy that while the primary argument for maintaining BMSA (and creating it in the first place) was the under-representation of Biomedical students and Honours Science students, this was simply inconsistent with observation. Case in point, *three of*

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the Executives on Science Society and *two* Board members (5/11 seats) are held by *Biomedical Science* students. The Board further recommended that BMSA as a separate program club incorporate under FEDS as a registered club and seek Science Society external funding in the future. This proposal was well received by the other Board members, and indicates the drive of the Board to fund groups that benefit Science students – particularly a subset so large as Biomedical Science. Perhaps a fundamental mistake of the Board originated in allowing BMSA to exist in the first place on the condition that they distinguish themselves. It was noted by a few board members that their existence as representative of a program on the Board would be akin to Mathematical Physics or Materials Chemistry programs receiving a voting board seat and thereby a distribution of funds.

Other arguments were presented including a reproach of the claims that BMSA could and was representing/targetting Honours Science students. This was asserted, but little to no actionable evidence exists to substantiate this claim. The Science Society Executive noted that events planning lacked originality, and were either events of other societies' BMSA joined with or borrowed. The Executive contended that there was an expectation by BMSA of event management by SciSoc. Based on turn out results from events, the Association predominantly failed to involve their own students with lower end turnout at ~30 students, and upper end not past 70 students with significant overlap with BUGS students. The Board also called attention to the fact that Biomedical Science is only operating as a program between Fall and Winter, and thus theoretically has no students in Spring terms, meaning that they their major operating time frame is only 2/3 of a year. This would mean Biology (via BMSA and BUGS) received extra voting and funding, whilst having fewer students to accommodate in that term. A significant and potentially salient feature of this decision is that Biomedical students involved in this student government voted in favour of the dissolution, this speaks to value of the Board's structure and the validity of the arguments presented.

Independent of these measures, the Board is considering offering Honours Science students an elected voting Board seat so they, as the largest proportion of individual science students, get greater say beyond simply departmental societies. The Board's recommendation that the Biomedical Student Association affiliate instead with FEDS is predicated on their niche role as a student organization for a their program and affiliation with a select group, whereas the Science Society strives for total open access of all events and all materials for all students within the Faculty. Under the Federation of Students, BMSA can flourish more from the increased flexibility, allowing greater opportunity for success as they move into a new chapter. The Board would look very favourably upon the Association returning in the future for external funding, so that they may provide Biomedical Science students with the resources they need to succeed without impinging the efficacy of the Board or the Science Society. The Board also resolved that BMSA should hold a nonvoting observer seat going forward so they can give input and voice for what they believe to be under-represented groups at the University of Waterloo.

Please feel free to contact the Science Society Executive at 519-888-4567 ext. 32325 for further information or questions, or by email at SciSoc@uwaterloo.ca. Thank you for your attention to this matter, the Board of Directors hopes your questions and concerns have been addressed.

Sincerely,


(Speaker of the Board)

3 April, 2017

(President of the Board)