

University of Waterloo
Senate
Minutes of the September 22, 2025 meeting
[in agenda order]

Present: John Abraham, Nasser Abukhdeir, Yasmeen Almomani, Veronica Austen, Aubrey Basdeo, Jordan Bauman, Jean Becker, Raouf Boutaba, Andrew Chang, Helen Chen, David Clausi, Martin Cooke, Cecilia Cotton, Ashley Day [Secretary], Hans De Sterck, Laura Deakin, Charmaine Dean, David DeVidi, Michael Drescher, Thomas Duever, Mark Ferro, Paul Fieguth, Teresa Fortney, Bruce Frayne, Gen Gauthier-Chalifour [Secretary], Vivek Goel [Chair], Rob Gorbet, Vikas Gupta, Peter Hall, Kevin Hare, Marc Jerry, Acey Kaspar, Achim Kempf, Misha Khan, Scott Kline, Jochen Koenemann, Sachin Kotecha, Christiane Lemieux, Ondrej Lhotak, Lili Liu, Jun Liu, Brad Lushman, Shana MacDonald, Carol Ann MacGregor, Blake Madill, Colleen Maxwell, Richard Myers, Carter Neal, Cathy Newell Kelly, Christopher Nielsen, James Nugent, Alex Pawelko, Nicholas Pellegrino, David Porreca, Neil Randall, Arya Razmjoo, Jacinda Reitsma, Jessica Rindlisbacher, Sharon Roberts, Meray Sadek, Beth Sandore Namachchivaya, Rida Sayed, Mark Seasons, Marcus Shantz, James Skidmore, Karen Sunabacka, Su-Yin Tan, Christopher Taylor, Alexie Tcheuyap, Katie Traynor, Sharon Tucker, Diana Vangelisti, Justin Wan, Johanna Wandel, Mary Wells, Jeffrey Wilson, Stan Woo, Changbao Wu, En-Hui Yang

Regrets: Laith Alkhawaldeh, Murray Gamble, Chris Houser, Nadine Ibrahim, Christopher Lim, Pendar Mahmoudi, Peter Meehan, Damian Mikhail, Sushanta Mitra, Jagdeep Singh Bachher, Clarence Woudsma

Guests: Nenone Donaldson, Bernard Duncker, Melanie Figueiredo, Jenny Flagler-George, Anne Galang, Diana Goncalves, Diane Johnston, Andrea Kelman, Tony Ly, Nick Manning, Christine McWebb, Ian Milligan, Fayaz Noormohamed, Chris Read, Nadia Singh, Greg Smith, Brandon Sweet, Mathew Thijssen, Ian VanderBurgh, Nickola Voegelin, Tim Weber-Kraljevski, Katy Wong-Francq

OPEN SESSION

The chair welcomed members to the meeting and offered opening remarks. It was noted that Tuesday, September 30, is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and events are scheduled to take place on campus including a walk around Ring Road. The chair shared best wishes to our Jewish colleagues as they observe the festival of Rosh Hashanah that begins on September 22, 2025 at sundown.

The Chair welcomed back returning senators and a special welcome to new senators joining for the first time. The Chair also officially welcomed Thomas Duever, Interim Vice-President Academic and Provost, who will also serve as vice-chair to Senate. A reminder was given about the annual Joint Board and Senate Retreat taking place on Thursday, September 25th at the Cora Building in R+T Park. The retreat provides an opportunity to bring together Board and Senate Members on areas of mutual interest and foster connectivity in our governance system.

The Chair noted the recent call for nominations for Honorary members of the University. This award recognizes employees for outstanding service to the University as a whole. Further information can be found on the Secretariat's website or please reach out to the Secretariat for more information. Additionally, on September 16th the Secretariat put out a call for nominations for vacant Faculty Senate seats. There are four vacancies, one in Arts, two in Health and one in Science. More information can be found in the consent agenda under item 9.2.2.

1. Territorial Acknowledgement

The territorial acknowledgement was given by Amanda St. Marie and Johanna Wandel, along with a brief presentation on the Moccasin Identifier Project.

2. Approval of the Agenda and Minutes

2.1 Conflict of Interest.

No conflicts of interest were declared.

2.2 Approval of the Agenda, and Consent Items

A member requested the item 9.2.3 be removed from the consent agenda and be added to the regular agenda under item 10.

A motion was heard to approve the agenda as presented, and to approve or receive for information the items on the consent agenda, listed as items 9.1-9.8 of the Senate agenda. Porreca and Lhotak. Carried.

2.3 Minutes of the June 9, 2025 Meeting

The chair noted a request for clarification and amendment to the minutes, received in advance of the meeting. An amendment was proposed under item 3.1 Report of the President, to clarify that the announcement of Bill 46 referenced governance consultations, but the bill itself does not specifically mention them.

A motion was heard to approve the minutes of the meeting, as amended. Abukhdeir and Deakin. Carried.

2.4 Business Arising from the Minutes

A member asked if there would be an SMA 4 update at the September Senate meeting. The Chair indicated this update would be provided under the President's Report. There was no further Business Arising.

3. Report of the President

3.1 General Update

The President and Chair of Senate welcomed senators back and noted the enthusiasm across campus with the start of the new academic term. He acknowledged the complex global and sector-wide issues currently facing higher education and emphasized the importance of remaining responsive and engaged.

In August, the University received a transformational philanthropic gift in the area of physics of information and artificial intelligence. Congratulations were extended to Achim Kempf for his leadership and involvement in securing this important contribution. The Global Futures competition continues to move forward. Over 60 letters of interest were received in the first round, of which 15 groups were invited to submit full proposals. Eight of those proposals received funding. The next round of the competition will begin in November 2025. This initiative is funded through a reallocation of resources previously designated for research centres and institutes.

Preliminary enrolment figures for the Fall term were shared. Domestic undergraduate enrolment is either on target or slightly above. International enrolment is also close to target; however, official counts will not be finalized until November 1. The President reminded senators that last year, the university intentionally reduced international enrolment targets. As a result, overall international enrolment remains lower than in previous years. For graduate studies, overall applications have increased, particularly due to a rise in applications from the United States. Allocations for international graduate students are on track, and there are still Provincial Attestation Letters (PALs) available for the Spring term. Visa processing delays continue to present challenges. The President emphasized that the core issue is not the availability of spots but rather the ability to recruit high-quality students. A recent recruiter survey conducted by ApplyBoard identified Canada as a stronger destination of choice compared to previous years. The final co-op employment rate for the term reached 94%, which is an improvement over previous terms. However, it was noted that students generally took longer to secure placements this term, reflecting broader challenges in the employment market.

At the federal level, the government is currently focused on improving Canada's global competitiveness. The next federal budget is expected in early November and will likely include a mix of strategic investments and spending reductions aimed at containing the national deficit. The federal government also announced the Build Canada Homes initiative, which includes provisions for the acceleration of student housing projects. This will be an important component of ongoing planning for the main campus and potentially the Research and Technology (R+T) Park. More information will be shared at the upcoming joint Board and Senate retreat. At the provincial level, discussions have concluded regarding the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA). Once agreements are signed off they will be publicly posted by the Government. A new agreement is in effect a placeholder while the province reviews the funding formula. Any changes to the funding model are expected to be implemented in the 2027–28 academic year, which would be Year 3 of the current SMA cycle.

Based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Institutional Partnerships the administration is preparing to bring a draft statement on principles for partnerships to Senate in Fall 2025 for consultation. Final approvals are anticipated during the January/February 2026 governance cycle. A Budget Update will be brought forward to the Senate Planning and Finance Committee in October and to Senate in November. Gauthier-Chalifour clarified a question from a member regarding the cadence of the new Senate Planning and Finance Committee and added that meetings could be added if warranted and at the discretion of the Chair.

4. Report of the Senate Executive Committee

4.1 Senate Engagement Working Group

The Chair introduced the item, speaking to the proposal as an impetus to previous Senate Effectiveness surveys, governance reviews and Senate discussions. The Chair invited Gen Gauthier-Chalifour, University Secretary, to speak to the details of the proposed working group.

Gauthier-Chalifour reminded senators that in June 2022, Senate endorsed a report with 38 recommendations to enhance Senate operations. Key focus areas included making discussions more strategic, reducing meeting frequency, improving meeting materials, strengthening ties with the Board of Governors, and overall functional improvement. Most recommendations have since been implemented. These include launching a governance portal, streamlining agendas and documentation, enhancing senator orientation, and reviewing Senate committee and council structures. Building on this progress, the formation of an ad hoc Working Group to support the next phase of governance improvement is proposed. This proposal is informed by feedback from senators and results from the Senate Effectiveness Survey discussed at the June 2025 meeting. The survey indicated strong interest in examining how senators engage with Senate processes and structures, including roles and responsibilities, rules of order, and the membership and election process.

The mandate of the proposed Working Group would be to review and recommend changes to Senate's governing documents and procedures, to focus on improving senator engagement and governance effectiveness, and to align with best practices in academic and bicameral governance. The group would also ensure responsiveness to senator input and support continuous improvement.

If approved by Senate, the Working Group is expected to convene in November 2025 and will report regularly to Senate through the Senate Executive Committee (SEC). Any formal recommendations will be brought forward to Senate via SEC, in accordance with established governance procedures. Following Senate approval, the Secretariat will issue a call for expressions of interest. The SEC will then propose a membership slate for the Working Group, to be presented for approval at the October Senate meeting.

A member raised concerns about the governance process, asking whether the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) could block recommendations from the proposed working group. Gauthier-Chalifour clarified that the SEC does not block proposals but may return items for clarification or further development to ensure readiness for Senate consideration. The SEC serves as a governance oversight body to manage process, not content. Another member questioned whether forming an ad hoc group through SEC was the most democratic approach, particularly in light of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals. They suggested that Senate elections could be used instead. He also asked whether the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (EDI-R) had been consulted. Gauthier-Chalifour responded that the working group will be reviewing Senate membership criteria, including gender balance, and that elections alone may not be the most effective tool. Gauthier-Chalifour added that input from the Office of EDI-R and relevant stakeholders would be welcomed in the working group's discussions.

The Chair emphasized that reports from the working group will be brought to Senate for final decision-making and that the SEC's role is not to block, but to ensure submissions are properly prepared and procedurally sound.

A member raised several questions including whether the proposed co-chair model was necessary, why SEC was designated as the supporting body, and whether the membership was appropriate. Gauthier-Chalifour responded that co-chairs help share responsibilities and ensure diverse perspectives. The SEC, as the body responsible for making recommendations to Senate regarding the establishment of ad hoc committees of Senate, is the natural group to establish and receive reports from the working group. The member then expressed a preference for a single chair who is not ex-officio and the removal of the two SEC member roles on the working group and requested the motion be revised. Another member requested the amended motion be broken into two separate motions.

A motion was heard to amend the proposal to remove the ex-officio co-chair position from the membership of the working group. Abukhdeir and Porreca. The motion did not carry.

A motion was heard to amend the proposal to remove the SEC members from the membership of the working group. Abukhdeir and Porreca. The motion did not carry.

To close the discussion, a member encouraged broadening the working group's scope to ensure robust input from senators. They highlighted the value of including context and institutional memory in discussions about governance. Another member emphasized making sure someone on the committee understands the relationship and pathways between committees, and that any governance changes may have profound unintended impact to how things work operationally at the University.

The original motion was then heard that Senate establish an ad hoc working group to review current practices and opportunities to enhance senator engagement, as presented. Skidmore and Gorbet. Carried.

5. Joint Report of the Senate Graduate & Research Council and Senate Undergraduate Council

5.1 Academic Calendar Dates for 2026-2027

DeVidi introduced the item on behalf of the Senate Undergraduate Council. This is an annual report and associated motion to approve the next year of academic calendar dates and guidelines. A member asked for clarification around rule 10 as there are two terms where only one pre-exam study day is given. Newell Kelly clarified that the terms are closer together than normal due to the timing of the winter break.

A motion was heard to approve the 2026-2027 academic calendar dates and calendar guidelines for establishing academic dates, as presented. DeVidi and Newell Kelly. Carried.

6. Policies

6.1 Proposed Amendments to Policy 42 – Gender-Based and Sexual Violence Alleged Against Students

The Chair gave an overview of the proposed amendments to Policy 42: Gender-Based and Sexual Violence Alleged Against Students. The policy is being reviewed in accordance with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act, which specifies that universities in Ontario are required to review their sexual violence policy at least once every three years and amend it as appropriate. A Policy Drafting Committee was established in April 2023. The redrafted policy has three major areas of change: inclusion of acts of gender-based violence in addition to sexual violence; the policy will no longer apply to incidents occurring off-campus, where the incident is not connected to a University activity or event; change in decision-maker is transferred from the Associate Deans to the Associate Provost, Students, or their delegate. The policy amendments will be presented to the Community and Culture Committee of the Board for endorsement on September 24, 2025, and the Board of Governors for approval on October 28, 2025.

Members commended the Policy Drafting Committee for its extensive consultation process. A few minor amendments were requested including the formatting of the bullets on page 27, addition of a summary on page 13 for readability purposes, and the removal of WUSA Advocacy Committee on the list of groups consulted due to a scheduling conflict.

7. Report of the Associate Vice-President, Academic

7.1 Undergraduate Communications Requirement: Completion of Guidelines

David DeVidi, Associate Vice-President, Academic, introduced the item and welcomed George Lamont, who provided a presentation outlining the cross-university initiative. The initiative addresses longstanding issues with the English Language Proficiency Exam (ELPE), which had shown declining scores over a ten-year period. In response, the university shifted in 2015 from a "test-first" to a "teach-first" model for communications skills. A structured development process began in 2021, involving 16 drafts and input from over 40 reviewers.

The Undergraduate Communication Requirement Group (UCRG) has produced a UCR Governance Structure and Approvals Process, UCR Course Design Principles, and a website with information relating to Undergraduate Communication Requirements. A member questioned why the group was not formally under the Senate Undergraduate Council. Lamont clarified that the initiative enhances, rather than replaces, existing structures and allows for more agile review. DeVidi emphasized that local academic decisions often have broader university-wide impacts, necessitating coordinated oversight. Another member raised concerns from Section 3: Mandate of the UCRG, suggesting the group may inadvertently impact departmental autonomy. Lamont reassured that decision-making remains under Dean discretion and does not encroach on unrelated areas.

8. Reports from the Faculties

8.1 Faculty of Arts – Reorganization Proposal

Alexie Tcheuyap, Dean of Arts, provided an overview of the reorganization proposal. The proposal had been endorsed by the Arts Faculty Council on September 10, 2025 with 84% voting in support of the reorganization. The current structure of 15 schools will be reorganized into 6 schools, including two new schools, the School of Critical and Creative Humanities, and the School of Social, Political and Historical Research, to be comprised of existing departments.

Tcheuyap noted the idea to reorganize into fewer, larger units predates any current financial challenges. The focus is on reorganizing for greater programmatic, administrative, and functional efficiencies and effectiveness. The key goals of the proposed reorganization are to create opportunities to build the Arts Faculty of the future, sustain programming amid expected reductions in funding and people, and build resilience. A transition period between Fall 2025 and July 1, 2026 will occur, during which administrative, leadership and staff roles will be established. Tcheuyap emphasized that the proposal does not include relocating the existing 13 departments to different buildings or areas. The proposed staffing structure assumes that all permanent staff will have a position within the new schools and will offer equitable opportunities for specialization and career progression.

The proposal is the result of long-term strategic planning and extensive consultations. Since September 2024, there have been approximately 90 meetings and consultations to collect feedback and input into the proposal. If recommended by Senate, the proposal will move forward to the Board of Governors for approval at the October 28, 2025 meeting.

Senators expressed appreciation for the extensive consultations undertaken and the responsiveness to feedback throughout the development of the restructuring proposal. A member raised concerns about staffing imbalances due to retirement attrition and asked whether the proposal will provide more flexibility. Tcheuyap clarified that no jobs would be lost and that two net-new staff positions would be added. The proposed model aims to offer clearer career pathways for staff. Student senators welcomed the proposal's potential positive impact on students but questioned its financial implications. Tcheuyap responded that while minor efficiencies may result, cost-saving was not the primary goal. Instead, the intent is to create a more dynamic and future-ready Faculty of Arts. Senators inquired about the rationale behind those who voted against the proposal, emphasizing the importance of understanding minority dissent. Tcheuyap acknowledged that not all views could be incorporated and that dissenting members had the opportunity to share their input throughout the process.

A motion was heard that, on the recommendation of the Arts Faculty Council, that Senate accept and recommend the Board of Governors approve the proposed reorganization of the Faculty of Arts, as presented, effective July 1, 2026. Tcheuyap and DeVidi. Carried.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

The following items were received for approved / received for information.

9.1 Senate Work Plan 25/26

9.2 Report of the Senate Executive Committee

9.2.1 Elections to Senate Committees and Councils

9.2.2 Senate By-Elections

9.2.3 Senate Executive Committee - Summary of the September 8, 2025 Meeting

9.3 Report of the Senate Graduate and Research Council

9.4 Report of the Senate Undergraduate Council

9.5 Report of the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee

9.6 Report of the Vice President, Academic and Provost

9.6.1 Faculty Appointments and Leaves

9.6.2 2025 University Research Chairs

9.6.3 Call for Nominations - University Professors

9.7 Report of the Vice-President, Research and International

9.7.1 Awards, Distinctions, Grants, Commercialization Activity, Waterloo International Engagements

9.8 Report on Spring 2025 Convocation

10. Items Removed from the Consent Agenda

A member requested to move item 9.2.3 Senate Executive Committee - Summary of the September 8, 2025 Meeting to the consent agenda. The member asked if future summaries of the Senate Executive Committee could include more detail.

11. Other Business (open session)

A member requested clarification on whether the Technion Partnership would be renewed as it concludes in the near future. Charmaine Dean, VP, Research and International, confirmed that the partnership would not be renewed in the current circumstances. It was also clarified that individual researchers with relationships with Technion would be able to continue their work.

There was no other business. Senate proceeded into confidential session.