

University of Waterloo
SENATE GRADUATE COUNCIL
Minutes of the January 21, 2026 Meeting

Present: Mike Beazely, Steven Bednarski, Helen Chen, Rob de Loë, Alison Hitchens, Abhishesh Homagain, Brian Ingalls, Brian Laird, Christiane Lemieux, Tony Ly [Secretary], Lilhac Medina, Tizazu Mekonnen, Christopher Nielsen, Nicholas Pelligrino, Brad Pomeroy, Ian Rowlands, Meray Sadek, Justin Wan [Chair]

Resources/Guests: Nasser Abukhdeir, Carlie Bolton, Graham Brown, Angela Christelis, Jennifer Gillies, Carrie MacKinnon Molson, Marianne Simm, Rebecca Wickens, Richard Wikkerink, Jefferey Wilson

Regrets: David Clausi, Charmaine Dean, Tom Duever, Vivek Goel, Carter Neal, Clarence Woudsma

Organization of Meeting: Justin Wan took the chair and Tony Ly acted as secretary. The secretary advised that a quorum was present.

1. Governance Resources

This item was provided for information only.

2. Approval of Agenda

Council heard a motion to approve or receive for information the items of the consent agenda. Hitchens and Lemieux. Carried.

2.1. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

2.2. Approval of the Agenda and Consent Items

Council approved the agenda as distributed.

3. Consent Agenda

Council approved items 3.1 – 3.3 on behalf of Senate and received for information item 3.4.

3.1. Minutes of the November 17, 2025 Meeting

Council approved the minutes of the meeting as distributed.

3.2. Curricular Submissions

Council approved all curricular submissions items 3.2.1 – 3.2.4 on behalf of Senate.

3.3. Graduate Awards and Scholarships

Council received for information and approved all new awards and scholarships.

3.4. Accessible Education Project Updates

Council received for information an update from the Accessible Education Project.

4. Regular Agenda

5. Chair's Remarks

The Chair thanked council members for attending the recent joint meeting with the Senate Research and Innovation Council. The next joint meeting will likely be in the Spring term and members were invited to submit topics of interest.

6. Curricular Submissions

6.1. Faculty of Arts

Pomeroy presented the changes for the Political Science and Psychology programs. The current timeline for the PhD in Political Science program was very constrained. The updates for the Political Science program included updates to the graduate research field, expanding the number of elective courses, adding flexibility to the comprehensive exam reading list, and the option for removing the thesis for the MA program. The Applied Data Science specialization was added for the PhD in Psychology program.

A motion was heard to recommend that Senate approve the major modifications to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Political Science; Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Political Science - Co-operative Program; Master of Arts (MA) in Political Science; Master of Arts (MA) in Political Science - Co-operative Program (direct entry); and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychology, effective May 1, 2026, as presented. Pomeroy and Ingalls. Carried.

6.2. Faculty of Environment

Rowlands presented the changes for the Master of Environmental Studies program. A coursework option will be added following the recommendations from the cyclical program review. There are two specializations and they fit well with the capstone projects. Students will need to apply for the coursework option and attend the same classes as the research option.

A motion was heard to recommend that Senate approve the major modifications to the Master of Environmental Studies (MES) in Geography, effective May 1, 2026, as presented. Rowlands and Nielsen. Carried.

6.3. GSPA Regulations

Simm and Bolton highlighted proposed updates to GSPA regulations. Council members proposed an amendment to clarify the language for the final assessments section in the Final Examination Regulations and Guidelines document. The amendment will be reflected in both the regulation and in the system.

A motion was heard to recommend that Senate approve the major modifications to the 2026 Graduate Studies Academic Calendar, effective May 1, 2026, as amended. Ingalls and Pelligrino. Carried.

7. Faculty of Environment – Joint Education Institutes

Rowland, Wicken, and Wilson provided an overview of the new 2+0 joint education model with international institutions. The initiative includes plans for University of Waterloo course-based Master programs to be delivered entirely at the partnered institution. Students will receive dual degrees and there are minimal research security risks. The Registrar Office is currently reviewing enrollment and admissions processes, and consultation will occur with GSPA. Quality assurance and academic standards will be assessed and maintained. Policy related requirements and compliance issues are currently being reviewed. Academic support and resources will most likely be offered by the host university. There is ongoing consultation and council members were invited to contact the presenters with questions and feedback.

8. Student Academic Disability Accommodations Policy

Brown and Gillies provided a presentation about the Student Academic Disability Accommodations Policy. Graduate-specific concerns were outlined in the pre-read materials that were distributed. Council members raised concerns about communication gaps regarding accommodation at the Faculty and Department levels. The guidelines aim to include additional points of contact beyond the graduate student supervisor. Consultation is ongoing and the policy will be presented at Senate for approval in April. Council members were invited to submit feedback about this policy.

9. Senate Academic Innovation Committee

Abukhdeir presented a proposal for the Senate Academic Innovation Committee (SAIC). The

proposal responds to the work of the Academic Innovation Working Group (AIWG), and Abukhdeir emphasized the need to transition this work into a formal, Senate standing committee with a focus on academic innovation including alternative credentials. Abukhdeir outlined three primary goals of SAIC: 1) Establishing a Senate standing committee dedicated to academic innovation and allowing Senate Undergraduate Council (SUC) and Senate Graduate Council (SGC) to maintain oversight of academic innovation; 2) Providing a Senate-level approval process for alternative credentials; and 3) Ensuring that academic innovation remains a visible and sustained priority at the University of Waterloo. Abukhdeir suggested that SAIC reports could be included in the consent agenda of SGC and SUC to improve overall efficiency.

Discussion followed and council members raised the following concerns: 1) add a teaching fellow to the membership of SAIC; 2) unclear governance pathways and alignment with existing Senate processes; 3) unclear on the types of recommendations SAIC will make as a Senate standing committee; and 4) unclear whether SAIC has the authority to direct the Faculties or Departments at the university.

10. Items Removed from the Consent Agenda

No item was removed from the consent agenda.

11. Other Business

No other items of business were identified.

12. Adjournment

The next meeting of the Senate Graduate Council will be held on March 3, 2026 from 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. in Needles Hall 3318.