

University of Waterloo
SENATE
Minutes of March 2, 2026 Meeting

Present: John Abraham, Nasser Abukhdeir, Yasmeen Almomani, Veronica Austen, Michael Barnett-Cowan, Aubrey Basdeo, Jordan Bauman, Raouf Boutaba, Andrew Chang, David Clausi, Martin Cooke, Cecilia Cotton, Hans De Sterck, Laura Deakin, Charmaine Dean, David DeVidi, Michael Drescher, Thomas Duever, Andrea Edginton, Mark Ferro, Paul Fieguth, Teresa Fortney, Bruce Frayne, Murray Gamble, Gen Gauthier-Chalifour (Secretary), Vivek Goel (Chair), Rob Gorbet, Vikas Gupta, Kevin Hare, Nadine Ibrahim, Marc Jerry, Acey Kaspar, Achim Kempf, Misha Khan, Scott Kline, Jochen Koenemann, Sachin Kotecha, Christiane Lemieux, John Lewis, Ondrej Lhotak, Jun Liu, Brad Lushman, Shana MacDonald, Carol Ann MacGregor, Blake Madill, Pendar Mahmoudi, Heather Mair, Colleen Maxwell, Peter Meehan, Damian Mikhail, Sushanta Mitra, Carter Neal, Christopher Nielsen, James Nugent, David Porreca, Neil Randall, Arya Razmjoo, Jacinda Reitsma, Meray Sadek, Beth Sandore Namachchivaya, Rida Sayed, Mark Seasons, James Skidmore, Karen Sunabacka, Su-Yin Tan, Christopher Taylor, Alexie Tcheuyap, Sharon Tucker, Ian VanderBurgh, Diana Vangelisti, Bojana Videkanic, Justin Wan, Johanna Wandel, Mary Wells, Jeffrey Wilson, Stan Woo, En-Hui Yang

Regrets: Laith Alkhalwaldeh, Helen Chen, Peter Hall, Chris Houser, Christopher Lim, Lili Liu, Richard Myers, Alex Pawelko, Nicholas Pellegrino, Jessica Rindlisbacher, Sharon Roberts, Marcus Shantz, Jagdeep Singh Bachher, Katie Traynor, Clarence Woudsma

Guests/Resources: Kathy Acheson, Whitney Barrett, Heather Bolton, Graham Brown, Tanya Daniels, Ashley Day, Nenone Donaldson, Melanie Figueiredo, Jenny Flagler-George, Anne Galang, Jennifer Gillies, Yip Jasmine, Diane Johnston, Andrea Kelman, Jennifer Kieffer, Tony Ly, Nick Manning, Christine McWebb, Ian Milligan, Kirsten Muller, Chris Read, Samir Sharma, Greg Smith, Tim Weber-Kraljevski, Katy Wong-Francq

1. Governance Resources

A link to the governance resources for Senate was provided for information.

2. OPEN SESSION

The Chair called the meeting to order and welcomed all to the meeting, acknowledging Samir Sharma, incoming Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) President. The Chair congratulated Mary Wells, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, on her recent appointment to the Order of Ontario.

The Chair noted that the results of the recent Senate elections are included in the consent agenda under item 12.2. In September, new and returning Senators will be welcomed for the 2026–2027 governance year. Elections for faculty and student Senators to the Board of Governors will take place from March 30 to April 7.

An update was provided on the development of a pathway for the review of Policy 8: Freedom of Speech. Updates will be provided at future Senate meetings.

3. Territorial Acknowledgement

The territorial acknowledgement was given by Charmaine Dean, Vice-President, Research & International.

4. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

4.1. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

4.2. Approval of the Agenda and Consent Items

The Chair noted that the WUSA and Graduate Student Association presentations under item 11: Report of the Associations, would be postponed until the April meeting of Senate.

A senator requested clarification of the governance pathway of item 6.2: Senate Alternative Credentials

Committee (SACC) Proposal, in relation to another committee proposal from that Senator for a Senate Academic Innovation Committee (SAIC).

The Secretary noted that the SACC materials have been under consideration through Senate governance processes since 2024 and were reviewed by the Senate Undergraduate Council (SUC), Senate Graduate Council (SGC) and Senate Executive Council (SEC), each of which recommended the proposal for Senate approval. The SACC had undergone broad consultation through established Senate processes. The SAIC proposal is currently undergoing consultations at the committee level and has not yet received recommendations to proceed to Senate.

The Chair proposed proceeding with approval of the agenda and addressing these questions regarding item 6.2 during its scheduled discussion.

A motion was heard to approve the agenda as amended, and to receive for information the items on the consent agenda, listed as items 12.1-12.8 of the Senate agenda. Porreca and Deakin. Carried.

4.3. Minutes of the October 20, 2025 Meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes.

A motion was heard to approve the open and confidential minutes of the January 26, 2026 meeting, as distributed. Skidmore and Porreca. Carried.

4.4. Business Arising from the Minutes

No items of business arising were identified.

5. Report of the President

5.1 General Update

The President and Chair of Senate acknowledged that current global events, including the situation in Iran, may be affecting members of the University community personally. The Chair reminded senators of the importance of registering with Safety Abroad when travelling. The Chair further emphasized the University's dedication to fostering an environment at Waterloo that promotes thoughtful dialogue, upholds care, civility, and mutual respect, and providing appropriate support to community members impacted by global events.

On February 17, 2026, the Government of Canada announced its Defence Industrial Strategy, aiming to boost defence research by 85% and launch the BOREALIS organization. The University will support campus researchers who seek further collaboration and funding opportunities.

On February 18, 2026, Canada introduced a new Express Entry category for university professors, teaching, and research assistants. This policy aims to attract international talent and give graduate students and professors more opportunities for permanent residency in Canada.

Recently the province has committed \$6.4 billion in additional funding for colleges and universities over the next four years. This investment increases annual total base operating funding for the sector from approximately \$5.4 billion to \$7 billion. This is a welcome shift in the provincial approach to postsecondary funding. While \$6.4 billion is a large number, it is spread out over 4 years and across all the colleges and universities in the province.

The government announced funding for 70,000 new student spaces by 2029, of which 30,000 support existing students over corridor and 40,000 are net new positions. Details are still to be announced on the process by which institutions will be invited to submit proposals demonstrating enrolment growth in priority labour markets. Capped tuition increases will be permitted, with institutions allowed to increase fees by up to two percent annually for the next three years. While this represents positive news for the sector and for Waterloo, careful stewardship, operational efficiency, and financial sustainability remain essential.

The Chair acknowledged recent changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), highlighting that grant funding will drop from up to 85% to 25%, with the balance now offered as loans. This shift is

anticipated to have a notable impact on both current and future students. The Chair noted the University is aware of students' concerns, and the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) is planning action for March 4, 2026. The University has reiterated its commitment to supporting student access by continuing to invest in need-based grants, bursaries, scholarships, and specific financial aid for both undergraduate and graduate students.

The Chair invited Damian Mikhail, President of WUSA, to offer comment. Mikhail spoke in support of the increased investment in funding and sustainable tuition framework, emphasizing the significant impact of the OSAP changes on students, particularly those from low-income families. WUSA is proposing a student walkout on March 4, 2026, to protest these changes. Mikhail called for faculty understanding of the challenges faced by students.

Senators discussed the impact the tuition freeze has had on the operating budget, and the constraints on international student enrollment. Data indicating how many students use OSAP at the University and the potential impact would be provided at a future meeting.

In relation to proposed student action on March 4, senators discussed the use of short-term absences and the request from WUSA for faculty to be empathic and understanding of student concerns.

6. Report of the Senate Executive Committee

6.1 Academic Freedom of Academic Administrators

The Chair spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package, including an interpretive memo to clarify provisions in university policy and based on academic scholarship and legal perspectives on this topic. It was noted that the Secretariat received a communication to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) on this topic from Faculty Senator Nasser Abukhdeir. The SEC met on February 17, 2026 and agreed to forward both memorandums to Senate for information.

Senator Abukhdeir spoke to his concerns as outlined in his memorandum.

It was suggested that this issue could be discussed as a potential topic at a future joint retreat of the Senate and the Board of Governors.

6.2 Senate Alternative Credentials Committee Proposal

The Chair noted that following feedback and approval from the Senate Undergraduate and Graduate Councils, the SEC is recommending the establishment of a Senate Alternative Credentials Committee to replace the existing Alternative Credentials Approval Committee (ACAC).

David DeVidi, Associate Vice-President, Academic, spoke to the materials included in the meeting package, noting that the proposal originated from a recommendation in the 2024 Credentials Framework Report. With the proliferation of alternative credentials, the proposed committee is intended to strengthen governance, credibility, and reporting of alternative credentials through closer alignment with Senate oversight.

Senators raised concerns regarding the proposed speed of approvals and potential pressure on Faculties, and inquired whether evidence from peer institutions supports the proposed approach and need for a more expeditious approvals process. DeVidi noted that other institutions are moving aggressively in this area. The proposed committee is intended to balance maintaining the high quality associated with the University of Waterloo name while supporting emerging revenue-generating opportunities. In 1973, Senate agreed that non-credit credentials would not be subject to Senate oversight; this proposal would restore Senate authority over their quality, reporting, and governance.

Senators suggested that clarification regarding the stackable credentials process be included in the proposal and also raised concerns about the proposed membership of the committee.

A senator moved to defer the item. The Chair invited a seconder, and Senate agreed to defer the item to a future meeting of Senate.

7. Report of the Senate Graduate Council

7.1 Faculty of Arts

Justin Wan, Chair of the Senate Graduate Council, spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. A question was raised whether other programs have teaching as instructor-of-record or being a teaching assistant in a course as a requirement and if the new collective agreement for sessionals would limit assignment of teaching to students in such programs. Wan clarified MA and PhD students are allowed to teach one course during their graduate degree program as part of their pedagogical training without the requirement to advertise such positions in accordance with the collective agreement between CUPE 5524 Unit 0 and the University of Waterloo.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major modifications to the 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. Wan and Tcheuyap. Carried.

7.2 Faculty of Environment

Wan spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. There were no questions.

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

7.3 Office of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs

Wan spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. There were no questions.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major modifications to the 2026 Graduate Studies Academic Calendar, effective May 1, 2026, as presented. Wan and Porreca. Carried.

8. Report of the Senate Undergraduate Council

8.1 Faculty of Arts

DeVidi, as Chair of the Senate Undergraduate Council, spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. A senator noted the large output from the curriculum management software, Quali.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major plan modifications and retirements for the Faculty of Arts School of Accounting and Finance, Department of Communication Arts, Department of Economics, Renison University College programs, and regulation changes, effective September 1, 2026, as presented. DeVidi and Tcheuyap. Carried.

8.2 Faculty of Engineering

DeVidi spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. There were no questions.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major plan modifications for the Faculty of Engineering Biomedical Imaging Technologies Specialization, Diploma in Business and Entrepreneurship programs, and retired regulations, effective September 1, 2026, as presented.

8.3 Faculty of Environment

DeVidi spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. In response to a question, it was clarified that the regulation modification does not change the existing rules. Approval requirements under section 3.5 remain in place; however, requests for students to take an increased workload will now require approval at the Associate Dean level. In response to a query about timeliness of approvals, Senate was assured that this would continue to be the case.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major plan modifications for The Faculty of Environment Geographic Information Systems Certificate, Environment, Society and Well-Being Specialization, Remote Sensing Specialization programs, and regulation changes, effective September 1, 2026, as presented. DeVidi and Porreca. Carried.

8.4 Faculty of Mathematics

DeVidi spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. A senator noted that student feedback on the program included comments regarding the tuition classification.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major plan modifications for the Faculty of Mathematics Data Science program, effective September 1, 2026, as presented. DeVidi and Koenemann. Carried.

8.5 Faculty of Science

DeVidi spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. There were no questions.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the major plan modifications for the Faculty of Science Advanced Physics Option, Aviation Minor, and regulation changes, effective September 1, 2026, as presented. DeVidi and Deakin. Carried.

8.6 Office of the Registrar

DeVidi spoke to the materials provided in the meeting package. A minor grammatical error was noted that did not impact the intent of the materials. There were no questions.

A motion was heard that Senate approve the Office of the Registrar new regulation and regulation changes, effective September 1, 2026, as presented. DeVidi and Porreca. Carried.

9. Report of the Senate Research and Innovation Council

This item was deferred to a future meeting of Senate.

10. Report from the Ombudsperson

The Chair noted that this is the inaugural report of the Office of the Ombudsperson, which was established in January 2025. A report to Senate is being brought forward as part of the annual reporting obligations under the tri-party MOU between the University of Waterloo, WUSA, and GSA.

Whitney Barrett, Ombudsperson, spoke to the report as provided in the meeting materials. Barrett highlighted the priorities for the office, outcomes from year one, and engagement plans for future.

Senators discussed how to support increased visibility of the office, and it's work and the role of the Ombuds Office in relation to anonymous complaints and policy development. It was clarified that the office maintains an informal and impartial role, providing feedback during policy drafting but not serving as a formal actor in processes or negotiations. Barrett added that the purpose of the office is to remain impartial and informal.

11. Report of the Associations

This item was deferred to a future meeting of Senate.

12. Consent Agenda

The following items were received for information as part of the consent agenda motion for approval under item 4.2.

- 12.1 Senate Work Plan 2025-26
- 12.2. 2026-2027 Senate Election Results
- 12.3. Report of the Senate AQUE Committee
- 12.4. Report of the Senate Executive Committee
- 12.5. Report of the Senate Graduate Council
- 12.6. Report of the Senate Undergraduate Council
- 12.7. Report of the Vice-President, Academic & Provost
- 12.8. Report of the Vice-President, Research and International

13. Items Removed from the Consent Agenda

There were no items removed from the consent agenda.

14. Other Business (open session)

With no other business identified for the open session, Senate proceeded into the confidential session.

March 2, 2026

Ashley Day
Associate University Secretary