



Council Speaker 2025 AGM Report

To: GSA Membership

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Date of Meeting: April 3, 2025

Summary:

This report outlines the activities and achievements of the GSA Council from May 2024 to February 2025.

Activities and Achievements

Over the term, there were numerous changes on policy that were made, such as amendments to GP8 which clarified the policies regarding council speaker nomination, council member specification and the various roles of Speaker, Council Member, and Directors on the Council. In the Fall 2024 term there were also changes to many different council and board related policies to better reflect how specific policies can be changed and implemented. These policies also now reflect which member, be it a director, or a council member, can propose changes to each of their committees.

Although not strictly a council only matter, council members of various dGSAs across campus also deliberated and brought forth their thoughts and feedback on the overall GSA project that aimed to harmonize communication between GSA and the dGSAs. This included feedback on the constitution, what it should look like, and specifications on what roles must be filled to be a dGSA at campus and the operational requirements associated.



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Various campus committees and groups also have come to Council to present and inform members of the services that campus has to offer. This includes the GSA equity presentation, presentation from accessibility services, GSEF, etc. Although we were not able to get campus housing in 2024, they are scheduled to present in 2025 in the March meeting. Non-campus-based groups, such as Elections Ontario, have also participated in our meetings, to ensure graduate students are staying well informed of critical issues such as provincial elections. Another similar event will be planned for the upcoming federal election.

In September, the council member remuneration program was launched, giving \$25 in remuneration to those who regularly attend and participate in the meetings. This has shown to be a good incentive to increase not only attendance in Council meetings but also increased meaningful participation from members. The remuneration program also saw the overhaul of the onboarding contract that council members sign, leading to better bookkeeping on current members.

In November, Council held a special meeting where Associate Deans (AD) from each faculty were invited to have an informal discussion about various different issues facing the graduate student community at UWaterloo. This session in particular spawned discussions around graduate study spaces, and had students bring their issues directly to the ADs and were able to talk about potential issues surrounding communication of open spaces, when some spaces would be closed, and how to better communicate this info with students. Issues surrounding claw back of tri-agency funding was also brought up and sparked discussion on whether this system should exist in its current form for specific departments and how we can better fund our successful graduate students.

In December and January, Council was informed of the ongoing negotiations surrounding PhD minimum funding and ultimately voted to approve a minimum of 10%



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increase in funding for the 2025–2026 year. This was not accepted by the GSRC and instead an increase of 4.5% was voted on by the committee. Every student member within GSRC voted against this motion but ultimately the motion passed and was sent to the Provost for final approval.

Challenges

Although there is a strong number of recurrent members who attend and participate in discussion, there could be more done to reach out for the remaining council members. Renumeration has helped in this front but changing the culture of council meetings is a slow process that will take time to come to fruition. Council feedback surveys continue to have some intermediate support for more in-person meetings and encouraging members to join in person.

There is still some understandable frustration from council members who believe that the Council should be able to do more than just be a forum for discussion and should have a more active role in addressing issues facing graduate students. This could be addressed by having a more transparent process of following up on problems brought up in Council meetings. Usually, more active changes and advocacy resides in different sub committees of the University, and the Council itself, barring some sort of joint communication letter has little influence directly on the UW decision-making.



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Looking Forward

A welcome change to Council meetings has been the willingness of new members to reach out to Council members and bring forward real issues facing students. Even if a solution cannot be reached during the meetings, it is essential that we know what problems other faculties and departments face, so we can help them out in any way. It is important that this culture continues and is encouraged upon in future Council meetings.