

**GSA RESEARCH REPORT TO COUNCIL:  
HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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- BA from UW in Political Science & English
- Previously worked in the Township of Woolwich administrative office as a Co-Ordinator, overseeing council meetings and other administrative affairs

## OUTLINE

Purpose

Issue

Background

Key Considerations

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## PURPOSE

- To provide an alternative to Robert's Rules of Order for The Graduate Student Association of the University of Waterloo's (GSA-UW) Board of Directors and Council in order to determine a governance model that better supports engagement and meeting efficiency.



# ISSUE

- The main issue surrounding the current governance model surrounds the efficiency at which ideas can be brought forth by council members while also ensuring that all voices are heard in an equitable manner.
- This hierarchical nature of governance can deter participation from council members and therefore an alternative structure that aids in representation and accessibility overall is preferred. An alternative structure that allows for a more fluid dynamic will help foster the GSA-UW's values of "transparency, inclusivity, integrity, and self-improvement".

## BACKGROUND

- The Board of Directors is the governing body of the corporation of GSA-UW and oversees the operations of the corporation. Therefore, if a divide exists between the Council and the Board of Directors, there is friction in the democratic process.
- Therefore, this report will explore popular criticisms of Robert's Rules, as well as possible solutions and their adaptability in order to discuss the best possible course of action the GSA-UW should take in their future governance models.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

**What are the notable alternatives?**

**What are the weaknesses of Robert's Rules?**

## NOTABLE ALTERNATIVES

There are two unique and notable alternatives to Robert's Rules, these consist of:

- Consensus Processes
- Dynamic Facilitation



## CONSENSUS PROCESSES

- The aim is to work towards a decision where all members can agree on the outcome and where the outcome can effectively last.
- Deliberations are “insightful, inclusive, and everyone is engaged in the implementation of final decisions”.
- When disagreements arise, they are valued as information resources for building a solution that everyone can agree with.



## DYNAMIC FACILITATION

- A shared field of perception is created to include the diversity of all perspectives, ideas, and concerns in the group.
- Proposals are encouraged and recorded on a chart pad as possible solutions, but they do not determine the flow of conversation, nor do they become the focus of the decision-making process. Thus, consensus solutions grow as they emerge to contain the shared energy of the group through discussion.
- Disagreements are re-framed as valuable additions to the group exploration. Each disagreement is acknowledged or recorded in the group's charts.

## WEAKNESSES OF ROBERT'S RULES

- Robert's Rules are too complicated and can be difficult to understand let alone put into practice.
- Robert's Rules are too rigid, where many people become "expert" at simplified and modified unique versions of the rules through participation with various other organizations, but there can be disagreement on what the rules are.
- Robert's Rules discourage participation, as they require a lot of work to understand and be comfortable with the rules which can be off putting to people without previous experience and people who do not have sufficient time in their daily lives to learn these rules.
- Robert's Rules can become easily weaponized, when the complexity of the rules can become a tool for people whose primary purpose is to derail or disrupt a meeting or to prevent a meeting from acting. If groups stick too closely to Robert's Rules and dismiss active and constructive conversation, then the rules do not serve their purpose.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

## OVERALL RECCOMENDATION: A CONSENSUS BUILDING APPROACH

- The results of a CBA process are, in fact, easier to implement than decisions made by majority rule or other elaborate Robert's Rules-type procedures.
- When clear reasons are given about why a decision has been made, those who prefer a different course of action will find it easier to live with the result.
- Because CBA seeks to include everyone in the decisions that are being made, it leaves relationships intact. This makes it easier to work together over the long term.
- Therefore, adopting a consensus approach that allows for all the benefits of an alternative to Robert's Rules in an easy to understand and flexible way is recommended.

## OTHER RECCOMENDATIONS

- CREATING COMMITTEES & CAUCUSES
- These groups provide more accessible and usable support to students in need. Some committees at the University of Toronto include: the Environmental Justice and Sustainability Committee, the Equity and Advocacy Committee, and the Finance Committee.
- Notable caucuses include: the Race and Ethnicity Caucus to be committed to social justice, community building, and healing, the International Students' Caucus to be the main student body that coordinates approximately 5000 international graduate students' interests and concerns, and the Queer Caucus for UofT students who identify as LGBTQ2S+ and holds various events.
- CONTINUING WITH A "BREAK-OUT" ROOM MODEL TO FACILITATE DISCUSSION

Q&A