



GSA COUNCIL
 Notice of Meeting
 March 4, 2020
 4:00PM – 7:00PM
 NH 3407

AGENDA

Time	Item	Action
4:00PM	1. SPEAKER'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS	-
4:01PM	2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA	For Approval
4:03PM	3. ATTENDANCE	For Information
4:08PM	4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES a. February 5, 2020	For Approval
4:10PM	5. GUEST PRESENTATION a. GSSAC Funding (20 mins) – Jeff Casello	For Approval
4:30PM	6. REPORTS a. Update from the Board – Stirling (5 mins) b. Update from the JPRC – Reid (5 mins) c. Update from the Speaker – Billedeau (5 mins) i. Research contracts d. Advising the President – Samuel (15 mins) i. Vital Signs ii. Graduate House iii. Presidential Nomination	For Information
5:00PM	7. APPROVAL ITEMS a. Senate Endorsement (30 mins) b. Political Positions – Robbins (30 mins)	For Decision
6:00PM	8. STRATEGIC PLANNING (SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS) - Billedeau a. GP-15 and Strategic Planning b. uWaterloo's President Nominating Committee c. Review of Council Policies	For Discussion
7:00PM	9. ADJOURNMENT	-
RECEPTION FOR COUNCIL 7:00PM – 8:30PM Grad House, Second Floor Free Food + Drinks!		

MINUTES

1. Speaker's Welcome and Opening Remarks 4:02

Billedeau takes the chair and calls the meeting to order at 4:02.

2. Adoption of the Agenda 4:03

Motion to approve the agenda. Approved.

3. Attendance 4:05

Billedeau and Little take the attendance.

4. Approval of Minutes 4:05

a) February 5, 2020

Approved.

5. Guest Presentation 4:05

a) GSSAC Funding – Jeff Casello

Deputy Provost manages and provides consultation on the financial aspects of the university and is the chair of GSSAC. Membership of the committee was listed. Examined trends in tuition changes, housing, fees, cost of living, etc. for graduate students. Two shortcomings of this process: 1) unsure if the baseline for funding is appropriate and, 2) have not examined the accuracy of projections from previous years. Comparison of research funding at UWaterloo to other U15 peers shows that our funding is the same or higher. The previous estimates for housing increases versus the actual changes are substantially different: 11% vs. 25%. Altogether, UWaterloo funding support has increased by 11.2%, whereas there has been a 12% cost of living increase. To adjust for this, a proposal of 2.2% increase in funding is being proposed. There is time sensitivity surrounding approval of funding packages since incoming offers must be made for students beginning in Fall 2020. TA funding must be topped off through scholarships or other means to bring students to their guaranteed funding.

Data sources for funding levels were obtained from the U15 reporting dataset. The data provides actual, raw numbers across faculties and institutions rather than percentiles. Housing cost estimates were obtained from regional housing in Waterloo. GSSAC did not examine regional overall cost of living adjustments.

Grad student funding is reviewed annually whereas staff is reviewed less frequently. This has placed the provost in an awkward situation as a staff increase of 2.15% has already been approved. The timeline for setting funding is as follows: prospective students for Fall 2020 can apply as soon as October 2019. Review of applications and delivery of offer letters begins in the first week of February, so funding is set during the winter break.

2.15% increase is not equitable when looking at the gross income differences between staff and graduate students. GSSAC seeks approval of funding levels from both WUSA and GSA. If approval is not given, it is unclear what will happen; there is no precedent for this. Since funding letters have already gone out, what can be done if funding levels are not considered sufficient? Provost must approve funding packages officially, but it is unknown what the process is otherwise.

Based on U15 comparisons and the difference of 0.8% between funding level and cost of living increases, the adjustments seem reasonable. However, given that they have acknowledged baseline estimates for costs of housing were off by over 10%, this should be adjusted for in some way. No table provided with actual cost of living breakdowns; access to the actual numbers is needed. It was suggested that councilors may formally abstain from voting to support ongoing negotiations for funding level increases.

No members endorsed a motion to support the 2.2% funding increase.

If councilors have any concerns beyond what are included in the draft minutes, please email to Billedeau by the evening of March 6th. Based on the minutes and emailed concerns, he will draft a response to send to Casello regarding the GSSAC proposal.

6. Reports

4:38

a) Update from The Board – Stirling

A working group on unionization is meeting weekly and is comprised of 3 directors and 2 executives. The working group will have a report ready by the next board meeting with a recommendation on whether to formally endorse the union. Will account for feasibility, legal constraints, consistency with ends, etc. and provide a path forward. Chief Returning Officer nominations currently open. GP-15 passed its second reading and GP-9 passed first reading. JPRC submitted a substantial report on policy changes. StudentCare provided a presentation on student legal fees following retirement of previous lawyer; information will be provided to the Council Speaker. The GRT contract up for renewal; the president will present at the next board meeting. Audit is prepared and will be accepted into the minutes for the next board meeting. AGM planning is underway. An official notice with the date and location, as well as the agenda, will follow. Work on Board handbook and operation manual, as well as Board training, is underway. Graduate House upgrades are completed.

b) Update from the JPRC – Reid

4:44

Presidential and Vice-Presidential nominating policies need to be approved by Council; further information will be provided in the next meeting.

c) Update from the Speaker – Billedeau

4:44

Research Contracts

Two additional research contracts were proposed: 1) graduate student contributions to uWaterloo, both financially and academically, and, 2) needs of graduate students living with physical disabilities. Council members were invited to send applications of interest to Billedeau by March 9th.

University of Alberta conducted an accessibility audit that included disabilities other than those that are physical and it was suggested that the research contract follow suit. Mental wellness is a separate research contract and so they were kept separate to allow for in-depth investigation into both. However, OADA has criticized post-secondary schools for incomprehensive definitions of disability. Invitation to connect further after the meeting regarding this point.

d) Advising the President – Samuel

4:46

i) Vital Signs Survey

1100 respondents so far; total number of graduate students is approximately 5000. The deadline was extended to March 8th.

ii) Graduate House

Repairs and upgrades have been completed.

iii) Presidential Nomination

Motion to move into confidential session (Marin/Bell). Approved unanimously.

Motion to leave confidential session (Marsh/Beaudry). Approved unanimously.

7. Approval Items

5:16

a) Senate Endorsement

There are currently 4 candidates running for 2 open seats. The term is 1 year: May 2020 to April 2022. The functional purpose of Council endorsements was described. All four candidates presented their statement of interest and qualifications, followed by a Q&A period.

Motion to move into a confidential session (Billedeau/Robbins). Approved unanimously.

Motion to leave confidential session (Salahub/Sargent). Approved unanimously.

Motion to destroy the voting ballots (Parker/Bjelan). Approved unanimously.

b) Political Positions - Robbins

6:15

Robbins provided updates on the political positions based on feedback from the previous meeting. A preview of how the revised political positions would appear on the new GSA website was demonstrated. Benefits of condensing political positions from 16 into 4 was described. Strategy for enacting political positions was outlined, e.g. council champion & co-champions, responsibilities, timelines, townhalls, etc.

Hesitancy was expressed over dividing timelines for the positions equally. For instance, some positions have more responsibilities attached to them than others and as a result, may require more time. Positions are also ranked for importance; should the most important receive more time than others? A proposal was to have the most important position be addressed each term and at the townhall, while the other positions are addressed one at a time. A potential disadvantage is that the champion for a position may prioritize some topics over others. Approval of new political positions is approved via Council policy changes. Champions for each position can be selected via formal application and voting, volunteers at meetings, etc. This process will need to be discussed further.

Regarding political position one (union subtext), inclusion of timelines, names of staff members, and other contextual information was questioned. Acknowledging the staff members who supported the position serves to provide information on who performed work at the time as well as maintaining stakeholder relations. Further scrutiny of wording for this position was advised. Formal adoption of unionization as a political position was suggested; this can be discussed at the next meeting.

Motion to approve the new set of political positions, as presented to Council on March 4, 2020, which will condense the existing 16 positions to 4. However, the union subtext under political position one will be tabled and returned to Council for further discussion (Marsh/ Valipour). Approved unanimously.

8. Strategic Planning (Small Group Discussions)

6:44

- a) GP-15 and Strategic Planning
- b) uWaterloo's President Nominating Committee
- c) Review of Council Policies

Due to time constraints, councillors were asked to email Billedeau with feedback on questions regarding the President's Nominating Committee by end of day on Friday, March 13. Feedback on Strategic Planning should be sent to Harleen by end of day Friday, March 13. Review of council policies should be emailed to Jenn Reid by end of day Friday, March 20.

9. Adjournment

6:49

Motion to adjourn meeting at 6:49PM (Billedeau/Bjelan). Approved unanimously.