



MINUTES OF MEETING

Date: March 4, 2026

Mode: In person and online on Teams

Meeting called to order by: Vice President Parmida Amngostar

Recording: Teams Meeting [Link](#)

In Attendance

Senators: Kush Sharma (proxy for Elise Miller), Neil Traft, Chhayank Srivastava (online), Lizah Makombore, Natalie Cote, Fitzwilliam Keenan-Koch, Collin Coil, Frances Starn, and additional senators present in person and online.

Executive Council Attendees: Parmida Amngostar (Vice President), Saba Rafiei (President, joined later), Oluwamuyiwa (Muyiwa) Davis (Treasurer), Shakira Iyanda, Sevda Alvirdizadeh. Zane Zupan (online, elected Secretary during meeting). Note: Kush Sharma served as proxy for Elise Miller.

Agenda Item 1 – Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice President Parmida Amngostar on March 4, 2026. Amngostar noted the meeting was starting slightly late while waiting for additional members to join and for President Saba Rafiei to arrive.

Amngostar welcomed attendees to the second GSS meeting of the semester and acknowledged that the previous meeting minutes were incomplete due to the recent resignation of the Secretary. She explained that the incoming Secretary would be tasked with completing and distributing both sets of outstanding minutes once elected.

Agenda Item 2 – Secretary Election

Amngostar explained that the Secretary position became vacant after the previous Secretary stepped down. Two candidates — Elise (unable to attend) and Zane Zupan (attending online) — were presented for consideration. Amngostar and Rafiei stated that both candidates were strong and that the decision would be put to a Senate vote.

Candidate statements of purpose were read aloud. Kush Sharma, serving as proxy for Elise Miller, read Elise's statement on her behalf. Zane Zupan then read their own statement.

Summary of Candidate Statements:

- **Elice (Elise Miller, read by Kush Sharma):** Expressed commitment to serving the graduate student body and improving the GSS website, including updating senator and committee listings, calendar formatting, and the adopted resolutions

section. Cited prior leadership experience including serving as secretary of a high school Key Club, president of multiple student organizations, and public relations co-chair of Vandy Votes at Vanderbilt University. Emphasized values of transparency, collaboration, and results-oriented leadership.

- **Zane Zupan:** Expressed commitment to building an organized, transparent, and representative graduate community. Highlighted academic and professional background in public service, institutional effectiveness, and inclusive leadership. Noted prior experience updating UVM Drupal websites across the College of Arts and Sciences as a UVM undergrad, earning Student Employee of the Year in Technology. Emphasized strong organizational skills, attention to accurate record keeping, and a collaborative mindset.

A vote was conducted. Due to current constitutional limitations on confidential online voting, a combination of paper ballots for in-person senators and a Teams chat poll for remote attendees was used. The Vice President noted that the Operations Committee would be tasked with addressing this gap in the Constitution.

Results: Zane Zupan received approximately 79% of votes; Elise received approximately 21%.

Zane Zupan was **elected** as Secretary of the Graduate Student Senate for the remainder of the semester. Amngostar confirmed weekly E-Council meetings are held Mondays 9–10 AM (hybrid) and arranged to add Zupan to the GSS WhatsApp group and provide Drupal website access.

Agenda Item 3 – Upcoming Senate Meeting Dates

Amngostar noted that the next two Senate meetings are scheduled for April 1st and April 29th, both from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. She requested that senators notify the E-Council if there are scheduling conflicts, as attendance at Senate meetings is required and senators who miss both meetings in a semester may be removed from their seats.

Agenda Item 4 – Committee Assignments and Chairs

Amngostar reviewed the current committee chair assignments:

- Elevate Grant Committee – Chair: Chhayank Srivastava
- Events Committee – Chair: Neil Traft
- Finance Committee – Chair: Treasurer (Muyiwa Davis)
- Student Affairs Committee – Chair: Saba Rafiei
- Operations Committee – Chair: Parmida Amngostar
- Communications Committee – Chair: Sevda Alvirdizadeh
- Student Life and Support Committee – **Chair vacancy (see Item 5 below)**

Senators were reminded to contact their committee chair and schedule an initial meeting to discuss plans for the remainder of the semester.

Agenda Item 5 – Committee Updates

Elevate Grant Committee (Chhayank Srivastava):

Approximately 60% of awards from the previous cycle have been processed. Remaining awards are pending receipt submissions and will be processed by the accounts team in

the coming weeks. For the current Spring 2025 cycle, applications are open but volume has been lower than expected due to an incorrect link in a previous newsletter. The recently sent newsletter and dedicated Elevate Grant email contained the correct link. The website link is also expected to be updated by the new Secretary.

Events Committee (Neil Traft):

A Pizza Night is planned for Friday, March 20th. An additional event, tentatively a Trampoline Park outing, is being planned for April 5th or sometime in April. The Events Committee is also coordinating with other committees on the upcoming sexual violence prevention workshop.

Finance Committee:

No updates at this time.

Student Affairs Committee (Saba Rafiei):

Focused on advancing the sexual violence prevention workshop. Details discussed further under Agenda Item 7.

Operations Committee (Parmida Amngostar):

A committee meeting was held to begin reviewing the GSS Constitution. Amngostar noted that feedback was expected from committee members but had not yet been received. Kush Sharma raised the question of how the broader Senate should be involved in the amendment process. Discussion ensued; the consensus was that while the Operations Committee would lead the logistics of identifying and drafting proposed changes, all senators should have an opportunity to provide input. Amngostar will share a Teams document where senators can add comments. Senators may also email suggestions directly.

A key area identified for constitutional revision is the current lack of support for confidential online voting, which was highlighted by the secretary election process held earlier in the meeting.

Communications Committee (Sevda Alvirdizadeh):

The graduate student survey has been finalized with input from multiple committee members and distributed to graduate students. Four \$50 gift card raffles are available to incentivize responses. A deadline for the survey has not yet been set; the committee will monitor responses and send reminders before closing it, targeting completion before the next Board of Trustees meeting in mid-May.

The union (Neil Traft) offered to help distribute printed flyers with a QR code link to the survey during departmental walkthroughs. Amngostar agreed to prepare the flyers. Survey anonymity was addressed: only the Communications Committee, Vice President, and President have access to responses. Email addresses collected for the raffle are stored separately from survey answers. Chhayank Srivastava noted that Google Forms may collect IP addresses and GPS location by default and recommended verifying that these settings are disabled.

Student Life and Support Committee:

Frances Starn indicated they are not serving as chair and reported that attempts to convene the committee had not received responses. Amngostar and Rafiei noted the committee chair position was effectively vacant and invited volunteers.

Natalie Cote volunteered to serve as Chair of the Student Life and Support Committee. The motion was accepted and Cote was **appointed Chair**. Senators interested in switching committees were encouraged to contact the E-Council.

Agenda Item 6 – External Committee Updates

Curricular and Instructional Committee (CIC) – Chhayank Srivastava:

The next meeting is scheduled for the following day (March 5). No updates available at this time; updates will be provided at the next Senate meeting.

Davis Center Advisory Group – Sevda Alvirdizadeh:

The Davis Center Advisory Group is seeking input from graduate students regarding a planned renovation of the Davis Center first floor, including new furniture and décor in UVM green and gold colors. Senators and graduate students are invited to share feedback with Alvirdizadeh via the GSS email. Kush Sharma raised the question of whether displaced furniture could be repurposed. Rafiei suggest such furniture could be used for a graduate student space; Alvirdizadeh agreed to inquire.

Faculty Research Rights – Fitzwilliam Keenan-Koch (Research Committee):

Keenan-Koch reported on a Faculty Senate discussion regarding research publication rights. The university has proposed that faculty first transfer publication rights to the university before submitting to journals. This would allow the university to then return the rights to researchers, sidestepping journal restrictions that would otherwise limit faculty rights post-publication. The proposal is modeled on a similar program at Harvard. Faculty response was mixed, with some supportive and others concerned. Senators were encouraged to direct questions to Keenan-Koch.

EPIR and SAC Committees:

Neither committee has met since the last Senate meeting. The SAC is scheduled to meet the following day (March 5).

Agenda Item 7 – Semester Initiatives Follow-Up

Graduate Student Survey:

The Communications Committee successfully launched the survey (detailed above under Item 5).

Sexual Violence Prevention Workshop:

Natalie Cote and Kat have volunteered to lead coordination of the workshop. Fitzwilliam Keenan-Koch also offered to assist. The workshop is tentatively planned for the first two weeks of April, aligning with Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week. The Graduate College has offered to fund refreshments and provide collaborative support through a Graduate College representative who has also joined the planning group. Rafiei will schedule a coordination meeting among Natalie Cote, Kat, Keenan-Koch, and the Grad College representative.

Rafiei noted that CAPS has been contacted for resources for tabling support associated with the workshop.

Listening Session / GSS Town Hall:

Amngostar proposed organizing a GSS listening session / town hall to increase GSS

visibility and create a direct line of communication with graduate students. The session would include a brief overview of GSS, its structure, funding, and events, followed by an open forum for student questions and feedback. Kush Sharma agreed to assist with preparing slides.

The session is tentatively planned for later in April, possibly in conjunction with Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week. Involvement from Graduate Dean Holger Hook and the Provost is being considered. The date of March 20 (Nowruz / Iranian New Year) was noted as unavailable for some E-Council members.

Visibility and Tabling:

Amngostar outlined plans for GSS tabling events, likely in the Davis Center, to be held after spring recess (between March 20 and end of April). Tabling will involve distributing printed brochures, flyers with the survey QR code, and GSS promotional items. The Communications Committee will create brochure and flyer designs. Neil Traft offered to handle initial tabling. Volunteers for additional tabling shifts were requested.

Agenda Item 8 – Leadership and Institutional Updates

Graduate Dean Transition:

Graduate Dean Holger Hook will be departing at the end of the semester. Rafiei expressed appreciation for his support of graduate students and noted that he has offered to assist with GSS initiatives before his departure. A search committee for his replacement has been formed; Rafiei is a member and noted that one additional graduate student representative will be needed on the committee. Interested senators were encouraged to make themselves known in advance.

Provost Search:

Natalie Cote is serving on the Provost Search Committee. The current Provost is retiring and a successor is expected to be named after December.

President's Strategic Planning:

Graduate student representatives are needed for President's Strategic Planning implementation groups across various university units, including the Graduate College. These positions offer an opportunity to shape how university policies are implemented. Rafiei will provide more information when nominations are sought.

Board of Trustees Update (Saba Rafiei):

Rafiei reported on the March 2, 2026 Board of Trustees meeting, which focused primarily on governance and structural matters. The board confirmed leadership roles and committee assignments for 2026 and welcomed new trustees. Changes were also made to the governance structure of UVMCO (UVM's investment management organization), with its board expanded from 9 to 11 members to increase oversight and coordination between the university and the foundation. Rafiei noted there were no direct decisions affecting graduate policy at this meeting. Full meeting materials are publicly available on the Board of Trustees website.

International Student Resources:

Rafiei noted that the Provost's office has shared resources addressing concerns from international students regarding recent federal immigration policies. Key guidance shared: international students who are stopped should contact UVM Police Services to

verify their student status and may also contact the Office of International Education. External legal support resources are available in the Provost's email communications.

Natalie Cote added that UVM Police are authorized to operate statewide and that identifying oneself as a UVM student is always advisable. Rafiei also noted resources for reporting discrimination and harassment through the Office of Equal Opportunities website and emphasized the importance of reporting incidents.

Neil Traft (UVM Graduate Workers Union) added that the union held a bargaining session the previous Thursday with testimony from international students and allies seeking written commitments from the university not to share student information except as legally required and to request warrants before allowing searches. Traft noted the university has been resistant to putting these protections in writing and encouraged senators to reach out to him with questions.

Working Outside the U.S. Policy:

In response to a prior inquiry from a Neil Traft, Rafiei clarified that the policy prohibiting work outside the U.S. is not new, is not targeted at students from specific countries, and has always been part of graduate student contracts. Students on vacation outside the U.S. are not affected; however, students whose visa is expired and who are working remotely from abroad may be in violation.

Agenda Item 9 – Additional Updates

Amngostar confirmed that a graduation processes workshop previously requested by GSS is being developed by the Graduate College and will be made available on the website soon. Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week is the first week of April.

Agenda Item 10 – Open Discussion and Adjournment

Open discussion was held. A senator asked about the plan for the Student Life and Support Committee given the prior chair vacancy; this was addressed with Natalie Cote's appointment as Chair (see Item 5).

The meeting was adjourned. Amngostar thanked all attendees for their participation.

Next Meeting

April 1, 2026, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM, In-person and online. Venue to be confirmed.