



University
of Vermont

Graduate
Student Senate

MINUTES OF MEETING GENERAL SENATE

Graduate Student Senate

MINUTES OF MEETING: GENERAL SENATE

Date: September 17, 2026

Present:

- **In person:** Collin Coil (President), Natalie Cote (Vice President), Aviral Chawla (Comms. Director), Abby Keith, John McMann, Neil Traft, Parmida Amngostar
- **Virtual:** Chhayank Srivastava (Treasurer), Sevda Alvirdizadeh, Ritwik Bandyopadhyay, Oluwamuyiwa Ayodele-Davis, Daniel Muhwezi, Frances Starn, Amine Barzegar Tilenoie, Modupe Omoniyi, Asa Asad, Farzan Kaviani, Frederick Senya, Juwaria Jama
- **By proxy:** Krittika Dey (represented by Chhayank Srivastava), Shahrzad Ahmadkaraji (Represented by Sevda Alvirdizadeh), Niharika Singh (represented by Aviral Chawla)

Location: Waterman 427A & Online via Teams

Agenda

- ☐ **Call to Order and Quorum**
 - ☐ **Approval of Minutes (August Special Meeting)**
 - ☐ **President's Remarks**
 - ☐ **Executive Council Reports**
 - ☐ **Shared Governance Appointee Reports**
 - ☐ **New Business: Budget and GSS Coffee Hours**
 - ☐ **New Business: Committee Establishment and Senator Assignment**
 - ☐ **New Business: Shared Governance Appointments**
 - ☐ **New Business: Nepali Student Association Funding Request**
 - ☐ **New Business: Resolution in Support of Graduate Student Workers and a Contract with the Graduate Student Union**
 - ☐ **New Business: Resolution Reaffirming a Call for an Open Access Publication Fund**
 - ☐ **New Business: Resolution on Fossil Fuel Divestment**
 - ☐ **New Business: An Act to Align GSS Elevate Grant Eligible Expenses with the University Travel Policy**
 - ☐ **Announcements**
 - ☐ **Adjournment**
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Discussion & Decisions

1) Call to Order, Quorum, and Meeting Record

- This was a meeting of the General Senate, presided over by Vice President Natalie Cote. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM.
- Quorum was explained as 30 active senators plus the Secretary, Communications Director, and Treasurer (33 members), requiring 17 for quorum. Quorum was not met at the start of the meeting, so no votes were taken until later in the meeting.
- Quorum was met then lost later in the meeting (count of 16) after a member left following the Nepali Student Association funding vote. All remaining items were presented for discussion only and will be considered as old business at the next meeting.

2) Approval of Minutes (August Special Meeting)

- The minutes from the special August meeting, held to approve the BBQ budget, were presented. They had been posted to the Senate Teams channel but not emailed. The Executive Council offered to share future minutes by both Teams and email if preferred.
- **Decision: Minutes approved. 13 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 non-voting. Three Executive Council members count for quorum but do not get a vote.**

3) President's Remarks and Report

- Collin thanked senators for serving, emphasized that the Senate is the collective body of senators, and encouraged senators to write resolutions and advocate for graduate students. He thanked those who attended Saturday's orientation.
- Over the summer, the Executive Council improved Senate operations; the Senator Handbook and bill and resolution templates are available in the Senate Teams channel.
- Collin reported on his August 27 meeting with the University President and Provost, where he presented the GSS leadership memo. Monthly memos to the President, Provost Schadler, and Dean Berger summarize GSS actions and are posted to the GSS website.
- The August memo summarized summer events (creemees at the South End Get Down in June, a Patrick Gym event, and the new graduate student lunch in August), Graduate Student Services work, and limited summer advocacy.

4) Executive Council Reports

- Vice President (Natalie Cote): No report.
- Treasurer (Chhayank Srivastava): No formal report; the updated budget is still in progress and must be shared before a Senate meeting for review and a later vote.
- Communications Director (Aviral Chalwa): Communications is focusing on channels GSS controls directly, including a subscribable GSS events calendar and increased Instagram engagement, which is expected to become the main platform if issues with Graduate College channels continue. Senators with ideas for promoting events and improving turnout were invited to reach out.
- Shared Governance Appointee Reports: None.

5) Budget Overview and Elevate Grant

- GSS is currently operating under the budget passed last academic year. An updated budget is in development and was presented for discussion only.
- Oluwamuyiwa Oluwadamilola Ayodele-Davis noted confusion over the budget cycle: the Constitution calls for each semester to pass the next semester's budget, but in practice the Senate has approved the budget for the current semester. This is expected to be addressed in the new Constitution.
- Proposed total allocation is \$55,730. The account holds about \$95,000, inclusive of carryover and expected revenue this semester. GSS funding comes from graduate student Senate fees, received in batches.
- In response to Asa (online), the coffee hours draw on the combined fund of carryover and new fee revenue.
- Parmida Amngostar asked whether the \$600 Elevate conference grant could be increased given rising costs. Collin suggested writing a bill to amend the award amount. Chhayank explained that last year's Executive Council raised the Elevate allocation from \$14,000 to \$18,000 to increase the number of awardees (from 23 to 26) rather than the award amount.
- **Action: Chhayank to share the draft budget with all senators for input, followed by a vote at the next meeting.**

6) GSS Coffee Hours Spending Approval

- Although coffee hours are budgeted, the Constitution requires Senate approval of purchases over \$500. The Executive Council is applying the strictest reading of the Constitution to give the Senate full authority over its budget.
- Motion to approve spending over the \$500 threshold for GSS coffee hours; seconded by Neil.
- **Decision: Approved. 14 in favor, 0 opposed; 0 abstentions.**

7) Committee Establishment and Senator Assignment

- Standing committees: Finance (chaired by the Treasurer) and Student Affairs (chaired by the President). Collin proposed three ad hoc committees: Operations, Events, and a new External Affairs Committee to carry out the Constitution's mandate to advocate to local, state, and federal government.
- In response to a question, Collin explained that the former conference grant committee has been folded into the Finance Committee to increase Elevate Grant capacity.
- Committee approval requires a two-thirds majority; each committee was voted on individually.
- **Decision: Operations Committee approved. 15 in favor, 0 opposed; 0 abstentions.**
- **Decision: Events Committee approved. 15 in favor, 0 opposed; 0 abstentions.**
- **Decision: External Affairs Committee approved. 10 in favor, 0 opposed, 4 abstentions.**
- Senator assignment: With 30 active senators and 5 committees, roughly 6 per committee is expected but not required. Only Finance and Student Affairs must be filled. Each senator is expected to serve on at least one committee. Committees set their own meeting times, and chairs report to the Senate.
- **Action: Collin to send a form asking senators to join committees, indicate interest in multiple committees, and indicate interest in chairing.**

8) Shared Governance Appointments

- Senators are expected to serve in a shared governance role. Collin is building a tracker of requests for representatives.
- At least five open positions: Faculty Senate Student Affairs Committee, Curricular Affairs Committee, Education and Research Technologies Committee, Catamount Core Curriculum Committee, and a liaison with Christopher Pallas (Graduate College professional development). Board of Trustees committees meet around Board meetings (about three times a year).
- Juwaria volunteered for the Faculty Senate Student Affairs Committee.
- **Action: Collin to contact Juwaria to complete her appointment and share committee meeting times.**
- **Action: Collin to send another call for shared governance appointments.**

9) Club Recognition and Nepali Student Association Funding Request

- Clubs have not yet been recognized this semester due to limited documentation. Eliza is compiling a list of clubs, and club renewals are planned for October. A senator suggested emailing all graduate students about forming new clubs; the Executive Council accepted the suggestion.
- Collin asked the Senate for leniency in approving funding ahead of formal renewal, given that NSA has been a recognized graduate student club and is expected to be renewed.
- Request: \$2,000 toward a Dashain night on October 17, to subsidize graduate student tickets. Total estimated cost is about \$17,000, with other funding from fundraising and ticket sales. Food is requested for about 200 attendees. The event is open to all graduate students and includes food and cultural performances. NSA has agreed to GSS branding requirements (GSS in promotional materials and the GSS banner displayed at the event). No NSA representatives were present.
- Chhayank: the request is 50% of the \$4,000 club budget for the semester (also \$4,000 last spring). NSA was inactive for two years, recently reactivated, and has about \$3,000 in its own account not reflected in its budget plan. Funds can be transferred within a day by email to Taylor Page, the business manager.
- Concerns: a senator noted another \$2,000 request (e.g., for Diwali) would exhaust the club budget. Avi suggested identifying the major events per semester and creating a fairer bidding process, and was hesitant to approve. Chhayank noted it is early to commit 50% of the club budget before clubs report planned events.
- In favor: Neil noted GSS has historically carried over unspent funds and suggested \$1,500 as a more cautious option. Collin noted about \$40,000 would remain in the account if the full proposed budget is spent. Oluwamuyiwa and Chhayank cautioned that this reserve funds future Executive Councils and covers irregular Graduate College transfers, and should not be treated as available spending.
- Because the next Senate meeting (October 15) is two days before the event, the Senate chose to vote at this meeting.
- **Decision: Funding request of \$2,000 approved by majority. 10 in favor, 4 opposed. No abstentions recorded.**
- Chhayank asked whether the Treasurer has a vote. Collin clarified that the Constitution counts the Treasurer, Secretary, and Communications Director toward quorum but does not grant them voting rights; the outcome would be unchanged either way.

10) Resolution in Support of Graduate Student Workers and a Contract with the GSU

- Resolution 9.10.2026.2 was presented for discussion only; no vote was taken due to loss of quorum.
- The resolution notes about 44 bargaining sessions over roughly two years without a contract for the approximately 600 graduate student workers represented by the union, university legal challenges and more than \$1,000,000 spent on legal services, unfair labor practice charges, and GSS survey data showing strong support for the union. It calls on the university to finalize a first contract without delay and commit to a good-faith timeline. It is addressed to the Board of Trustees, the President, and the Provost.
- Five or six comments were received during notice and comment, generally in favor. The resolution is in the Resolutions and Bills folder of the General Senate Teams channel.
- Collin noted his discussions with administration on this topic have been contentious, and that he would include the resolution in his monthly memo and his Board of Trustees presentation if passed. The Board of Trustees ratifies any contract.
- A senator asked how graduate students are notified of resolutions open for comment. Resolutions are posted on the GSS website and are intended to be included in the weekly newsletter; they were not in the most recent newsletter due to communication issues with the Graduate College. A senator suggested advertising at coffee hours, which was welcomed.

11) Resolution Reaffirming a Call for an Open Access Publication Fund

- Resolution 9.10.2026.3 was presented for discussion only.
- In 2024, the Senate adopted a resolution calling for an open access publication fund; per former senators, it was well received but not implemented amid administrative turnover. This resolution reaffirms the call and asks for a working group of graduate students, UVM Libraries, and the Office of the Vice President for Research to recommend the fund's scale, eligibility criteria, and administration. No dollar amount is specified.
- One comment questioned the need given free preprint servers such as arXiv. A senator suggested prioritizing higher-impact publications.
- Chhayank asked how to respond to the university's creation of its own open access journal. Collin replied that a fund to publish in the most impactful journal for one's field differs from the UVM Press diamond open access journal, and that the original resolution called for a collaborative process with graduate students.
- Parmida suggested seeking Faculty Senate support; Collin agreed and noted this is another reason to fill Faculty Senate appointments. Chhayank suggested researching open access funds at other universities; Collin noted the proposed working group would do this.

12) Resolution on Fossil Fuel Divestment

- Resolution 9.10.2026.4 was presented for discussion only. The Graduate Student Senate and Faculty Senate jointly passed resolutions in March 2020 calling for divestment from fossil fuels, and a follow-up request for a status report was made.
- The university has indicated most divestment was completed by 2024, but student journalism reports a small amount remains in long-term contracts until 2027. The resolution asks the university to provide the transparency it previously committed to.

- In response to a question, Collin explained that the university's endowment (about \$1 billion) is invested across assets that may include oil company stocks, and that the 2020 resolution was part of a national push to shift those assets for climate reasons.

13) Act to Align GSS Elevate Grant Eligible Expenses with the University Travel Policy

- Bill 9.10.2026.5 was presented for discussion only. The Elevate Grant's eligible expenses are currently narrower than the university travel policy, which caused confusion and frustration with a recent reimbursement. The bill would make eligible expenses track the university travel policy automatically, including future changes (e.g., IRS-driven mileage rates).
- A senator proposed requiring that GSS be notified of travel policy changes and that the Senate vote on whether to continue aligning with them. Collin said he would accept such an amendment, to be considered at the next meeting, and noted that GSS has policy-writing authority at the same level as the Faculty Senate, so a notification requirement would carry the force of policy.
- Another senator noted that departments often match Elevate funding and that consistent rules reduce reimbursement complexity.

14) Announcements

- Meeting rescheduling: Either the November or December Senate meeting will be rescheduled to accommodate senators who cannot attend any currently scheduled meeting. A call will go out via Teams and email.
- Constitution: A resolution amending the Constitution (with the draft attached as an appendix) is open for notice and comment in Teams. Collin aims to have it approved before the Board of Trustees meeting (stated as October 16) and will confirm the timeline with Corinne Thompson. If time allows, a special session focused solely on the Constitution will be called; otherwise, it will be considered at the October meeting and go to the Board of Trustees in the spring.

Follow-Up Action Items

Task	Assigned To	Due	Bucket
Send committee interest survey	Collin Coil	TBD	Operations
Contact Juwaria to complete Faculty Senate Student Affairs Committee appointment and share meeting times	Collin Coil	TBD	Advocacy
Send another call for shared governance appointments	Collin Coil	TBD	Outreach
Share draft budget with all senators for input; bring to a vote	Chhayank Srivastava	Next meeting (Oct 15) or online vote	Finance
Transfer approved \$2,000 to Nepali Student Association via business manager	Chhayank Srivastava	TBD (event Oct 17)	Finance

Task	Assigned To	Due	Bucket
Compile list of graduate student clubs and contacts	Eliza Beebe	TBD	Admin
Contact existing clubs for renewal; bring club recognition to the Senate	Executive Council	October meeting	Admin
Email all graduate students about establishing new clubs	Executive Council	TBD	Communications
Set up and advertise GSS coffee hours	Executive Council	TBD	Events
Include resolutions open for comment in the weekly newsletter	Executive Council	Ongoing	Communications
Place tabled items on October agenda as old business (GSU resolution, open access fund resolution, fossil fuel divestment resolution, Elevate Grant bill)	Executive Council	Oct 15	Admin
Write monthly memo for upcoming meeting with the President	Collin Coil	TBD	Advocacy
If passed, contact Faculty Senate about a companion open access fund resolution	Collin Coil	After passage	Advocacy
Send call to reschedule the November or December Senate meeting	Collin Coil	TBD	Operations
Confirm constitutional amendment deadline with Corinne Thompson	Collin Coil	Before Board of Trustees meeting	Admin
Call special session on the Constitution if timeline allows	Collin Coil	TBD	Operations

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 PM on a motion that was. Because quorum was lost during the meeting, the remaining resolutions and the bill will be considered as old business at the next General Senate meeting on October 15. These minutes were prepared from the Teams transcription in the Secretary's absence.