University of Vermont | Graduate Student Senate

# MINUTES OF MEETING
## GENERAL SENATE

**Graduate Student Senate**

**MINUTES OF MEETING: GENERAL SENATE**

**Date:** October 15, 2026

**Present:**

- **In person**: Collin Coil (President), Natalie Cote (Vice President), Chhayank Srivastava (Treasurer), Eliza Beebe (Secretary), Neil Traft, Carrie San Angelo, Krittika Dey, John McMann
- **Virtual**: Aviral Chawla (Comms. Director), Sevda Alvirdizadeh, Parmida Amngostar, Asa Asad, Oluwamuyiwa Ayodele-Davis, Frances Starn, Modupe Omoniyi, Daniel Muhwezi
- **By proxy**: Marco Balboa, Diego Martinez, Abby Keith, and Vighnesh Pai (represented by Krittika Dey); Shahrzad Ahmadkaraji, Amine Barzegar Tilenoie, Saba Rafiei, and Farzan Kaviani (represented by Sevda Alvirdizadeh); Niharika Singh (represented by Aviral Chawla)

**Location:** Waterman 427A & Online via Teams

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## Agenda

- **Call to Order**
- **Approval of Minutes**
- **President's Remarks**
- **Reports (Executive Council Updates, Provost Search Update, Ask UVM with Kevin McPherson)**
- **Old Business: Resolution 9.10.2026.1: Adoption of the Revised Constitution of the Graduate Student Senate**
- **Old Business: Resolution 9.10.2026.2: In Support of Graduate Student Workers and a Contract with the Graduate Student Union**
- **Old Business: Resolution 9.10.2026.3: Reaffirming a Call for an Open Access Publication Fund**
- **Old Business: Resolution 9.10.2026.4: Reaffirming a Call for a Report on Fossil Fuel Divestment**
- **Old Business: Bill 9.10.2026.5: An Act to Align GSS Elevate Grant Eligible Expenses with the University Travel Policy**
- **New Business: Club Renewals**
- **New Business: Fall Budget Approval**
- **Announcements**
- **Adjournment**

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## Discussion & Decisions

## 1) Call to Order, Quorum, and Proxies

- This was a meeting of the General Senate, presided over by Natalie Cote. The meeting was called to order at 1:05 PM.
- Quorum was confirmed at the start of the meeting with 21 members present, counting proxies (Collin later cited 21 or 22 including proxies). Sixteen members were required for quorum. Quorum was maintained for every vote taken. The Secretary, Treasurer, and Communications Director count toward quorum but do not vote.
- Proxies were registered and counted during the opening minutes of the meeting (see the By proxy list above). Guests in attendance were Kevin McPherson (Ask UVM) and Christina Cardona (Graduate College).
- Screen-sharing difficulties temporarily prevented online attendees from seeing presented slides. The slide deck had been shared in the Senate Teams channel the prior evening, and sharing was restored during the Executive Council reports.

## 2) Approval of Minutes

- The minutes from the September 17 General Senate meeting were presented. No changes were requested. Neil moved to approve and Chhayank seconded.
- **Decision: Minutes approved.**

## 3) Reports: Ask UVM (Kevin McPherson)

- Kevin McPherson, coordinator for AskUVM, introduced the new campus resource, located in Davis Center 301 across from the bookstore. AskUVM is a catch-all office for questions about student life, financial matters, academic advising, and academics. It is staffed by about 15 trained undergraduate students who either answer questions or make referrals through Navigate360 to roughly 20 offices across campus. Students do not need to be familiar with Navigate360 to use Ask UVM.
- Kevin noted that AskUVM has worked with Christina Cardona in the Graduate College to bring graduate students onto Navigate360, and that the office may begin hiring a graduate student staff member for the spring semester. He invited recommendations on how Ask UVM can better support graduate students.
- Chhayank suggested building graduate-specific resources organized by stage of the program, such as the signatures and forms needed to graduate, or how new students register for courses, contact professors, and meet Graduate College requirements that differ from other universities. Kevin said AskUVM would look into graduation resources and ways to connect students with their support systems, and that student staff can help draft emails to professors or open a referral to an advising office.
- Krittika suggested a resource explaining how to submit claims under the student health insurance (SHIP) plan, including which bills and documents are needed, since the plan is difficult to navigate.
- Collin offered GSS help disseminating AskUVM resources through the newsletter and other communications. He noted that AskUVM was featured in the most recent graduate student newsletter and will continue to be added to the resources page on the GSS website.

- Kevin announced a trick-or-treat event hosted with SGA and the Graduate College. Trick-or-treat bags will be available at AskUVM starting Monday, October 26. On Thursday, October 29 and Friday, October 30, participating offices (including the Graduate College and offices around the Davis Center and Living and Learning) will have candy or treats during regular business hours. The bag includes a list of participating offices, costumes are optional, and the event is open to all students. Kevin also invited GSS to co-sponsor future events.
- Collin added the event to the GSS subscribable calendar, where it is now visible to all subscribed graduate students.

## 4) President's Remarks

- **Attendance:** The Constitution requires senators to attend meetings or send a proxy, and two unexcused absences make a senator eligible for removal. Collin thanked senators for the strong turnout compared with the previous session and noted that the Senate only works when quorum is met.
- **Shared governance appointments:** Five positions remain open: student seats on four Faculty Senate committees and a graduate student professional development liaison with Christopher Pallas.
- Senators noted that it is difficult to volunteer without knowing when committees meet, and one senator said that in the past the Faculty Senate set meeting times only after student members were named. Collin said he had shared only the times given to him and will ask the Faculty Senate office for updated times.
- Collin announced that Graduate College Dean Chris Berger will soon release several additional seats on the Graduate Executive Committee, which handles authorizing new programs and policies affecting graduate students (for example, transfer credit and comprehensive exam policies). Jennifer Tripp Mead, executive assistant to the dean, sends scheduling calls for its monthly meetings, so members have more say in when they meet. The liaison role with Christopher Pallas is informal and flexible. Collin explained that appointing students to these bodies is a requirement of the Senate as a whole, not of each senator, and is a key way in which GSS influences university policy.
- **Action:** Interested senators should send Collin a Teams message about shared governance or Graduate Executive Committee seats.
- **Leadership meetings:** Collin's meeting with President Tromp and Provost Schadler was cancelled last month. The next meeting is scheduled for October 23rd, and Collin will write a memo on Senate activities to be published online. The Executive Council also met with the Dean of the Graduate College, a productive conversation focused on Senate activities and on the Graduate College's moderation of GSS communications. Content such as support resources and union-related messages has been modified or moderated in the past. GSS is working with the Dean to define what can be sent, and Collin has requested a statement from General Counsel on the policy.
- **Board of Trustees:** Collin will give an address to the Board of Trustees on October 16 and has submitted a written statement. Both will be published online, and senators are welcome to attend.
- **Falling in Love with Vermont:** Collin and the Graduate College are hosting this event the same afternoon, 4:00 to 6:00 PM, in a third-floor meeting room of the Old Mill Building, with bucket lists of things to do around Vermont and refreshments.

## 5) Executive Council Reports and Provost Search Update

- **Treasurer (Chhayank Srivastava), Elevate Grant application overview:** The Elevate Grant received 77 applications this cycle, up from 44 last year (+75%). Chhayank attributed the increase partly to Elevate's lighter requirements (an advisor signature, with receipts submitted after the award) compared with the Graduate College's funding, which requires a 50% advisor match and whose cycle announcements are unclear. The Graduate College funded only 14 students this semester, about half of what Elevate funds. He recommended that GSS push the Graduate College to increase the number of students it funds.
- Of the 77 applicants, 54 (70%) are presenting and 23 (30%) are not. By degree level, 49 are doctoral (64%), 27 are master's (35%), and 1 is an MD student, who is not eligible because MD students are not part of GSS. Doctoral applicants by year were 10 first-year, 9 second-year, 12 third-year, 7 fourth-year, and 11 fifth-year or beyond. Thirty-two programs applied; Electrical Engineering (7), Mechanical Engineering (6), and Public Health (6) account for 19 of the 77 applications. Chhayank noted the applicant pool has historically skewed toward the sciences and was pleased to see Public Health, Rubenstein, and MBA programs applying this year. The data reflects who applied, not who is eligible.
- Eligibility screening is underway, led by Modupe Omoniyi, who chairs the Elevate Grant Subcommittee, which met on October 14. Once applications are reviewed, awardees will be selected by randomized draw and announced on October 23.
- Carrie asked about expanding Elevate to cover conference membership fees, noting that students in small programs (such as Educational Leadership and Policy PhD students) often cannot attend conferences without society membership their program does not fund. Chhayank replied that membership is already reimbursable when it is required to attend a conference, with a receipt, and that applications open in two cycles per year, with details on the GSS Elevate Grant website.
- Krittika noted that humanities PhD students face open access publishing costs of roughly $2,000 per article, which would consume much of the $18,000 Elevate budget, and that Elevate has not funded publishing so far. Chhayank suggested raising this with the Graduate College. Collin pointed to Bill 9.10.2026.5, which would clarify reimbursable expenses including required membership fees, and Resolution 9.10.2026.3, which renews the call for an open access publication fund. He noted that Elevate is primarily designed for travel and professional development.
- **Vice President (Natalie Cote), Provost Search Committee:** Candidates have visited campus and the committee has shared its input with President Tromp, who is expected to extend an offer. The hope is for a new provost to start in January.
- No other Executive Council members had updates.

## 6) Committee Chair Reports

- **Student Affairs (Collin Coil):** Nothing substantial to report; the first meeting is being organized, hopefully for next week.
- **Finance (Chhayank Srivastava):** The committee is helping the Nepali Student Association with purchases and reimbursements for its October 17 event, and met with the Events Committee about its budget and timing. Modupe Omoniyi is reviewing Elevate Grant applications against the eligibility criteria before the randomized draw.
- **Events (Krittika Dey):** The committee held its first meeting this week and is planning a pumpkin carving and pizza social before Halloween. It is also pushing for a Halloween poster competition

across the Graduate College, modeled on an existing event in one school's programs in which participants wear costumes and present posters for about two hours with pizza and desserts. Krittika was invited to the Executive Council meeting following the Senate meeting to discuss further.

- **Operations (Asa Asad):** Nothing to report; the committee has held its orientation and will get started soon.
- **External Affairs (Carrie San Angelo):** Carrie met with Collin for orientation last week and emailed committee members to schedule a first regular meeting. She described her professional experience with local, state, and federal policy and offered to mentor any committee member new to advocacy.

## 7) Resolution 9.10.2026.1: Adoption of the Revised Constitution

- Collin summarized the revised Constitution: it redefines membership and quorum (replacing three senators per program with 36 senators total, apportioned by college), separates the Executive Council from the Senate to strengthen Senate oversight, increases accountability for officers, defines standing policies so the Senate can act independently of the Board of Trustees and Graduate College, and introduces new tools such as electronic voting and package voting.
- A report summarizing the changes was sent to senators the previous week, and neither it nor the public notice and comment period received any comments. No discussion or debate took place on the floor.
- Collin explained that the revised Constitution must be approved by the Board of Trustees before taking effect. Because it was not approved in time for the October 16 Board meeting, it will go to the February Board meeting, and GSS will operate under the current Constitution until then.
- Chhayank moved to vote and John seconded.
- **Decision: Resolution adopted. 17 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. The vote exceeded the two-thirds majority required (quorum is 16).**

## 8) Resolution 9.10.2026.2: In Support of Graduate Student Workers and a Contract with the Graduate Student Union

- Collin summarized the resolution, which calls on the university to finalize a contract with the Graduate Student Union, to address issues identified in the GSS annual survey (including housing, childcare, and transportation), and to publicly disclose its spending on outside counsel for bargaining.
- A handful of public comments were received, all in favor, with commenters noting that the lack of a contract is one of the largest stressors for graduate student workers. No further discussion took place.
- Neil moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
- **Decision: Resolution passed. 16 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.**

## 9) Resolution 9.10.2026.3: Reaffirming a Call for an Open Access Publication Fund

- Collin explained that this resolution follows up on a March 2024 resolution calling for an open access fund administered in partnership with UVM Libraries. It calls for a working group to outline the scope of the fund, including its size and application requirements, and would address needs like those raised earlier by Krittika for humanities students with limited funding support.

- One public comment pointed to open-source venues such as arXiv as an alternative that reduces the need for a fund. Aviral seconded that comment, noting that posting to open-source venues does not prevent authors from also publishing in a peer-reviewed journal, that many authors post to both, and that funding may be less necessary as open-source publication becomes more common.
- John moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
- **Decision: Resolution passed. 15 in favor, 2 opposed, 0 abstentions.**

## 10) Resolution 9.10.2026.4: Reaffirming a Call for a Report on Fossil Fuel Divestment

- Collin explained that this resolution follows up on a March 2024 resolution calling for a report on fossil fuel divestment. The university has largely divested, but campus reporting indicates some investments remain in funds with fixed terms. The resolution asks for a public report on those remaining holdings. No public comments were received.
- Chhayank asked who the reports are requested from. Collin said each resolution names its recipients, and that this one is to be delivered to the President, the Board of Trustees, and the UVM Foundation, which oversees much of the endowment. He noted this is the third request on the subject, so there is no guarantee a report will be produced.
- Chhayank moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
- **Decision: Resolution passed. 14 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention.**

## 11) Bill 9.10.2026.5: An Act to Align GSS Elevate Grant Eligible Expenses with the University Travel Policy

- Collin explained that over the summer several rulings were needed on which expenses the Elevate Grant covers, causing confusion. Elevate's eligible expenses are narrowly scoped to conference registration, travel, and meals, while the university travel policy is broader. The bill would point to the university travel policy so that expenses are standardized across the university. No public comments were received.
- In response to Krittika, Collin clarified that Elevate would still be limited to expenses covered by the university travel policy, so it would remain primarily travel and conference expenses with somewhat more flexibility. For example, tips for hotel workers were not reimbursable under Elevate this summer because they are not a mandatory conference expense, but are allowed under university policy.
- Chhayank raised a concern that Elevate is run by students, without the staff or software the university uses to screen expenses. Currently, receipts are required for everything, and Elevate has reimbursed items such as taxis, meals, and Wi-Fi needed to present online. Tips cannot be receipted, which would make verification harder and could be difficult to justify in an audit. Tracking university policy changes would add work for the Treasurer and subcommittee without added resources. He advocated reimbursing any expense that enables conference attendance as long as a receipt is provided.
- Neil asked how alignment would add work, since it would let reviewers rely on the university policy rather than make their own judgments, and noted that whether receipts are required is separate from which categories are allowed. Collin added that the university travel policy generally requires receipts, with a limit of about $5 per day for tips without a receipt, and that policy changes would only need to be checked a few times a year. Chhayank responded that

receipts arrive on a rolling basis after each conference and that Elevate sets a one-month receipt deadline after travel, with a waitlist if awardees do not follow through. Chhayank and Collin were both unsure whether the travel policy covers society membership fees. A senator asked whether the Graduate College could provide resources to verify receipts, and another suggested a single end-of-cycle receipt deadline; Chhayank explained that Elevate is funded and administered by GSS, and that a single deadline would leave students waiting months for reimbursement.

- In closing remarks, Neil said the issue seemed minor and inspired by a single case (a tip receipt) that can be handled case by case, that the concerns from the Elevate lead were fair, and that he would vote no.
- Krittika moved to vote and John seconded. One senator split their proxy votes.
- **Decision: Bill did not pass. 7 in favor, 7 opposed, 3 abstentions.**
- Collin noted that four resolutions passed at this meeting, which he described as a high level of productivity for the Senate in recent years.

## 12) Remarks from Christina Cardona, Graduate College

- Christina Cardona, Student Success Coordinator for the Graduate College, joined the meeting and senators introduced themselves by name and program.
- Christina began at UVM in June 2026 and described her role as a mix of administrative tasks (forms for leaves of absence and withdrawals, including medical withdrawals) and programming and engagement with graduate students and campus partners. She described herself as a student advocate and support resource, including for situations such as an advisor issue a student does not want to raise in their department. She has a background in career services and offered to bring in her colleague Chris Pallas, director of professional and career development.
- Christina holds office hours in Waterman 325, held mid-semester check-in hours, and is moving appointments into Navigate360. She invited ideas for Graduate College events or support, including preferences on in-person versus virtual formats and timing, and described an open-door approach. She thanked GSS for partnering on Falling in Love with Vermont.
- **Action: Collin to share Christina's contact information with senators.**

## 13) Club Renewals and Recognition

- Eight club renewals and one new club recognition were presented. Eliza had coordinated with club presidents on structural changes and collected governing documents. Each club was voted on individually.
- **Pentecost Students and Associates (PENSA),** a campus worship and fellowship group with 18 graduate students (point of contact: Vincent Tamakloe). Krittika moved to vote and Neil seconded.
  - Decision: PENSA renewed. 18 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- **Indian Subcontinent Student Association (ISSA),** with 32 members, 27 of them graduate students (point of contact: Maryam Abbasi). Krittika moved to vote and John seconded.
  - Decision: ISSA renewed. 18 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- **Larner College of Medicine Graduate Student Council (LCOM GSC)**, with 8 graduate students (point of contact: Abby Keith). A senator asked whether medical students are part of GSS. Collin explained that medical students are technically under GSS, but their degrees are conferred by the Larner College of Medicine rather than the Graduate College. He would like to speak with

the college about spinning them out as their own shared governance body at the level of GSS and SGA, depending on what they want. Krittika noted that LCOM students do not pay the graduate student fee, which goes to the Graduate College. Collin emphasized that this is a renewal of a club that has historically lived under GSS, and that the broader question is an ongoing discussion. Neil moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
    - Decision: LCOM GSC renewed. 12 in favor, 0 opposed, 6 abstentions. Collin noted that abstentions count toward quorum, so the motion passes.
- **Nepali Student Association (NSA)**, with 28 members, 21 of them graduate students (points of contact: Prakash Dulal and Birasa Malla). Asa asked whether this is the organization GSS funded at the last meeting. Krittika moved to vote and Neil seconded.
    - Decision: NSA renewed. 18 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
    - Following the vote, Collin responded to Asa's question and acknowledged he should have addressed it before the vote. GSS funded NSA's event before its renewal because the event was approaching and funds needed to reach the club in time, and because club renewals are later this year than in the past due to poor records of which clubs were active. The Executive Council did not feel the Senate's recordkeeping delays should penalize a club, and a renewal was expected.
- **Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS),** with 180 members, 136 of them graduate students (point of contact: Daniel Penados Richter). No discussion. Neil moved to vote and John seconded.
    - Decision: SACNAS renewed. 17 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- **UVM Doctorate of Physical Therapy Club (DPT),** with 48 graduate students (points of contact: Megan Ezzo and Lolly Vasilion). Krittika moved to vote and Neil seconded.
    - Decision: DPT Club renewed. 17 in favor, 1 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- **The Alternative Protein Club,** with 8 members, 6 of them graduate students (point of contact: Christopher Foley). Neil moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
    - Decision: Alternative Protein Club renewed. 19 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- **Rubenstein Graduate Student Association (RGSA),** with 83 graduate students (point of contact: Peyton Heisch). Neil moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
    - Decision: RGSA renewed. 19 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- **Club recognition (new club): YUVA @ UVM,** with 9 graduate students (point of contact: Krittika Dey, President and GSS liaison). Neil moved to vote and Krittika seconded.
    - Decision: YUVA @ UVM recognized. 19 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.
- Collin noted that the new Constitution allows package voting, so next year all renewals can be voted on in a single package, saving about 20 minutes.

## 14) Fall Budget Approval

- Chhayank presented the Fall 2026-27 budget alongside the Fall 2025-26 budget. The total grows by $13,007 (about 30%), from $42,723 to $55,730.
- **No change:** E-Council stipends ($4,250), GSS BBQ ($2,000), and Clubs & Committees ($4,000).
- **Increases:** Coffee Hour (Monday) rises from $6,000 to $8,000, to allow rotating hours at locations such as the Trinity Campus, CMB, and Innovation, after feedback that students there cannot easily travel to the Davis Center. Events rises from $3,000 to $11,000 (Big Events $8,000, Weeks of Welcome $2,000, and a Finals Week event $1,000); the Weeks of Welcome money was not needed because that event was funded from the spring budget. The Elevate Grant rises from $14,000 to $18,000, an increase carried over from last spring to fund more awardees.

- **New:** Wednesday Pizza ($6,400), a free food event open to all graduate students (not only senators) that can be paired with Senate meetings. The day is tentative and depends on the organizer's availability.
- **Decreases:** Fall Retreat falls from $1,200 to $1,080, since GSS will no longer buy gifts for senators; a small amount is kept for new awards recognizing active senators, and GSS is working with the Graduate College on a certificate. Senate Meetings falls from $2,700 to $0 because refreshments were provided by Collin. The Slush Fund falls from $5,573 to $1,000, which Chhayank felt was enough to cover expenses such as $300 for parking.
- Chhayank explained that the account holds about $95,000 because one semester about a year ago had no spending. He budgeted $55,730 of it, noting GSS has historically spent at most about 80% of its budget, and is keeping a buffer because Graduate College transfers arrive sporadically and at unexpected times.
- Neil asked where the additional funds come from; Chhayank confirmed they are leftover from the semester with no spending.
- Krittika asked whether Wednesday Pizza counts against the Events budget. Chhayank explained that it is a separate line because EMS access is held by the President and Vice President, who must book rooms and contract catering. The pizza event is predetermined, while the Events Committee can choose the timing and location of its other events.
- Parmida asked whether $4,000 for clubs is enough, given that $2,000 has gone to NSA and ISSA may request $2,000 for Diwali. Chhayank said the line was built from historical funding requests, that club funding is first come, first served, and that most clubs have not yet met or planned events. He noted that the Executive Council can move money between line items up to $500 and must return to the Senate for approval above that, and that an additional $2,000 is available through the Weeks of Welcome savings and the Slush Fund.
- Parmida also asked how the $11,000 for events will be spent. Krittika said the Events Committee is still brainstorming but plans a pumpkin carving and pizza social, a Halloween poster competition (likely one of the largest GSS events), apple picking, corn mazes, an outdoor event, end-of-semester events for both fall and spring (Marco and Neha have volunteered), and collaborations with UVM Campus Rec such as yoga, salsa, and dance classes. Any student, senator or not, may suggest ideas, and Krittika will share the events planning sheet with the full Senate.
- Sevda thanked the Executive Council and said the updates addressed many of the problems the Senate previously faced.
- Krittika moved to approve the budget and Neil seconded.
- **Decision: Fall budget approved. 16 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.**

## 15) Announcements

- No announcements were made from the floor. Collin encouraged senators to post announcements to the Senate Teams channel.

## Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 PM. The next General Senate meeting will be held virtually on October 26, 2026.