

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Public Session of the February 24, 2026 Meeting
via Videoconference
2:32 p.m. - 4:20 p.m.**

Academic Council Committee Agendas, Materials and Minutes 2025-2026

Present:

Steven Murphy (Chair)	Ana Duff	Scott Nokleby
Asifa Aamir	Mikael Eklund	Gabby Resch
JoAnne Arcand	Shanti Fernando	Aliza Rizwan
Rachel Ariss	Shahram Heydari	Carol Rodgers
Laura Banks	Jessica Hogue	Denina Simmons
Wendy Barber	Mehdi Hossein-Nejad	Gillian Slade
Mary Bluechardt	Sayyed Ali Hosseini	Peter Stoett
Rupinder Brar	Lori Livingston	Joe Stokes
Toba Bryant	Janet McCabe	Dwight Thompson
Krystina Clarke	Carolyn McGregor	Ken Wilson
Amanda Cooper	Pejman Mirza-Babaei	
Catherine Davidson	Fedor Naumkin	

Regrets:

Scott Aquanno	Brenda Jacobs	Robyn
Ahmad Barari	Les Jacobs	Ruttenberg-Rozen
Mihai Beligan	Venuga Kariharan	Jemma Tam
Mitch Frazer	Hossam Kishawy (on leave)	Shannon Vettor

Staff and Guests:

Kirstie Ayotte	Sandra Grouette	Jennifer MacInnis
Nicola Crow	(Secretary)	Brad MacIsaac
	Krista Hester	Sarah Thrush

1. Call to Order and Land Acknowledgement

The Chair called the Public Session of the Academic Council (AC) Meeting to order at 2:32 p.m. and J. Arcand provided their personal Land Acknowledgement.

2. Agenda (M)

Upon a motion duly made by A. Cooper and seconded by S. Nokleby, the Agenda was approved as presented, including approving and receiving the Consent Agenda and its contents.

The Chair noted a request to have links to individual agenda items within the agenda as done previously.

3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair noted the recent provincial \$6.4B post-secondary funding announcement, indicating that while welcome, its impact will be limited when distributed across 54 institutions over four years. He observed that the lifting of the tuition cap is a positive signal, though the 2% increase provides only modest additional revenue and does not address longer-standing funding pressures identified by the Blue Ribbon Panel. Work continues with the Ministry to clarify details related to new funding and opportunities, including those associated with STEM priorities.

The Chair also highlighted the University's national visibility through the unveiling of the next phase of Project Arrow at the 2026 Canadian International Auto Show. He further shared updates on national and international nuclear workforce initiatives, including outcomes from the recent Southeast Asia visit, noting strong demand for upskilling and reskilling partnerships in Canada and abroad.

The Chair provided an update on the University's AI learning agent pilot, now active in 22 courses, emphasizing its focus on privacy, academic integrity, and responsible AI development.

During discussion, the Chair provided additional context on the funding announcement and confirmed that pilot data is hosted with a Canadian partner. He noted that the initiative will be benchmarked against ISO standards, including human rights considerations. Questions related to faculty support for large language models were deferred to the Provost. The Chair also clarified that the naming of the previously approved School of AI rests with the leadership team working with the Provost, and that the group has adopted the name "School of AI." He supported a suggestion to showcase Project Arrow on campus.

4. Inquiries and Communications

None

5. Provost's Remarks

L. Livingston confirmed that the detailed, original School of Ethical AI proposal was presented to and approved by Academic Council. She further noted that as previously reported, the School's Institutional Leadership Team (ILT) would be tasked to review the School's name. She advised that following discussion, the ILT approved the new name in February. She confirmed that the School of Artificial Intelligence will not make curriculum decisions and that all programs will remain within their respective faculties.

L. Livingston also announced that Dr. Peter Stoett will conclude his term as Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities at week's end and thanked him for nine years of service. She advised that Dr. Thomas McMorrow will serve as Interim Dean effective March 1. L. Livingston reported that a call for expressions of interest for the Decanal Search Committee has been issued, and a search firm engaged. Once the Committee is established, she advised that timelines will be determined and regular updates will follow.

L. Livingston also noted several upcoming March events recognizing faculty, staff, and student achievements, including the Three-Minute Thesis competition, the Teaching Conference and Celebration of Teaching Awards, Athletic Awards, and Student Leadership Awards.

Finally, she invited S. Thrush to provide an update on the tuition framework previously presented to Academic Council following the recent provincial funding announcement. S. Thrush shared

that the University plans to apply the recently announced 2% tuition increase, which is now reflected in the recommendations going to the Board for approval. She also reported that multiyear planning will follow once funding impacts are better known. In relation to student supports, given the tuition increase and OSAP changes, she noted that the University continues to exceed required financial aid set asides and plans to continue this commitment. L. Livingston also referenced the wide-range of Ontario Tech's fundraising efforts which provide targeted supports for our students.

During an ensuing discussion, there was further dialogue on the School of AI, its establishment, name and purview, with L. Livingston reiterating that the School of AI has no program or curriculum authority and its website will be updated to ensure clarity in terminology and language. The Chair confirmed that the Interim Dean appointment followed required Board processes. It was also clarified that the AI learning agent pilot uses only instructor-approved materials. L. Livingston advised that a cross-unit working group, including the Secretariat, is actively reviewing academic integrity across the Institution, including AI use. She further highlighted the need for alternate assessment approaches, with the Teaching and Learning Centre playing a key role in providing supports and guidance in this regard.

6. Student Recruitment, Success, and Retention*(D)

L. Livingston reported that this year's update focuses on key strategic priorities, emphasizing intensified domestic recruitment efforts in response to federal measures affecting international enrollment, and acknowledged the strong performance of the Registrar's Office, faculty, students and staff in attracting domestic students. She advised that international recruitment strategies are being adjusted to maintain market presence despite current constraints. In addition to recruitment, she shared that the University is prioritizing student retention through enhanced academic advising, Teaching and Learning Centre initiatives, and expanded Student Learning Support, as outlined in the accompanying briefing materials.

There was discussion regarding the important contributions of campus libraries, faculty, teaching assistants and staff to student learning, success, and retention. It was also underscored that everyone plays a role in this work with specific appreciation expressed to library staff. Personal accountability was also noted as being embedded across Student Learning Support programs.

7. Enrollment Update* (I)

S. Thrush reported on the University's 2025-2026 enrollment performance and its context within differentiated growth 2.0 which was taking the University to 20,000 students by 2030. She shared that enrollment has grown by more than 1,400 students, with an 8.8% intake increase supported by gains across undergraduate and graduate programs, improved retention, and balanced international enrollment notwithstanding the challenges in this regard. She advised that enrollment projections highlight steady growth in traditional pathways and future potential from innovative and non-traditional program models, with projections monitored regularly to balance strategic goals and budget planning.

J. Stokes presented system-level application trends, noting that the University continues to outperform the provincial system and key competitors in overall application growth across both high-school and non-high-school cohorts. Provincial data show significant system-wide declines for a second year in computer science, software engineering, IT, and communications likely influenced by AI-related labour-market uncertainty with some institutions experiencing substantial losses. While the University has also seen decreases in these areas, its broader

program mix has driven overall applications to their highest level to date. He shared that other universities may lower admissions averages in programs with available capacity to offset declines, underscoring the need for continued focused recruitment and admissions efforts.

L. Livingston noted that the recent provincial funding announcement, while positive, does not address long-term sector instability and so Ontario Tech must continue prioritizing enrollment growth, enhancing retention, strengthening program quality, and leveraging community partnerships. The Chair also highlighted the University's stronger position relative to peers is attributed to sustained growth in recent years, and continued growth remains essential under the current funding model to avoid workforce or program reductions seen elsewhere.

In response to some clarification being sought on the meaning of "differentiated growth" and "differentiated growth 2.0," as well as how projected enrollment increases relate to resourcing, L. Livingston emphasized the longstanding differentiated growth strategy to grow student numbers with the growth approach varying by Faculty based on program opportunities. She noted that differentiated growth 2.0 had been discussed at various townhalls and reiterated that "2.0" reflects an expanded approach that includes new instructional modes, flexible scheduling beyond traditional term structures, and strategies to attract learners beyond the domestic high-school market. She also confirmed that the University will continue its practice of aligning resources with enrollment growth.

8. Undergraduate Studies Committee

M. Bluehardt provided the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) report from the USC's January meeting. She reported that the USC continued its work to support program innovation driven by student needs. She advised that updates to academic programs were presented to ensure continued alignment with industry trends and best practices, while strengthening student pathways, flexibility, and career readiness. She also noted that USC received several items related to administrative and curricular housekeeping to support best practices.

8.1 Major Program Modification: Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science: Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Mechanical Engineering – Aerospace Specialization* (M)

M. Bluehardt shared that the proposed aerospace specialization responds to expressed student interest and will expand student options within the program. The specialization replaces four existing electives with four specialized aerospace courses. She noted that this will also enable the Faculty to assess the potential for a standalone aerospace program.

Upon a motion duly made by M. Eklund and seconded by S. Nokleby, that pursuant to the recommendation of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves the Major Program Modification to introduce an Aerospace Specialization within the Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Mechanical Engineering program.

8.2 Major Program Modification: Faculty of Health Sciences: Bachelor of Health Science (Hons) in Kinesiology – Fitness and Health Promotion Pathway* (M)

M. Bluehardt shared an update on the proposed bridge structure, which is intended to increase applications by enabling students to complete the program in two years instead of three, thereby broadening the prospective applicant pool.

Upon a motion duly made by M. Bluehardt and seconded by K. Wilson, that pursuant to the recommendation of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves

the Major Program Modification to the Bachelor of Health Science (Hons) in Kinesiology – Fitness and Health Promotion Pathway, creating a Bridge structure for Durham College graduates.

8.3 Major Program Modification: Faculty of Social Science and Humanities: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Legal Studies – Teesside LLB Pathway* (M)

M. Bluechardt presented an expansion to the previously approved pathway by adding the University of Aberdeen as a partner, and a renaming to the UK LLB Pathway. Under the updated structure, students with the highest GPAs may now choose to pursue their studies at either the University of Aberdeen or Teesside University.

Upon a motion duly made by P. Stoett and seconded by M. Bluechardt, that pursuant to the recommendation of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves the Major Program Modification to add the University of Aberdeen as a new institutional partner to the Honours Legal Studies – Teesside LLB pathway and amend the pathway title to the UK LLB pathway.

8.4 Major Program Modification: Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Software Engineering* (M)

M. Bluechardt shared that the proposal adds a railway engineering specialization to software engineering by replacing existing electives with four railway-focused courses, consistent with offerings in other engineering programs. It also replaces the program-specific capstone with a common multidisciplinary capstone model aligned with industry practice, supporting collaboration across all engineering programs.

Upon a motion duly made by S. Nokleby and seconded by D. Thompson, that pursuant to the recommendation of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves the Major Program Modification to the Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Software Engineering to introduce a new Railway Engineering Specialization and to make additional changes to upper-year offerings within the main program and the Internet of Things specialization.

9. Graduate Studies Committee

P. Mirza-Babaei provided the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) Report from the GSC's January meeting, which included information on upcoming opportunities for doctoral and postdoctoral training awards.

9.1 Major Program Modification: Faculty of Business and IT: Master of Business Analytics and Artificial Intelligence* (M)

P. Mirza-Babaei provided an overview of the Master of Business Analytics and Artificial Intelligence proposal which added new focus areas in AI governance, supply chain and entrepreneurship in response to industry needs. He noted there were no major structural changes with this proposal which aligned with the University's strategic focus on responsible AI and differentiated growth. He advised that the revisions include additional elective options and fewer core courses.

Upon a motion duly made by P. Mirza-Babaei and seconded by S. Fernando, that pursuant to the recommendation of the Graduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves the Major Program Modification to the Master of Business Analytics and Artificial Intelligence program to establish three new fields in AI Governance, Supply Chain, and Entrepreneurship.

In response to a question regarding resources, it was confirmed that no additional resources are required to implement the program changes.

10. Research Committee

10.1 Office of Research Services Executive Report* (D)

J. Freeman provided the office of Research Services Executive Report on behalf of L. Jacobs. She shared an update on current research chair activity, including the launch of the Internal Research Excellence Chairs program and ongoing recruitment for several major external federal chair programs. Updates were also provided on tri-agency policy changes related to clinical trial disclosure, open access requirements, responsible conduct of research including the availability of research ethics training modules, ongoing licensing and public engagement process for the subcritical nuclear assembly, and the recruitment for a new Research Ethics Board (REB) Chair.

J. Freeman advised that the University is trending ahead of last year in research funding, supported by provincial and federal investment increases, including the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). She also highlighted federal warnings on research security, including risks associated with certain foreign-sourced technologies and collaborations.

In response to a question, J. Freeman also shared that to ensure broad faculty awareness, Research Services disseminates information through a listserv, Research Committee, workshops, social media channels, and regular updates to the institutional website.

11. Consent Agenda:

The Chair confirmed that contents of the Consent Agenda were approved and received under Agenda Item # 2.

11.1 Public Minutes of the January 27, 2026 Meeting* (M)

11.2 Minor Program Adjustments from USC* (I)

- (i) Faculty of Business and IT: Bachelor of Commerce Co-Operative Education* (I)
- (ii) Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science: Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Energy Engineering* (I)
- (iii) Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science: Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Nuclear Engineering* (I)
- (iv) Faculty of Health Sciences: Bachelor of Health Administration (Hons)* (I)
- (v) Faculty of Health Sciences: Bachelor of Health Sciences (Hons) in Kinesiology* (I)
- (vi) Faculty of Health Sciences: Bachelor of Science in Nursing (Hons) and RPN to BScN – Advanced Entry* (I)

12. Other Business

In response to a question regarding the 20,000 student target, it was explained that the higher figure reflects projected growth through non-traditional and innovative delivery models, including programmatic changes, regional upskilling and reskilling opportunities, and expansion in course-based master's programs, with the target based on student numbers.

13. Termination

There being no other business, and upon a motion to terminate by S. Nokleby, the AC Meeting terminated at 4:20 p.m.

Sandra Grouette, Assistant University Secretary