

BOARD OF GOVERNORS
STRATEGY & PLANNING COMMITTEE (S&P)

Minutes of the Public Session of the February 5, 2026 Meeting
via Videoconference
2:00 p.m. - 3:05 p.m.

Governors Present:

Eric Agius, Chair	Emily Whetung-MacInnes	Hannah Scott
Lisa McBride, Vice-Chair	Matthew Mackenzie	Alveena Shrestha
Ahmad Barari	Roger Poirier	Jeffrey Spiegelman
Laura Elliott	Michael Rencheck	

Regrets:

Mitch Frazer	Steven Murphy
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Staff and Guests:

Kirstie Ayotte	Krista Hester	Jennifer MacInnis
Nicola Crow	Les Jacobs	Joe Stokes
Sandra Grouette	Lori Livingston	Sarah Stokes
(Secretary)	Brad MacIsaac	Sarah Thrush

1. Call to Order and Land Acknowledgement

The Chair called the Public Session of the Strategy & Planning Committee (S&P) Meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. and provided the Land Acknowledgement.

2. Agenda

Upon a motion duly made by M. Mackenzie and seconded by M. Rencheck, the Agenda was approved as presented, including approving and receiving the Consent Agenda and its contents.

3. Conflict of Interest Declaration

None Declared.

4. Chair's Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first S&P Meeting of 2026 and of the Board year. He extended a welcome to Sandra Grouette, who joined Ontario Tech University in January as Assistant University Secretary following Kirstie Ayotte starting her new role as Assistant to the President.

The Chair shared that February is Black History Month and this year's theme is "30 years of Black History Month: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations" a celebration of 30 years of Black History Month in Canada. He noted that as Canadians recognize this month and the 30th

Anniversary, it presents an opportunity to learn, a time to reflect and to reaffirm commitments in this month and beyond.

5. President's Remarks

In the President's absence and on their behalf, K. Hester shared updates on recent University events. She reported on the 5.3% year over year increase in undergraduate applications, which is more than double the provincial average, with the growth being attributed to the strength of the University's academic programs, its strong reputation, and its emphasis on career-ready, future-focused education. K. Hester also updated the Committee on the recent productive visit to the Philippines and Indonesia by the President and herself which centred on nuclear energy skills training, broader workforce development, human capacity building, and pathways for upskilling and reskilling. She noted that the visit emphasized the strategic importance of engaging in regions with growing populations and rapidly evolving power systems amid global energy transitions.

K. Hester also reported on this week's groundbreaking for the new on-campus residence, The Ridge. Scheduled to open in Fall 2027, she advised the residence will support the University's growth and enhance the student experience by offering modern housing aligned with the strategic "sticky campus" priority. She further noted that the project will help address regional student housing needs, strengthen academic-life balance, and expand residential capacity as the University advances toward its goal of 20,000 students.

6. Strategy

6.1 Student Recruitment, Retention & Success* (D)

L. Livingston provided an update on the University's recruitment performance. She shared that this year the University has achieved a 5.3% increase in undergraduate applications in comparison to last year and a 73% increase in total applications since January 2021. She noted that this performance exceeds many provincial peers despite significant drops in some of our program areas, such as computer science. International recruitment remains active to ensure readiness for when the market opens again as international students remain important, particularly at the graduate level.

L. Livingston provided an overview of the University's multi-pronged recruitment approach which combines in-person outreach, online engagement, and targeted, data-driven recruitment by school and discipline, supported by a detailed analytics dashboard. She also shared some examples of the strategies employed, including on-campus events, student ambassador outreach initiatives and specific Faculty activities, which also help to strengthen recruitment in undersubscribed programs.

L. Livingston emphasized retention and student success as cost-effective drivers of sustained enrollment and shared the wide range of supports offered by the University to support retention efforts, together with new and ongoing initiatives. She highlighted an early-alert system led by academic advising, the NExt Hub and its digital literacy modules which focussed on ethical use of AI and use of AI in the classroom, an upper-year retention program for students experiencing academic challenges, and international student welcome events.

During the ensuing discussion it was noted that online pre-admission options and targeted outreach help address prerequisite gaps for rural/small-town applicants. A Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science initiative was shared as an example, which offered a pre-engineering pathway for students from rural areas lacking prerequisite courses, allowing them to complete a catch-up term before entering the full program. It was noted that this initiative enrolled about 60 students last year.

In addition, in response to an inquiry about the impact of rising GPA admission requirements, J. Stokes reported that observed grade inflation post COVID-19 has declined, with averages returning closer to pre-pandemic levels. Further, it was shared that annual regression analysis shows a nonlinear relationship between high school averages and first-year performance with students entering in the mid-70's demonstrating comparable success to those with higher grades.

7. Planning

7.1 Digital Strategy Update* (D)

S. Stokes provided an update on AI capacity-building initiatives within the University's teaching and learning space. She highlighted the integrated institutional approach supporting responsible AI use by aligning student learning supports, instructional development, and educational technology. She shared with the Committee some key initiatives including the AI and Assessment Scale, the NExT Hub digital literacy platform and the University's Generative AI Modules.

She also reported on complementary programming being offered, which includes discipline-specific student workshops on AI use in coursework, faculty development sessions on pedagogical applications of AI, and targeted workshops for academic units. S. Stokes highlighted ongoing initiatives, such as the "Speaking of Learning" podcast, the annual teaching and learning conference, weekly makerspace drop-ins, and the Quad C booking system.

A Member commended S. Stokes for the excellent presentation. In response to a question, S. Stokes shared how the University's AI strategies include introducing academic literacy skills programming into high schools. She also reported that following the piloting of the University's generative AI modules with current students, the plan is to expand this initiative by developing an add-on component for teachers and high school students.

B. MacIsaac also shared that the Frazer Faculty of Education is collaborating with the Ministry on several initiatives, including a grant-supported project. Members encouraged the University to continue pursuing opportunities broadly and proactively, emphasizing the rapid pace of AI adoption in industry and the importance of ensuring that incoming students arrive with foundational knowledge in this area.

S. Stokes confirmed that program evaluation is a core element of all Teaching and Learning Centre activities and that the same evaluative approach is applied to AI capacity-building initiatives to ensure consistency and accountability.

B. MacIsaac updated the Committee on the significant progress in the Digital Strategy, reminding Members that this work aligns with the Integrated Academic-Research Plan. He highlighted key initiatives including the introduction of the 24/7 learning management system enhanced by AI, noting early results showed that after regular service hours, approximately 500 student inquiries were handled by the system, with 98% resolved on the first attempt. He also reported on the current status of AI adoption at the University and the multi-year Banner enterprise system renewal project, now entering its fourth year on time and on budget.

8. Significant Project Oversight

8.1 Critical Nuclear Assembly Project (I)

L. Jacobs reported on the subcritical facility project. He shared that the Class 2 operating licence application was submitted to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) on December 31, and a formal review is expected to begin shortly, after which the project will appear on the CNSC public project list. He advised that active discussions continue with several industry partners, including Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, Bruce Power, Ontario Power Generation, and Kinetrics to align training, testing, and research use cases with the facility's capabilities.

He noted the approximately 50% increase in applications to the nuclear engineering program this year, attributed in part to investments in new facilities and heightened industry engagement. He advised that the subcritical facility is positioned as a key pillar of a broader nuclear research and training ecosystem at Ontario Tech, alongside the power plant simulator and other potential future facilities, with this emerging ecosystem's focus being on industry-aligned training and specialized research capacity. L. Jacobs also reported on Federal government engagement activities which are exploring potential support for nuclear facility capacity building and other related priorities.

A Member recommended exploring Arctic and defence use cases. L. Jacobs confirmed work was already underway, including initial discussions with an Arctic Training Centre for simulation collaborations.

9. Consent Agenda* (M)

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

9.1 Public Session Minutes of the June 12, 2025 Meeting* (M)

10. Adjournment (M)

There being no other business, and upon a motion duly made by M. Rencheck the Public Session of the S&P Committee Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

Sandra Grouette, Assistant University Secretary