

ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Minutes of the Public Session of the March 25, 2025, Meeting via Videoconference 2:30 p.m. - 4:20 p.m.

PUBLIC SESSION

[Academic Council Committee Agendas, Materials and Minutes 2024-2025](#)

Present:

Steven
Murphy (Chair)
Scott Aquanno
JoAnne Arcand
Robert Bailey
Wendy Barber
Mihai Beligan
Mary Bluechardt
Toba Bryant
Krystina Clarke
Amanda Cooper
Ana Duff

Nicola Crow
Catherine Davidson
Mikael Eklund
Nawal Elshamiy
Shanti Fernando
Jessica Hogue
Mehdi Hossein Nejad
Brenda Jacobs
Les Jacobs
Hossam Kishawy
Lori Livingston
Carolyn McGregor
Fedor Naumkin

Scott Nokleby
Carol Rodgers
Robyn Ruttenberg
Rozen
Gillian Slade
Peter Stoett
Joe Stokes
Jemma Tam
Dwight Thompson
Shannon Vettor
Ken Wilson

Staff & Guests:

Kirstie
Ayotte (Secretary)
Tara Ashley
Clara Barton
Chelsea Bauer
Jamie Bruno
Stephanie Callahan
Alison Carruthers
Krista Hester
Pela Imafidon
Tanya Karam Zanders
Roy Conliffe

Lindsay Coolidge
Logan Ewanation
Barbara Hamilton
Andrea Kassaris
Jacqueline King
Jennifer MacInnis
Brad MacIsaac
Janet McCabe
Kimberley McCartney
Christine McLaughlin
Mariya Nasim
Amy Neil

Niall O'Halloran
Darryl Papke
Elita Partosoedarso
Maddison
Pennefather
Melissa Ramirez
Sarah Thrush
Lisa Townsend
Becky Tranter
Adam Wingate
Chris Woods
Rabeah (unknown)

Regrets:

Asifa Aamir
Ahmad Barari
Mitch Frazer
Sayyed Ali Hosseini

Janet McCabe
Breanne McAlpin
Denina Simmons

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1. Call to Order and Land Acknowledgement

The Chair called the Public session of the Academic Council (AC) meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. and A. Duff read aloud the Land Acknowledgement.

2. Agenda (M)

A member requested that Agenda items 11.1 and 11.4, respectively, be removed from the Consent Agenda for discussion.

Upon a motion duly made by H. Kishawy and seconded by S. Nokleby the Agenda was approved as amended, including approving and receiving the Consent Agenda and its contents as amended.

3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair expressed gratitude to faculty, staff, and students for their hard work as the semester comes to an end, acknowledging the challenges of this time of year. He also commended student athletes for their numerous achievements.

4. Inquiries and Communications

In response to the discussion at the last Academic Council meeting regarding program admission suspensions, L. Livingston addressed several inaccuracies, particularly the incorrect number of programs that were stated from Academic Council membership as being supposedly suspended. She clarified that only three programs were affected by the program admission suspensions.

She emphasized that these were not program closures but program admission suspensions. She advised that the three program admission suspensions were the BA Sociology (Hons) program, which was inaccurately listed on the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) website despite not yet being approved by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities for funding; and the BA Liberal Studies and BASc in Sustainability programs. She provided details on the application numbers, the number of offers of admission and zero acceptances of offers to date. She also added that arguably there were only two program admission suspensions given that the BA Sociology (Hons) program should never have been on the website.

L. Livingston noted that the decision to suspend admissions was made in consultation with the Deans. She highlighted that the program admission suspensions provide an opportunity to reassess recruitment and marketing strategies, with the aim to enhance the respective programs' appeal and long-term sustainability, so as to attract more applicants with the go forward goal of increasing both offers and acceptances.

A member raised concerns regarding the change in the reported number of program freezes from the last meeting to this meeting and asked for assurances that future closures would adhere to proper consultation processes as outlined in applicable policies. They also added that they were delighted that there were only

three suspensions. In response, L. Livingston explained that while initial discussions had considered pausing admissions for additional programs, no final decisions had been made prior to the February Academic Council meeting. She clarified that pausing admissions does not equate to closing a program. She advised that there is no consideration being given at this time to closing programs. She reiterated that Academic Council would be consulted on any potential program closures.

5. Provost's Remarks

L. Livingston reminded attendees that the Teaching Conference, and the Teaching Awards immediately following, will be held in Business and IT building on the mezzanine tomorrow starting at 3:30 p.m.

5.1 Senior Academic Administrator Search Update (I)

L. Livingston noted that the Renewal Advisory Committee for the Dean of Health Sciences has completed its work and submitted its decision to the President who will make a recommendation to the Board. She also noted that the search for the Dean of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is underway, with applications open since February. The Search Committee will review candidates in April.

A member raised concerns regarding the cancellation of a student event, questioning if the decision violated University policies, such as the Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism policy, and requested clarification on the reasoning for the decision. L. Livingston explained that student events on campus are subject to established policies and oversight regarding space usage and event conduct.

J. MacInnis, General Counsel, advised that a request for a review of the decision had been submitted under the Booking of Space Policy regarding the decision to not permit the usage of space for the event, and was pending clarification to proceed. She cautioned that as the Provost was the decision maker for that review L. Livingston should not be engaging in discussion regarding the event to avoid prejudicing the review.

The Chair reminded attendees that during the Public Session of Academic Council, Public session attendees were welcome to observe but were unable to participate or engage in any way during the meeting.

Concerns were raised regarding the last-minute nature of the cancellation given that the event was booked last May. It was noted that many faculty and students were impacted by this decision and were greatly upset. J. MacInnis clarified that while the space was reserved in May 2024, the actual submission for approval for the event was only submitted two weeks before the event. In response to a question, J. MacInnis also confirmed that there was nothing that would preclude

the students from submitting a human rights complaint in respect of the decision not to provide space.

The Chair closed the discussion, emphasizing the importance of openness while also highlighting the need to respect the pending appeal and its process.

6. 2025-2028 Budget* (I)

B. MacIsaac highlighted the focus of the budget for the 2025-26 academic year, with a view on how decisions and assumptions may impact the future. He reviewed the University's historical budget framework, noting prior to 2010 funding was relatively stable, primarily driven by student enrollment and government grants. He explained that during this period, the University could accurately predict both tuition revenue and government support, often planning years in advance. However, since 2010, and particularly after 2018, the University has experienced increasing financial instability, marked by last-minute grants and sudden policy changes regarding tuition, which have complicated long-term budget planning.

S. Thrush presented the 2025-26 budget enrollment projections noting that it is based on November official counts and preliminary winter enrollment data, with assumptions that intake targets for Fall 2025 will be met and a three-year retention average was applied to flow through of current students. Moderate growth of 1.5 to 1.75% is projected for future years, with slight growth targeted for domestic undergraduates, research, and master's programs.

She advised that international enrollment continues to face challenges due to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) policy changes, but recruitment efforts remain strong. She highlighted that the University aims to reach 18,000 students for sustainability, focusing on developing new programs, expanding flexible learning options for non-traditional learners, and increasing market share in high-demand areas to fuel future growth.

B. MacIsaac outlined the University's budget approach, focusing on revenues and expenses for the year while excluding factors such as amortization and restricted funds. He emphasized that labour costs take up most of the budget, with limited funds for strategic initiatives due to tuition and grant freezes. He noted that the University is becoming more reliant on tuition as government grants make up a smaller portion of revenue.

He discussed rising labour costs, from contractual salary increases, and noted that the tuition freezes, and grant caps have led to a structural deficit. He advised that if enrollment remains flat, the University is projected to face a deficit, but efficiency measures and modest growth could balance the budget. University sustainability will require significant growth.

He also addressed the external audit by KPMG, which confirmed that the University is operating efficiently and recommended growth to achieve greater operational efficiency, as the fixed costs are spread over a smaller number of students. KPMG stressed the need to diversify revenue streams, enhance automation, and assess program sustainability.

The University needs reserves for facility repairs, estimating \$40 million in repairs by 2034 based on normal life cycle, as well as addressing concerns about aging equipment and limited funds for replacements. All of this highlights the need for long-term financial planning to manage these costs and ensure sustainability.

L. Livingston highlighted the precarious times facing the sector, driven by several uncontrollable factors such as declining tuition revenues, reduced guaranteed funding from government grants, increased competition for domestic students, tariff impacts and growing inflation. She emphasized that the value of university degrees is being increasingly questioned by the public, and universities are facing challenges like never before. She reiterated the need to focus on the University's growth strategy to 18,000 students by 2030, to diversify revenue resources and become more efficient. She noted that while there are extensive layoffs and staff reductions occurring at other institutions, that is not the case at Ontario Tech. Extensive advocacy is ongoing and that the University is doing all that it can in these precarious times.

A comprehensive discussion focused on key issues for the University, including whether the funding status of the post-secondary education sector was a focus for any party in the upcoming Federal election. L. Livingston and S. Murphy noted that education falls under provincial funding, making federal involvement unlikely.

A member asked about the \$2 million AI pilot investment within the budget documents. This was addressed by B. MacIsaac, who clarified that the funds aim to establish the University as an AI leader, with specific spending priorities yet to be determined through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

KPMG's role in evaluating academic programs, student-faculty ratios, financial reserves, and alternative revenue streams was discussed. Concerns regarding external auditors influencing academic decisions was raised, and B. MacIsaac clarified that KPMG's analysis is a financial/accounting one with only a recommendation of a model to help guide the Provost's Office in identifying areas for further review.

The student-faculty ratio discussion highlighted the balance between financial sustainability and maintaining academic quality. Maintaining the current ratio could increase the deficit; while increasing it may impact the student experience.

Financial reserves were discussed, noting past funds were spent on capital projects. The future focus will be on rebuilding reserves for deferred maintenance

and infrastructure costs. Concerns about alternative revenue streams were raised, with a need for more strategic initiatives aligned with the University's core mission.

B. MacIsaac clarified that labour costs made up 64% of total revenues, not 80%. The 80% figure applies only to the operating budget. The intent of focusing on the 80% in operating columns was to show the university is relying on other revenue sources to fund operating and capital projects.

S. Thrush responded to questions regarding SMA4, referencing prior Academic Council updates and discussion on this. She noted that SMA4 was not as yet finalized. She reiterated that there were eight metrics within SMA4, six were government mandated and two were institution-specific metrics. The University had decided on two existing SMA3 metrics related to research revenue and experiential learning placements. These metrics will help retain funding with the potential for additional allocation if other universities fail to meet their targets due to the performance-based funding approach.

Lastly, the \$1.7 million increase in ancillary fees was discussed, with \$1 million allocated for technology-enhanced learning, which will be used for digital platforms and software.

The Chair highlighted an upcoming Town Hall featuring a Q&A session regarding the budget on March 31, 2025, encouraging attendance.

7. Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC)

M. Bluehardt advised that the USC met in February, where they reviewed curriculum updates, program modifications, and policy changes. Two expedited major program modifications were approved by Academic Council last month. She advised that the discussions covered curriculum alignment, student success, and administrative matters.

7.1 Major Program Modification: Faculty of Health Sciences: Bachelor of Health Administration* (M)

M. Bluehardt highlighted the Bachelor of Health Administration program modification to address recruitment challenges and support growth. The program will transition to online delivery for better accessibility, align with certification requirements, and create flexible pathways for career advancement in Health Administration.

A member questioned whether the shift from in-person to fully online should be considered as a new program, in which K. McCartney confirmed that, as the learning outcomes remained the same, it qualifies as a major program modification, not a new program.

Upon a motion duly made by K. Wilson and seconded by M. Bluechardt, and pursuant to the recommendation of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves the Major Program Modification to the Bachelor of Health Administration to deliver the program fully online and modify degree requirements.

1 Abstention noted.

8. Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)

J. Stokes noted that the February GSC meeting focused on enhancing student recognition, postdoctoral engagement, and scholarship processing. Program adjustments were made to graduate programs to improve consistency and course offerings. Policy updates included revisions to course auditing and employment policies to expand access and align with regulations. He also noted that Admissions and Financial Aid underwent structural changes to streamline processes, update key contacts, and optimize enrollment.

9. Research Committee

9.1 Strategic Research Plan* (D)

L. Jacobs advised that the Community consultation in March provided valuable feedback, which has been incorporated into the development of the Strategic Research Plan (SRP). He noted that the focus was on identifying specific areas of research rather than covering a broad range of topics. Eight strategic attributes, such as: sustainability, community engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration; have been used to evaluate the seven strategic research priorities. These priorities, which engage at least three faculties each, now include an emphasis on entrepreneurship and business analytics. Recent updates have also added "climate change resilience" alongside clean energy to further address climate concerns. He noted that the process is nearing completion, with additional feedback welcome.

In response to concerns about whether equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is incorporated within the Strategic Research Plan, L. Jacobs clarified that the document shared is just one part of the plan, and the core values and principles related to EDI are still central. He noted that the strategic research priorities are framed around inclusive research excellence, ensuring that EDI remains a foundational commitment. The focus on inclusive research excellence, which was emphasized in the previous plan, continues to be central in the updated SRP.

10. Policy Consultation – Approval

10.1 Special Considerations Policy – Undergraduate and Professional Admissions* (M)

J. Stokes noted that a regular policy review was conducted, updating the policy to reflect current equity admissions practices. The previous policy included outdated terminology, such as references to the President's Equity Task Force, which has

completed its work. He advised that the updated policy aligns with the new processes and procedures in place.

J. Stokes responded to a question regarding the tracking of students admitted through the updated equity policy, confirming that the data is tracked, particularly for teacher education and graduate studies, but no formal report is provided.

Additional concerns were raised regarding the removal of the President's Equity Task Force reference in the policy, which was replaced with the undefined term "student engagement and equity team." The need for clarification of this term was noted, and it was agreed that the definition would be reviewed and clarified.

Upon a motion duly made by A. Cooper and seconded by K. Wilson, the Academic Council hereby approves the amended Special Considerations Policy - Undergraduate and Professional Admissions.

10.2 Revised Policy on Auditing an Undergraduate and Graduate Course* (M)

J. Stokes noted that this policy was updated to allow graduate students the ability to audit undergraduate courses, particularly when the content is relevant to their research.

Upon a motion duly made by K. Wilson and seconded by M. Hossein Nejad, the Academic Council hereby approves the amended Policy on Auditing an Undergraduate and Graduate Course.

10.3 Registration and Course Selection Policy Amendments* (M)

J. Stokes noted that the 10-hour work limit for graduate students was removed to allow more flexibility for students to pursue work within or outside the institution, addressing the outdated nature of the rule and providing greater opportunities for students.

He confirmed that the update aligns with the recently negotiated PSAC 555 Collective Agreement for Teaching Assistants and that the policy is now moving through the governance process after being finalized during the PSAC bargaining process.

In response to a question concerning reference to the Senior Academic Team, J. Stokes confirmed its membership and that it is an administrative body.

Upon a motion duly made by A. Cooper and seconded by K. Wilson, the Academic Council hereby approves the amended Registration and Course Selection Policy.

11. Consent Agenda:

11.2 Minor Program Adjustments from USC* (I)

- i. Mitch and Leslie Frazer Faculty of Education: Bachelor of Education – Concurrent option – Primary/Junior and Intermediate / Senior* (I)
- ii. Mitch and Leslie Frazer Faculty of Education: Bachelor of Arts – Educational Studies* (I)
- iii. Faculty of Science: Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Neuroscience* (I)
- iv. Faculty of Social Science and Humanities: Sustainability Studies Minor* (I)
- v. Faculty of Social Science and Humanities: Internship and Practicum* (I)
- vi. Faculty of Social Science and Humanities: Diploma in Public Policy* (I)

11.3 Minor Program Adjustments from GSC* (I)

- i. Faculty of Science: PhD in Materials Science* (I)
- ii. Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science: Meng, MAsC and PhD in Electrical and Computer Engineering* (I)

11.5 Policy Instruments from USC* (I)

- i. Special Considerations Procedures – Undergraduate and Professional Admissions* (I)
- ii. Undergraduate and Professional Admissions Procedures* (I)

11.6 Conferral of Degrees – Winter 2025* (M)

The Chair confirmed that the contents of the Consent Agenda were approved and received under Agenda Item #2, save for Agenda items 11.1 and 11.4.

*** Consent agenda items pulled for discussion as noted in item #2**

11.1 Minutes of the Meeting of February 25, 2025* (M)

A member noted that the earlier discussion under item #4 of the Agenda addressed the concerns raised regarding the previous Meeting's minutes. They also requested that the minutes of today's meeting include a reference to the existing policy on program closures: [Institutional Quality Assurance Process Policy](#); [Program Closure Procedures](#)

Upon a motion duly made by M. Eklund and seconded by R. Bailey, the Minutes of the Meeting of February 25, 2025 were approved as presented.

11.4 Cyclical Program Review from GSC* (I)

- i. Master of Health Sciences – 18 Month Follow-Up* (I)

A member emphasized the need for continued program marketing, especially considering recent challenges. J. Stokes confirmed strong recruitment efforts, with a notable increase in program enrollments, though some programs face more challenges than others. The recruitment for this program remains ongoing.

The Chair reminded members that this item was for information only.

12. Other Business

12.1 Land acknowledgement for April Academic Council Meeting

M. Eklund volunteered to provide the April land acknowledgement.

A member provided some additional background information on any attention being given to the post-secondary sector during the recent Provincial and Federal elections.

13. Termination

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

Kirstie Ayotte, Assistant University Secretary