
**GRADUATE STUDIES COUNCIL
Minutes of 11 December 2025****Call to Order**

The regular meeting of the Western Michigan University Faculty Senate Graduate Studies Council was called to order at 3:01 on 11 December 2025 via Webex by Marcellis Zondag, Chair.

Members Present: Upul Attanayake, Claire Binford, Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Micky Carignano, Lisa DeChano-Cook, Cristina Fava (substitute for Jennifer Fiore), Lori Gray, Peter Gustafson, Michael Harnar, Michelle Hrivnyak, Larry Simon, Marcellis Zondag

Members Absent: Kristhyna Fermin

Advisory Members Present: Carrie Cumming

Ex Officio: Laura Teichert

Guests: Melia Roberts, Graduate College

Quorum

A quorum was present with 13 members in attendance, of the nine members needed to establish a quorum.

Agenda

[MOTION] It was moved by Byrd-Jacobs, seconded by Zondag, to accept the amended agenda as presented. The motion carried.

Minutes

[MOTION] It was moved by Byrd-Jacobs, seconded by Zondag, to approve the 11 December 2025 minutes as presented. The motion carried.

Program Proposals

Clinical Social Work (CSWM)

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Simon to approve the Clinical Social Work (CSWM) program proposal. With one abstention, the motion carried.

Master of Social Work (Accelerated) (SWKQ)

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Simon to approve the Master of Social Work (Accelerated) (SWKQ) program proposal. With one abstention, the motion carried.

Policy Planning & Administration (PPDM)

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Simon to approve the Policy Planning & Administration (PPDM) program proposal. With one abstention, the motion carried.

Social Work Policy Planning & Administration (SWPM) Concentration

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Simon to approve the Social Work Policy Planning & Administration (SWPM) Concentration. With one abstention, the motion carried.

Social Work: Clinical Social Work (SWCM) Concentration

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Simon to approve the Social Work: Clinical Social Work (SWCM) Concentration. With one abstention, the motion carried.

New Business

DeChano-Cook brought forth the draft Memorandum of Action (MOA) -26/01: *Revision to Create Faculty-Driven Learning Assessment Opportunities for Graduate Programs*. Revisions were presented that outlined how the PLA is outside traditional classroom experience, such as prior work experience. As well, revisions were presented to clarify the department chair cannot act as evaluator of the PLA. Two faculty evaluators must sign and then the chair signs. In other words, ensure three people review the PLA before

approval. Finally, a definition was created for the Graduate Catalog and will go to HLC. WMU needs to have PLAs housed in a repository and a PLA plan. This will allow faster access, when needed.

[MOTION] It was moved by Simon, seconded by Linn to accept the MOA with minor revisions (remove item 7, renumber document). The motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Officers

Chair Zondag reported a brief summary of unfinished business related to Artificial Intelligence (AI). Chair Zondag notified GSC on two memos included earlier in the week via email that related to Charge #3 AI.

Ex Officio Teichert report included Executive Board conversations related to submitting syllabi on Banner in advance of course registration. The Board is exploring this topic as students have indicated the usefulness of having the syllabus in advance of registration, which helps students decide on what courses to register for. It appears faculty are not familiar with this option. A request for information on how to upload syllabi and to ensure the process is user-friendly was made. Currently it is submitted on a volunteer basis by faculty.

Reports of University Representatives

Byrd-Jacobs report included a reminder of 13 December commencement. Forty-one PhD students will graduate, with 25 to be hooded during the day's ceremonies, including one of Dean Byrd-Jacobs' students. The doctor of physical therapy students will also graduate. This marks the first commencement with President Kavalhuna.

Byrd-Jacobs recently returned from Washington, D.C. after attending the Council of Graduate Schools, a conference for national and international institutions. Pro-Quest repository for dissertations (which WMU uses) will soon include an accessibility checker that aligns with ADA requirements. It will scan all dissertations for accessibility and allow students to check before uploading. Pro-Quest also has a new AI tool that allows one to summarize a dissertation.

Byrd-Jacobs highlighted a session attended on the importance of graduate education for regions and states by directly impacting communities (not solely for the student). Key themes prospective students use to select programs 1. affordability 2. time to graduation 3. modality and 4. career outcomes. Over 100 graduate proposals were reviewed last month. This is an accomplishment, meaning, faculty are reviewing programs, changing/updating courses, eliminating barriers, and so forth, a sign that programs are evolving to stay current and, hopefully, attractive to students. Reminder that PLA now has a fee associated. This is standardized across WMU (approved by Board of Trustees) and set at \$250 for graduate PLA. This fee is charged regardless of whether credits approved or not.

DeChano-Cook report included a thank you for hosting a December meeting to ensure all curriculum proposals approved and signed by the end of the calendar year. DeChano-Cook drew attention to the GSC charge related to 5000 level courses. A reminder was issued that this will need to be discussed and brought to the Faculty Senate floor. DeChano-Cook recommended our first action focus on a definition/clarification of what 5000 level means.

Binford updated on the chief justice election. The individual has been elected but not yet announced. The person will begin onboarding next week and commence full role in January. The position will be served for a full academic year. Planning for the GSA gala is underway. Small awards will be given this year. The organization will seek nominations from faculty and students. The Graduate Allocations Committee held its last cycle in November. There were 18 conferences, four professional certifications, and 10 grants for events (in addition to operational costs) were allocated. The committee also updated its bylaws to align with Graduate College awards. Masters students may receive two and doctoral may not receive three.

Unfinished Business

Chair Zondag introduced his summary of the AI report and outlined four main issues and recommended sub-committees be created so that work related to Charge #3 AI may be completed in the spring. Chair Zondag suggested recommendations be made and included in a final report and reviewed with 1. Graduate College 2. program directors and faculty, then 3. returned to GSC and GSA for final review.

Given two key charges needing to be addressed in the spring, Byrd-Jacobs suggested two sub-committees be created. One sub-committee to work on AI charge and the second to focus on 5000-level courses. These smaller groups can complete work and report to each other. This allows members to select the topic they are most invested in.

Sub-committee membership is as follows:

- a. 5000-level: Linn, Cummings, Hrivnyak, Byrd-Jacobs, Simon, Gustafson, Gray, and DeChano-Cook. The group is to be led by Gustafson.
- b. AI: Zondag, Carignano, Harnar, Fiore, and Teichert, with Roberts liaison from Graduate College. The group is to be led by Chair Zondag.

Binford will seek out two GSA student volunteers to serve on the sub-committees (one student per sub-committee).

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

[MOTION] It was moved by Simon, seconded by Linn, to adjourn the meeting at 3:46 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The Graduate Studies Council will meet next on January 22 in Walwood Hall-Bertha Davis Room-111W at 3 pm.

Approval

Submitted by Laura Teichert, Ex-Officio

Minutes were approved on 29 January 2026.