
**GRADUATE STUDIES COUNCIL
Minutes of 26 March 2026 Meeting**

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Western Michigan University Faculty Senate Graduate Studies Council was called to order at 3 p.m. on 26 March in the Bertha Davis Room of Walwood Hall by Marcellis Zondag, Chair.

Members Present: Upul Attanayake, Claire Binford, Lisa DeChano-Cook, Tony Dennis (substitute for Christine Byrd-Jacobs), Jennifer Fiore, Michael Harnar, Michelle Hrivnyak, Cindy Linn, Larry Simon, Jessyca Olvera (substitute for Kristhyna Fermin), Sue Steuer (substitute for Micky Carignano), Marcellis Zondag

Members Absent: Lori Gray, Peter Gustafson

Advisory Members Present: Carrie Cumming

Ex Officio Present: Laura Teichert

Quorum

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

Agenda

[MOTION] It was moved by Attanayake, seconded by Fiore, to accept the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

[MOTION] It was moved by Attanayake, seconded by DeChano-Cook, to approve the 26 February minutes as presented. With two abstentions, the motion carried.

Reports of Officers

Chair Zondag reported an update provided at the March Faculty Senate meeting regarding the council's activities.

Ex Officio Teichert reported that council leadership elections will be held at the first fall 2026 council meeting. She added that Chair Zondag is no longer eligible to serve as chair.

Reports of University Representatives

Dennis provided the Graduate College report, noting that Graduate College Poster Day is scheduled for 9 April, and judges are currently being sought. The All-University Awards Ceremony will take place on 13 April from 5 to 7 p.m. The Graduate College is in the process of selecting fellowship recipients for several awards, including the Doctoral Scholar Awards, Doctoral Completion Fellowship, Thurgood Marshall Fellowship, and Research and Travel Grants. Graduate Student Appreciation Week is scheduled for 6 through 10 April.

DeChano-Cook reported that MOA-26/03: *Revise Faculty -driven Prior Learning Assessment Opportunities for Graduate Programs* was approved at the February Faculty Senate meeting. It is anticipated that there will be one curriculum proposal in May. DeChano-Cook will follow up as necessary.

Binford and Olvera provided the Graduate Student Association report, noting the completion of the recent funding allocation cycle, which resulted in awards supporting eight conference participations, one certificate program, and one data collection initiative. It was reported that The Hilltop Review will resume publication in the fall semester. The organization is currently seeking faculty advisors and plans to issue a call for editors and reviewers in the near future. The GSA Gala is scheduled for 17 April at 7 p.m. in the Fetzer Center.

Unfinished Business

Chair Zondag postponed the Graduate Artificial Intelligence Use Policy item to the next meeting agenda.

Cummings provided a spreadsheet detailing 5000-level courses with mixed undergraduate and graduate enrollment. Discussion centered on whether graduate students consistently receive graduate-level credit,

how instructional delivery differs, and the implications for policies allowing up to 12 transfer credits at the 5000 level. The council members considered the potential development of a Memorandum of Action (MOA) to clarify expectations for graduate students enrolled in 5000-level courses. One proposal suggested requiring additional graduate-level work; however, concerns were raised that such requirements would create inconsistencies in grading schemas and effectively differentiate the course beyond a shared designation. It was determined that additional data analysis is necessary before proceeding with MOA creation. Chair Zondag and Harnar will lead the analysis and MOA drafting. It was further recommended that the Graduate College engage Graduate Advisors (GAs) to assess whether the issue is systemic across programs or isolated to specific disciplines, ensuring that any future policy response is evidence-based and appropriately targeted.

New Business

Graduate Teaching and Research Awards were finalized as follows:

- Teaching Award Recipients
 - Master's Level: Rosemarie Davidson, Psychology; Kaleb Nuesse, Music
 - Doctoral Level: Justin Honer, Geological and Environmental Sciences; Latifa Ayad-Hall, English; Sia Isaria Mwendu, Civil and Construction Engineering

- Research Award Recipients
 - Master's Level: Emily Daniel, English
 - Doctoral Level: Abdullah Ibrahim, Geological and Environmental Sciences; Jamie Bienhoff, English; Hope Vanzo-Sparks, Biological Sciences

Attanayake raised a topic regarding inconsistencies in the administration of qualifying examinations across programs and the absence of a formalized policy. It was noted that individual programs retain autonomy in designing final academic experiences, resulting in varied approaches without a standardized requirement. Reference was made to expectations from the Higher Learning Commission, which emphasizes the need for "rigorous evaluation" in graduate education. It was suggested that resolution of these inconsistencies should occur at the departmental level, allowing programs to align practices with disciplinary standards while ensuring compliance with accreditation expectations.

Harnar raised concerns regarding inconsistencies in the ratio of enrolled graduate students to available graduate assistantships across colleges. It was suggested that variation may be partially attributable to structural differences, including the higher number of laboratory-based courses within the College of Arts and Sciences and the instructional demands associated with large-enrollment courses. It was stated that these disparities reflect broader resource allocation and instructional support considerations rather than a uniform institutional standard. It was concluded that further examination and potential alignment of assistantship distribution would need to be advanced at the college level, with deans positioned to lead and advocate for any necessary changes.

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

[MOTION] It was moved by Fiore, seconded by Teichert, to adjourn the meeting at 4:14 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The Graduate Studies Council will meet next on 23 April via Webex at 3 p.m.

Approval

Submitted by Jennifer Fiore, Secretary

Minutes were approved on 23 April 2026