



Graduate Student Association
University of Rhode Island

URI GSA General Assembly
Meeting Minutes for 02/20/2026

Date: 02/20/2026

Location: Hamilton Senate Chamber, Memorial Union (3rd floor, Room 300)

Time: 5:00 pm

Members in Attendance: (Executive Council)

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| Justin Watkins | President |
| Vacant | Vice President |
| Marianne Naana Otoo | Treasurer |
| Joshua Franco | Interim Secretary |
| Jordyn Hickey | Interim Events Coordinator |
| Ruth Nangeh Najel | Social Media Manager |
| Subek Acharya | Webmaster |
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| Mariam Oladepo | Past Treasurer |

Absent

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| Moazzem Houssain Saeem | GAU Liaison |
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| Ruth Nangeh Najel | Social Media Manager |
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Members in Attendance: (Senate)

Quorum: (32)/(42). 1/3 of Voting Members

- I. Call to Order.
- II. Approval of 01/30/2026
- III. Roll Call
- IV. Approval of the Agenda
 - a. Approval of the agenda was passed with majority vote
- V. New Senators Welcome
- VI. Committee Reports (5 minutes each)

- a. Constitution and By-Laws Committee: (Matthew Cayer):
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - b. Events Committee: (Tracy Santos):
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - c. Graduate Student Conference Committee: (Emelia Tawiah-Arthur and Dakota Hunter):
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - d. Publicity Committee: (Evelyn Mensah)
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - e. Nominations and Elections Committee: (Nick Labriola):
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - f. Technology Committee (Sansrit Paudel):
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - g. Budget and Finance Committee: (Gavin Moffat):
 - i. Committee meeting report
 - 1. Updates on the investments and approvals (id din't catch everything else)
- VII. Executive Board Reports (5 minutes each)
- a. President
 - i. External Revenue Task Force Update
 - b. Treasurer
 - i. Current Accounts Status
- VIII. Unfinished Business
- a. Google Drives Set Up And Shared Password Manager
- IX. New Business
- a. Drink Tickets Budget Request
 - i. 750
 - b. New Constitution Review and Voting
 - i. CONSTITUTION HERE
 - ii. Gavin made a point of the constitution too closely aligning with the undergraduate one
 - iii. Discussion about fixes in future made by Matt and a placeholder one for now, concerns defined within the bylaws also too
 - iv. Brought up review by lawyer, passing nd voting on this now, then ending up having so next time bylaws reviewed by a lawyer alongside the constitution alongside any amendments to be made by the senate at large would be proposed and passed all at once
 - v. Gavin put forward amendment, amendment got repealed because wasn't within the constitution for the stipulation brought up and was tabled until he found the corresponding section
 - c. Shared Google Calendar
 - i. Shared calendar for everyone on the GSA to put events their committee will be having, meetings for each committee advertised, and will include emails
 - d. Interim Vice President Position
 - e. Interim Chair Remuneration and Bonuses for Senators

- f. Quality of Life Task Force
 - g. Rescinded amendment made prior by Gavin, point of clarification asked for by marianne in regards to the guidance needed for reimbursement to student groups, clarified about changes that would occur in the bylaws and current language that was debated on wasn't there
 - h. Amendment asked to be drafted for zoom and hybrid meeting inclusion
 - i. Friendly amendment to the constitution passed
 - j. New constitution passed with friendly amendment
- X. Adjournment

II. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM in the Hamilton Senate Chamber. With 28 of 42 voting members present, quorum was confirmed.

III. Approval of January 30, 2026 Minutes

A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes dated 01/30/2026.

Vote:

- In Favor: Majority
- Opposed: 0
- Abstentions: Minimal

Motion Passed.

IV. Approval of the Agenda

The agenda was presented for approval. A motion was made and seconded.

Vote:

- In Favor: Majority
- Opposed: 0
- Abstentions: Minimal

Motion Passed by Majority Vote.

V. Welcome to New Senators

New Senators were formally welcomed. Brief introductions were encouraged to foster engagement and familiarity across committees.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Constitution and By-Laws Committee (Matthew Cayer)

The committee reported that discussion of the proposed new constitution and potential alterations would initially be deferred to allow additional internal review and structured preparation. The committee emphasized its commitment to ensuring Senators have adequate time and context prior to deliberation.

Later during New Business, the constitution was formally reviewed and voted upon. The committee reiterated that bylaws may be refined following constitutional adoption and recommended future legal review to ensure alignment and compliance.

B. Events Committee (Tracy Santos)

The Events Committee reported active planning for a Mario Kart event scheduled for the 27th. Discussions included event logistics, participation format, and engagement strategies. While planning is well underway, final logistical confirmations are pending.

The committee continues coordinating with the Publicity Committee to ensure alignment with broader engagement goals and maximize participation.

C. Graduate Student Conference Committee (Emelia Tawiah-Arthur & Dakota Hunter)

The committee reported significant progress following a recent Friday planning meeting. The keynote speaker, Dr. Wolff, has been confirmed, and alignment regarding the conference theme and direction has been established.

The conference will adopt a revised format rather than a traditional academic structure to increase accessibility and interdisciplinary engagement. Subcommittee progress was reviewed in programming, logistics, sponsorship outreach, and budget management.

Additional faculty participation has been secured from history and philosophy, culture and arts, and communications. Interest has also been expressed by Tammy Reiss, Women's Basketball Coach at the University of Rhode Island.

Posters have been distributed, and assistance with broader distribution was requested. Three additional event dates are being finalized (one in March and two in April spaced approximately three weeks apart).

Discussions included outreach strategies emphasizing community engagement beyond campus and encouraging attendees to invite broader community members.

D. Publicity Committee (Evelyn Mensah)

The Publicity Committee reported ongoing efforts to promote the Graduate Student Conference and other GSA initiatives. Collaboration across committees has improved consistency in messaging and visual branding.

The committee is reviewing outreach analytics and refining promotional strategies. Plans include new poster creation and identifying potential gaps in advertising coverage.

E. Nominations and Elections Committee (Nick Labriola)

No major updates were reported. However, early recruitment was emphasized to prepare for the upcoming election cycle. Increased participation now will ensure smoother execution of election procedures later in the semester.

F. Technology Committee (Sansrit Paudel)

The committee reported acquisition of an advanced high-value webcam to improve hybrid meeting quality and recordings.

Preliminary planning for an upcoming hackathon continues. Discussions include scope, goals, accessibility, and interdisciplinary participation. Further proposals will be presented at a later meeting.

G. Budget and Finance Committee (Gavin Moffat)

The Finance Committee reported ongoing fiscal planning and compliance review. A meeting is scheduled next Wednesday to evaluate potential accounting firms for required financial filings. Evaluation criteria include cost, services provided, and long-term sustainability.

The committee also discussed:

- Fund tracking and reallocation
- External Revenue Committee initiatives
- Conference funding oversight
- Investment exploration and long-term sustainability strategies

These discussions are exploratory and intended to inform future decision-making.

The committee plans to meet every three weeks to ensure consistent oversight and accountability.

VII. Executive Board Reports

A. President – External Revenue Task Force Update

President Watkins provided updates on administrative discussions related to Pints and Perspectives as a conduit for URI representation.

Additional conversations included:

- Potential keynote speakers for Living Labs
- Industrial partnerships
- Entrepreneurial initiatives
- Transitioning toward sponsor and donation acquisition once venues and speakers are finalized

B. Treasurer – Current Accounts Status

Treasurer Otoo provided updates on current account balances and fiscal positioning. Emphasis was placed on responsible spending and maintaining flexibility for conference and programming needs.

VIII. Unfinished Business

A. Shared Google Drives & Password Manager

Discussion centered around implementing shared digital infrastructure.

Quotes were presented for 1Password:

- \$20/month option
- \$14 per user per month option

Discussion focused on cost structure (per Senate, Executive Board, or committee-based licensing). It was agreed that a formal budget proposal will be prepared once a recommended structure is determined.

No vote taken at this time.

IX. New Business

A. Drink Tickets Budget Request – \$750

A budget request of \$750 was presented for drink tickets.

Vote:

- In Favor: Majority
- Opposed: Minimal
- Abstentions: Minimal

Motion Passed.

B. New Constitution Review and Voting

The proposed constitution was reviewed.

Gavin Moffat raised concern that the constitution closely mirrors the undergraduate governance document.

Matthew Cayer noted that immediate adoption would serve as a placeholder, with future revisions to occur through bylaw amendments. It was proposed that future constitutional amendments and bylaw revisions be reviewed by legal counsel and presented collectively.

Gavin introduced an amendment; however, it was repealed as it did not align with current constitutional stipulations and was tabled pending identification of the relevant section.

A friendly amendment regarding Zoom and hybrid meeting inclusion was drafted and incorporated.

Friendly Amendment: Passed.

Final Vote on Constitution (with Friendly Amendment):

- In Favor: Majority
- Opposed: Minimal
- Abstentions: Minimal

New Constitution Passed.

C. Shared Google Calendar

A centralized Google Calendar was proposed for:

- Committee meetings
- Events
- Email inclusion
- Advertising coordination

Approved by consensus.

D. Interim Vice President Position & Compensation Discussion

It was agreed that no interim Vice President position will be created this semester.

President Watkins proposed:

- \$200–\$250 raise for Chair Abbas
- Bonuses for Senators

Concerns were raised by Senator Nicholas Labriola regarding fairness and potential inequities. Other members recommended keeping funds in the general budget.

Outcome:

- Chair stipend increase approved
- No senator bonuses approved
- No interim VP appointed
- Remaining funds left unallocated

X. Quality of Life Task Force

Discussion included clarification regarding reimbursement guidance for student groups. Marianne requested clarification regarding bylaw language. It was noted that previously debated language was not present in the current constitutional draft.

An amendment was rescinded following clarification.

XI. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded.

Vote: Majority in favor.

The meeting was adjourned.

Summary

The Constitution and By-Laws Committee reported that discussion of the proposed new constitution and any potential alterations will be deferred to a future meeting. The committee noted that additional internal review and preparation is needed before the document is formally presented to the Senate. Once ready, the committee intends to provide a structured presentation outlining the purpose of the proposed changes, areas of continuity and revision, and any anticipated implications for Senate operations. The committee emphasized its commitment to ensuring that Senators have adequate time and context for discussion and deliberation prior to any further action.

The Events Committee, chaired by Tracy Santos, provided an update on ongoing and upcoming programming efforts. The committee reported active planning for a Mario Kart event scheduled for the 27th, including discussions related to logistics, format, and participant engagement. While core planning is underway, some details remain under development and will be finalized closer to the event date. The committee also noted continued coordination with other committees to ensure events are well-publicized and aligned with broader GSA engagement goals.

The Graduate Student Conference Committee, co-chaired by Emelia Tawiah-Arthur and Dakota Hunter, reported on a committee meeting held on Friday during which conference planning progress was reviewed in detail. The committee shared that they have met with the keynote speaker, Dr. Wolff, and confirmed alignment on expectations and thematic direction. The committee announced that the upcoming conference will follow a new format rather than a traditional conference structure, with the goal of increasing accessibility, engagement, and interdisciplinary participation. Subcommittee progress was reviewed, and next steps were identified to maintain momentum as planning continues.

The Publicity Committee, chaired by Evelyn Mensah, reported ongoing efforts to support publicity for both the Graduate Student Conference and other upcoming GSA events. The committee highlighted continued collaboration with event-hosting committees to ensure consistent messaging and timely promotion across platforms. Efforts remain focused on increasing visibility, refining outreach strategies, and coordinating promotional materials to strengthen engagement both on campus and beyond. The committee noted that feedback mechanisms are being used to assess outreach effectiveness and inform future improvements.

The Nominations and Elections Committee, chaired by Nick Labriola, reported no major updates at this time. However, the chair emphasized the importance of early engagement and encouraged Senators and members of the graduate community to join the committee. It was noted that the committee's workload and responsibilities will increase significantly as the election cycle approaches, and early participation will support smoother planning and execution of election-related processes.

The Technology Committee, chaired by Sansrit Paudel, reported progress on strengthening the GSA's technological capacity. Updates were provided regarding the acquisition of a high-value, advanced webcam intended to improve the quality of meetings, recordings, and hybrid engagement. The committee also shared preliminary planning for an upcoming hackathon, including early discussions around scope, goals, and potential participation. Additional details and proposals will be brought forward at a future meeting once planning advances further.

The Finance Committee, chaired by Gavin Moffat, reported continued work related to fiscal planning, compliance, and overall budget oversight. The committee is scheduled to meet next Wednesday to review potential accounting firms that the GSA may engage for required financial filings and compliance needs. This review will consider cost, scope of services, and long-term suitability for the organization.

The committee also reported ongoing discussion regarding the reallocation and tracking of funds to support External Revenue Committee initiatives, event programming, and Graduate Student Conference funding requests. Emphasis is being placed on transparency, consistency, and alignment with Senate-approved budget priorities. Additionally, the committee noted preliminary conversations regarding long-term financial sustainability, including exploration of investment options and revenue-planning strategies. These discussions are exploratory in nature and intended to inform future decision-making rather than prompt immediate action. Moving forward, the Finance Committee plans to meet every three weeks to ensure consistent oversight of expenditures, timely review of funding requests, and ongoing fiscal accountability.

VII.

Posters have been posted, and assistance with broader distribution was requested. Planning is underway to confirm three additional event dates, including one in March and two in April scheduled approximately three weeks apart. New faculty participants have committed from history and philosophy, culture and arts, and communications, with interest including Tammy Reiss, Women's Basketball Coach at the University of Rhode Island. New posters will be created, and feedback was requested on advertising strategies, including identifying any gaps in current outreach efforts. Moving forward, the outreach strategy will place greater emphasis on engaging the broader community beyond campus through direct engagement, while also encouraging participants to invite friends and community members to help build attendance and momentum.

Additional discussion included updates with administration regarding support for *Pints and Perspectives* as a conduit for URI representation, as well as conversations about potential keynote speakers for Living Labs and the promotion of new initiatives in the coming year related to interdisciplinary affairs, industrial partnerships, and entrepreneurial opportunities. The meeting concluded with discussion about transitioning toward securing event sponsors and general donations, with fundraising efforts to be prioritized after venues and speakers are finalized.

Unfinished Business

The group discussed the setup of shared Google Drives and the use of a shared password manager. Quotes were presented for one Password, including an option priced at \$20 per month and an alternative priced at \$14 per user per month. Discussion focused on determining the most effective and cost-efficient approach, including whether access and costs should be structured per Senate, per Executive Board, or per committee. It was agreed that a budget request will be prepared and presented once a recommended approach for purchases is determined.

New Business

A budget request of \$750 was presented for drink tickets, and the request was approved to proceed as proposed. The new constitution was reviewed and voted on during the meeting. Gavin raised a concern that the proposed constitution closely mirrors the undergraduate constitution. Matt noted that fixes could be made in the future, with a placeholder constitution used for now and related concerns addressed within the bylaws. The group also discussed having the constitution and any future amendments reviewed by a lawyer; the plan is to vote on the constitution now and conduct legal review of bylaws and amendments before future proposals are submitted to the Senate. Gavin proposed an amendment during the discussion, but it was repealed because it did not align with the current stipulations in the constitution and was tabled until the corresponding section could be identified.

A shared Google Calendar was proposed to centralize GSA events and committee meetings, which will include relevant emails and serve as a tool for scheduling and advertising activities across all committees. Discussion regarding the interim vice president position and compensation for the chair and senators was merged into a single topic. It was agreed that no interim vice presidential role will be established this semester. President Watkins proposed a raise for Chair Abbas of \$200–\$250 and suggested providing bonuses for senators. Concerns were raised by Senator Nicholas Labriola about fairness and the potential for a popularity contest influencing compensation, while other members, including Jordyn, Tracy, and Marianne, recommended keeping the funds in the general budget. The Senate reached consensus to approve the chair stipend increase, leave other funds unallocated, and not appoint a vice president this semester.