Senate
Minutes

April 24, 2026
CE261

The Chair, F. Odartey-Wellington, called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm.

1. Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum and Land Acknowledgement

The Chair began with the acknowledgement that Cape Breton University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British Crown in 1726. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

Present:
Harsimran Kaur Antaal, Sahand Ashtab, Tammy Bernasky, Matthias Bierenstiel, Tanya Brann-Barrett, Martin Chandler, David Dingwall, Shannon Ezzat, Virginia Gunn, Michael Henick, Enrique Hernandez, Angelica Bermudez Herrera, Jenny Kassen, Harkanwal Kaur, Carolin Kreber, Tracy Lillington, Doug Lionais, Ellyn Lyle, Jaxson MacDonald, Shauna MacDonald, Gordon MacInnis, Stephanie MacQuarrie, Terry MacDonald, John Mayich, Willena Nemeth, Rod Nicholls, Felix Odartey-Wellington, Andy Parnaby, Kinnon Pitcher, Sergiy Pysarenko, Timothy Rawlings, Quinn Rowe, Nathan Ryan, Rebecca Seymour, Nancy Spina, Toyin Tade, Destiny Tobin, Jamie Tunnicliff, Tom Ue, Bilynda Whiting

Regrets:
Melissa Bishop, Sean Campbell, Linda Cavanaugh, Karen Kennedy, Emily MacLeod, Chris McDonald, John Nadeau, Kathleen Nash, Marcia Ostashewski, Joe Parish, Alex Paul, Stefanie Ruel, Nancy Samson, Ann Sylliboy, Laurianne Sylvester, Karen Tobin, Kellie White, Guosong Wu

F. Odartey-Wellington welcomed the incoming Students' Union executive as guests to the meeting and welcomed the following members to Senate.

- Paarth Mehla, President & CEO
- Bria Goyetche, Executive Vice President
- Nova Nguyen, Vice President Promotions
- Tracy Dike, Vice President Finance & Operations

2. <u>Take Note Debate – Start Smart Program:</u>

F. Odartey-Wellington explained the Take Note Debate process and then turned it over to John Mayich, Director of Student Affairs, and his team for the presentation.

Motion:
Moved by J. Mayich, seconded by Tanya Brann Barret to allow speaking rights for Jennifer Billard, the manager of student experience, and Donalda Johnston Roper, the manager of Student Support Services.
Motion Carried.

J. Mayich introduced the Start Smart program, an orientation initiative designed to familiarize incoming students direct-entry, transfer, and graduate students with campus supports and services outside the classroom. The program, in development since approximately 2015, evolved from an in-person conference model to an online format in 2020–2021. While early uptake was strong, participation later declined, prompting a comprehensive review and update of the content over the past year. Members were advised that outdated materials were revised to improve usability, and short video content is expected to be added in the coming months. The intent is for Start Smart to become a mandatory module linked to student access to Moodle courses, with consultations indicating feasibility for implementation in September. Comparable models were noted at other Nova Scotia and Canadian institutions.

Ms. Jennifer Billard advised that Start Smart is a key component of student onboarding, complementing existing supports such as pre-arrival programming, orientation activities, advising, and student navigator services. She explained that the Moodle-based resource will remain accessible to students throughout their time at CBU, serving as a central, ongoing reference point. The content has been reorganized into thematic sections to improve clarity and usability, links directly to up-to-date web resources, and includes interactive, accessible activities. Feedback from the Students' Union informed enhancements to content and wayfinding. The module concludes with a quiz and badge completion, with work underway to ensure accessibility compliance and consistency across sections.

F. Odartey-Wellington thanked the team for their presentation and opened the floor for questions and feedback.

During discussion, members expressed strong support for the initiative and raised questions regarding faculty access, timing, and implementation.

- It was suggested that faculty be granted access to the Start Smart module as a reference tool to better support student advising and awareness of available resources.
- Concerns were also noted regarding completion timelines for students who register late and the potential impact on access to course Moodle shells. In response, presenters advised that access for faculty and staff is planned, and that internal communication will be important to support student completion. The estimated completion time was noted as 45–60 minutes.
- Additional suggestions included providing clear troubleshooting guidance for faculty and staff to assist students experiencing completion issues.
- Members also offered feedback on wayfinding and signage to align Moodle content with campus navigation, and inquired about the use of engagement data and metrics to assess

student interaction with the module. Presenters advised that activity completion can be tracked within Moodle, though more granular engagement data may be limited.

- Questions were also raised regarding measures of success, technical support processes, and testing, with presenters noting student union involvement and initial user testing with plans to continue piloting it with smaller groups as content development progresses.
- The importance of a clear communication plan was emphasized, including the potential development of FAQs to support students experiencing completion or access issues. The anticipated measure of success was identified as increased student engagement with campus services, addressing ongoing concerns that students are often unaware of available supports amid high volumes of information.
- Members offered suggestions to enhance usability, including indicating estimated completion time for each section and exploring the future potential of integrating content into a centralized knowledge or Co-pilot-type resource for staff and faculty reference. In response, presenters advised that approximate completion time will be communicated and acknowledged interest in knowledge-sharing tools, noting that while related discussions have occurred, broader implementation would require coordination, resourcing, and campus-wide adoption.
- Further discussion addressed concerns regarding student information overload at the beginning of term and the potential value of reminder communications later in the semester to reinforce awareness of the Start Smart resource. Questions were raised about the possibility of allowing students to bypass content or fast-forward to the final quiz; however, presenters advised that full completion is important to ensure students have been exposed to key information and policies, particularly given recurring concerns that students report being unaware of available supports. It was clarified that the module includes links to institutional policies such as the Student Code of Conduct, Respectful Campus, consent, and sexual violence policies, serving as an additional accountability measure.
- Questions were also raised regarding assessment requirements. Presenters confirmed that the final quiz will allow unlimited attempts, with the intent of ensuring completion rather than creating a barrier to access. The discussion concluded with broader reflections on the evolving institutional approach to responsible and structured use of artificial intelligence, noting the potential need for future Senate-level discussion on AI policy and practice.
- The Chair sought consensus on whether the Start Smart module should become a mandatory component of student onboarding. Clarification was provided that the intention is for students to complete the module once per academic year to gain access to Moodle courses, rather than repeating it for each course. Members suggested that, consistent with Take Notes debate, feedback be considered and a formal written motion be brought forward for decision at a subsequent Senate meeting.

3. <u>Reports and Items for Information</u>

3.1 <u>President</u>

President Dingwall reported the following:

- The President reported that the Board of Governors approved a balanced operating budget for 2026–2027, achieved in part through the use of reserve funds in response to significant enrollment pressures stemming from national declines in international student enrolment following IRCC policy changes. Over the three-year period ending March 2027, enrollment decline and the discontinuation of post-baccalaureate programs have resulted in an estimated $77 million reduction in revenue. The University revised its enrollment target to approximately 3,500 students and aligned operations accordingly, implementing staffing and spending reductions, including impacts to approximately 50 positions this year, following 112 positions affected last year. Tuition increases of 5% for undergraduate programs and international differential fees, and 3% for most professional programs, were approved, while regulated tuition remains unchanged. Despite these measures, the University continues to prioritize academic quality, student services, and targeted financial aid in support of long-term sustainability.
- President Dingwall also provided updates on collaboration between Career Services and Communications, strong application volumes for new academic programs, and continued demand for high-quality new programming.
- He noted the Chancellor-designates recent campus visit along with ongoing national advocacy related to international student policy and participation in sector-wide discussions.
- Additional updates included attendance at provincial leadership roundtables, progress on campus infrastructure projects, including the medical campus, Tartan Downs, and childcare facility expansion, and engagement in emerging opportunities related to national defence funding.

Following the President's report, Senate members commented favourably on the approval of the balanced budget and the strong application numbers for new academic programs. Questions were raised regarding the use of reserve funds, enrolment planning, the scale of revenue reductions, and funding for the Tartan Downs project.

- In response to questions about reserves, the President advised that reserves are being used to balance the current and upcoming budgets and that most reserve funds will be exhausted through this process, with only a limited amount potentially remaining as the University approaches a more structurally balanced position.
- Questions regarding the revised enrolment target of 3,500 students prompted discussion about changes in the University's program mix since earlier periods of similar enrolment. The President noted that new and revised programming is essential for competitiveness and relevance and that some traditional programs may need to adapt to changing student and labour-market demand. While 3,500 students represent a realistic near-term target, the President indicated an intention to pursue growth when conditions permit.
- Clarification was also provided on the reported $77 million revenue reduction, which reflects cumulative lost revenue over a three-year period due primarily to enrolment decline, including the elimination of post-baccalaureate programs. The Vice-President Finance added that gross expenditures have declined significantly, noting that the operating budget approved for 2026–2027 is approximately $89.8 million, down from a peak of approximately $131.8 million two years earlier.
- In response to questions about Tartan Downs, the President clarified that the University's direct financial contribution was limited to the initial land purchase, with capital and

financing costs funded through provincial and federal sources. Phase one of the project will include 145 housing units, within a longer-term development plan.

3.2 Vice President Academic and Provost

R. Nicholls reported the following:

- Deans John Nadeau and Chris McDonald were absent to attend the opening of a new student residence at the Beinn Mhàbu Campus of Baie Academy College, highlighting the importance of CBU's academic partnerships across the Island.
- Senate was advised that the examination period had concluded and grading was underway. Several university achievements were noted, including recent promotions approved by the President, national and regional awards received by members of the CBU community, and the appointment of Ellen Lyle as Provost and Vice-President Academic at the University of Regina.
- An update was provided on the Bilateral Academic Program Review, with departments and schools working toward completion of action plans by May 15, and members were encouraged to remain engaged in the process. Strong application volumes for new graduate programs were reported, with the caution that initial cohorts remain modest within the context of overall enrolment decline.
- With respect to the approved budget, it was noted that the Board of Governors is considering financial planning within a multi-year framework, and Senators were encouraged to review the detailed planning documentation shared through Senate's Planning and Review Committee. Academic implications of budget reductions were outlined, including significant cuts to part-time teaching budgets, and ongoing work to refine the fall and winter timetables was acknowledged.

Following the report, a question was raised regarding the potential impact of recent layoffs and budget implications on existing and proposed programs. R. Nicholls clarified that the Board approved a one-year budget within a three-year planning framework and that no additional program closures are planned at this time beyond those already approved. He emphasized that all new program proposals continue to undergo rigorous academic and financial review to ensure sustainability.

R. Nicholls also noted that this meeting marked Gordon MacInnis's final Senate meeting prior to his retirement, and the Chair and Senate extended congratulations and best wishes in recognition of his service.

3.3 Unama'ki College

No Report.

3.4 Students' Union

R. Seymour, SU Vice-President, provided the report on behalf of the Students' Union and highlighted the following:

- The Students' Union noted that its term concludes on April 30 and that the outgoing executive has been focused on wrapping up activities and supporting the transition of the incoming executive team.
- Over the past year, the Students' Union executive, Student Council, and full-time staff undertook a comprehensive revision of the bylaws to better reflect current student needs. As part of this work, changes were made to the Student Representative Council to broaden representation, including the addition of new seats for Indigenous students, online learners, women students, and in-community program students.
- The Students' Union expanded its operations during the year, opening new locations in the NSCC Medical Campus, a merchandise store, a Welcome Centre, and resuming operation of the Pit Lounge, bringing the total number of Students' Union-managed operations to five.
- Six Indigenous and international student scholarships were awarded based on academic achievement and community involvement. The Students' Union also delivered several themed and awareness weeks, including Academic Integrity Week, Pride Week, Multicultural Week, Women's Week, Healthy Living Week, and Open Education Week in collaboration with Atlantic OER. Data collected during Open Education Week highlighted student financial pressures, with many indicating that textbook savings would be directed toward food.
- Outreach activities were conducted with local high schools and distance education learners, including engagement with the Millbrook and In-Community Program. Recreational programming included ski trips offered in partnership with Cape Smokey.
- The Students' Union confirmed its continued use of an anonymous sexual violence reporting platform following the expiry of the University's previous agreement and noted associated awareness campaigns. Through its Capers Helping Capers initiative, the Students' Union supported several local charities and reported raising a total of $25,000 for the selected organizations.
- Representatives attended multiple provincial and national conferences throughout the year. The Students' Union also highlighted several leadership milestones, including historic firsts in executive representation and external student leadership roles.
- The presentation concluded with expressions of appreciation to Senate and committee members for their support throughout the term and noted the conclusion of the current executive's mandate and transition to the incoming team.

F. Odartey-Wellington commended the Students' Union for the significant work accomplished during its term, noting in particular its outreach to in-community learners and the expansion of the Union's presence both on campus and within the broader student community. Appreciation was expressed for the positive student experience fostered by the outgoing team, and congratulations were extended on a productive year.

3.5 Board of Governors

M. Bierenstiel reported that the Board of Governors met earlier that day, a comprehensive overview of the budget and current financial context was provided, with approval of the budget as the primary agenda item. The next meeting of the Board of Governors is scheduled for late June.

3.6 Executive Committee

H. Antaal reported the following:

The Senate Executive last met on April 10, 2026. The meeting included discussion of holding a take-note debate, as demonstrated at the current meeting with the Start Smart Program. Updates were reviewed from several standing committees, including the Academic Committee, which discussed potential language changes related to course evaluations. The Quality Assurance Committee reported on proposed updates to its terms of reference, clarification of Students' Union voting representation, and consideration of nursing representation within the bylaws. The Senate Executive also discussed potential Senate bylaw amendments related to the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the establishment of a Library Council. The draft agenda for the current meeting was reviewed and approved.

4. Approval of the Minutes

- Senate – March 20, 2026

Motion:
Moved by C. Kreber, seconded by T. Brann Barrett, that Senate approve the minutes from the March 20th, 2026 Senate meeting.
Motion Carried. (8 abstentions)

5. Business Arising from the Minutes – N/A

6. Report from Senate Committees:

6.1 Academic Committee

C. Kreber reported that the Committee met earlier today and noted that a written report was included in the Senate material outlining recent committee activity. The report indicates that the committee has been active and that several items are expected to come forward to Senate for consideration at the next meeting in May.

6.2 Research

M. Bierenstiel provided an update from the Research Committee and expressed appreciation to the Research Assistant Committee, particularly Michelle Jetha for reviewing 38 RISE grant applications. He noted that decision letters will be issued shortly, with further details on funding outcomes and budget allocation to be reported at a future meeting. The Committee also completed minor updates to its terms of reference, which have been submitted to Bylaws. Upcoming agenda items include the Institute and Research Centre Policy and the Intellectual Property Policy, which are expected to come forward to Senate at a future meeting.

6.5 Planning and Review

R. Nicholls advised that following approval of the budget, the University will be undertaking an administrative reorganization of its academic structure over the next two to three years. This work builds on reorganization already completed within support units. As an initial step, Public Health within the Health Sciences Department will transition to the School of Science and Technology by the summer. It was emphasized that this change signals broader discussions to come, informed by financial pressures, enrollment shifts, external regulatory requirements, and accreditation considerations. Further planning and consultation are expected, and additional discussion will be brought forward to the Planning and Review Committee.

6.2 Quality Assurance

S. Ashtab advised that the Quality Assurance Committee met and reviewed its terms of reference, approving two minor revisions unanimously. The updates clarify that the student representative is a voting member of the Committee and formally reflect the School of Nursing's status as a standalone school by confirming representation from nursing faculty or a nurse practice educator on the Committee.

6.3 Teaching, Learning, and Evaluation

No. Report.

6.4 Bylaws and Procedures

It was noted that there was no report; however, concern was raised that any future changes to the University's academic structure would require a corresponding review of Senate bylaws and committee terms of reference to ensure alignment. It was emphasized that this process would require careful planning, consultation, and consideration of potential implications.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Harsimran Kaur Antaal
Secretary to Senate