Senate
Minutes

February 20, 2026
CE339

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, Matthias Bierenstiel, Tanya Brann-Barrett, Martin Chandler, Shannon Ezzat, Virginia Gunn, Enrique Hernandez, Angelica Bermudez Herrera, J Karen Kennedy, Carolin Kreber, Tracy Lillington, Doug Lionais, Jaxson MacDonald, Shauna MacDonald, Chris McDonald, Kathleen Nash, John Nadeau, Willena Nemeth, Rod Nicholls, Felix Odartey-Wellington, Marcia Ostashewski, Joe Parish, Andy Parnaby, Kinnon Pitcher, Timothy Rawlings, Karen Rowe, Stefanie Ruel, Nathan Ryan, Nancy Samson, Nancy Spina, Laurianne Sylvester, Toyin Tade, Destiny Tobin, Karen Tobin, Jamie Tunnicliff, Kellie White, Bilynda Whiting

Regrets:
Sahand Ashtab, Tammy Bernasky, Melissa Bishop, Sean Campbell, Linda Cavanaugh, David Dingwall, Michael Henick, Jenny Kassen, Harkanwal Kaur, Ellyn Lyle, Terry MacDonald, Gordon MacInnis, Emily MacLeod, Stephanie MacQuarrie, John Mayich, Alex Paul, Sergiy Pysarenko, Quinn Rowe, Rebecca Seymore, Ann Sylliboy, Tom Ue, Guosong Wu

2. <u>Orientation Brief:</u>

The Chair welcomed and introduced Dr. Tom Urbaniak provided an orientation to Senate. He highlighted the following:

The presentation highlighted Senate’s role as a deliberative and influential academic body, emphasizing discussion, consultation, and collegial governance over simply passing motions. It outlined Senate’s authority, committee structure, relationship with the Board of Governors, and basic procedures, while underscoring the value of thoughtful debate, consultation, and clear processes in supporting the academic mission of the university.

The discussion focused on whether Senate procedures, which largely follow Robert's Rules of Order, could be made more collegial and culturally responsive, including through Indigenous approaches such as greater use of consensus and less reliance on formal motions for routine matters (e.g., moving in and out of camera). It was noted that Chairs can already use informal practices like seeking unanimous consent or sensing the will of the room, while still operating within formal rules.

There was also discussion about why certain formal motions—particularly for in-camera sessions—remain important, as they represent an explicit and exceptional decision by Senate to depart from its usual openness.

The conversation then shifted to Senate's influence within the bicameral governance system, especially where Senate lacks final decision-making authority. Examples were shared of how Senate can exert influence through early consultation, committee work, budget input, reporting to the Board of Governors, and informal relationship-building between Senate and Board leadership. Participants reflected on how this influence may be evolving as governance structures and external pressures change, and noted the inherent overlap between academic and administrative responsibilities in university governance.

3. Nominations for Tributes Committee

Doug Lionais was nominated and accepted the nomination for the Tributes Committee.

4. Reports and Items for Information

4.1 President

No Report.

4.2 Vice President Academic and Provost

a) R. Nicholls presented his response to the Quality Assurance (QA) Review of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) program, noting that the BA is a long-standing and stable program, originally approved in 1984 and continuously offered since that time. He reiterated a concern previously raised during the BSc review: the practice of reviewing large, multidisciplinary degree programs should be reconsidered, as it can result in individual disciplinary programs being under-reviewed. While emphasizing this concern, he affirmed the importance of reviewing the BA core curriculum. He commended the self-study group and external reviewers for their strong recommendations to modernize the core curriculum, particularly their student-centred rather than discipline-based "turf protection" approach. Additional highlights were noted included recommendations to strengthen cooperation between Marketing and Recruitment and the SASS Dean and faculty (SS&T was cited as a positive model); enhanced experiential learning opportunities; and better alignment of the core curriculum with professional realities students will face after graduation.

<u>Motion:</u>
Moved by R. Nicholls, seconded by C. McDonald, that Senate approve the VPA Response to the Bachelor of Arts QA External Review.
It was clarified that, following Senate approval, the full QA package (self-study, external reviewers' report, responses, and VPA response) will proceed to the Quality Assurance Committee of Senate, after which action plans will be developed and implemented.
Motion Carried.

<u>Bilateral Academic Program Review (APR)</u>

R. Nicholls provided an update on the Bilateral Academic Program Review (APR) process since the previous Senate meeting and highlighted the following:

- The APR Working Group has met with Deans and Associate Deans by school to discuss preliminary categorizations of programs (no change required, modernization, revitalization, or rationalization).
- Follow-up meetings were held as requested, including discussions with all five Deans on shared issues.
- Key timelines:
    - By February 23, Deans were to submit initial program categorizations with brief rationales.
    - By March 2, the Working Group will respond with questions, comments, or suggested adjustments.
- Program assessment reports and associated action plans are targeted for completion and return to schools by May 15, ahead of the summer period. Over the summer, these reports will be integrated into a comprehensive CBU program portfolio, forming a foundation for future academic and strategic enrolment management (SEM) planning.

The VPA noted that development of a new academic plan is being deferred until completion of the provincially mandated APR process, to avoid duplication and overextension of institutional capacity. Uncertainty remains regarding how the province will ultimately use the APR reports, particularly in light of anticipated budget constraints within the Department of Advanced Education.

<u>2026–27 Budget Context and Related Developments</u>

He provided context for CBU's 2026–27 budget, noting that Planning and Review had already produced an austerity-focused pre-budget report. He highlighted the following:

- Budget Advisory Committee meetings are scheduled to resume shortly, leading to submission of the budget proposal to the Board in mid-to-late April.
- Significant financial challenges were highlighted, including a projected loss of approximately **$46 million in revenue** from post-baccalaureate programs alone;
- Positive developments were noted, including MPHEC approval of a third new master's program (Master of Health Innovation and Leadership)

    - While welcomed as future-oriented and academically important, it was emphasized that revenues from new master's programs will offset only a small fraction of projected losses.
- Ongoing cost-containment measures were outlined, including:
    - A second year of budget reductions at the school and department level.
    - A second round of Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program (VRIP) offers.
    - Reviews of sessional teaching, overloads, and spring/summer and fall/winter timetables.
    - Consideration of possible academic reorganization.
- He emphasized the interconnectedness of QA reviews, the APR process, and budget planning, and invited Senate members to engage in substantive discussion on these issues.

Following the report, discussion included the following:

With regard to how many students are expected and what is the capacity to fill the MBA and other master's programs, it was noted that the target intake is 35 students per program, beginning September 2026, and that Marketing and Recruitment activities are already underway. While external factors such as federal immigration initiatives may influence application volumes, the programs will operate with firm enrolment caps. Admissions will be managed deliberately, and the programs are designed to utilize existing capacity and will not require additional faculty resources.

A question was raised about whether categorizing programs through the Bilateral Academic Program Review (APR) as requiring modernization, revitalization, or rationalization has direct budget implications. The Vice-President Academic clarified that there is no direct or immediate link between APR categorizations and the annual budget process. Any connection is indirect and more likely to emerge over time, given broader provincial funding pressures.

It was explained that the province has provided specific criteria for program categorization, including financial health, labour market demand, enrolment trends, and graduation trends. While many criteria are straightforward, some—particularly labour market relevance for liberal arts disciplines—require interpretation. Deans have applied the criteria using a simple decision framework while ensuring that categorizations reflect CBU's institutional context and strengths.

Concern was expressed that the APR process may ultimately be used by the province to support system-wide reductions. In response, it was emphasized that CBU is using the interpretive flexibility within the process to frame programs strategically and to articulate the University's unique regional role and mandate. It was noted that launching a separate academic planning process alongside the APR would be impractical given current capacity, but that academic planning will resume once the APR is complete.

Discussion also addressed the financial impact of program growth. It was clarified that the medical school is not currently a revenue source for CBU, as tuition flows to Dalhousie University. However, indirect benefits were noted, including increased undergraduate interest in related programs. Graduate program growth was acknowledged as academically and reputationally important, though insufficient on its own to offset significant revenue losses, and it was noted that professional and graduate programs remain costly to operate.

4.3 Unama'ki College

L. Sylvester reported the following:

- The In-Business program launched earlier in the year; 17 students remain and are completing mentored, weekly work. The program concludes in March, with the aim of encouraging progression into the Business degree.
- Staffing updates include the upcoming departure of the Business Program Manager and the need to recruit a replacement, as well as plans to hire a coordinator for the L’nu Health Science Advantage program in collaboration with the School of Science and Technology.
- Remaining provincial funding for an internal Chair position is under review to determine whether it can be carried forward beyond the five-year period.
- Discussions are underway with We’koqma’q regarding a potential new in-community program, which would bring the total to six. In-community program information is being updated, with efforts to encourage greater faculty participation.
- Recruitment and communications activities are continuing, including updated viewbooks and spring/summer recruitment events.
- An information session for the Bachelor of Science pathway to Nursing is scheduled for March 4, supporting the second cohort, with participation from Nursing faculty and Unama’ki College.
- Students are being supported to attend conferences, including SEPI in Membertou (March 10–12).
- A new Knowledge Keeper, David Muse, has been engaged to support cultural activities with Unama’ki College.
- A four-year Mi’kmaq student graduate banquet is planned for May.

4.4 Students' Union

H. Antaal, SU President provided the report on behalf of the Students’ Union and highlighted the following:

- Pride Week was held last month; two opening events were cancelled due to snow days, but remaining events proceeded successfully. Events included Sex Star Bingo, queer trivia in collaboration with the Youth Project, and an Indigenous drag show with Cicero Crow in partnership with the Ekkian Indigenous Centre; overall attendance and student engagement were strong.
- Sexual health tabling was held in the cafeteria as part of Pride Week.
- Healthy Living Week followed immediately and included a Cape Smokey trip, free breakfast and health snacks, kickboxing and Zumba sessions with CB Rec, a pottery night,

food bank snack distribution, and sexual health and STI testing kits in collaboration with Health and Counselling Services.
- Student Services launched a workshop “passport” initiative to encourage attendance at workshops on job search, tenancy rights, and financial literacy, with prize incentives.
- A grocery shuttle was offered and utilized by 22 students.
- Student union election preparations are underway: nominations open next week, debates will be held March 3–5, polling will take place March 4–5, and official results will be announced March 7.

Appreciation was expressed to the Students’ Union executives for their work in fostering a strong campus culture and student experience.

On behalf of Senate, the Chair extended congratulations to SU Executive Vice President Rebecca Seymore, recognized as CBU’s first McCall MacBain Scholarship finalist, with best wishes conveyed for her continued success.

4.5 Board of Governors

No Report.

4.6 Executive Committee

H. Antaal reported the following:

Senate Executive met on February 6 to discuss and set the agenda for the today’s meeting. Recommendations regarding Senate plenary meetings were discussed with Joe Parish, with further details to be provided in his report. The executive reviewed and provided collective feedback on a policy developed by the Research Committee. Preparations for the upcoming Senate membership cycle were discussed; emails requesting new Senate appointments were sent to all schools in recent weeks.

5. Approval of the Minutes

- Senate – January 23, 2025

Motion:
Moved by J. Tunnicliff, seconded by C. McDonald, that Senate approve the minutes from the January 23rd Senate meeting.
Motion Carried. (4 abstentions)

6. Business Arising from the Minutes – N/A

7. Report from Senate Committees:

7.1 Academic Committee

J. Parish reported the following:

- The Academic Integrity Policy has been forwarded to its subcommittee for final input. The committee is awaiting their comments before preparing a final version. This policy will come to Senate together with the Appeals of Academic Decisions Policy, as the two documents reference each other and should be considered jointly. Once those policies return, the committee will next review the Online Exam Policy.

- The committee also received a list of policies that require review, striking, or further consideration. This list will be addressed in upcoming meetings.

Recommendations

J. Parish advised that although four recommendations were included in his report, the second recommendation is being withdrawn pending further information. He proceeded to present the following recommendations:

1. **The committee recommends that Senate approves the Decision Matrix changes.**

The committee has undertaken extensive work on the Decision matrix over many months, updating it to better reflect actual processes and procedures. The revisions clarify existing practices rather than introduce new ones, with the exception of updates related to suspension and termination processes approved last year.

A working version showing tracked changes and a clean version were provided. The document is significantly overdue for its five-year review (originally from 2019). The committee emphasized that updates can continue to be made as needed and do not require waiting for the next formal review cycle.

Motion:
Moved by J. Parish that Senate approves the Decision Matrix changes.

A question was raised about removing "School Academic Committee" and "Senate Academic Committee" from the Decision Matrix. It was clarified that this was done only for formatting, with no change to the approval steps or committee roles.

Regarding the use of "as required" in the articulation agreement section, it was explained that agreements follow different processes, so consultations vary by case. The phrase reflects established practice and indicates that certain bodies are consulted only when relevant.

Motion Carried.

3. **The committee recommends that Senate approve the proposed changes to the BHS degree for submission to MPHEC for review.**

J. Parish advised that renaming the degree to Bachelor of Applied Health Sciences, Environmental Public Health to better reflect the program's applied, professional focus and to align with the accreditation standards of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors. Replacing NUTR 1101 with COMM 3113 as a required course to strengthen students' cultural and communication competencies, which are essential to professional expectations in the field.

Because the name change requires MPHEC consideration, the proposal is being brought forward in this formal capacity. If approved by Senate, the modification will be submitted to MPHEC for review. The committee expressed confidence in the rationale provided and recommends that Senate approve the proposed changes. The vote count is included in the committee's report.

Motion:
Moved by J. Parish that Senate approve the proposed changes to the BHS degree for submission to MPHEC for review.

The Registrar noted that a program name change also changes the credential awarded, which is why MPHEC review is required. A question was raised about whether current students would retain the old credential or move to the new one; it was explained that this depends on where students are in their program, though this modification is minor and unlikely to significantly affect current cohorts.
Motion Carried.

4. **The committee recommends that Senate draft an additional by-law to clarify the recommendation and approval processes.**

J. Parish explained that the committee had examined how "approve" versus "recommend" functions within the Decision Matrix and has now included definitions in the document for clarity. He outlined that when a body recommends a proposal, it typically requests revisions from the proponent if needed, and once resolved, the proposal moves forward. In rare cases where the evaluating body and proponent disagree on requested changes, the body may choose to issue a negative recommendation. A clear mechanism is needed to capture this process.
To support transparency and consistency, draft wording was presented stating that evaluating bodies may recommend approval or non-approval, and that proposals should still move to the next body even when the recommendation is negative. The committee therefore recommends that Senate develop an additional bylaw to clarify the recommendation process.

Motion:
Moved by J. Parish that Senate draft an additional by-law to clarify the recommendation and approval processes and offer the following wording as a foundation to build upon to accomplish that:

> "Evaluating bodies within the decision matrix who make recommendations may choose to recommend that the next highest body in the matrix approves a proposal or does not approve a proposal. Recommendations reflect the work of the previous body to investigate a proposal and should be given context and a rationale, especially when they are in the negative. Proposals should be forwarded by an evaluating body to the next body even if the recommendation is in the negative."

Discussion:

- Rod supported the motion in principle but raised concerns about transparency leading to impractical outcomes—for example, proposals being repeatedly rejected at lower levels yet still advancing to Senate, potentially even on a consent agenda. While removing the "however" clause improves transparency, it may allow proposals with multiple negative recommendations to continue unnecessarily.
- Others noted the risk of turf wars or proposals being blocked for non-academic reasons, and the need to balance transparency with efficiency. There was general agreement that Senate should not spend time on proposals with no realistic chance of approval, but also that proponents should not be unfairly shut down.
- The consensus was that these edge cases need clearer guidance. Rather than approving specific wording now, the motion should direct the bylaws committee to consider the issue, take into account the concerns raised, and bring forward refined language clarifying how rejected proposals should proceed through the approval process.

A friendly amendment was made to the motion that Senate direct the Bylaws Committee to create the bylaw.
Amended Motion Carried.

7.2 Quality Assurance

No Report.

7.3 Teaching, Learning, and Evaluation

No Report.

7.4 Bylaws and Procedures

The By-laws and Procedures Committee have the following recommendation to Senate:

Motion:
Moved by J. Tunnicliff that Senate approve the SASS School revised by-laws.

A question was raised about section 1.2, noting that the reference to July 1, 2018 is outdated and does not reflect current departments. It was agreed that the date should be revised or removed, with a clearer approach being to list current departments and include a general "last updated" statement at the end of the bylaws to reflect the most recent revision date.
Motion Carried.

Motion:
Moved by J. Tunnicliff that Senate approve the SASS L'nu, Political, and Social Studies (LPSS) revised by-laws.
Motion Carried.

Motion:
Moved by J. Tunnicliff that Senate approve the SASS Experiential Studies in Community and Sport (XCS) revised by-laws.

Concerns were raised that several bylaw sections include language related to programs, pedagogy, and curriculum, which may be more appropriate for the academic calendar than governance documents. Questions were also raised about whether electronic voting provisions should align with existing Senate-approved templates rather than being restated in detail.
Further discussion focused on unclear definitions of "part-time members," particularly whether this includes ICAs, sessional instructors, or continuing part-time faculty. The wording around "contractual arrangements" was seen as ambiguous, and several participants noted that clearer, more precise language would help avoid confusion about departmental membership and voting rights.
Given these governance and clarity issues, there was general agreement that the motion should be postponed and referred back for revised language and further review.

Motion Postponed.

7.5 Research

M. Bierenstiel reported the following:

The committee reported that a draft policy on research institutes has been circulated for a final round of feedback to Deans and institute directors, with the expectation it will come to Senate soon. The remaining item on the committee's mandate is the intellectual property policy, which is also being prepared for future consideration.

A list of additional policies requiring updates was identified, including several that are significantly outdated (research integrity, copyright statements, animal care mandate, and standardized CVs). These will be addressed as capacity allows, likely extending into the next year. There were no items requiring a vote at this time.

7.6 Planning and Review

M. Bishop reported that most outdated policies have been assigned for review and will be coming forward, with some possibly being replaced rather than updated. The committee itself is reviewing the adjunct review policy, which is expected to come to Senate at the next meeting.

8. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Harsimran Kaur Antaal
Secretary to Senate