



Senate Meeting
MS Teams

May 27, 2026
1:30 p.m.

MINUTES: Special Meeting

Present: J. Dickinson (Chair), E. Ballantyne, A. Benzaquén, G. Boulet, S. Brigham, R. Bursey, E. Copeland Solas, P. Crouse, C. Dawson, N. Deal, T. Findlay, L. Francis, J. Gahagan, S. Hale Wills, T. Harriott, E. Henderson, S. Huntemann, M. Matthews, M. McGonnell, I. Nault, P. Otiora, L. Paul, M. Paul, D. Piccitto, S. Reddington, B. Russo, K. Schlieff, A. Thurlow, J. Valcke, K. Whitfield

Regrets: J. Bail, C. Barker, A. Card, N. Davila, K. Jones, C. McLean, G. Sneddon, L. Sobey-Skinner, S. Trenholm

Observers: G. Batten, M. Benabdelouahad, K. Bernard, M. Caswell, S. Daniels, N. Gendron, J. Lamb, L. MacFarlane, A. Major, W. Mason, S. Mills, K. McCabe, G. Nepean, C. Shumacher, H. Standing, E. Tomlinson

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. Observers were welcomed. Procedures to be used during the meeting and for voting were outlined.

1. Indigenous Land Recognition

J. Dickinson provided an acknowledgement that the Mount is built on traditional, unceded Mi'kmaq territory and paid respect to the Indigenous peoples of the land on which Senate meets.

2. Approval of Agenda

Moved by S. Hale Wills, seconded by B. Russo, to approve the agenda as presented.
CARRIED.

3. Administration Update

3.1. Vice-President Administration – Budget Presentation

I. Nault presented the 2026–2027 budget for information and discussion. The presentation included an overview of the budget development process, the context informing fiscal planning for 2026–2027, MSVU's obligations under the bilateral agreement with the Province, key assumptions and potential impacts for the fiscal year, changes to the operating grant, the broader government funding landscape and enrollment trends and new initiatives.

I. Nault clarified that while the proposed budget can be supported through the use of reserve funds, continued reliance on reserves is neither sustainable nor fiscally responsible over the long term. She emphasized that without corrective measures, expenditures will continue to outpace revenues and further indicated that this challenge is not unique to MSVU but reflects broader financial pressures being experienced across the post-secondary sector in Nova Scotia.

Moved by S. Hale Wills, seconded by B. Russo, to extend the meeting by 30 minutes.
CARRIED.

4. Question Period

B. Russo expressed concern regarding the loss of the Kinu Tourism Project, noting its strong connections with Nova Scotia communities and Indigenous partners, as well as the services and opportunities it provided to students. She suggested that the implications of the program's discontinuation warrant further consideration. J. Dickinson acknowledged these concerns and noted that the Kinu project was funded through external grant funding rather than the University's operating budget. She further noted that following the conclusion of the original grant, efforts were made to secure additional funding and that while bridge funding had been identified to support a transition period, additional external funding was ultimately not secured.

A. Major noted that many of the staff members affected by the May 12 layoffs had provided critical operational support to the University and questioned what motivation remains for employees following these layoffs. J. Dickinson acknowledged the concern and noted that discussions are ongoing regarding how best to support employee morale while minimizing anxiety within the Mount community. She also emphasized the importance of being realistic about the uncertainty facing the institution over the coming years and indicated that the administration welcomes suggestions and input from the Mount community as it works to address these challenges.

M. Matthews asked what level of savings is expected from the requests to departments to reduce course offerings for the Fall and Winter terms. L. Francis responded that due to the fluidity of the situation, finalized savings figures are not available to share and noted that managing the number of course sections offered is one measure being taken to help contain expenses and avoid further exacerbating the deficit. She added that decisions regarding the cancellation of affected sections were made by the Deans in consultation with department chairs, and that process took into consideration the role of those sections within each academic program. L. Francis also noted recent positive developments related to federal work permit policies, which may help support Canada's reputation internationally and contribute to future international student recruitment efforts.

T. Findlay referenced a previously circulated survey that solicited ideas and suggestions from the Mount community regarding cost savings and income generation and asked how those submissions would be shared. I. Nault responded that she is currently uncertain how the full results will be disseminated and noted that some suggestions aligned with initiatives already underway, while others have not yet been explored in detail due to time and capacity constraints.

G. Nepean raised concerns regarding course section reductions and the assumption that students affected by cancelled sections will simply register in alternative sections, noting that some students may instead choose to take fewer courses. He asked whether the registration patterns of these students can be tracked. L. Francis acknowledged the complexity of course scheduling and noted that not all students affected by section cancellations will necessarily register in alternative sections. She further indicated that predicting these outcomes in advance is not possible, although students can be supported through academic advising to identify alternative course options.

L. Paul asked whether any assessment has been undertaken to identify how best to support students affected by course reductions, noting that while academic advising is valuable, alternative courses may not be available. L. Francis responded that curriculum work underway in several departments may create additional options in some cases and that the Academic Advising team could undertake targeted outreach to students in program areas most affected by course reductions to help identify pathways forward.

L. Paul further expressed concern regarding the cumulative impact of recent changes, referencing the discontinuation of the Kinu program alongside other reductions. L. Francis suggested that a dedicated conversation be arranged with students affected by the Kinu program to discuss their concerns and available supports.

D. Piccitto reiterated that this is a particularly sensitive time for the Mount and emphasized the importance of considering employee morale in decision-making, adding that small class sizes and the pedagogical approaches they enable are important characteristics of the Mount. She also asked whether we are now in a position for departments to proceed with posting CUPE job ads for fall and winter. L. Francis responded that this process is largely managed through the Deans' Offices and noted that many departments are still finalizing which course sections will proceed and therefore what positions will be advertised.

C. Dawson added that the situation remains active and evolving, and that while these discussions have required considerable time, the process is nearing completion. L. Francis further noted that enrollment demand continues to be monitored through waitlists and that additional capacity may be created in courses where sufficient demand exists.

G. Nepean asked whether a formula or quantitative mechanism was used in determining course and section cutbacks. C. Dawson responded that a single formula was not applied, noting that a “one size fits all” approach is not appropriate across programs. She explained that smaller departments, or those offering few electives and primarily core courses with limited or no multiple sections, have less flexibility to absorb reductions compared to larger programs with multiple sections. L. Francis further noted that enrollment patterns are not uniform across the University and provided two examples: the BEd program where additional cohorts have resulted in the addition of sections and other programs which have been significantly affected by declines in international student enrollment resulting from IRCC changes.

A. Major raised concerns that the workload being transferred to remaining employees has been presented as mandatory and asked where equity considerations are reflected for continuing staff. I. Nault responded that work has been undertaken with affected teams to reassess and reallocate scope, including identifying tasks that may be deferred or deprioritized in order to improve efficiency and manage capacity. J. Dickinson added that units impacted by position reductions are not expected to absorb and continue all responsibilities previously carried out by those roles and emphasized that teams are working to identify core priorities and adjust expectations accordingly, noting that the same level of output from affected units is not expected going forward.

J. Valcke raised concerns regarding the timing of cancelling CUPE course offerings in May, noting that students typically register for Fall and Winter courses later in the summer. She also asked whether the figure of approximately eight students as a “tipping point” for a course to become financially viable is accurate. L. Francis responded that the University is aware of the variability in student registration timelines and the challenges this creates in forecasting enrollment, noting that application trends and overall enrollment patterns indicate fewer incoming students relative to graduating cohorts, resulting in a smaller pool of students available to register. She added that break-even calculations are not fixed and may change over time, particularly when considering associated overhead costs.

5. Adjournment

As the agenda was exhausted, J. Dickinson adjourned the meeting at 3 p.m.