

George Mason University Faculty Senate Minutes

Meeting Date: February 25, 2026

Location: Zoom

Time: 3:00-4:30 PM

[Meeting Agenda](#)

Opening Remarks:

- Meeting called to order by Faculty Senate President Solon Simmons at 3:01 PM.
- Senate committees fall into three categories: committees created by the Senate, Faculty Senate Standing Committees, and University Standing Committees. University Standing Committees perform specialized work independently, while the Senate retains certain oversight rights.
- A spillover meeting will be scheduled in March; Faculty Handbook votes will not take place at that meeting, only in today's meeting.
- Senators were encouraged to provide feedback to the Faculty Handbook Committee on the proposed revisions.
- The Policy Management Group will be discussed during the spillover meeting.
- President Gregory Washington will attend the April Faculty Senate meeting.
- Elections for the next year of the Faculty Senate will also take place. Solon Simmons has one remaining year of eligibility.
- Updates were shared regarding the President Washington town hall, the President's General Faculty meeting on March 18th, and the upcoming Board of Visitors meeting on February 26, 2026.
- The Technology Policy Committee discussed university policies related to technology and applications and determined that AI-related issues require broader university-wide discussion. As a result, time was allocated for an overview of AI developments and their implications for teaching, research, and administrative processes.

1. AI Governance and Policy Update

Charmaine Madison provided an overview of AI governance, guidelines, and initiatives at George Mason University.

Key points included:

- Development of an AI maturity policy through the MS Cloudforce AI Task Force.
- Strong interest and enthusiasm across the university for AI adoption and literacy.
- Marketing and communications challenges were noted as a barrier to AI adoption, with ongoing efforts to improve awareness and outreach across the university.
- Ongoing efforts to expand AI training opportunities, including access to LinkedIn Learning courses through GMU 101.
- Continued development of PatriotAI and exploration of industry partnerships and data center collaborations to support workforce development.
- Overview of emerging AI tools and agents, including use cases such as grant proposal searches and grant matching.
- Discussion of CompanionAI (“Einstein”), an advanced AI agent capable of completing assignments and quizzes. The university has opened an investigation to determine how such tools may be blocked on Canvas if necessary.

During discussion, senators raised questions regarding:

- Governance and oversight of AI tools.
- Participation opportunities through the Enterprise Technology Council working groups.
- Potential negative consequences and misuse of AI technologies.

2. Faculty Handbook Revisions (First Reading) – [Appendix A](#)

Lisa Billingham presented the first reading of proposed Faculty Handbook revisions with feedback invited before the Handbook Committee meets on March 16 to consider revisions ahead of a Senate vote on March 25. A detailed rationale for the revisions was included in the appendix to the meeting agenda.

The Handbook Committee reported that all proposed revisions received unanimous support from the committee that proposed them and Handbook Review Committee.

Key proposed changes include:

1. Faculty Rank Title Change
 - Proposal to change “Term Master Instructor” to “Principal Instructor.”
2. Honor Code Update

- Revisions related to replacing Honor Code with Academic Standards Code.
3. Proposed changes to align governance documents included:
- Revisions to Section 1.3.2 to align the Faculty Handbook with the Faculty Senate bylaws by allowing the Senate President to recognize any individual to speak during meetings.
 - Revisions to Sections 1.3.1 and 2.1.4 to clarify that part-time faculty are members of the general faculty, remove the word “term”, and include voting rights for part-time faculty.
4. Revisions Related to Reimagining Faculty Roles and Rewards
- Revisions to Sections 2.2 and 2.4 reflect work to develop more inclusive Renewal, Promotion, and Tenure (RRPT) guidelines for faculty, reflecting work from the Committee on Reimagining Faculty Roles and Rewards.
 - Revisions expand the list of faculty ranks to include all term and tenure-line positions and clarify expectations for each rank in section 2.2.
 - Section 2.4 Revisions: Updates evaluation criteria for tenured, tenure track, and term faculty to reflect more contemporary and inclusive definitions of excellence across teaching and student success, research, scholarship and creative activity, and service and leadership. The revisions clarify that evaluations should proportionally account for administrative responsibilities within a faculty member’s workload, such as serving as department chair or graduate director. The proposed changes also shift from the current framework of excellence in one area and competence in another to a holistic model of overall excellence across areas, similar to peer R1 and aspirational AAU institutions. Colleges and schools would further define guidelines for excellence within their RRPT policies, with a proposed two year transition period to align their criteria if the revisions are adopted.
5. Section 2.7 Revisions
- Proposed revisions to Section 2.7 were requested by multiple stakeholders, including LAU heads, department chairs, the Committee on Faculty Roles and Rewards, and faculty members across the university. The changes aim to address inconsistencies in the current language and respond to recommendations from faculty stakeholders. A summary of the proposed changes is included at the beginning of the document.

Faculty were invited to send feedback to Lisa Billingham by Thursday, March 12.

The committee will meet again on March 16, and the second reading will occur at the March 26 Faculty Senate meeting.

Discussion

- Several senators expressed concern about the proposed revisions to Section 2.7, particularly the removal of language related to Board and President review of tenure decisions, noting that the current language reflects principles from the 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities and cautioned that removing it could weaken faculty governance and academic freedom or shift authority toward administrators.
- Concerns were also raised about language in the teaching section tying evaluation of teaching to student success (Section 2.4), with senators noting that faculty do not fully control student success and that such metrics could create unintended incentives and misrepresent teaching effectiveness.
- Questions were raised about unclear language in the service and leadership section (Section 2.4.3), including the phrase “active participation is necessary but not sufficient,” and whether more concrete definitions were intended.
- Some senators expressed support for the revisions, particularly Section 2.4.2 on Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity, noting strong positive feedback from faculty.
- Additional discussion focused on the proposed shift from a dual pathway to tenure to a framework of overall excellence, with opposing views expressed. Some senators argued that eliminating the dual pathway could diminish the role of teaching and reinforce research as the primary path to tenure, while others explained that the intent of the revisions is to strengthen expectations across teaching, research, and service, preventing cases where strong research outweighs minimal engagement in other areas and raising standards across faculty work.
- Concerns were also raised about potential impacts on faculty governance (Section 2.7), the need for clear language to reflect intent (section 2.4.3), and ensuring administrators uphold the Faculty Handbook.
- Questions were further raised about proposed changes to Section 1.3.1 and whether removing reference to “any George Mason University campus” could unintentionally exclude Mason Korea faculty, as well as suggestions to clarify the relationship between faculty contracts and the Faculty Handbook and to strengthen protections so the handbook is upheld as more than an aspirational document.
- A senator raised concerns that “overall excellence” in Section 2.4 could increase subjectivity by masking how factors are weighted and noted departments may need flexibility to define it.

Responses to concerns & further discussion:

- Committee members responded to concerns regarding the proposed revisions, explaining that the concept of overall excellence was informed by a review of policies across Mason's colleges and peer institutions, including AAU universities, and that additional guidance and evaluation rubrics would be developed during the proposed two-year implementation period.
- It was noted that the goal is to better recognize contributions across teaching, research, and service, including significant service contributions that may not be fully captured under current guidance, while maintaining checks and balances through multiple levels of review and internal standards. It was emphasized that the framework is intended to elevate and value teaching alongside research, including recognition of the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- In response to concerns about language linking teaching and student success, it was clarified that faculty are expected to support, facilitate, and foster student success, not be held directly responsible for outcomes. Some senators reiterated concerns that the term "student success" could be interpreted narrowly by external stakeholders and that clearer language may be needed.
- Additional concerns were raised regarding the replacement of the Honor Code with the Academic Standards Code, with suggestions that a shorter faculty-appropriate code or clarifying language may be needed.

A motion was made and seconded to extend the meeting by 15 minutes to 4:30 PM, which was approved by the Senate.

3. Academic Policies Committee Motion

Policy AP 4.2.1 – Dual Degree Programs ([Appendix D](#))

Doug Eyman introduced several appendices related to Academic Policy (AP) updates, noting that five appendices were included in the agenda but only three required Faculty Senate consideration. Appendices B and C were informational updates from Graduate Council and were included for reference only.

- It was noted that in the past Graduate Council updates to AP6 were not typically shared with the Faculty Senate, but these materials will now be posted to the Faculty Senate agenda for transparency and context.
- Doug Eyman then introduced AP 4.2.1 ([Appendix D](#)) regarding dual degree programs at the undergraduate level. The proposed revision allows some overlap of credits between concentrations across two different units, while maintaining the existing rule that concentrations within the same unit must count credits separately.

- The change was requested by the Office of the Provost for Undergraduate Education to help avoid requiring excessive credit hours for students pursuing dual degree programs. He also mentioned that this is only applying to the undergraduate level, not the graduate level.
- A motion was made to approve the proposed policy language, and the chair opened the floor for discussion.

Discussion:

- A senator raised concerns about the large number of appendices and difficulty reviewing materials in time, requested a board book, and asked about postponement. It was explained that timing is driven by catalog deadlines and postponement could increase the volume later, though earlier posting may help but may not always be possible.
- Some senators noted the presentation was frustrating but preferred to consider the item on its merits. It was clarified that the proposal allows limited credit overlap between concentrations in dual degrees while maintaining 12 credits per concentration and is a technical fix to support dual degree programs without major changes.
- Concerns were raised about existing overlaps, accreditation, and impacts on certificates, and it was noted that the current policy is more restrictive, the proposal applies only to concentrations, and stackable credentials remain unaffected, with some uncertainty regarding accreditation.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and approved. The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Next Meeting

The next Faculty Senate meeting will take place on March 4, 2026, at 3:00 PM on Zoom.

Action Items

- Faculty Senate Leadership
 - Provide materials earlier when possible and consider creating a Board book format for complex agenda items.
 - Provide more education and context on materials prior to vote.

Attendee List

George Mason University Faculty Senate Minutes

Meeting Date: March 4, 2026 (Spillover Meeting)

Location: Zoom

Time: 3:00-4:30 PM

[Meeting Agenda](#)

Opening Remarks:

- Meeting called to order by Solon Simmons after confirmation of quorum.
- The meeting served as a continuation of the previously adjourned Faculty Senate session.
- The Senate resumed discussion of Academic Policy Committee agenda items.

Academic Policy 4.2.1 – Concentrations in Dual Degree Programs ([Appendix A](#))

- Johanna Bockman presented the policy item on behalf of the Academic Policy Committee. The proposed revision applies on undergraduate concentrations in dual degree programs. Many degrees are developed across colleges with overlapping concentrations; separate policies make completing two degrees more difficult.
- The revision allows concentrations in two separate undergraduate degrees to share some overlapping credits. Each concentration must still maintain at least 12 unique credit hours specific to that concentration.

Administrative Clarifications: Associate Provost Keith Renshaw explained that the policy was originally intended to prevent similar concentrations within the same degree. He noted that some cross-college degrees are intentionally designed with overlapping concentrations, and the revision helps streamline dual-degree pathways that are otherwise difficult to complete. He also mentioned that certificate language was removed after causing confusion, and the revised policy now applies only to undergraduate concentrations, with certificate-related issues to be addressed separately later.

Discussion

- A senator asked whether accreditation implications had been considered, noting that requirements like ABET may be affected by overlapping courses and could lead to unintended consequences.
- Keith Renshaw responded that accreditation concerns are addressed through existing double-degree policies, which require 18 non-overlapping credits within the same college and 30 across colleges, so the proposed change should not impact accreditation or single-degree programs.

- A senator asked whether a concentration requires 12 unique hours not shared with another concentration.
- Solon Simmons clarified that the 12 unique hours apply within the same degree program, counting toward only one concentration, and Johanna Bockman confirmed this is existing language across graduate and undergraduate programs.

Vote

- Motion: Approve the proposed language changes to Academic Policy 4.2.1.
- After discussion, the Senate proceeded to a voice vote.
- Result: Motion passed.

Academic Policy 3.3 – Removing B-, NA & Adding SW ([Appendix A](#))

- Proposed changes include removing the B- at the graduate level to align with the 3.0 GPA requirement for good standing, adding a “satisfactory withdrawal” option for students leaving a program, and removing the “never attended” designation.
- Kelly Schrum explained that B- has historically been used infrequently in graduate courses. Under newer GPA policies requiring a 3.0 for good standing, a B- could unintentionally place students on academic probation.
- Removing the grade was proposed as a way to simplify the grading scale and prevent unintended consequences.

Removing Grade B- Discussion

- Some supported removal due to visa risks for international students who must maintain a B or above. Others expressed concerns and opposition noting it could - make B the lowest satisfactory grade and create a large jump from B to C+, increase pressure on faculty to change grades, force assignment of more harmful C grades with greater GPA impact, create implications for employment outcomes.
- A senator emphasized that grading responsibility ultimately rests with students with visa risks. Alternatives were suggested such as adding automatic warnings for grades affecting academic standing and improving communication to faculty about grading consequences
- Kelly Schrum noted that the Graduate Grading Task Force is just beginning its work and that removing the B- is intended as a temporary measure due to probation risks starting next fall, with some programs already requiring a B or better. Laurence Bray noted that the proposal is not about low usage but about the minimal differences between B-, B, and C and their impact on GPA.
- Some senators opposed removing the B-, noting it is premature with the task force just beginning, questioning why A- would remain if granularity is the issue, and raising

concern that removing B- forces a choice between B or C, with a C being more punishing to GPA. Senators also emphasized the need for more discussion, raised concerns about competency vs. success, and suggested educating faculty about B- rather than removing it.

Senators discussed separating the proposal to remove the B- change while keeping the introduction of Satisfactory Withdrawal (SW) and the removal of the Never Attended (NA) grade, noting the latter changes address consistency and clarity and were supported to move forward while broader grading issues are addressed later.

Removing NA Discussion

- Senators discussed removing the Never Attended (NA) grade, noting it was originally used so students who never attended would not automatically receive an F, but it has created financial aid, reporting, and audit complications at a non-attendance-taking institution (GMU), where instructors have delegated authority to track attendance.
- Concerns were raised about whether removing NA would lead to assigning F grades, creating compliance issues, and financial aid fraud as well as its role in tracking financial aid cases. It was clarified that NA would remain a reportable grade but not appear on the transcript and would be converted to a final grade such as F or possibly NC after submission, with some noting NC may be preferable.
- Senators also emphasized the need for clear policy language to explain the process and ensure transparency, while the proposal aims to include only grades that appear on the transcript for clarity and consistency.

The Senate voted to disaggregate the proposal so each item could be considered and voted on individually, beginning with Satisfactory Withdrawal (SW).

Adding SW Discussion

- It was explained that SW would provide an option for graduate students who begin thesis or dissertation work but later change paths, so they are not penalized with an NC when they made progress but did not complete the work, and that SW serves as a middle path that does not count toward degree requirements but can prevent NC from contributing to termination.
- Senators expressed both support and concerns, with some noting SW provides flexibility and is preferable to NC, while others questioned whether it gives students an advantage or rewards incomplete work and raised concerns about implications for funded research and student accountability. It was clarified that NC remains for unsatisfactory progress, while SW applies only when progress has been satisfactory.
- The Senate confirmed it was debating the motion to add the SW option along with the related IP section, as the two are connected. A motion to suspend discussion of SW and IP to move to other items was seconded and approved by voice vote.
- The meeting time was extended to 4:30 PM by motion and approval.

Delton Daigle moved to **table discussion** of the **B-minus proposal** until after the grading task force convenes and also moved to call a vote on the “Never Attended (NA)” item; the first motion was approved by voice vote and the second motion was seconded-opening debate on the proposal.

Removing NA Discussion

- Several senators expressed concern about removing NA language from policy, noting it could make it difficult to explain the grade to students and suggesting the committee clarify how NA is used.
- A suggestion was made to send the item back to committee for further clarification, particularly regarding how temporary grades like NA are used and explained. It was noted that NA has been used at the university for over 15 years, though only recently added to the catalog, raising the question of whether all grade notations used by instructors should appear in policy. The need for clearer communication and education about these policy changes before future votes was emphasized.
- The committee agreed to withdraw the NA proposal and **return it to committee** for further review and clarification.

SW & IP Discussion

- The Senate returned to the SW and related IP discussion, clarifying that the proposal would add SW as an option alongside existing options such as NC, giving faculty another way to handle these situations.
- Senators expressed both support and concerns, with some noting that SW could give students too much flexibility without consequences, particularly in MS thesis versus non-thesis situations and in cases involving external grant funding, while others clarified that the proposal does not remove faculty authority to assign NC but adds another option when a student has made progress but changes path. It was also mentioned that repeated NCs can still make a student eligible for termination.
- It was also noted that the proposal was coherent and supported, though clearer explanation of how SW, NC, and related codes interact would be helpful. The Senate **voted by voice vote to approve** the addition of the **SW language** and related IP changes, and the motion passed by voice vote.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and approved. The meeting adjourned at 4:29 PM.

Action items

• Academic Policies (AP) Committee

- Return the “Never Attended (NA)” proposal for further review and clarification
- Provide clearer policy language on NA usage and conversion

• Graduate Grading Task Force

- Continue reviewing broader grading policies, including B- and related issues

• Faculty Senate Leadership

- Provide more education on materials before a vote takes place

[Attendee List](#)