

GRADUATE HOUSE RESIDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

December 1st, 2025, 3:30- 5:00PM

Event Room, 2nd Floor, Oak House

Meeting Minutes

IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Role
Aisalyn Templin	Administration and Communications Assistant (Secretary)
Alicia Whittfield	Manager, Residence Admissions
Derrick Gravener	Associate Dean, Residence Life (Chair)
Gabrielle Wong	Resident
Kevin Dancy	Director of Residence Operations
Lucy Chandler	Residence Administration and Project Coordinator
Michael Fernandes	Residence Life Coordinator
Nathan Shin	Residence Council Co-President
Ryan Hopkin	Facilities Coordinator
Samarendra Chandan Bindu Dash	Resident
Steven Masse	Dean of Residence and Director of Student Life
Tao Wang	Residence Advisor
Yara Corky	Residence Council Co-President

REGRETS

Name	Role
Alim Alarakhia	Occupancy and Admissions Coordinator
Ana Katarina Bosiljkov	Resident
Julian Blasioli	Service Desk Assistant
Matthew Lefebvre	Resident
Mohamed Elsayed	Resident

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Terms of Reference
3. Admissions Report
4. Facilities Project Updates
5. 2026-27 Draft Residence Fees
6. Residence Council Updates
7. Other business

Note: This meeting was chaired by Derrick Gravener, Associate Dean, Residence Life

WELCOME

All participants introduced themselves. A Land Acknowledgement was shared ([see slide 2](#)).

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Steven Masse provided an overview of the Terms of Reference including proposed changes related to membership, meeting materials, and fostering additional resident engagement ([see slides 7-9](#)). There was a brief discussion about increasing student engagement and ensuring they are aware of the work of the Residence Advisory Committee. Members expressed no objections to the proposed changes, so they were adopted as presented.

2026-27 DRAFT RESIDENCE FEES

Masse began his presentation by highlighting the four objectives that the University requires of all ancillary operations ([see slide 12](#)). He explained that ancillary operations do not always achieve all four, but that they must be achieved in sequence.

In setting residence rates each year, Masse indicated that multiple factors are considered including operating expense pressures, capital renewal and deferred maintenance, occupancy levels and demand, and rates of comparable accommodation ([see slide 11](#)). Inflation over the past few years has been unusually high, resulting in significant increases in operating expenses and costs of capital renewal.

Kevin Dancy provided an overview of operating expense categories and their relative proportion ([see slide 12](#)). He explained that salary and benefits are often the largest cost in any organization. Other large categories like utilities and overheads are those over which we have little control. There are many small costs that are easy to predict (i.e. light bulbs). Other costs are much more cyclical. He explained that there is a preventative and corrective maintenance schedule. Kevin highlighted that our revenue has been allocated and cannot be easily adjusted.

Samarendra Dash asked why the renovations planned for the fifth floor were cancelled last year. Dancy responded that these renovations were part of a planned 10-year cycle that we had started to undertake until significant cost escalation occurred following the COVID-19 pandemic. The team is currently developing a new way to design and procure these projects so that they are more cost effective. Once this is sorted, we plan to include renovation of kitchens as well as the suite's washrooms in the scope of work.

Dash mentioned a number of smaller maintenance-related concerns in suites and expressed hope that delays will not continue for the larger projects. Dancy explained that some small issues require larger renovations to occur before they can be properly remedied.

Masse shared that the proposed rate increase at Graduate House for 2026-27 is 5% across-the-board ([see slide 10](#)). He highlighted that this increase is a step toward more typical rate adjustments following increases in the past few years of 4.5%, 7%, and 7%. With next year's fee increase, Graduate House will still be among the most affordable suite-style residences on campus.

Dash commented that last year's rent increase at Graduate House was not 7%. He referenced some numbers from his student account that could verify this. Masse suggested that they connect offline to review and discuss further.

Gabrielle Wong asked whether we would be maintaining the current payment structure. Masse indicated that students would continue to pay an initial deposit plus a series of 11 monthly instalments. This model was adopted to simplify the experience of students and reduce administrative overhead related to payment of last month's rent.

Alicia Whitfield added that we plan to incorporate our learning from this year to further streamline and simplify the model, so it's even more straightforward for students next year.

Wong asked if a rate increase of just 5% might mean that future students would need to pay higher annual increases to maintain the facilities as the building ages. Masse explained that that should not be the case, as we plan these expenditures well in advance to avoid unnecessary spikes in annual rate increases.

Dancy highlighted that inflation in the construction sector is typically much higher than the overall rate. The team does long-term planning for facilities to account for these fluctuations. Dash noted that other residence buildings in Ontario face similar construction costs and asked why Graduate House requires a 5% increase while the provincial rent increase guideline is 2.1%.

Masse clarified that Graduate House is exempt from the Residential Tenancies Act, which means that the provincial rent increase guideline does not apply. The University operates its residences much differently than a private landlord and there are different pressures that apply.

Masse explained that the University also tries to operate in a compassionate way, for example, releasing a student from the obligations of their occupancy agreement should they take a leave of absence or need to move out unexpectedly for medical reasons.

Dash asked if this could be outlined more explicitly in the Occupancy Agreement and stated that the withdrawal policy had actually become less flexible this year. Massé responded that we would draft language to this effect and could review in the next RAC meeting.

Wong asked if this flexibility is the reason that our fees need to increase. Massé explained that previously, students could withdraw from residence by providing two months' notice. This resulted in a significant number of early withdrawals through the spring and summer that were difficult to backfill given the seasonal nature of the academic cycle.

The current model requires that students commit to the full occupancy term, while accounting for early withdrawals due to exceptional reasons through our appeals process. Demand for Fall admission at Graduate House is very high, and we wish to ensure that those who choose to accept a space in residence plan to reside there for the full occupancy term. If greater flexibility is desired with respect to occupancy terms, then this would likely result in higher fees.

RESIDENCE COUNCIL UPDATES

Yara Corky highlighted that the final membership has been solidified and the Graduate House Council is looking at how they can do things differently and better than last year. Nathan Shin explained that they onboarded a new financial officer recently and they will visit the bank this week to transfer the accounts. They will ensure that the bookkeeping process is aligned with the University guidelines.

Shin said that they are open to incorporating more graduate students from Oak House into their programming. The principle of being more inclusive is something they are very open to. Event planning is going well. Attendance is high at recent events.

Shin also spoke in support of increasing residence fees as they go to programming. This makes Grad House unique and it has helped build a nice community in our building.

ADMISSIONS REPORT

Alicia Whitfield presented an overview of the occupancy statistics, as well as the demographic composition of the building for the current academic year ([see slides 16-17](#)). Whitfield explained that it is helpful to know this information if you are looking at programming for residents. Shin asked how many upper year vs. new students are at Grad House. Whitfield indicated that approximately 30% of the students are returning, and 70% are new to their program.

FACILITIES PROJECT UPDATES

Ryan Hopkin highlighted that there are two major facilities projects happening at the moment.

There is a new weekly in-suite common areas cleaning program ([see slide 18](#)). Schedules for this service are still being established. Teams must get into rhythm and routine to determine the timing of the cleaning service. The cost of this new service is included in residence fees. During the pilot offered last year, it was a paid opt-in program.

Dash asked whether one was able to opt-out of the program. Hopkin indicated that there is not currently the option to do so, as we want to consistently keep the building maintained. Wong asked about the type of products used, and whether they are environmentally friendly. Hopkin shared that we use environmentally friendly cleaning products, unless a suite has mold or mildew which requires harsher chemicals and products.

Dash asked whether garbage would be removed as part of this service. Hopkin responded that students are responsible for removing garbage between scheduled cleanings. Ryan reinforced the idea that it is residents' responsibility to maintain the space to a standard between cleaning and for large garbage removal.

Hopkin concluded by highlighting the landscaping activity in the lot just East of Graduate House on Harbord Street. He indicated that this property belongs to the University for a future project but will be converted to a temporary parkette. Planters and fencing have recently been installed, with benches and additional seating coming soon. Food trucks, in limited numbers, may also be permitted for events and activities. Tao Wang suggested that this could be a great space where residents from Oak House and Graduate House can connect.

OTHER BUSINESS

Shin inquired if there is any support the Graduate House Council can provide for helping engage more students with the Residence Advisory Committee. Masse responded that the Council could help by forwarding student feedback and sharing it with peers.

Shin also asked about the Graduate House Council's role in fixing/adding items located in the CCR. Hopkin noted that the ping pong table and the pool table belong to the Council as it is their responsibility, but the furniture and other parts of the building are managed by the residence. Hopkin indicated that we intend to refresh the furniture in the next couple of years.

NEXT MEETING

We aim to have another meeting in February and March.