



GRADUATE HOUSE RESIDENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

April 1st | 3:00 - 4:15 PM

Event Room, 2nd Floor, Oak House

Meeting Minutes

IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Role
Aisalyn Templin	Administration and Communications Assistant (Secretary)
Alicia Whitfield	Manager, Residence Admissions
Anjali	Resident
Derrick Gravener	Manager, Residence Administration (Acting) (Chair)
Fute	Resident
Gabrielle	Resident
Jessi Sidhu	Assistant Dean, Residence Education
Julian Blasioli	Service Desk Assistant
Kevion	Resident
Lucy Chandler	Residence Administration and Project Coordinator
Michael Fernandes	Residence Life Coordinator
Michael Kaev	Assistant Director, Residence Operations
Ryan Hopkin	Facilities Coordinator
Samarendra	Resident
Steven Masse	Dean of Residence and Director of Student Life
Tao Wang	Residence Advisor
Yara	Residence Council Co-President
Victoria	Resident

REGRETS

Name	Role
Kevin Dancy	Director of Residence Operations
Laura Lysecki	Manager, Building Operations and Services
Mohamed	Resident
Nathan	Residence Council Co-President
Sangeeta Jeyakumar	Manager of Finance, Administration and Operations



AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. 2026-27 Residence Budget Highlights *POSTPONED*
3. 2026-27 Residence Admissions Process Overview
4. Residence Council Updates
5. Facilities Project Updates
6. Digital Suggestion Box Review
7. Other business

Note: *This meeting was chaired by Derrick Gravener - Manager, Residence Administration (Acting)*

WELCOME

Derrick Gravener welcomed meeting attendees and shared a land acknowledgment.

2026-27 RESIDENCE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Michael Kaev provided an overview of the operating budget ([see slides](#)). We take a balanced approach to maintain operations and make improvements. Residence fees, fall and winter sessions, are the core source of funding ([see slides](#)). There is a strong reliance on residence fees, and seasonal occupancy is a key factor. Direct, day-to-day costs are the biggest expenditures. Most resources are directed to operations and capital investments.

Discussion

Gabrielle asked whether there are any significant changes between this budget and previous years. Kaev said that, because he is new to the role, he does not have the context but can speak with Kevin Dancy and share with the Committee. Steve Masse said that we may have seen a lesser increase in salaries, wages, and benefits this past year, as management/supervisory level salaries are now shared across more residences now that Oak House has opened. He further stated that we have seen a significant increase in cleaning costs this year, as we introduced weekly cleaning of all suites. This new service was discussed with RAC members at previous meetings.

Samarendra requested more specificity as to how the additional rent increase is being used. He indicated it would be good to know what the new initiatives are, and where the funding is going. Kaev indicated that most operating costs increase with inflation. He said the bulk of the rent increase goes towards the operating budget. Masse said, at future RAC meetings, we can add a year-over-year variance highlights slides that show the key drivers of expenditures. In reference to the charts presented, Masse indicated that our revenues are almost fully allocated to operating and capital expenditures. Kaev indicated planned suite renovations is a large component of our capital expenditures for next year. There are other larger scale capital expenditures.



FACILITIES PROJECT UPDATES

Ryan Hopkin highlighted that we are updating the humidifier. To facilitate this, he explained that there will be a planned building-wide electrical shutdown. This will take approximately two hours to complete and will likely take place between 3-5am. Hopkin explained that there have been parts delays. It was supposed to happen in mid-March; we do not yet have a new date. All suites and rooms will have no power or water; these systems are not on electrical backup. Elevators and emergency systems will operate normally. We will communicate at a higher level with more information to students. The building should be up and running by 6am.

Hopkin explained that last year, the summer renovation project did not happen. This year it is back on the table, currently out for tender. This is supposed to happen on May 1st. We have reduced the number to five suites. Communication to residents that might be impacted has gone out today. We are hoping to have a slight kitchen upgrade, with undermount sinks. The facades of cupboards will be upgraded. We will also upgrade appliances to stainless steel. This is what is available on the market right now.

Hopkin highlighted that in the recreation area to the East of Grad House, we started putting planters. Next, we will place concrete pads to anchor the furniture. This should happen in mid-April. When the weather warms, we should begin this.

During the shoulder season, Hopkin said that we may get a spike of warm weather, when the heat is still on. People will ask about the cooling system. Building engineers will monitor the forecast. When we hit temperatures at twenty degrees consistently, we will go to free cooling. Once we switch to the cooling system, we cannot go back. This is a challenging task that we go through each year.

Discussion

Victoria asked whether we are replacing an old humidifier. Hopkin said that the university has a project called [LEAP](#), and they identify buildings that can use funding to upgrade electrical systems to become more efficient. At Grad House, the humidifier is 26 years old. The new system should add more humidity. Samarendra said many residents don't know there was a humidifier; it is usually below 25% humidity. Samarendra asked Hopkin to explain what the problem was before, and whether it was not working due to the age of the system. Hopkin said the humidifier was identified to be updated. Different parts of the building would register different humidity. Samarendra said if the fan and vents are on, would this help? Hopkin said yes, the system must be on.

Anjali asked if residents could be let out of their contract earlier if they are impacted by the suite renovations. Alicia Whitfield said residents can select to return to their old room, but they do not need to do this. She explained that we make a special provision for students who are affected by the renovations. Samarendra asked if the suite is being renovated; will residents be relocated? Hopkin said that renovations often go up until move-in date.

Gabrielle asked whether the courtyard pond is coming back. Hopkin said that, unfortunately, there were many leaks, and it couldn't run again. Hopkin encourages residents to reach out and let us know if you have any ideas to introduce colour into this space. Tao Wang suggested a Community Garden. Hopkin said this would have to be managed at the community level; it cannot be taken care of by facilities. Wang says we could have a club that manages the space. Hopkin has connected with Britney Glasgow-Osment about this. There was a plan to place astroturf there, but this was very costly.



RESIDENCE COUNCIL UPDATES

Yara said the Council has had a few events; Osment-Glasgow invited us to share our experiences about building a Council with Oak House residents. There may be collaboration in the future. Yara highlighted that, recently, there was a dinner with Don, Mohamed. There was a warm community. There was a skiing and sledding event recently. We collaborated with GSU for a [‘Paint and Sip Bubble Tea’](#) event for mental health week. Nathan Shin was elected to the GSU Board of Directors, so he will be a main point of contact moving forward.

In the summer, Yara explained that the Council will focus on events at Casa Loma, Wonderland, and other places in the city. We want to welcome new students and make them feel comfortable. With respect to a Community Garden, many residents might be interested in this and would take responsibility and take care of this. There was an event at the Jays game yesterday that went well.

Whitfield asked if elections had happened, and Yara said they had not taken place yet; this will be closer to the second half of the semester.



RESIDENCE EXPERIENCE SURVEY RESULTS

Jessi Sidhu provided an overview; the survey was opened later this year, and we saw increased participation from last year ([see slide](#)). There were 70 questions. Incentives were a pizza party or a \$150 community prize. There was a draw for two \$75 gift cards. Tao Wang's community won.

Sidhu explained that, in the survey, a small number of people attended many events. They had various reasons for this. A small population had trouble making friends and felt isolated. We will prioritize 15–30-minute drop-in events. Recurring weekly, monthly events were the most popular.

Most students are satisfied with their services at the Front Desk. There are high rates of satisfaction with Housekeeping. With a new weekly suite for housekeeping service, over 80% of responses indicated a high level of satisfaction. There were some constructive comments made ([see slide](#)). For maintenance, satisfaction remains high. Sidhu explained that, overall, over 80% agree that living in residence had a positive impact on their university experience.

Discussion

Samarendra asked whether we could have more options for events, such as book clubs. Sidhu said this was a pilot year to find out what is working. We have learned a lot and used feedback from the survey and the Don teams. We have not solidified the summer program yet.

Gabrielle asked is the programming the same as undergrad? Sidhu said yes, but we are thinking of tailoring this. “Grad House's Buddies” was a popular club. The club used to go to different gyms together. Some things have worked in the past. Sidhu asked that residents provide your feedback so that we can implement these programs again. Samarendra asked what the best way to communicate is. Wang said you can use post event surveys, speak to your Don, send an email. Whitfield suggested that residents start an informal club. She said that you can go through Council to help with this. Wang said a resident started a crochet club.



Gabrielle and Samarendra asked whether the survey differs from previous years, and if so, they would like to see what is different. Sidhu said that she will investigate this. Masse said we will look at the year-over-year analysis, and we could offer a session to review the data with residents.

Yara suggested that we put up a board where residents can offer suggestions. Samarendra said that in the past, students have set up a desk in the reception area and conducted a survey. Sidhu said Community Coordinators would be happy to help with this. Samarendra commented that there are too many questions for some residents, so maybe there can be an option to respond to a smaller number of questions. Sidhu said we have investigated this, and it is something we are considering. She said that we have decreased the number of questions from previous years, but there is still so much we want to know. Samarendra suggested splitting the questions into smaller segments. This could target the appropriate audience. Kevion Daley said that we should communicate what each segment of the survey contains. Sidhu said it is like Microsoft forms, and there may be options we can investigate. Anjali asked about the question around recommending Grad House. Sidhu will investigate this.

OTHER BUSINESS

Samarendra said if a student leaves because they are graduating, they are sent the default response for leaving (i.e. you need to find a replacement). He asked if we can make this clearer in the Occupancy Agreement. Maybe we can send a more tailored message. Whitfield said when a student submits the early withdrawal form, it encourages them to review the occupancy agreement and asks that they provide the reason for their withdrawal. If a student indicates they are graduating, we still require supporting documentation, so they aren't automatically released from the occupancy agreement.

She continued that we can investigate tailoring our responses more based on the reason for withdrawal. Samarendra said this is not clear in the Occupancy Agreement. Masse indicated that we heard feedback at previous meetings that additional clarity in the occupancy agreement regarding exceptional circumstances that might warrant release from the occupancy agreement would be beneficial. In response, he indicated that a new clause was added to the 2026-27 occupancy agreement that speaks to the fact that in limited circumstances beyond a resident's control, such as significant changes to academic status (e.g., graduation, medical leave), continuous occupancy may not be feasible.

Samarendra asked how the replacement works, since the deposit is used to reduce monthly installments. If a student finds a replacement, does the new student need to make the deposit again? Whitfield said we refund the unused portion of the payment made by the original student. The pro-rated refund is the unused 50%. Monthly installments are reduced for the new student, after they pay the deposit. Samarendra said the main reason for the upfront deposit is to reduce the number of times a student is refunded. Whitfield said there are less refunds this way, fewer transactions to process.

Yara asked whether the \$500 administrative fee will be removed? Masse said it has been removed, and it was not necessary.

Fute asked regarding early withdrawal, whether we are applying the same principals this term. Whitfield said that we are simply clarifying the current policy. The clause Masse shared helps to clarify



this for the coming year. Masse said the addition of the new clause in the 2026-27 occupancy agreement doesn't represent a change to our current practice.

Gabrielle asked what the summer rent is based on if they find a replacement? Masse said that any new resident that moves in on/after May 1 pays a residence fee that reflects rate increases for the new fiscal year. Once the new resident signs the occupancy agreement with us, the outgoing resident is fully released from any future financial obligations. This differs from a typical sublet arrangement off campus.

Gabrielle asked, do summer residents pay more? Masse said yes; the summer fee has the annual increase applied. Samarendra asked, are summer residents not paying the deposit? Masse said it is a matter of the fee increase. The new resident pays the revised rate. Daley asked, as a returning resident, is the confirmation deposit refundable? Whitfield said that it is not. This year there was an exception for some GCPS residents, because offers were sent earlier than in the past, and this was too early for some residents to make their plans. This is only for GCPS who received their offers the earliest. For everyone else who will receive their offers in the spring and summer, the confirmation deposit is not refundable.

Anjali said that receiving an offer in March is too early for some residents. Going forward, is the residence going to release offers slightly later or what can we expect to be the norm? Masse explained that the change in timelines and process for this year was the direct result of feedback from non-GCPS residents and those prospective students awaiting offers. Our past practice of beginning to send our earliest offers in June meant that many students were waiting until late in the summer to hear that we were full, many felt there was insufficient time for them to secure other housing. As a result, Masse indicated that the Admissions team sought to start issuing offers earlier.

Masse indicated that Nathan Shin, one of the co-Presidents of the Graduate House Council, provided feedback that the change caught some residents by surprise, as they expected to have a few more months to sort out their plans for next academic year. As a result of the change, we decided to offer a limited exception for those who received offers as part of the GCPS program, in that they would be eligible for a refund of their confirmation deposit until the end of April. This allows admissions to proceed with the earlier timeline while offering flexibility for students who received offers earlier than anticipated. Whitfield offered that most residents were happy to receive an earlier offer.

Anjali raised that if residents cannot choose to leave before mid-August, they are having to compete with many other students who are also seeking housing in the fall. Having a little more flexibility and earlier confirmation of being released from the occupancy agreement would be helpful.

Masse indicated that the team will take this away and consider what we may be able to do. He conveyed that there was considerable interest in new residents wishing to move in early and there may be an opportunity to satisfy both Anjali and prospective students' requests on this front.

Samarendra said that policy changes should be included in the survey. This would allow us to know how many students want this change. Masse said we can certainly consider this. We know that flexibility is always helpful. We always endeavour to balance this flexibility with operational need. Masse conveyed that this is one of the reasons the conversations at RAC this past year have been so helpful.