



Suggestions for Council Meetings

Following are the comments and suggestions that were raised by councillors at the March 8 Council meeting with respect to how to address the tendency of some councillors to leave SOGS Council meetings after only one hour. These comments have been relayed to the Speaker, the chair of the By-laws and Constitutions Committee and the President-elect for consideration. Should you have feedback on these suggestions or on how to address attendance and quorum challenges at SOGS Council, please send it to sogs.president@uwo.ca and sogs.speaker@uwo.ca.

- Change the by-laws so that councillors must stay for the first 90 minutes of a Council meeting in order for their attendance to count for the purposes of departmental grant cheques;
- Don't do elections to SOGS's internal committees during SOGS Council – too time-consuming;
- Introduce safeguards to avoid wasting time on discussing frivolities during Council meetings. The GTA Union provides a good model for this;
- Move Council meetings to earlier in the month so they do not have to compete with other month-end obligations, such as academic conferences;
- Discuss only issues directly relevant to graduate students at SOGS Council meetings, not time-consuming, controversial material;
- Be less flexible about the conduct of meetings; ignore Robert's Rules;
- There are advantages to Robert's Rules. It should not be abandoned;
- Set a time limit for speakers;
- Set a time limit for guest speakers;
- Don't force councillors to step down if they miss three meetings;
- Formal procedure (like Robert's Rules) can be problematic. Councillors come in with different knowledge bases in this respect. It's therefore important to educate them by using formal procedure in a strong way;
- Introduce a training session for new councillors;
- Councillors have responsibilities; they should take them seriously;
- Councillors should learn how to use Robert's Rules' mechanisms for stopping frivolous discussions;
- New councillors are given an orientation binder. They should read it;
- Motions from the BCC bog the meeting down. They should therefore be spaced out over several meetings;
- Consider e-governance;
- Distribute a single sheet of "Roberts Rules for Dummies" before meetings;

- Which issues are frivolous and which directly relate to graduate students is a matter of interpretation;
- When SOGS officers and councillors give orientation talks to departments at the beginning of the year/term, they shouldn't claim that SOGS Council meetings last less than an hour. They should make clear what councillors' real responsibilities are;
- It's important and necessary to better educate new councillors about SOGS procedures. It's scary for them to ask for help;
- Departmental grant payments should be pro-rated based on proportions of meetings attended such that, for instance, someone who leaves halfway through a meeting only counts as having attended half a meeting for grant calculation purposes;
- Learn to distinguish between useful and frivolous debates;
- The BCC is planning an open meeting to discuss by-laws relating to councillors' responsibilities. This will be a good venue to take up these issues. Additionally, those interested in reforming Council procedures should consider joining the BCC;
- Transparency is important. It is possible to omnibus motions, but then transparency is compromised;
- Council is SOGS's governing body; it has responsibilities;
- Time-sensitive items should be placed first on the agenda. Councillors can make motions to amend the agenda;
- Better education for new councillors is needed in order to communicate to them their responsibilities;
- None of the matters that get raised at SOGS Council are frivolous. Why did people join SOGS Council if not to discuss internal SOGS matters and external "political" matters?
- Councillors should not forget the responsibilities entailed by citizenship. They should take sufficient time to deliberate and engage in critical debate, and should avoid calling the question;
- Speakers should communicate what they mean more effectively;
- Consider adopting a revised Robert's Rules "Light" – with some of the structure of Robert's Rules, but more flexibility;
- Each SOGS Council year should begin with a combined orientation/social gathering for new councillors;
- Some speakers/councillors/officers are more political; some are more pragmatic. All should recognize these two different styles and try to accommodate them;
- Long meetings aren't a problem. They should go as long as necessary to get the work done;
- Council should try to be more efficient;
- Consider establishing a bi-cameral council – a full council and a "board of directors" or similar. The former could meet less frequently and the latter be charged with most of the business of the Society;
- Councillors should be more forgiving with each other and with SOGS officers. We come from a variety of backgrounds and bring a variety of skill-sets. For some of us, the learning curve is steep.