

Grand Valley State University Student Senate

GENERAL ASSEMBLY MINUTES

Thursday, January 29th, 2026

Kirkhof 2204, 5:15 PM

Chair: Evan Jackson

Vice Chair: Ty Vanlerberghe

Parliamentarian: William Laurin



Minutes

1. Call To Order

- i. Meeting was called to order at 5:18 PM
- b. Approval of the Minutes
 - i. Minutes from the General Assembly meeting on January 22nd, 2026 stand approved.
- c. Passing of the Papers
 - i. Hardgrave: President Jackson, Chair McDonough, and I met with athletics today and are aiming to host a zero-waste basketball game on February 14th. If you are interested in attending this game and being on the Zero-waste team, please reach out to me.

2. Public Comment

- a. No public comments were made at this time.

3. Executive Reports

- a. **President** - Evan Jackson
 - i. Good afternoon, I want to begin by thanking everyone for your flexibility and engagement in making Zoom work last week. I appreciate the patience and professionalism you all brought to that meeting.
 - ii. I also want to sincerely thank each of you for the attention and thoughtfulness you put into passing the Reach Higher Together and Academic Affairs Strategic Framework endorsements. The level of deliberation and commitment Student Senate brought to that process was clear and meaningful.

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- iii. The following morning, I shared our endorsements with members of the Senior Leadership Team, including Jenny Hall-Jones and Laura Aikens, as well as President Mantella and Provost Jen Drake. They had nothing but glowing feedback about our engagement and expressed a deep appreciation for the ways you all contributed to strengthening the final work. They were especially thankful for the insight and partnership you demonstrated throughout the process.
 - iv. As you all recall, because of the weather last Thursday, Vice President Truss had to cancel. I'm happy to share that Vice President Truss has been rescheduled for March 19. He and his team will be joining us then to discuss updates within the admissions and enrollment division of Grand Valley.
 - v. Later today, during general announcements, I will be sharing two exciting opportunities within our campus community that I encourage you all to pay close attention to.
 - vi. Finally, we are joined today by some highly anticipated guests who will be speaking with us about the federal landscape: Stacie Behler, Robert Shorty, and Jess Weare. Their work helps ensure our community stays informed amid the many changes currently underway.
 - vii. I am very grateful for their time and willingness to join us today, and I strongly encourage everyone to listen closely—there is a great deal to learn from this conversation.
 - viii. I will now yield to Vice President Vanlerberghe.
- b. **Vice President** - Ty Vanlerberghe

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- i. Hi all! It is great to see you all in person today, and to welcome our new Senators to their first GA in Pere Marquette. A couple quick updates for you all today.
 - ii. First, if you RSVP'ed to the Laker Food Co. Q&A session that was supposed to take place this past Tuesday, you should have received another email informing you of a rescheduled date. The Q&A session will now be held next Tuesday, February 10th from 5-6 PM in Kirkhof Center. Please RSVP back to Deb Rambandt if you are attending.
 - iii. Second, as I had mentioned last week, we will be holding a second town-hall alongside IT to gauge the student perspective as they plan their next digital transformation strategic plan. This upcoming session will be held Thursday, February 5th from 11:30AM to 12:30PM in the Seidman Forum on City Campus. Please let me know if you are interested.
 - iv. Third, next week President Jackson and I will be meeting with the Dean of the College of Computing, Marouane Kessentini and Eric Kunnen from IT who together co-chair the University's AI Steering Committee. This meeting is to help provide the student perspective on Artificial Intelligence as GVSU navigates its use for the future. I know this has been a hot topic for many of you, so if you have any questions or concerns that you would like Evan and I to pass on, please let us know by next Thursday, February 5th.
 - v. Fourth, as a reminder, next week we will NOT be holding committee meetings before GA and will instead be taking our semesterly headshots. I just dropped a link to a sign-up sheet in Slack for everyone to register for a time. Headshots will be taken from 4:00-4:45, with 4:45-5:15 reserved for

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committee photos. Please consider coming as early as you can, so we can avoid running over into GA.

vi. I now yield to Chief of Staff Laurin.

c. **Chief of Staff** - William Laurin

i. Good evening everyone, It's great to see you all back after our second winter break, I hope you're all doing well.

ii. I don't have a lot of updates today, just an announcement for allocations members in case you did not see Lukas' slack message; I will be chairing allocations tomorrow, we will meet at the usual time of 1:30 and I look forward to seeing you then.

iii. That's all from me, I yield back to President Jackson

4. Federal Landscape

a. VP Stacie Behler, VP Jess Weare, and VP Robert Shorty

i. Behler, Weare, and Shorty introduced themselves to members of the General Assembly and provided a briefing on current federal and state landscape changes that are impacting higher education. The three senior leaders provided context behind the work that they do on behalf of the University, and emphasized Michigan's inequitable higher education funding model, and the importance of getting increased, proportional funding for Grand Valley. The floor was then opened to questions.

1. Eapen: Thank you for being here today. Stacie, you mentioned Grand Valley has one of the lowest per pupil funding in the state. What are the factors that play into this? Can you speak to why these other institutions get more.

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- a. Behler: There is really no good explanation. The current model is not based on how many students an institution has. The model simply gives each institution an across the board increase of 1% or 3% or some number each year. 20 years ago, when that model came to be, Grand Valley was a much smaller school. That means we had a smaller amount of original funding, and that amount has not grown proportionally with the growth of the school's enrollment.
 2. Hardgrave: When it comes to fighting for more funding for Grand Valley, are we asking for more money for all of higher education or are we asking to take from other institutions?
 - a. Behler: I don't know that the pie is going to get any bigger. The State has a shortfall in the budget as it is, and I don't foresee increases in the pot for higher education. I don't go into offices and ask to take money away from other institutions, or other students. However, it is an equity argument. We have an enormous economic impact on that state. For every \$1 the state gives Grand Valley, we return \$34. That's astounding and we deserve to be rewarded for that.
 3. Taverne: Grand Valley has lower cost of tuition, but gets less funding from the state than universities with higher tuition. That's not fair. How do we fix this?
 - a. Behler: Grand Valley hasn't done the best job being advocates for ourselves. Have you ever heard of West

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Michigan nice? We need to get rid of that attitude and start asking for more because our students and staff deserve it. Just imagine the impact we could have with more. Also, there is an election coming up, we can always make change through voting as well.

- b. Weare: All three statewide offices are term limited and are up for election. There is a lot of opportunity for impact there.
 - c. Behler: Your voices matter!
- 4. Frikken: Is the way Michigan's budget is determined similar state-to-state? And if so, have you worked with other institutions outside of Michigan to fix this?
 - a. Behler: No, not all states use the same model. We are currently working with a faculty/staff presidential fellow to conduct research and complete a landscape analysis to see what other states are doing. We can not go to the legislature and just say "it's not fair," we have to put a plan and some reasoning in front of them.
- 5. Zazula: Have we worked with other institutions in Michigan to make a case for the legislature?
 - a. Behler: Yes, particularly, my alma mater, Oakland University. They have a similar return on investment, and they have a huge impact on the South East Michigan economy—like we have on West Michigan. So, yes, we will partner with them to show the value.

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6. Burgos-Woodfork: How can we relay that our voices directly affect our peers who think their voice doesn't matter? How do we tell them this directly affects them?
 - a. Behler: We stress that there is an opportunity to get more engaged regardless of what you believe. The importance of higher education is real, and we can make the case for it. Both you all and I have to engage students more, show them the importance of this work, and what they could all have with a better system and more funding.
 - b. Weare: I bet you know a lot more than us about how to engage your students. You know what they care about, you know what resonates with them. So, helping tell the story of this work through what motivates them, what calls them to action, is a great strategy.
 - c. Behler: I gotta double click on that. I can't directly relate to the way that students are motivated, because I am not a student. I need your voice and your direction on how we engage more students.
 7. Wright: I know you talked about our state budget being broken and that you work hard for students in Lansing. What does this process look like and what is the timeline for that like?
 - a. Behler: I appreciate that question. Nothing happens fast in government. I can't snap my fingers and make things happen. Shortly after the Governor does her State of the State address, she will make her budget recommendation

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for the coming fiscal year. Then the leaders from the House will make their recommendation, and the Senate will do the same thing. They have to then work together to come to a compromise. That is when the fun starts, and that is when we are fighting the hardest for Grand Valley. So, it is slow work, but it is possible.

8. Smith: Are there ways that other colleges are struggling that we are not, and are there ways that GV would thrive if we had more funding?
 - a. Behler: Are we struggling with anything? I wouldn't say we are. We are in a much better spot than other institutions because of our students, our staff, and the careful stewardship of this university. To your second question, just imagine what we could do with more, more co-ops, more experiential learning, more research, etc. It's hard to imagine how we could change your experience with more money, but I know we need it and that Grand Valley students deserve it.

5. Elections Packet Vote

- a. Chief of Staff Laurin reviewed election materials, rules, and guidelines that were presented to the General Assembly at the previous General Assembly, and opened the floor to questions.
- b. Vanlerberghe: If any of you, especially new members are having any apprehension at all about running in the election, or still have remaining questions, please lean into our veteran members who have ran in elections before.

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Additionally, Chair Gemmen and I will be launching an elections page on the website soon, that can provide additional information and an outline on how the process will work.

- c. Stang: Motion to approve the 2026 spring election packet.
 - i. Theakston: Second.
 - ii. Motion passes with a vote of 39-0-0, and the packet is approved.

6. Call for Announcements

- a. Advisor Reports
- b. Chair Reports
 - i. Allocations - Lukas Hartley
 - ii. Public Relations - Sophie Gemmen
 - 1. Hello everyone! It's lovely to see your faces and hear your voices today.
 - 2. PRC is busy with creating promotional materials for all of our exciting events and initiatives. One I'm particularly excited for was devised by Senator Carma Taverne – PRC will pilot an interview video process with VP Jenny Hall-Jones at the end of February to put on our Instagram with the aim to connect the student body with members of the Senior Leadership Team, who are vital to student life on campus.
 - 3. Next Thursday, we'll take headshot photos with the Promotions Office, which PRC will then put up on the bulletin board and website, so look out for that!
 - 4. Otherwise, as always, if you have any interest in running for this Chair position, reach out to me. Have a good night!

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iii. Advocacy - Genna Wright

1. Hi everyone!
2. The Advocacy Committee will be partnering with BSU to have our first ever Black History Month Showcase, on February 23rd. The event will be sort of like the Teach-In where faculty and students are welcome to host a session about a topic involving black culture, if anyone is looking to get more involved please reach out to senator finley and I if you have any questions.
3. Also as you all know MLK Day of Service was canceled but has now been rescheduled for February 4th 6-7:30 you should've all received an email today on that.
4. We will also be partnering with the health and wellness center for sex education week tabling February 11th from 11-1. Senator Rodgers will be sending that over Slack after my report
5. Also anyone who is interested in running for advocacy chair in this upcoming election, please feel free to reach out to me.

iv. Policy - Cera McDonough

1. Hi, everyone!
2. I am happy to see everyone's faces. I don't have a lot to report on currently. However, starting next week, we will be reaching out to our relevant stakeholders. As Senator Hardgave announced during the passing of papers, we are in the works of hopefully hosting the Senate's first Zero Waste Basketball. We are still waiting on some logistics BUT if we are able to get this event approved, we would need at least 8-9 volunteers to host this event. If you have any

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further questions, please feel free to reach out to me or Senator Hardgrave.

3. On a serious note, in current events, there has been some scary and confusing news going around. However, I wanted to reiterate our constitutional rights. Everyone who is in the United States has the right to remain silent when questioned or arrested. Has the right to refuse a search without a warrant that is signed by a judge, and the right to ask for an attorney.

v. Events - Karen Theakston

1. Happy National Corn Chip Day!
2. I will be having a meeting with Melissa Baker about Elect Her next Monday and will be providing more information about the event next GA! If anyone would like to be more involved in Elect Her please let me know. Additionally, Events will be taking strides to update and improve upon our tabling, so if you have any ideas or opinions please feel free to slack me. As always if you are interested in the Events Chair position reach out to me on slack, so I can discuss the position and give advice.
3. On a more serious note, I know there are a lot of intense situations going on in our country right now and it is hard not to have this affect you. It is affecting me and it makes me mad, please educate yourselves on your rights especially with ICE, like Chair McDonough had said no matter your citizenship you have rights. There are plenty of resources on campus to help you and there are plenty of senators that would be willing to listen and be there for

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you, me and the cabinet included. I will be sending some brief resources in slack and please keep advocating for yourselves and others.

c. General Announcements

- i. Several announcements were made by Senators about events happening around campus with other Registered Student Organizations.

7. Public Comment

- a. No public comments were made at this time.

8. Adjournment

- a. Meeting was adjourned at 6:33 PM.