



M-01.22-23 Memorandum on GPSS Public Commentary Policy

To: GPSS Executive Committee
From: Jack Flesher, Vice President of Administration
Date: August 26, 2022
Subject: GPSS Public Commentary Policy

I. Introduction

As a representative organization of graduate students at the University of Washington (UW) that is capable of taking meaningful stances and actions on issues affecting the graduate student community as a whole, the GPSS recognizes the importance of public commentary within regular meetings of the GPSS. Likewise, the GPSS acknowledges the necessity of guidelines for public commentary that are in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA), the GPSS Constitution, the GPSS Bylaws, the *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (originally authored by Alice Sturgis) governing GPSS parliamentary procedures, the GPSS Mission Statement, and GPSS's commitment to equity and diversity. Therefore, I recommend that the following policies regarding public comments be adopted and implemented to ensure safe, fair, and democratic public commentary in GPSS meetings where periods of public comment are present.

II. Policy Recommendation

- Context: Compulsory OPMA Guidelines for all Periods of Public Commentary
 - Public commentary must be made available at or before any regular meetings with final actions. Final actions are defined as “a collective positive or negative decision, or an actual vote by a majority of the members of a governing body... upon a motion, proposal, resolution, order, or ordinance.”¹
 - While public commentary is recommended for special meetings and meetings without final actions, it is NOT required, and the GPSS retains discretion on the allowance of public commentary for all meetings outside the above criteria.
 - Public commentary may be delivered orally at a regular meeting with final actions being taken or taken in writing prior to a regular meeting with final actions being taken.
 - If public comment is taken in writing prior to a meeting, those comments must be distributed to the GPSS.
 - If public comment is taken orally at a meeting and a member of the public requests to make an oral comment remotely because they cannot attend in-person, the GPSS must provide an opportunity for this whenever it is reasonably feasible.
 - “Governing bodies may place limits on the time available for public comment, as well as reasonably necessary conditions to ‘protect public health or safety, or to protect against interruption of the meeting.’”²

¹ This language is taken from email correspondence from Eliza Saunders of the UW Office of Public Records and Open Public Meetings regarding OPMA compliance updates received on May 24, 2022.

² Ibid.

- Should a regular meeting enter a closed session and/or a period of executive session that is closed to the public, the chair of the meeting must publicly announce the purpose for the session, and the purpose for the session must also be entered into the meeting minutes.
- Recommended GPSS Policy for Public Commentary
 - In accordance with the recommendations of the UW Office of Public Records and Open Public Meetings and the UW Student Activities Office GPSS advisors, the GPSS will administer a system for receiving and distributing written public comments through the official GPSS website when required to provide periods of public commentary. Periods of open oral public comment are not recommended.³
 - The deadline for submitting written public comments to the official GPSS website public comments portal shall be one hour prior to the meeting for which written public comments are being taken.
 - Written public comments must be distributed and made available to the GPSS. The distribution of written public comments should occur at or before the meeting for which the written public comments were taken. Comments will be distributed by publication on the official GPSS website, or distributed digitally by the Vice President of Administration or Senate Director.
 - Each member of the public shall be limited to one written comment per person, not to exceed 1500 characters (approximately 300 words with spaces) in total length.
 - While the GPSS values free speech, written public comments that are not in keeping with the UW or GPSS missions to foster inclusive, equitable, and safe spaces for all shall be excluded from initial distribution, at the discretion of a GPSS Executive Officer and/or the chair of a meeting, until such time as the comment has been reviewed by the UW Office of Public Records and Open Public Meetings and the executive committee.
 - This includes, but is not limited to, comments containing racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, bigotry, xenophobia, directed or personal attacks, and other -isms resulting from systems of oppression that perpetuate disempowerment.

III. Policy Implementation

Whereas the UW Office of Public Records and Open Public Meetings is currently in the process of creating a set of university-wide “best practices” with regard to changing laws surrounding public commentary at open public meetings that may necessitate updating or creating a new GPSS Public Commentary Policy, this memorandum shall stand as official GPSS policy with a majority vote of the GPSS Executive Committee, subject to review by the GPSS per Article VI, Section A, Clause 4 of the GPSS Bylaws.⁴ This memorandum may be amended by a majority vote of the GPSS Executive Committee.

Final version presented to the GPSS Executive Committee on August 26, 2022.

³ This recommendation comes from email correspondence between the GPSS Vice President of Administration and Nick DeMuro of the UW Office of Public Records and Open Public Meetings on August 25, 2022.

⁴ “Any actions of the Executive Committee are subject to review by the GPSS.”