

Business Meeting Draft Minutes

CSGS Annual Meeting

February 20th, 2026

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

1:29 CDT Call to Order

Audit Committee Report

The Audit Committee met this morning at which the treasurer Peter Harries provided a financial briefing. The committee reviewed last year's income statement and projections for the coming year.

The committee has no findings, meaning we submit an unqualified, clean opinion.

Well, our only finding is that Peter does a tremendous job as treasurer. This is truly a heavy lift and the audit committee requests we applaud him for his efforts and fiduciary management of the conference.

In summary, the CSGS' financial situation is, when all outstanding obligations are paid, we should have a concluding balance of \$85-90k not including a savings reserve of approximately \$35k.

There are several reasons we will end with a positive balance. First, as you recall, last year the audit committee requested an increase of \$100 to the registration fee, which was approved. Second, this year's venue was much more affordable. The city of Baton Rouge and this hotel worked closely with the executive committee to secure them as our venue. Part of the hotel package is the hotel will refund \$10 per rented room to CSGS.

As next year's venue in Arlington will be more expensive, a positive annual balance will provide a financial cushion for additional costs.

In terms of process, the audit committee respectfully recommends we alter the treasurer's reporting cycle to a June/July calendar. A financial report delivered on June 30th will include all budgetary reconciliations from the annual conference and provide the audit committee with a completed set of financial statements. The audit committee will convene in August virtually and provide a written report for the upcoming conference meeting.

In conclusion, the Audit Committee wishes to convey its complete confidence in our treasurer Peter Harries. He is doing a great job.

Thank you to Peter.

*The 2025 Profit and Loss Report is attached to the end of this document.

Ad-Hoc 3MT Committee Report

Committee Members:

Mary Farmer-Kaiser (University of Louisiana at Lafayette), Chair

Erin Brown (Virginia Commonwealth University)

Jennifer Ercoli (University of Louisiana at Lafayette)

Robyn Olejniczak (formerly at the College of Charleston)

Marieke Van Puymbroeck (University of Tennessee Knoxville)

Jessica Queener (West Virginia University)

Jessica Zagorski (Louisiana State University)

CSGS held a face-to-face 3MT competition during the 2026 annual meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

A record-setting 65 institutions sent competitors who competed in six simultaneous preliminary round heats on February 19, 2026. They were evaluated by 23 preliminary round judges, and the two highest scoring competitors from each heat (total of 12) advanced to the final round competition, which closed out the conference on February 20, 2026.

Thank you to the CSGS board for accommodating our request to add a sixth preliminary round heat and, consequently, adding two more competitors to the final round of competition.

Twenty-three leaders from the Baton Rouge community served as judges for the preliminary heats, including:

- Lacey Brown-Kelly, Assistant Director, Baton Rouge Community College TRIO Educational Opportunity Center
- Shayne Creppel, Ph.D., Director, Collegiate and Community Outreach, Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Jenna Jaureguy, Collection Development Librarian, East Baton Rouge Parish Library System
- Haley Miller, Higher Education Reporter, The Advocate

- Mary Durusau, Museum Director, Louisiana's Old State Capitol
- Crystal Ellis, Principal Consultant, Rouxted Growth Co.
- Dexter Jackson, Executive Director, MidCity Redevelopment Alliance
- Community Volunteer (Together Baton Rouge)
- Julio Naudin, Artist
- Brandon Brown, Owner, Brandon Brown Realty LLC, Port Allen, LA, Former City Councilman
- Erin Douget, Development Director, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
- Eric Holden, Attorney
- Darlene Adams Roland, Executive Director, Red Stick Farmers Market
- Emily Glascock, Director of Philanthropic Impact, Baton Rouge Area Foundation
- Jon Parks, Minister, University Baptist Church of Baton Rouge and Former Director of the Interfaith Foundation
- Patrick Roque, Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner for Audit and Compliance, Louisiana Board of Regents
- Lisa Tompkins, Attorney
- Margaret Delaney, Health Section Coordinator, Times-Picayune | Nola.com | The Advocate | Shreveport-Bossier Advocate
- Gaines Foster, Murphy J. Foster Professor of History Emeritus, Retired
- Deidre Deculus Robert, President and CEO, Build Baton Rouge
- Erin Tolar, Associate Pastor, University Presbyterian Church
- Michael Diresto, Director, LSU Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs (Formerly at the Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce)
- Adrian Owen Jones, Partner, Success Labs
- Mary Mikell, Social Worker (retired) and

The 12 finalists included:

Institution	Name	Presentation Title
Emory University	Jonathan Einterz Owen	How a Virus Makes Spaghetti
Mississippi State University	Samadhi Nisansala Nawalage	Turning Waste into Sustainable Iron Composites for Cleaner Water
North Carolina State University	Azka Arshad	From Beakers to Bots: Accelerating Chemical Discovery with Light, Robots and AI
Oklahoma State University	Suman Poudel	Broken to Blackout — Impact of Tornado Debris on Transmission Towers

Stephen F. Austin State University	Callie Lynn	"The Dolphin Cocktail Party Effect: Did you whistle my name?"
University of Arkansas	Ruvindu Perera	Developing a Vaccine to Prevent Lameness in Broiler Chickens
University of Georgia	Anshul	Peanuts: The Uncrushed Oil Potential
University of Kentucky	Alyson M. Ackerman Olivelli	Nature's Cure for Cancer? Upgrading Ancient Remedies with Modern Chemistry
University of Miami	Natasha Khatwani	From Exhausted to Energized: Recharging Cancer-Fighting T Cells
University of South Carolina	Michael J. Kaven	Peptoid mimic of Alzheimer's disease hallmark ameliorates neurotoxic inflammation
University of Tennessee Knoxville	Kriza Faye Calumba	Tiny Armor, Big Impact: Protecting Probiotics with Shellac
Western Carolina University	Kristina Gray	Flooded with Microplastics

The final round of competition was evaluated by a panel of community judges, including:

- Jan Risher, Louisiana Culture Editor and Columnist, The Advocate
- Emily Mastrantonio, Director of Marketing, Visit Baton Rouge
- Robyn Merrick, Vice President for External Affairs and University Relations, Southern University
- Stephen Hightower, Director of Food and Beverage, University Club Baton Rouge
- Byron Washington, Founder of Scotland Saturdays

Special thanks to Jan Risher and Chris Yandle, Associate Commissioner for Strategic Communications at the Louisiana Board of Regents, for providing much support for securing judges for the preliminary heats. Thanks also to Visit Baton Rouge for connecting me with additional community members to serve as judges.

First and second place winners and the audience-selected People's Choice Award winner are identified, along with monetary prizes, below.

Award	Competitor	Institution	Presentation Title
First Place (\$1000)	Natasha Khatwani	University of Miami	From Exhausted to Energized: Recharging Cancer-Fighting T Cells
Second Place (\$500)	Samadhi Nisansala Nawalage	Mississippi State University	Turning Waste into Sustainable Iron Composites for Cleaner Water
People's Choice Award (\$250)	Alyson M. Ackerman Olivelli	University of Kentucky	Nature's Cure for Cancer? Upgrading Ancient Remedies with Modern Chemistry

Sponsorship Committee Report

The Sponsorship Committee consisted of:

Peter Harries (chair), NC State University

Annette Kluck, University of Mississippi

Sharon James McGee, East Tennessee State University

A standing goal of the Sponsorship Committee has been to raise \$20,000 for the Annual Meeting. As of February 2025, we exceeded our goal by raising \$31,350. This includes 3 Platinum Sponsor, 2 Gold Sponsors, 6 Silver Sponsors, and 13 Member Sponsors.

Company/Institution	Level	Amount
ETS	Platinum	\$5250
Center for Graduate Career Success	Platinum	\$5000
EdVision	Platinum	\$3100
ProQuest – a part of Clarivate	Gold	\$2500
EAB	Gold	\$2500
Advanced Education	Silver	\$1250
Liaison International	Silver	\$1250
Selected Insights	Silver	\$1000
Phi Kappa Phi	Silver	\$1000
Duolingo	Silver	\$1000
Sage/Epigeum	Silver	\$1000
Association of Texas Graduate Schools	Member Sponsor	\$500
Auburn University	Member Sponsor	\$500
Duke University	Member Sponsor	\$500
NC State University	Member Sponsor	\$500
Florida Atlantic University	Member Sponsor	\$500
Louisiana State University - Shreveport	Member Sponsor	\$500
SMU	Member Sponsor	\$500
University of South Florida	Member Sponsor	\$500
University of Alabama – Huntsville	Member Sponsor	\$500
University of Alabama - Tuscaloosa	Member Sponsor	\$500
University of Arkansas - Fayetteville	Member Sponsor	\$500
University of Louisiana - Lafayette	Member Sponsor	\$500
University of South Florida	Member Sponsor	\$500
TOTAL		\$31,350

Membership Committee Report

Alan Itkin and Jennifer Schroeder, co-chairs

Members: Manu Gupta, Desi Hacker, Anthony Marsh, Nicole Piquero, David Shafer, Misty Stewart

CSGS currently has 121 institutional members, up from 120 institutional members in 2025. In difficult economic times for many institutions, this small increase in memberships reflects the impact of the organization and the efforts of the Membership Committee. Members of the membership committee met throughout the year and coordinated outreach to institutions that have let their membership lapse or who were not previously members. Prior to this conference, an email was sent to all first-time attendees to welcome them to the conference. Membership Committee members have made themselves available to connect with first-time attendees personally. The Membership Committee will meet again in the coming weeks to review the year's activities and make recommendations to the Executive Committee.

Program Committee Report

Submitted by John Lopes on Feb 13, 2026

The Program Committee included Ruth Bahr (U South Florida), Debra Jackson (East Carolina U), Robert Stackman (Florida Atlantic U), and Brian Wayne (Elizabeth City State U). The deadline for applications was initially Oct 3, 2025 but it was extended to Oct 10. The Committee met virtually on Oct 14, 2025 and reviewed 15 applications that spanned the 4 themes:

Graduate Community and Culture 7

Resilience and Adaption 6

Weathering Challenging Times and Their Aftermath 1

Facing Our Biggest Challenges 1

The committee recognized the excellent quality of the proposals which reflected thoughtful and innovative perspectives on graduate education. The committee reviewed and debated each application with respect to content, overlap with other applications, as well as meeting the goal of ensuring representation across the 4 themes. We also considered themes that would be relevant to the diverse representation of CSGS member graduate schools. The committee ultimately chose 12 of the proposals that spanned all four themes. Also, the approved sessions employed 4 different styles including: panel, facilitated discussion, case study/studies, and other.

The committee is grateful for the thoughtful contributions of the session leaders to the overall success of the 2026 annual meeting in Baton Rouge.

Jessica Zagorski, Matt Calamia and Kristen Williams – all from LSU - also met several times with the Chair of the Program Committee to discuss the graduate student breakout sessions. The focus was on activities unlikely to be offered as part of typical professional development platforms, that would help to lower stress as students prepared for the 3MT competition, and that would provide a useful skill/knowledge for the students. The LSU team created two highly relevant, fun, and constructive breakout sessions. We are grateful to them for their commitment to this part of the annual meeting.

Finally, we express our gratitude to the members of the executive committee – especially, Troy Terry, Peter Harries, Laurence Bray, André Denham, Sharon McGee and Debra Jackson who identified an outstanding set of plenary speakers.

Faculty Awards Committee Report

The faculty awards committee was convened virtually in late Fall 2025 to consider the nominees. There were 17 nominations for the Outstanding Mentoring Award and 2 for the Outstanding Contributions Award. One nomination packet for the Outstanding Mentoring Award was incomplete. As the committee chair, I reached out to the nominator for the additional required materials, and they decided to withdraw the nomination and submit it next year. Committee members ranked the nominees using a rubric developed to reflect each nominee's relevant contributions based on the award criteria.

As expected, deciding the winners of awards of this nature was very difficult. The committee was very impressed by the quality and depth of mentoring in our graduate community. This highlights that across our region there are excellent mentors doing excellent work in preparing the next generation of scholars. Additionally, while the number of submissions were low, the committee was impressed by the strength of the nominations received for the Outstanding Contribution to Graduate Education award.

The Outstanding Mentoring Award winner is:

Dr. Nils Peterson, North Carolina State University

Nominated by: Dr. Peter Harries, Dean of the Graduate School, North Carolina State University

Dr. Nils Peterson was nominated for the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools Outstanding Mentor Award in recognition of nearly two decades of exemplary graduate

mentoring, teaching, and program leadership at North Carolina State University. Since 2007, he has chaired the committees for 30 graduate students, served on 41 additional committees, and mentored more than 130 undergraduate researchers. His mentoring philosophy centers on aligning research and professional development with each student's passions and career goals, resulting in strong outcomes: timely degree completion, extensive publication and presentation records, and successful placement of graduates in academia, government, and industry. His students have co-authored more than 140 peer-reviewed journal articles, delivered over 200 conference presentations, earned numerous awards, and frequently advanced to doctoral study or faculty positions. Dr. Peterson is widely recognized for combining high expectations with deep personal investment in students' academic growth, professional preparation, and well-being.

Beyond individual advising, Dr. Peterson has had a transformative impact on graduate education through leadership, curriculum development, and faculty mentoring. As Director of Graduate Programs for the interdisciplinary Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology program and for Forestry & Environmental Resources, he has successfully managed complex, multi-college programs, strengthened community, expanded access through initiatives such as dropping GRE requirements and launching accelerated bachelor's–master's pathways, and advocated persistently for graduate student resources. He has also developed innovative, service-learning–based graduate courses that integrate research, teaching, and community engagement, often resulting in publishable scholarship and direct impacts on policy or practice. Colleagues, former students, and senior administrators consistently describe Dr. Peterson as a model mentor whose generosity, collaboration, and holistic approach have shaped a culture of mentoring excellence and left a lasting legacy through his students' success.

The awards committee strongly affirms that Dr. Peterson exemplifies all the qualities desired in an Outstanding Mentor Award recipient. He is most deserving of this award.

The Outstanding Contributions to Graduate Education in the Southern Region Award goes to:

Dr. RaJade M. Berry-James, Virginia Commonwealth University

Nominated by: Manu Gupta, Dean of the Graduate School, Virginia Commonwealth University

Dr. RaJade M. Berry-James was nominated for the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools Outstanding Contribution to Graduate Education in the Southern Region Award in recognition of her transformative leadership and contributions to graduate education,

public affairs, and public service. As Senior Associate Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, she has led strategic initiatives that significantly expanded access, enrollment, and student success, including a 48.4% increase in master's enrollment and a 46.2% increase in doctoral enrollment between Fall 2022 and Fall 2025. Her leadership has strengthened graduate advising, faculty mentoring, and professional development for graduate assistants, while also securing substantial funding for graduate assistantships and teaching assistantships. Previously at North Carolina State University, she directed MPA and PhD programs through successful NASPAA reaccreditation, pioneered culturally responsive and equity-centered curricula, and led high-impact service-learning experiences that connected graduate education to real-world public challenges.

At the national and international levels, Dr. Berry-James has shaped the standards and future of graduate public service education through exceptional leadership in NASPAA and the National Academy of Public Administration. Serving as NASPAA Vice President, President, and Immediate Past President, she advanced global collaboration and convened a landmark international conference that brought together hundreds of scholars and institutions to address pressing public-sector challenges. Her extensive leadership in accreditation (chairing the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation and leading global training efforts) has influenced the quality of graduate education worldwide. As a NAPA Fellow and chair of the Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance, she has further integrated scholarship, practice, and graduate education, securing resources that directly support graduate students and emerging scholars. Across institutions and organizations, Dr. Berry-James is consistently recognized as a visionary leader, mentor, and advocate whose work has elevated graduate education through innovation, equity, and sustained impact.

The committee believes that Dr. Berry-James' contributions have significantly advanced graduate education across the Southern Region, fostering lasting improvements at the local, state, and regional levels. She is most deserving of this award.

Respectfully submitted,

André R. Denham, Chair, The University of Alabama

Laurence Bray, George Mason University

Ashley Colquitt, Appalachian State University

Montrale Boykin, Winston-Salem State University

Kristi Gaines, Texas Tech University

Becky de Cruz, Valdosta State University

Forest Lane, Stephen F. Austin State University

Thesis Award Committee Report

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee members that did an outstanding job reviewing 42 Thesis submissions: 16 Candidates in the Life Sciences, 17 Candidates in the Social Sciences, and 9 in the Non-Traditional Category. The committee consisted of Annette Kluck, from the University of Mississippi, Beth Lovern, from the University of Georgia, Karen Randall, from Moorehouse School of Medicine, Robert Stackman from Florida Atlantic University, Aimee Suprenant from Virginia Tech, and Benedict Uzochukwa, from Virginia State University. The review process was structured such that each thesis was reviewed by 3 members of the committee in the first round. In the second round, we selected three theses from the first round in each category for review all of members of the review committee. Once those scores were tabulated the committee met to discuss and select the top candidate in each category. Some things that the committee suggested:

1. Require all candidates to submit an electronic version of their thesis. Links didn't always work and we had to spend time searching for copies of the thesis on the web.
2. Some thesis packages had letters from advisors and committee members and others didn't. Making the requirements clear to those submitting would make the review packages more consistent in terms of content.
3. We had two submissions from students that did not meet the submission requirements. Two of the submissions were for students who did not graduate until December.

I want to thank the committee; they did an excellent job reviewing the thesis submissions and we had some excellent discussions as we worked toward identifying the winners in each category.

Submitted by Ed Pohl, Chair of the committee.

New Dean's Breakfast Report

The annual New Deans' Breakfast was held as an informal professional-development and networking opportunity for recently appointed graduate deans. The session provided an opportunity for discussion of common challenges, institutional contexts, and approaches

to graduate education leadership. At least sixteen participants attended, and the session was facilitated by Irene Pittman Aiken, with assistance from Preselfannie McDaniels.

Nominating Committee Report

The Nominating Committee was composed of Ernest Brothers (The University of Tennessee, Knoxville), Michael Cunningham (Tulane University), Jon Hakkila (Chair, The University of Alabama in Huntsville), Jill Huerta (The University of North Carolina at Charlotte), and Mary Anne Templeton (Troy University). A call for nominations was sent out from the CSGS email advertising six open positions: President-Elect (three-year term, including President and Post-President), Secretary (three-year term), and four Executive Committee members (three-year term, unless filling a position that has been terminated early).

The committee received three nominations for President-Elect, one nomination for Secretary, and eight nominations for Executive Committee members. Self-nominations were permitted. One candidate for President-Elect withdrew their name for nomination.

Nominations were closed and submitted to the CSGS President and President-Elect on January 28, 2026.

Elections went forward with the following results, having reached a quorum:

Sharon James McGee President-elect

Julie Goodliffe Secretary

Three-year terms for Executive Committee:

Irene Aiken

Greg Bell

Alan Itkin

Ron Walcott

One-year term (replaces Sharon James McGee):

Lindey Aloia

Submitted on behalf of the Nominating Committee,

Jon Hakkila

Tribute to Jon Hakkila

Troy Terry presented a plaque to Past-President Jon Hakkila in honor of his dedication and contributions to the CSGS. Jon gave a short, heartfelt speech about how much the CSGS community has meant to him over the years.

1:55 CDT Adjourn