Overview:

The PGSS Council is responsible for governance of society activities within PGSS and is charged with dealing with the long-term vision of the Society, policies, approval of internal committee placements, while serving as an accountability mechanism for the PGSS Executive team.

Meetings are held monthly, and departmental representatives from across the University debate, discuss, and vote on the actions of the Society.

Council is held in the Thomson House ballroom. Doors open at 6:00 pm for a 6:30 pm start. A special exception is made for Council meetings preceding a General Meeting, for these meetings, doors will open at 5:30 pm for a 6:00 pm start.

Councilors are encouraged to submit PGSA announcements, motions or discussion items to the agenda. The deadline for submission is 1 week prior to the scheduled council date. Discussion items should contain a minimum of one question to help guide discussion. Motions should include a few whereas statements (justifications and/or background) to help ground the conversation as well as at least one "be it resolved clause" with an action item.

If you have any question about how to phrase or submit a motion or discussion item, email the Speaker (council.pgss@mail.mcgill.ca) or Secretary-General (sec-gen.pgss@mail.mcgill.ca).

In the PGSS Bylaws, section 6, point 2.1.1., Council members make decisions about Society Activities including but not limited to: the Society budget, the Society Activities Manual, and the Society Policy Manual. Furthermore, for point 2.1.2., joint decisions are decided about Shared Activities in conjunction with the Board of Directors. While in point 2.1.3., Council shall have no purview over Business or Corporate Activities. Any concerns can always be brought forth to the PGSS Executives.

Getting appointed

In order to become a councilor, a PGSS member must contact their Post-Graduate Students’ Association (PGSA). Otherwise, the PGSS Chief Returning Officer or PGSS Executive can follow up and provide information whether that PGSA’s council seat is vacant.

Only your department can appoint you to speak on their behalf at the PGSS Council. Therefore, you should get either your department’s graduate student association (GSA) to issue a letter stating that they have appointed you to act as PGSS representative, or if none exists, your department’s graduate coordinator/secretary is just as suitable. This letter can be an email, as long as it’s in writing. Once we receive it, you’re officially a councilor and the fun begins.
Please send all letters/emails to studentlife.pgss@mail.mcgill.ca

**Getting in the loop**
There is a lot of information you should know about PGSS and the Council’s business.

You’ll find our current items of business, all resolutions passed in the year, minutes from our previous meetings, a list of councilors, rules of order, policies, etc… through the Council tab on the PGSS website. Take some time and browse through it. Then you’ll know what we’ve been up to and what we’re all about. If you have any questions, PGSS staff and Executives can help.

**Accountability**
There are only a few key things to remember when serving as Councilor. These can be quickly understood in one quick read though of the Councilor Pledge Form. Once the Agenda is sent to councilors, it is the PGSA representative’s responsibility for ensuring that any discussions or decisions being made at council are reviewed. This ensures sufficient and constructive discussion at council. Decisions made at council can make a huge impact on the entire membership of McGill graduate and post-doctoral students. It is essential that any information be reported to PGSA’s before and after council.

**Schedule**
Council meetings are almost always on the first Wednesday of each month, at 6:30 p.m., at Thomson House (3650 McTavish).

**Questions**
Of course, you may have questions and concerns. Our Student Life Coordinator will help you find any Council-related business or people; don’t hesitate to contact them.

**PGSS COUNCIL RULES OF ORDER**

**At-a-glance**

At every council, the PGSS Speaker maintains order. To be efficient, councilors can view possible actions found on their voting cards. At any time, a councilor can request information or clarification by raising their placard, announcing “POINT OF INFORMATION”, followed by stating the PGSA they represent, and their name. This will be further expanded on in the following pages.

Commonly used rules of order
This by no means is the totality of Robert’s Rules of Order. However, if you master these rules, you’ll do just fine on the floor of Council.

**PRELIMINARIES**

When it is your turn to speak, please state your name and your position on Council (Councilor, Executive, Officer, Committee member). A recording secretary must inscribe these in the minutes (official notes) of the meetings.

Also you must state if you are speaking on a point of debate, on a point of information, or to make a motion to amend. This allows everyone to know where you’re going with your statements, for
the Speaker to determine if your point is in order, and for the recording secretary to accurately represent your statements.

**MOTIONS**

**WHAT IS “WHEREAS” & “BIRT”?**

Motions can be preceded with a preamble (outlining the issues relevant to the motion) and generally begin with the word “Whereas”. A Whereas statement cannot be amended by council. This allows context to what the motivator would like the rest of council to know. Usually a whereas statement is one sentence long. A motion must contain a “BIRT” statement which stands for “Be it resolved that”. This concludes your motion and signals what will result from passing this motion.

eg. Whereas the Polywogs have submitted their grant application and it has been reviewed by the Grants Review Committee,

BIRT the PGSS grant the Polywogs $600.00 from the grants budget.

**GETTING STARTED**

This rundown of steps is repeated at each consideration of motion;

An item of business, or a motion on the agenda is read by the Speaker.

eg. BIRT the PGSS grant the Polywogs $600.00 from the grants budget.

**MOTIVATION**

A motivation is made by either the mover (author of the motion) or the seconder (supporter of the motion) but not both. The motivation is simply an opportunity for the mover or seconder to introduce the motion and to have the first chance to debate. As each person has the right to debate only once, the motivation may be declined if the mover and the seconder wish to reserve the right to debate at a later time.

eg. The Polywogs grant application was submitted on time, and reviewed by the Committee on Monetary Affairs and fulfills all requirements.

**DISCUSSION**

People will be recognized to speak in the order in which they have been recognized by the Speaker to be on the speaker’s list. (Being “recognized” just means raising your hand). The most common actions taken by someone who has the floor is either to (1) debate, (2) ask a question (called a point of information), or (3) move to amend the motion.

**DEBATE**

Debate simply means speaking in favor or against the motion. You have two minutes to speak. You may debate any motion only twice per motion. If inside a discussion about motion ‘x’ – a new motion is proposed (to amend it for example), then you can debate again, but only once, on the new motion.
eg. Speaking in favor – I think they should obtain the grant because I support their project.

eg. Speaking against – I don’t think the Polywogs project is worthy of funding because their project is questionnable.

Anything asking for an opinion or a matter of rhetoric is a point of debate.

eg. Point of debate – Why should we support this motion?

POINT OF INFORMATION
A point of information is a factual question dealing with the motion at hand.

eg. How much money would be left in the granting budget?

eg. From what department are the Polywogs from?

You may ask as many questions (points of information) as you wish during the discussion of a motion.

MOTION TO AMEND
An amendment is a suggestion to change the wording, content, substance of a motion in question.

If you wish to amend the motion, the first thing you should do is write it down. A tremendous amount of meeting time is lost due to coming up with proper wording for amendments. When it is your turn to speak, move your amendment.

eg. The Polywogs should get $400.00 instead of $600.00 therefore I move that “Motion to grant the Polywogs $400.00 from the grants budget.”

You’ll then have a chance to debate your amendment. You may also debate the main motion first, and proceed with your motion to amend. As with most motions, your amendment will require a seconder.

eg. Point of debate; I disagree with the $600.00 amount in the motion since their project only costs the group $500.00. Therefore, I think the Polywogs should get $400.00 instead of $600.00. I move that “Motion to grant the Polywogs $400.00 from the grants budget.”

Either way, this constitutes your turn to debate the main motion and the amendment.

If you have an amendment planned before the meeting, please submit it to the Speaker before the meeting begins. It makes everything a lot easier and saves headaches if we already have it in writing.
SUMMATION
After the Speaker’s list is exhausted, the mover or the seconder may summate. The summation is not intended to be further debate or an extra chance for the mover to debate, but rather just a quick summary of and reponse to the debate and possibly a brief reiteration of the mover’s reasons for the motion. The summation is limited to one minute.

eg. So conclusively, the motion will now grant the Polywogs $400.00 from the grants budget as their application is valid.

CALL TO VOTE
Finally, the motion will be called to a vote. The motion will be read by the Speaker, as amended if that’s the case. You can vote “in favor”, “opposed” or “abstain”. (An abstention is your choice “not to vote” on the particular issue)

In the interest of speed, Speakers will not count the votes but rather just call the result as s/he sees it. If you want an exact count, just ask aloud on a point of information. If the vote is too close to call the outcome by just a view of hands, the Speaker will call again for a vote and will count. Abstentions are rarely requested by the Speaker but if you want your abstention noted, just ask aloud on a point of personal privilege. If you’ve voted and you’d like your vote to be noted in the minutes, please also request this aloud by a point of personal privilege.

eg. The vote is 10 in favor and 15 against. I would like my support for this motion noted please.

ADDITIONAL RULES OF ORDER

CALLING THE QUESTION
When debate is on-going at length, you may also move to “call the question.” This means that you are asking for all debates to cease and for the vote to be called immediately. This often occurs when the Councilor believes that the meeting has exhausted all possible debate and councilors are debating in circles. By calling the question, you use your turn to debate. Therefore, if you’ve already debated the motion in question, you cannot call the question.

POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVLEDGE
You may also interrupt someone to raise an urgent point of information when waiting your turn on the speaker’s list means you won’t understand the ongoing debate.

eg. The author of the motion keeps referring to the acronym APPC and I don’t know what it means. You may also use a point of personal privilege if you have a problem such as you can’t hear the person speaking, the person speaking has unreasonably offended you; or the like. In these cases, interrupt and raise your point.

eg. It’s much too warm in the Council room – may we open a window?
eg. I can’t hear the debate because of noise in the hall – may we close the Council room doors?
eg. Could the Speaker instruct the author of the motion to speak louder?
eg. I take offence at the mover’s statement about Polywogs being ‘not so smart’.

**MOTION TO DIVIDE THE QUESTION**

Any councillor may move to divide the question. This is applied if the motion in question consists of two separate parts.

eg. BIRT PGSS grant the Polywogs and the Sword Swallowing Club each $600.00 from the grants budget

If you wish to divide the question, interrupt when the next person on the Speaker’s list is called upon.

eg. BIRT the PGSS grant the Polywogs $600.00 from the grants budget, and, BIRT the PGSS grant the Sword Swallowing Club $600.00 from the grants budget.

This now allows for a Councilor to amend one of the grant requests but not the other.

eg. Motion to amend: BIRT the PGSS grant the Polywogs $400.00 from the grants budget.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

If you have a personal conflict of interest with any motion, you must declare that conflict to the speaker before debate begins. Robert’s Rules further stipulates that you must abstain from the vote. Please note that a conflict of interest means something personal, not something affecting your constituents as a whole.

eg. NOT A CONFLICT: I am the representative from Polywogs

eg. CONFLICT: I am the representative from Physiology but I am also the President of Polywogs.

Your duty as Councilor is to represent the constituency which appointed you to the Council. As President of the Polywogs here, you are likely going to be voting with the interests of Polywogs, not Physiology. You must therefore note the conflict to the Speaker and abstain from voting. In this case, the Polywogs’ representative to Council may defend the interests of the group.

**Appealing the ruling of the Speaker**

If you disagree with any ruling made by the Speaker, you may challenge that ruling. The Speaker will immediately call for a vote of Council without debate. A 2/3 majority is required to overrule the Speakers ruling. Further appeals can be made through the Constitution Committee in the month following the meeting.

**A note on friendly amendments**

A friendly amendment is a proposed change of wording which no one objects to. This type of amendment does not require a vote. If the effect of the motion is changed, then the amendment must be voted upon.

eg. FRIENDLY: Motion to amend: BIRT the PGSS grant the Polywogs Team $400.00 from the grants budget

eg. REQUIRING VOTE: Motion to amend: BIRT the PGSS grant the Polywogs $400.00 from the grants budget upon reception of their project budget.
PASSING A MOTION BY CONSENT
If no one objects to a motion, the Speaker can declare it passed by consent of Council. This applied generally for non-contentious motions (such as approving minutes). The Speaker will just ask if anyone objects. This practice saves time and energy at meetings.

Sticking to relevant business
If a Councilor asks a question or begins debating about something that is not relevant to the motion currently in question, it is the Speaker’s job to interrupt the Councilor and ask him or her to either conclude or return to the subject in question.

eg. Point of information; Where did the Polywogs get their name?

EMERGENCY MOTIONS
Motions must be received by the Speaker seven days prior to the meeting. The agenda must be posted on-line five days prior to the meeting and this allows for the Speaker to prepare the agenda.

In the case of an emergency, you may introduce a motion on the Council floor without having it on the agenda a week before the meeting. This will require a 2/3 majority vote at Council to have your motion placed on the agenda.

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