

**Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration Inc.**

Mineral & Metallurgical Processing Division  
Hyatt Regency, Salt Lake City, UT: Salt Lake Ballroom A  
February 22, 2026, 9:00-11:30 am  
Salt Lake City, UT

Meeting Minutes  
Submitted February 28, 2026

**Opening:**

The regular meeting of the Executive Committee of the Mineral & Metallurgical Division (MPD) of the SME was called to order at 9:04 am on February 22, 2026, in Salt Lake City, UT by Tarun Bhambhani.

**Present:**

Tarun Bhambhani, Chair – Present  
Jaeheon Lee, Past Chair – Present  
Aaron Noble, Associate Chair – Present  
Kimberly Mills, First Vice Chair – Present  
Nick Gow, Second Vice Chair – Present  
Jim Wickens, Secretary-Treasurer – Present  
Adam House, Technical Program Associate – Present  
Zach Zanetell, Membership Associate – Present  
Chee Theng, SME Liaison – Present

**Guests:**

Sumedh Gostu, Fangyu Liu, Michael Spicher, Raghav Dube, Thom Seal, Lei Pan, Pengbo Chu, Jayson Ripke, Nickey Powell, Mohammad Rezaee, Mike Moats, Weston Hartzell, Tim Myers, Triveni Gangadari, Chandima Subasinghe, Younes Shekarian, Zeynep Cicek, Deniz Talan, Mark Strauss, Janet Baron, Ronel Kappes, Lana Alagha, Janaka Wijenayake, Orkun Yavuzkan, Xinbo Yang, Hari Oammulamadaka, Madison Sandoval, Olumide Ogunmodimu, Venkateswara Raochebxolv, Diego Davila, Wencai Zhang, Taylor Smith, Reza Mahmoudi, John Uhrrie, Shihua Han, Tom Rauch, Rick Honaker

**A. Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was unanimously approved as distributed.

**B. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously approved as distributed.

### **C. Safety Share**

Jaeheon Lee shared that many people are speeding to get through yellow lights at intersections. He recommended delaying your start at the change to green to be sure.

### **D. Open Issues**

#### **1. GPAC**

Rick Honaker provided an update on GPAC activities and highlighted that there has been a lot of activity since copper was added to the critical minerals list. This has opened access to funding for research and industry. Other initiatives include access to forest lands for exploration, building strategic stockpiles for critical minerals, encouraging the Mining Schools bills to progress through congress and preparing white papers for mineral processing in the US and critical minerals processing. The DOE is placing an emphasis on bio-leaching technology. MPD may be able to help GPAC with finding resources to assist in the development of the white papers.

#### **2. Programming**

The MPD technical program for the MINEXCHANGE 2026 SME Annual Conference & Expo in Salt Lake City, UT consists of 23 sessions, including a special session for the Balancing Transformation and Tradition symposium titled Processing Powers Progress. There were a record number of submissions, resulting in a record number of rejections. Unit Committees were thanked for being focused on quality over quantity. The Monday afternoon Plenary Session will include lectures honoring the division's major award recipients, and a certificate presentation to the Rong Yu Wan Ph.D. Scholarship recipient. A panel discussion on flotation equipment, led by Ronel Kappes, will follow the Plenary Session. The new Plenary Session format followed by a panel discussion, or other alternative session, will be tried for a few years and then reassessed.

The MPD technical program for the MINEXCHANGE 2027 SME Annual Conference & Expo in Denver, CO will be led by Kimberly Mills. All attendees were encouraged to attend the MPD Unit Committee Meeting in the afternoon to discuss session topics and special session ideas. There will be a reduction in the number of sessions allowed, and session topics will be due in April. Abstracts will be due in August. Pre-prints will be due before November. Kimberly Mills and Nick Gow will attend the 2027 Programming meeting later this week.

#### **3. Social Functions and Fundraisers**

The MPD Scotch Nightcap will be held on Tuesday, February 24, 2026. The event has raised \$37,000 from three title sponsors (\$7,500 ea.), four supporting sponsors (\$3,500 ea.) and one supporting sponsor at \$500 (due to a \$3,000 sponsor credit). The Bass

Metals band will once again perform, and Secretary-Treasurer Jim Wickens will serve as the host. Tickets had sold out, with more tickets to be made available at the door. Sales revenue will be determined after the annual meeting. Whiskey glasses (coordinated by Jim Wickens and sponsored by Molycop) and T-shirts featuring Bass Metals, koozies and badge ribbons (coordinated by Adam House) will be sold at the event for additional fundraising.

The Scotch Nightcap planning committee held periodic meetings with SME staff in the months leading up to the event. This appears to have worked well, and the MPD Secretary-Treasurer has been given the responsibility to coordinate each planning year.

The speaker for the 2026 MPD Luncheon is John Mansanti who will present on “Getting the ‘gists – Recruiting Process Talent.”

The 2026-2027 MPD Calendar will be distributed throughout MINEXCHANGE 2026 SME Annual Conference & Expo. Due to Kim Mills’ outstanding effort, all 12 months and both covers were sold.

#### 4. SME Awards

The committee recognized this year’s award recipients:

- Antoine M. Gaudin Award – Jan Cilliers
- Robert H. Richards Award – Robert McIvor
- Milton E. Wadsworth Award – Ronel Kappes
- Arthur F. Taggart Award – Sunil Tripathy
- MPD Outstanding Young Engineer Award – Fangyu Liu
- Mill Lady/Gentleman of Distinction – Tarun Bhambhani
- Frank F. Aplan Award (shared with Coal & Energy Division of SME) – James Gebhardt
- James Douglas Gold Medal Award (shared with TMS) – Kaixi Jiang
- Fred C. Bond Award (inaugural) – No Award Given this year.

The committee reminded attendees that the SME Awards Dinner has been replaced with a new format to be more of a social event to congratulate the award recipients on Wednesday evening.

MPD will again recognize best presentations from each of the Unit Committees. Unit Committee chairs will be required to submit their selections before the conference ends Wednesday evening.

There was some discussion about the efforts to provide clarification on awards. Tarun Bhambhani and Kim Mills have created an awards decision matrix and list of keywords to assist committees administering the awards. This will be shared with the committees this awards season.

## 5. Scholarships

The following MPD scholarships were awarded this year for a total of \$28,000:

- Outstanding Senior, Richard Klimpel Memorial Scholarship of \$7,500 to Alexia Carver of the University of Nevada Reno
- Outstanding Graduate Scholarship of \$5,000 to Angela Tita of the University of Nevada Reno
- Outstanding Junior Scholarship of \$5,000 to Ellah Olson of the University of Nevada Reno
- Graduate Student Scholarship of \$3,000 to Triveni Gangadari of Penn State University
- Undergraduate Student Scholarship of \$2,500 to Jayde Jordahl of South Dakota School of Mines
- Undergraduate Student Scholarship of \$2,500 to Allie Lucas of the University of Utah
- Rong Yu Wan Ph.D. Dissertation Scholarship of \$2,500 to Younes Shekarian of Penn State University

## 6. MPD Committees

The MPD Nominating Committee will be held in early March after the annual meeting concludes.

The MPD Unit Committee will meet on the afternoon of February 22, 2026 to begin planning for the 2027 program.

The MPD Membership Committee has been dormant for many years. It will be resurrected for 2026/2027 and falls under the leadership of the MPD Second Vice Chair, who will be Jim Wickens. The primary goal for this “new” committee will be to develop and implement a plan for membership engagement and provide interested volunteers with opportunities to contribute to MPD.

## 7. Fine Grind

The Fine Grind article schedule was filled with a number of recurring monthly submissions such as the CO and NV MPD meeting recaps and a review of the Metallic Student Design competition.

The editorial responsibilities for next year will be handed over to the incoming Secretary-Treasurer, Adam House, starting with the article due March 1, 2026.

## 8. Member Engagement

The MPD Volunteer Interest Online Form was used this year to coordinate focused communication with volunteers and Unit Committee leaders. Most submissions tended to come after the Annual Conference and the Coffee Break that was held in January.

## 9. Student Engagement

The MPD Student Poster Contest will be led by Wencai Zhang. The committee reminded everyone to attend the poster session on Wednesday morning and to encourage the students. The committee will again utilize the new judging structure this year, which narrows the initial submissions to a top tier for more in-depth presentations to the judges. Winners will be announced during the MPD luncheon that afternoon, and all student participants are provided with a complimentary ticket and nominal cash prize.

The 2025/2026 MPD Student Video Contest (aka the Elevator Pitch Contest) was held again this year. Sumedh Gostu and Fangyu Liu led the endeavor. Several students were awarded prizes, including Patrick Sarpong from Penn State, Will Bump from Virginia Tech, Kevin Sierra from University of Kentucky, Triveni Gangadari from Penn State and Stefany Huanca from Colorado School of Mines.

The Metallic Student Design Competition is underway and coming to a close. Teams are being judged this week. There was some discussion about future sustainability of this initiative. Deniz Talan is leading this initiative for now, supported by Nick Gow, but a plan needs to be in place to ensure it can continue if/when these leaders decide to move on. There is some concern with Rio Tinto wanting to take control of the competition (as they are the major sponsor), and this concern needs to be addressed as well. Deniz and Nick will investigate and report back to the committee.

## 10. Financial Review

Secretary-Treasurer, Jim Wickens, reviewed the division finances which will also be discussed at the Business Meeting after the MPD Luncheon on Wednesday. Division finances are very strong, and all accounts are in good standing due to sponsorship and fundraising efforts over the past years.

**ACTION:** A motion was made by Aaron Noble, seconded by Kim Mills to move \$1,000 from MPD General Fund (640) to the Gaudin Award Fund (642). The motion was passed unanimously by the Executive Committee.

It was noted that the Richards Award Fund (643) will be funded by AIME. MPD will still be responsible for administering the award but not required to fund it.

Also, it was noted the Bond Award funds are still not listed in its own account. This needs to be clarified prior to the 2026 Midyear Meeting.

## 11. Other Conferences

Dave Kanagy informed the Committee that the agreement between TMS and SME had been executed for future Extraction Conferences. The next Extraction Conference is planned for 2030.

### **E. New Business**

Bill Hancock, SME President, provided a brief update on general topics. One key point was the hiring of Dave Kanagy's replacement, Melissa Russell. Another note was that SME membership has declined by about 4%. The belief is that this is because more members are retiring from industry than new members entering the industry. SME would like to target growth to 15,000 members.

Mary Korpi, SME President Elect, highlighted the upcoming development of SME's Strategic Plan. This plan will be developed throughout 2026 and submitted to the Board for approval in December. The plan will be rolled out during the MINEXCHANGE 2027 SME Annual Conference & Expo in Denver.

Thom Seal announced that the Professional Engineer (PE) Committee needs help developing process-related questions for the PE exam.

### **F. Agenda for Next Meeting**

Items to be discussed at the next meeting will include:

- Safety Share
- MINEXCHANGE 2027 Programming and Fundraising
- 2026-2027 Fine Grind Schedule
- Scholarships
- Other MPD-Affiliated Conferences
- Membership and Student Engagement

### **Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:32 am by Tarun Bhambhani. The next general meeting will be on February 21, 2027, in Denver, CO. Time TBD.

Minutes submitted by: Jim Wickens

Approved by: Tarun Bhambhani