

Remarks made during the BOV Meeting

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Thank you Mr. Rector, members of the Board of Visitors, Ladies and Gentlemen

Once again, I'd like to express on behalf of the faculty our appreciation for these opportunities to participate in this level of the governance process and your responsiveness to faculty issues.

The budget cuts in General Fund allocations from the state have of course taken priority over the past few months, and the Faculty Senate is extremely concerned about the impact the cuts are having on the instructional mission of the university. We've been gathering feedback directly from the faculty on the impact of these cuts and on recourse actions they may have in mind. From feedback gathered from the faculty, the cuts so far have already had a deep impact on departments' ability to sustain their programs and provide their students with a quality educational experience in terms of the basic transaction that happens at a university: students being taught and advised by faculty. We've also heard from the students, who have expressed concern that faculty do not have enough time to spend on advising.

Mr. Chairman, it is of crucial importance for the university to protect its basic function of instruction. Unlike other units in the university, the largest portion of an academic department's operating budget is spent on faculty salaries and the rest is spent on operating expenses such as instructors, graduate teaching assistants, a few essential staff members and faculty startup packages. To illustrate the severity of the impact these cuts have, imagine a typical department that spends 90% or more of its operating budget on faculty salaries. That leaves only 10% or less to hire GTAs (graduate teaching assistants), instructors, staff and cover basic expenses. For such a department, a percentage cut out of the total operating budget would therefore have a 10-fold effect on their basic instructional and advising capabilities. A 1.5% cut becomes 15%, and a 5% cut becomes a 50% cut in essential instructional and advising expenses. It is my understanding that many departments have less than 10% to play with. If an instructor is not hired, then 3 or 4 courses have to be covered by the remaining faculty, and if GTA's cannot be hired, then that labor has to be done by the faculty as well, who are more than likely already loaded under the pressures of high-enrollment and ever-reducing resources and salaries that have not yet reached 60th percentile compared to our peers. We were therefore very relieved to hear that the latest 5% cut from the state could be centrally managed so that 1.5% could be handed down to the departments, the administrative units, the service units, and the auxiliary enterprises, and we'd like to express our sincere appreciation the university leadership and the Office of the Vice President of Finance in particular for the hard work they put in to shield all the units in the university from the severity of the state's reversions in General Fund allocations.

Mr. Chairman, we also believe that this crisis could be turned into a very positive turning point for the university. This could be an opportunity for Virginia Tech to become leaner, focus on what's important, and come out stronger at the other end of this recession. Someone, I believe it was Dr. David Ford, first said that now is the time for us to think carefully 'what the university should look like' as tough decisions are being made concerning the areas in which there should be cuts, and in which areas there should be investment – in the academic departments, in the research institutes, in the service units or in the administration. As mechanisms for addressing budget cuts wonderful ideas have been brought forward by individual faculty and also for increasing revenues in future. Ideas as simple as saving energy by turning off lights and equipment when they are not being used, to the more difficult ones like eliminating duplication of services in the university. The feedback from faculty are being compiled into a report by the Officers of the Faculty Senate and the Faculty Senate Cabinet and it should be ready to be released within the next few weeks.

I will refrain from speaking on faculty salaries or the desperate need for a faculty club this time, so that concludes my report for today's meeting.

Thank you.