

# Faculty Senate Meeting Agenda and Minutes

## August 20, 2021, @ 2:30PM

### In-person Meeting or Via Zoom

**Senators Present:**

Monty Abbas, A. Jonathan Auguste, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Susan Anderson, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Joseph Baker, Arthur Ball, A.K. Ward Bartlett, Andrew Binks, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Scott Case, George Davis, Ashley Dayer, John Ferris, Carla Finkelstein, Becky Funk, Joseph Guthrie, Kevin Heaslip, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Ran Jin, Brett Jones, Eric Kaufman, Young Kim, Nathan King, Vivica Kraak, Crystal Lane, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Alexander Leonessa, Jonathan Maher, Jason Malone, Caitlin Martinkus, Frances McCarty, Cayce Myers, Rachel Miles, Michael Nappier, Amy Nelson, Aaron Noble, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Robin Panneton, Sarah Parker, Christopher Pierce, Thomas Pingel, Patrick Pithua, Nicole Pitterson, Robin Queen, Steve Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Todd Schenk, Peter Schmitthenner, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Ryan Stewart, Laura K. Strawn, Cornel Sultan, Jay Teets, Steven Thompson, Diego Troya, Kwokleung Tsui, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Randolph Wynne, Hehuang Xie, Yan Xu, Liqing Zhang (69)

**Guests:** Kevin Cheng, Kira Dietz, Brooks King-Casas, Matthew Komelski, Leigh Anne Krometis, Vito Scarola

(17 individuals attended in person and 58 attended via Zoom)

**Call to Order by Senate President Robert Weiss at 2:30pm****1 Introduction of Officers**

Officers each completed a brief introduction of who they are and description of their roles in Faculty Senate this year. Introduction order was Robin Queen (Faculty Senate – VP), Ran Jin (Faculty Senate – Operations Officer), and Robert Weiss (Faculty Senate President).

**2 Consent Agenda**

*Unless a member requests an item be removed from the Consent Agenda, these items will be approved by unanimous consent*

- Approve and post April 30, 2021, meeting minutes ([LINK](#))
- Nomination of Layne Watson (COE - Computer Science) for the Information Technology Services and Systems Committee

The consent agenda was presented by Robert Weiss and with no comments or objections from the floor these items were passed by unanimous consent

### **3 Brief Announcements**

VTCRC Game Changer Week (See Announcements section for details).

Completed by Robert Weiss

### **4 2021-2022 Faculty Senate Goals**

- **Governance Model Transition**

Robert presented a brief overview of the work of the President's Council on Governance (PCG) and the work that the Faculty Senate will be doing over the next year to advance the shared governance changes.

- Brief description of the commissions that would report through the Faculty Senate.
- Additionally, it was explained that the Faculty Senate would be hearing more presentations from additional members of the PCG throughout the year.
- Robert and Robin will initiate office hours for all Faculty and send our campus announcements with details.
- Expectations from the Senators: it is important to participate in the faculty senate as senators and improve the two-way communications between the faculty and the faculty senate.

- **Experiential Learning**

Robert provided a brief update on experiential learning and the importance of this initiative to the administration. The goal is to embed experiential learning into the programs across campus.

- **Faculty Senate Task Forces**

Robert described the process by which he would like to bring together small groups of faculty (senators or others) who have expertise in specific subject areas.

- The ask of these small groups (task forces) would be to provide insight and guidance to the Faculty Senate leadership.
- This could be short term projects (few days) and potentially longer-term projects in which the group will need to continue to meet and work with Faculty Senate leaders to develop potential responses and solutions to challenges.

- **Statements:**

- The additional topic about faculty senate statements was included in this discussion.
- The goal of these statements is to do two things: (1) provide a unified Faculty Senate opinion related to topics of importance in the external landscape (example – the impact of critical race theory on academic freedom, and (2) provide a unified Faculty Senate opinion related to topics of importance specifically within the Virginia Tech community. For the internal challenges, the proposed plan was for a group of individuals to take the result of a conversation in Faculty Senate and all the associated comments and then generate a statement that could be reviewed by the entire Faculty Senate and be modified in an iterative process which will ultimately lead to a vote by the Faculty Senate to approve the statement prior to its release.
- **Additional Goal Ideas (Max 20 minutes)**

Robert led a discussion regarding additional goals for the Faculty Senate for the coming year. Below are listed the additional goals that were mentioned.

- Addressing work/life balance and the impact of school closures as well as the need for flexibility depending on life situations as well as recognizing the differential impact this can have based on career stage, sex, and race this topic was raised by multiple senators. A more thoughtful and intentional development of various committees and task forces and the need to make these groups more representational The impact of masking on teaching of foreign languages and the need for small group with and a need for greater flexibility for the use of synchronous online teaching
- Work with the administration to alter the narrative regarding COVID-19 and the need for vaccinations and how the current messaging is resulting in increased stress and fear for many in the community.
- Request that the Faculty Senate pushes for the addition of another team member for the Honors system to expedite the cases being resolved.
- Multiple concerns raised regarding flexibility in teaching and learning modalities and the desired to have more conversations with administration regarding the autonomy of faculty and graduate students to make these decisions and the need to develop a faculty senate statement.
- Request to have a statement from the Provost's office that faculty are not required to provide multiple learning modes for students so that faculty are comfortable with saying no when students request additional modes of learning.
- Request to gain clarity into the process for defining medical and religious beliefs and who will be making these determinations when it comes to vaccine exemptions.
- Remain engaged with the discussions regarding increasing undergraduate student enrollment and what this means for faculty workloads making sure to reference some statements that were provided to the Board of Visitors in 2019.

- Request to review the committee and governance representation requirements and determine if there are any ways to decrease the workload, which is especially challenging for some of the smaller colleges.

## **5 Commission on Faculty Affairs (1 Position) Election**

- Open Call for nominations: No additional nominations were received
- Candidate 1: Eric Kaufman (CALs - Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education)

Voting was completed electronically with the following outcome: Yes: 66, Abstain: 1 (No other candidates). Eric Kaufman is elected as the Faculty Senate representative in the Commission on Faculty Affairs.

## **6 Selection of Faculty Senate Cabinet Members (20-25 Minutes)**

- FS Past President/College of Agriculture and Life Sciences - Eric Kaufman
- College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences - Evan Lavender-Smith
- FS Vice President/College of Engineering - Robin Queen
- College of Architecture and Urban Studies - TBD during the week of August 23, 2021
- Pamplin College of Business - Anna-Katherine Ward
- College of Natural Resources and Environment – Dan Hindman
- FS President/College of Science - Robert Weiss
- College of Veterinary Medicine - Virginia Buechner-Maxwell
- Library – Rachel Miles
- Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine - Andrew Binks
- FS Operations Officer - Ran Jin

The caucuses from each college met and selected the senator who would serve as a member of the Faculty Senate cabinet. Two colleges were not able to select cabinet representatives during the meeting given their small number of participants from their college.

Robin will follow up with the two caucuses on Monday to request that the caucus determines the senator that will serve as a member of the cabinet.

## **7 Open Floor Discussion**

Robert recognized Ashley Shew to present her request to the members of the Faculty Senate.

- Ashley provided an open letter to the Virginia Tech administration regarding concerns about safe teaching environments for those with underlying conditions and concerns. Ashley Shew also provided a link to notes providing specific examples and concerns.

- Ashley read some of the open letter to the Senate as well as some notes related to the individual impact of some current VT policies and asked that Senators consider signing the attached letter indicating the individual senator's support for the document.
- A series of specific requests were presented by Amy Nelson.
- A motion was made by Jim Tokuhisa to have Faculty Senate endorse the Open Letter to the VT administration.
- The motion was seconded by Richard Shryock.
- Discussion regarding the motion on the floor and no consensus was reached. Concerns were raised over the rushed vote and the need to review the documents more carefully before voting to make an informed decision.
- Discussion regarding potential other options for the motion and being able to write a statement in support of the ideas without voting specifically on this motion.
- Motion was withdrawn by Jim Tokuhisa.
- Additional discussion regarding the potential to vote electronically following the meeting to allow others to have time to read and think about the document and their comfort in signing the open letter.
- Susanna Rinehart made a motion for the Faculty Senate to endorse the Open Letter to the VT leadership and to request that this vote happen over the coming weekend.
- Jim Tokuhisa seconded the motion.
- Based on the discussion an email will be sent to all faculty senators with the link to the open letter for review as well as a link to vote (yes/no/abstain) on whether the faculty senate, as a body, officially endorses the open letter to support safe working and learning environments at Virginia Tech.

The two additional topics for open discussion will be moved to the agenda for September 3, 2021.

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting and seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:36pm.