

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

August 19, 2022, @ 2:30pm

Pamplin 1045 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Senators Present: Onwubiko Agozino, Diane Agud, Richard Ashley, Azziza Bankole, Andrew Binks, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Joshua Clemons, George Davis, Zhuo Fu, Nick Copeland, Becky Funk, Wesley Gwaltney, James Hawdon, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Ran Jin, Eric Kaufman, Holly Kindsvater, Nathan King, Alex Kinnaman, Bradley Klein, Vivica Kraak, Leigh Anne Krometis, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Alexander Leonessa, Jonathan Maher, Jason Malone, Frances McCarty, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero Yavar, Aaron Noble, Gregory Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Robin Panneton, Christopher Pierce, Thomas Pingel, Nicole Pitterson, Robin Queen, Steven Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Charles Schleupner, Peter Schmitthener, Richard Shryock, Stephanie Smith, Laura Strawn, James Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Anna Ward Bartlett, Ashley Wilkinson, Angelica Witcher (52)

Call to Order by the Senate Vice President Robin Queen at 2:37pm

1. Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Robert Weiss)

- Consent agenda was adopted:
 - Minutes for May 6, 2022 ([Link](#))
 - Agenda for August 19, 2022

Business Agenda

Old Business

2. Updates

- No updates or announcements to report

New Business

3. Election & Nomination for Commission and Committee Members

- Commission on Faculty Affairs, Diane Agud (COS – Mathematics) elected
- University Tenure and Promotion Committee, two nominations for one vacancy put forward to the Provost:
 - Eric Kaufman (CALs - Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education)
 - Virginia Buechner-Maxwell (LACS – VMCVM)

4. Selection of Faculty Senate Cabinet Members

- Faculty Senate President, Robert Weiss

- Faculty Senate Vice President, Robin Queen
- College of Architecture, Arts, and Design, TBD
- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, TBD
- College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Evan Lavender-Smith
- College of Engineering, TBD
- College of Natural Resources and Environment, Daniel Hindman
- College of Science, Jim Tokuhisa
- College of Veterinary Medicine, Rebecca (Becky) Funk
- Pamplin College of Business, A.K. Ward
- University Libraries and Operations Officer, Rachel Miles
- Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Andrew Binks

Rachel Miles will reach out to the senators from the colleges with undecided Cabinet reps.

5. Freedom of Expression Task Force Update

- Charge meeting of Task Force occurred approximately one month ago; have met twice thus far.
- The Board of Visitors initially wanted the university to sign the [Chicago Principles](#) outright, but to follow a more democratic process, the BOV asked for the formation of a TF to craft a statement and/or incorporate or adopt the Chicago Principles or other set of principles. For example, the University of Virginia has its own [freedom of expression / academic freedom statement](#).
- TF will use existing outside statements as well as related statements at Virginia Tech, such as the [Principles of Community](#) and the [Faculty Senate Statement of Academic Freedom](#) to draft the VT statement. Statement should be brief (1-2 pages) and integrate existing concepts carefully and succinctly.
- This statement will not have any real “grip / teeth,” but eventually the statement would be used to inform and create policy.
- The TF will update the Senate on its work throughout the semester.
- 21 people on the TF with FS representing the largest group; also representatives from staff, A/P Senate, Undergraduate and Graduate Senates, the Council of College Deans, Office of Equity & Accessibility, the Board of Visitors, and Legal Counsel.
- Statement must be crafted and finished by the end of the fall 2022 semester, so there is a short turnaround time.
- One senator asked what prompted this TF and work.
 - Some students do not feel like it is safe for them to voice their opinions in the classroom which was the driving force behind this request. Some faculty members feel the same way. Their views may not be as socially acceptable in an academic or university environment.
 - This is also a formal request from the Governor’s office and will be a part of the BOV discussion at the BOV retreat next week.

6. Open Floor Discussion

- Brainstorming 2022-2023 Faculty Senate Priorities
 - 1st report of the year to BOV this weekend
 - Will talk about academic freedom and how it applies in the classroom

- Mental health – still an issue since the onset of the pandemic
- Two senators expressed concerns with COVID mitigations
 - Want to know if there is a way to get admin to encourage more mask wearing in classroom settings. Teaching spaces are smaller & AC system is not filtering
 - Answer: you can ask your students to wear masks but cannot demand it.
 - Also, the university is working on red, yellow, green light notification system for health & diseases.
 - What do faculty do if they're positive (students are asked to isolate for five days) – faculty still have to manage their classrooms if they are ill or recovering.
 - Also, the emergency management system monitors health and disease but does not help with recovery periods.
 - Last year – the university told faculty they have to be careful how they phrase questions to students about COVID (being infected/sick).
 - Faculty Senate President will talk with Legal Counsel about how to phrase these questions
 - Also need to ask about putting it in writing (e.g., syllabus) and if this is permitted and if so, what phrasing to use.
 - Issue of recovery never been built into anything – any kind of illness, injury, life interruption. This needs to be part of university planning.
 - Example: would rather take five days off for recovery rather than going through the stress of teaching online while also sick and/or recovering.
 - In addition, several senators expressed concern that staff members cannot even afford to stay home when they're sick – complication is that most of them are not VT employees; they're state employees, so the university cannot change sick leave policies for them. Faculty Senate should at least offer support and willingness to work with the Staff Senate to bring these concerns to the administration.
 - Another senator offered a solution of prerecording lectures and not banning online teaching when sick. However, others pointed out that the instructor is in control of the course and its format. There is no “ban” on how you present to your class. It may be preferred to be in-person, but you can do online teaching. You can change modality in the middle of the semester temporarily.

- New faculty are shocked at the lack of affordable housing (also an issue for students) – there’s definitely an awareness of this issue among university administrators and leaders.
 - How would we support this? Public transportation options to surrounding counties is one solution. Directly contributing to housing development is another solution (working with the Town of Blacksburg).
 - One senator offered the idea of rent control housing for faculty and graduate students on the turf grass area; however, there area and the programing that happens there is core to some of the work at VT.
 - Alice Fox presented to FS on housing affordability projects last spring, but she has not yet asked FS members to join the working group.
 - Graduate Student Senate formed this initial group. Group still forming and should also include all stakeholder members.
- University Budget has increased partly in response to inflation
 - Faculty Senate has previously voiced concerns about faculty salaries, but it hasn’t had any impact.
 - Everybody gets a \$1,000 bonus in December (faculty and staff)
 - Average 5% increase across the board
 - University has to come up with 60-70% of that raise, but State decided that the salaries will increase at 5%
 - How it works: department gets a spreadsheet with a number with all the salaries, and a separate section with the merit allocation and Faculty Distinction Program from another section (1%). Not everyone gets 5%, it’s 5% average.
 - According to BOV, market demand should take care of salary compression, but that is likely not the case. FS President has not found a way to convince the Provost or BOV that there should be more raises. Has talked to Provost about achieving salary targets. BOV also uses comparisons with peer institutions, SCHEV peers, etc. to make comparisons that make the narrative seem fair re: salaries (especially with compression). It would cost too much money to bring everyone up though.
 - In finances, FS has very little power, influence.
- Licensing IT PALS– form now available that helps fast-track certain software approvals
- Work group – looking for two to three more people on IRB working group that is making determinations on human studies that can be exempt (without going through the entire IRB review). Email Jim Hawdon if you are interested.

- Other problems with IRB – question of exempt vs. non-exempt. The protocol was redefined last year. Talked to Lisa Lee, and she agreed that there are redundancies.
 - This group is specifically to easily determine if the research is exempt to bypass the whole system and paperwork. Would apply to the majority of human subjects research.
 - Parking issue – need to discuss in Cabinet first and then decide how to approach the issue. Talking about putting more resources into parking & accommodations.
 - Letter to Presidents, Chancellors, and Superintendents on May 10 – Faculty Senate should go through that letter. It relates to academic freedom. Will discuss it in Cabinet first. Very careful not to delve into politics.
 - Robert meets frequently with Provost – if there’s any issue, Robert can discuss it with him and/or the President. It’s important to approach the FS President directly rather than expecting him to ask individual senators about their concerns and questions.
 - Consideration for future discussion: Questions for the IRB related to international work and requirements
- SharePoint Access or Navigation Questions
 - Any SharePoint issues? Be sure to download any doc links sent through email before sharing it with all your faculty; otherwise, they won’t be able to access it.
 - One senator asked: are we allowed to share any doc from SharePoint? Yes, you can share – if there is anything sensitive, FS officers will let you know.
 - Zoom link – this is an open meeting. If someone is interested in attending, connect them with the officers and we can share the Zoom link. If we go into closed session, it can become complicated to ensure we know who is there and get everyone moved quickly so knowing who is attending would be helpful.

7. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 4:15PM.