



Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

<https://www.facultysenate.vt.edu/>

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
November 11, 2022, @ 2:30pm
Pamplin 1045 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Robert Weiss (presiding), Masoud Agah, Diane Agud, Susan Anderson, Richard Ashley, Netta Baker, Joseph Baker, Arthur Ball, Azziza Bankole, Hilary Bryon, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Joshua Clemons, Nick Copeland, George Davis, William Ducker, Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkelstein, Zhuo Fu, Becky Funk, Howard Gartner, David Gregory, Wesley Gwaltney, Rebecca Hester, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Susan Hotle, Scott Huxtable, Ran Jin, Brett Jones, Eric Kaufman, Holly Kindsvater, Nathan King, Bradley Klein, Bettina Koch, Vivica Kraak, Leigh Anne Krometis, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, GQ Lu, Jonathan Maher, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Frances McCarty, Joe Merola, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero Yavar, Aaron Noble, Gregory Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Bruce Pencek, Kelly Pender, Thomas Pingel, Nicole Pitterson, Robin Queen, Steven Rideout, Nicholas Robbins, Adrian Sandu, Charles Schleupner, Peter Schmitthenner, Richard Shryock, Stephanie Smith, Ryan Stewart, Laura Strawn, Jay Teets, James Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Kwok Tsui, Shane Wang, Anna Ward Bartlett, Layne Watson, Rose Wesche, Ashley Wilkinson, Randolph Wynne, Hehuang Xie, Yan Xu (78)

Guests: Jack Leff, Brooks King-Casas

Absent with Notice: Andrew Binks, James Hawdon, Alex Leonessa, Robin Panneton, Christopher Pierce, Susanna Rinehart (6)

Absent: Montasir Abbas, Biko Agozino, Jonathan Auguste, Kevin Boyle, Tanyel Bulbul, Kristy Daniels, John Hagy, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Young-Teck Kim, Caitlin Martinkus, Thomas Mills, Patrick Pithua, Hans Robinson, Eric Stanley, Angelica Witcher, Erin Worthington, Diane Zahm (18)

Call to Order by the Senate President Robert Weiss at 2:31 pm

1. Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Robert Weiss)

- Consent agenda was adopted:

- Minutes for 10-28-2022 ([Link](#))
- Agenda for 11-11-2022 ([Link](#))

Business Agenda

Old Business

2. Updates & Announcements

- Amy Sebring, new Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, came to introduce herself to the Faculty Senate and expressed her desire to be a partner with the Faculty.

3. Freedom of expression and inquiry task force update

- Have finalized a statement that has been sent to the Faculty Senate President and the Provost, co-sponsors of the task force.
- The task force's work on the statement is completed
- After the Provost and FS President review the statement, they will forward it to President Sands.
- The task force has three meetings left to accomplish the rest of their work.
- Question from a senator about what revisions were made to the statement following the comments and feedback from the university community. Answer: The statement was changed based on the comments from across the university and all comments were taken quite seriously when attempting to incorporate the university community's responses and suggestions.

4. Updates from Committees and Commissions ([Link](#))

New Business

1. Discussion and vote on procedures on tracking faculty senate meeting attendance

- Question about attendance being recorded at beginning of semester and whether the previous absences affect enforcing the current senator membership.
 - No, the FS leadership did not start tracking attendance until two meetings ago, and they will start enforcing it starting with the October 14, 2022 meeting.
- Question about whether we should be so strict about absences and dismissal of senators according to the bylaws, especially if meetings are not necessarily crucial to the functioning of the Faculty Senate.
 - Answer: The Senate has the power and ability to change the bylaws. It is beneficial to have meetings even with a small agenda as opposed to no meeting to keep consistency and momentum as well as provide opportunities for faculty to share.
- Suggestion made to change the number of absences allowed to a percentage.
 - This could be done, but the bylaws would need to be changed.
- Question about clarifying missed meetings: do they have to be subsequently missed or just two missed meetings without notice?

- The language in the proposed procedures will be clarified. It should be changed to reflect that if you miss two meetings *in a row without notice*, the FS leadership will reach out to you to see how they can work with you. A third missed meeting in a row would be more serious, especially without notice. FS leadership would need to reach out to the department head.
 - The intent of the bylaws and the procedures is to ensure we have representation from all the departments and colleges consistently during meetings. The bylaws are meant to strongly encourage elections of alternates, staying in touch with the Faculty Senate, and helping them to attend meetings and stay engaged.
 - Comment: it's healthier if a senator is in contact with the FS leadership
 - Senators should let the FS leadership know if their committee or commission meets during FS meetings; FS leadership will get someone else to replace you.
 - The Senate will vote at the next meeting on the revised attendance procedures. FS leadership needs to change the wording in the procedures to improve clarity.
2. Discussion and vote on procedures on resolution review process
- This is meant to walk the process for a resolution that comes from one of the Faculty Senate Commissions (CUSP, CGPSP, CFA, and COR).
 - There has been some delay in resolutions working their way through governance due to the new process not being entirely clear. These procedures are meant to clarify that process.
 - Comment: concern on timing of resolution getting through this process and taking too long.
 - University Council Cabinet (UCC) appears to be the point of delay in this process. UCC had a month where they did not meet due to the BoV meeting.
 - Suggestion for a checklist or electronic voting option for a resolution being reviewed by the UCC to prevent these delays.
 - Question about whether Faculty Senate can vote on the first reading.
 - We cannot act on the first reading, but a process in governance called First Reading with Action can take place, but it has a high bar ($\frac{3}{4}$ of those present need to vote for the amendment). However, if we give our pre-approval to the commission, they could make revisions without FS feedback.
 - First reading with action in the commission means the FS vote on it during first reading, similar to the FS doing First Reading with Action and sending it back to the Commission to allow them to pass the resolution without FS feedback. First Reading with Action from the commission means that the FS can vote and pass the resolution without additional feedback from the commission. However, this should be rare and not applied widely. It is not clear if a commission can perform a First Reading with Action, or if this is limited to the University Council and Senates.
 - If we vote on it at first reading, then it's done, and it would not go back to the commission. Then the commission wouldn't have a chance to revise it.
 - Comment & question: It would be nice to see a visual of this process to show the timeline. What is the minimum time for a resolution to move through governance?

- Probably around 3-4 months; once it goes to the first reading in the commission, it's four weeks.
- You don't have to have a final draft for the draft notice – it doesn't even have to be a rough outline. Therefore, it could take as long as 6-8 months.

3. Vote on Committee on Reconciliation, interim chair Robin Queen

- Currently, there is not a committee on reconciliation. Ken Eriksson, the previous and long-serving chair, is retired and no longer serving. For grievance purposes, we need a chair so the committee can start fulfilling its role.
- Robert Weiss, FS President, is suggesting that Robin Queen, FS VP, serve as interim chair until FS leadership has a permanent solution for this committee and the others in the grievance process that can be presented and voted on by the Faculty Senate.
- Question about what this committee does during the grievance process.
 - The chair of the committee on reconciliation must decide if a grievance should be considered in collaboration with the faculty senate president and the chair of the Faculty Review Committee.
 - This committee also serves as a place for faculty to go and ask questions of another member of the faculty as part of the formal grievance process and if a resolution is not reached through this process, then the grievant can request the process continues with the Faculty Review Committee.
- Question: what about ombuds office? Weren't they going to take on this role?
 - The ombuds person is not a faculty member, and faculty members would like to talk to other faculty members about their grievances.
 - Follow-up question: formal chair went through a lot of reconciliation training; he was a mediator.
 - This isn't necessary for this position though, and that was his choice.
- The goal of the interim chair is not to remain as the chair. The goal is to reconstitute this committee so that the grievance process can move forward as it is laid out in the Faculty Handbook.
- Suggestion: The Senate could change the process and appoint someone in the Cabinet that is ongoing and acts as a liaison between FS and the ombuds office. This can send a clear signal to the university that faculty members are not doing this work, but we want to be at the table and have a voice.
 - Response: ombuds office cannot take a role in FS procedure. Ombudsman must remain impartial, and the committee on reconciliation must take a stance on the grievance. Once the grievance process starts, ombuds person cannot be a part of the process anymore.
- Question & answer: Members and chair of this committee do not have to be on FS. They must be eligible to serve on FS.

- Ken was temporarily retained by the provost's office for a semester after his retirement to serve as chair of reconciliation and he did so in name. He was not technically a mediator or ombuds person.
 - Comment: Ken Ericksson previously told the Senate that the number of interactions went down dramatically when the ombudsman was hired.
- Question: why do we need an interim chair rather than just appointing a committee, which is what the Handbook states?
 - Answer: It is difficult for the Senate to appoint committee members, but with a chair, even an interim chair, the committee on reconciliation can fulfill its core function until committee members and a permanent chair are appointed.
 - Bettina Koch and Joe Merola are willing to serve but not chair.
- Comment: In June '22, the BoV approved what the Senate put forward in its revised constitution and bylaws. It is up to the senate to review and revise its role in grievance(s); they can be changed and resubmitted through governance for approval.
- Comment: Ken Eriksson may not have been formally a mediator, but he did act in that role.
 - Response: the word "mediator" has implications that do not describe what authority he had.

Open Floor Discussion

4. Hang tag issue with the North End Center parking garage. They had an issue with staffing the booth and the call button connecting you to a human being. The representative to the Parking and Transportation Committee called them to resolve the issue ahead of the committee meeting, and the button now works. In addition, the representative found out that there are sometimes human beings working in that booth.
5. Potential topics for Board of Visitors constituency reports
 - Taking place this Sunday and Monday.
 - FS President will bring forward the issue of academic freedom.
 - Comment: the drafting of the statement is the result of political pressure from the governor to the BoV. People who teach critical histories and literature are very worried about being bullied. One senator suggested that the FS presses this issue as a complaint and not just as a 'statement and response.' There has been a political culture of pushing back against what is taught in public institutions.
 - Response from FS President: This is a sensitive but important topic. The FS would have to craft very carefully what the President would say in the constituency report. It might be more

appropriate to raise this in the private meetings with BoV members.

- Comment: it might be good to have this on the record. We have put out statements previously from FS.
 - Comment: Non-controversial things can be said without issue (e.g., students must have an education). Other things can be said that touch on issues of academic freedom without being controversial (e.g., students must have an education, and academic freedom ensures students have a better education).
 - Suggestion: Meta-commentary should be presented at the BoV meeting to state that the assertion of freedom of expression being threatened on campus is a front to censor what is taught and researched at institutions of higher education.
 - Response from FS President: we do not want things to be construed as political statements. The FS can make this a faculty issue at the public meeting during the constituency report, but the President can speak more about this in private meetings. We need to have a positive spirit about it; otherwise, BoV members might feel pushed into a corner and will respond negatively.
 - Comment: If faculty members can show the BoV how exercising their right to academic freedom in their own research and academic activity has brought the university greater prestige, the BoV will support faculty fully in exercising this right. "We should view academic freedom as a tool for our own success."
 - There are positive ways to show the value of academic freedom. For example, academics can find a positive way to bring those who are science-opposed or science-remote, closer to what the researchers are doing and how science is relevant to their lives through community engagement and outreach.
 - One member of the task force on freedom of expression and inquiry encouraged other members to include academic freedom, freedom of expression, and educational freedom together into a powerful statement; however, those members of the TF who wanted a strong statement with equal emphasis on academic freedom and freedom of expression were concerned about academic freedom.
 - Question: will President Sands revise the statement after it is submitted to him?
 - Response from FS President: We do not expect the President to change the statement.
- Related comments on the upcoming BoV meeting:

- The governor finally shut down the complaint line on CRT. <https://www.businessinsider.com/virginia-governor-shut-down-critical-race-theory-hotline-2022-11>
- Here is the link to the 2021 Bipartisan Task Force report on Campus Free Expression - <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/a-new-roadmap/>
- Other topics that senators think should be raised? Constituency reports are about the collective / community.
 - Can we talk about the push to join the American Association of Universities (AAU)?
 - Many senators commented that the push to fulfill metrics of the AAU can cause the university to lose focus and direction of its land grant mission
 - Comment / explanation about AAU: universities cannot apply to be a part of the AAU. The university needs to meet some metric targets that are then reviewed by AAU, and if you the university meet these metrics, they might invite the university to be a part of it.
 - Comment: AAU uses Web of Science exclusively as its publication and citation data source, which does not represent humanities and social sciences, and it lacks comprehensive coverage across the STEM disciplines.
 - Comment: it is difficult to get an award for certain individuals and fields, especially when Virginia Tech is a land grant university and some of the problem solving that faculty members are doing are more practical and collaborative with local communities. Therefore, the metrics will not reflect this.
 - Comment: at least one senator has heard that AAU membership would be “great to have,” but the university is not going to change its priorities to achieve membership. However, faculty members also hear that the university is shifting priorities to try to obtain membership. President Sands acknowledged that AAU priorities do not match up with what Virginia Tech is doing. It looks great for administrators and for attracting some high-level faculty around the world, but, if the culture of the university is about this membership, then it could be negative publicity if it were in a position to get “kicked out” due to its land grant mission and values and community activities.
 - What is the advantage for the university? It is bragging rights but not much else.
 - Like pushing for better ranking in U.S. News & Reports.

- The university would need to strengthen humanities to get into AAU.
 - Comment: metrics related to sustainable development goals are more valuable than other types of rankings.
 - Another question and suggestion to bring an issue to the BoV constituency report: there is a tendency to throw certain programs on faculty, such as LastPass, especially when encryption and security has been violated. Is this “cheap” and not doing what it promises?
 - Response:
- War Memorial Recreation center will charge soon after it reopens after renovations. The types of fees used (student fees) must be reimbursed, so faculty and staff must pay for the renovations.
 - FS leadership will find out what the fee structure is and whether it is also connected to McComas as a joint membership fee.
- Virginia Tech’s Quality Enhancement Learning (QEP) 'The Bridge Experience Program,' offers students a scaffolded path toward a Bridge Experience, potentially an internship
 - Comment: the creation and implementation of a 0-credit course for transcribing and tracking Bridge Experiences will decrease the burden of additional work on students and faculty. However, there is a non-negligible amount of work for the students and the faculty.
 - Comment: there are issues with meeting credit requirements in the PIBB model, which is about seats filled.
 - Comment/response: The university does not take a realistic model forward regarding what human resources are involved in attempting to meet credit requirements for budget allocations.

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:14 p.m.