

Faculty Senate Constituency Report
Robert Weiss, Faculty Senate President
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Rector Long, President Sands, other members of the Board of Visitors, and senior members of the administration, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you from the faculty perspective. This semester has been very exciting and interesting for faculty. As you know, we are in the first year of the new shared governance model, and I am happy to report that Faculty Senate held its first vote about a resolution that is working through the governance process. Furthermore, faculty are very happy to be fully back in the classroom and to resume class room instruction. At the moment, there are some challenges with student absences and faculty struggle to accommodate absences and the resulting make-up work that have resulted from illness such as COVID, the flu and RSV. However, I am positive that we can and will overcome these (and you will appreciate how remarkable it is to be positive as a German). Looking ahead, it is essential that we take what we learned over the past three years to improve our ability to be more resilient as individuals, a community and entity in the future. I would like to use my time to discuss linked topics surrounding academic freedom, the future of Virginia Tech, and faculty temperature.

1. Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is an important topic that is on the forefront of faculty's mind. Academic freedom is a complex topic and is related to and yet different from the first amendment right of freedom of speech. However, academic freedom is generally not well-understood by the faculty as well as other members of the academic community as well as those outside of higher education. Academic freedom is essential for scholars to be able to seek and generate knowledge in an area of expertise. The faculty senate is pleased with the statement on freedom of expression and inquiry that we reviewed and for which the campus community provided feedback. Limiting academic freedom will impact the scholarly work of faculty as well as the education of our students. If faculty are not able to speak freely about their area of scholarly expertise both within and outside the classroom discovery and learning will be negatively impacted. Faculty have diverse opinions on almost every topic. The discussion in the faculty senate surrounding the statement on Freedom of Expression and Inquiry was robust and demonstrated the varying views. While the discussions were difficult and there was no consensus it was a wonderful example of the importance of having these discussions in a positive environment in which everyone listens respectfully and is willing to consider the views of others. The faculty are positioned to lead by example as we begin challenging discussions at the university surrounding freedom of speech and academic freedom.

2. The Future of Virginia Tech

We heard yesterday from our Athletics Director that we now have the opportunity to design our future athletics program while in the few years, the design will be pushed onto us. I argue that this is true for the entire university. Faculty are

looking forward to helping the university as a system to dream about what our future at Virginia Tech should look like. It is fascinating to look at some of the emerging innovations and what potential they might have to transform higher education. Whatever the future of Virginia Tech looks like it is important to acknowledge that faculty represent a fortified conduit between knowledge and the students through education and research. This means that we not only need to think about the future of Virginia Tech in terms strategy and programs, but we also need to deliberate about the community that underpins these strategic developments.

3. Faculty Temperature

Faculty are thrilled to be back on campus and engaging with students in the classroom, in the field and in research labs. There is a sense of pride in how we have worked to transition back to the classroom environment while still utilizing the best of what we have learned over the last few years. It is essential to also understand that for many of the faculty priorities have shifted as we have returned to campus. There are many faculty who are “quietly quitting”. These faculty are still exceptional in the classroom and willing to be engaged with students, however, they are no longer willing to go above and beyond the responsibilities of their role at the university. As we envision a Virginia Tech of the future it is essential that we think about how faculty will engage in that future and what we are asking of them especially as we plan for the expansion of experimental learning. Faculty have been actively leading experimental learning and need to be resourced to provide students with the experiences that will prepare them for their future outside of Virginia Tech.