



## Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

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

# Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

## March 24, 2023, @ 2:30pm

### Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

#### Check-In:

**Present:** Robert Weiss (presiding), Montasir Abbas, Masoud Agah, Diane Agud, Susan Anderson, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Arthur Ball, Azziza Bankole, Andrew Binks, Hilary Bryon, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Joshua Clemons, Carolyn Commer, Kristy Daniels, William Ducker, Stuart Feigenbaum, Zhuo Fu, Becky Funk, Howard Gartner, Wesley Gwaltney, James Hawdon, Rebecca Hester, Daniel Hindman, Susan Hotle, Scott Huxtable, Ran Jin, Brett Jones, Holly Kindsvater, Nathan King, Vivica Kraak, Leigh Anne Krometis, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Alexander Leonessa, Gary Long (alternate for Diego Troya), GQ Lu, Jonathan Maher, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Frances McCarty, Joseph S. Merola, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero Yavar, Aaron Noble, Gregory Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Robin Panneton, Bruce Pencek, Thomas Pingel, Nicole Pitterson, Robin Queen, Steven Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Nicholas Robbins, Adrian Sandu, Charles Schleupner, Richard Shryock, Keith Stephenson, Ryan Stewart, Laura Strawn, Jay Teets, James Tokuhisa, Anna Ward Bartlett, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Rose Wesche, Ashley Wilkinson, Angelica Witcher, Randolph Wynne, Yan Xu, Diane Zahm

**Guests:** President Tim Sands, Provost Cyril Clark, April Myers, Kara Latopolski, Jill Sible, Dee Dee Somervell, Bimal Viswanath

**Absent with Notice:** Joseph Baker, Eric Kaufman

**Absent:** Onwubiko Agozino, Jonathan Auguste, Netta Baker, Tanyel Bulbul, Nick Copeland, George Davis, Carla Finkelstein, David Gregory, David Hicks, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Young-Teck Kim, Bradley Klein, Andrea L'Afflitto, Caitlin Martinkus, Thomas Mills, Patrick Pithua, Hans Robinson, Tom Sanchez, Peter Schmitthenner, Stephanie Smith, Eric Stanley, Kwok Tsui, Shane Wang, Erin Worthington, Hehuang Xie

**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 2-24-2023 ([Link](#))
  - Agenda for 3-24-2023 ([Link](#))
  - **GPSP 2022-23D:** Resolution to Establish a Master of Professional Studies Degree in Climate Leadership (Faculty Senate leadership recommend waiving right to vote and comment)

## Business Agenda

### Old Business

#### 2. Updates & Announcements (Committees/Commissions) *(add link?)*

- Faculty Senate Reception: A reception for the Faculty Senate will be held during the final meeting of the academic year, May 5, 2:30–4:30 p.m., in the indoor Pavilion at Hahn Horticulture Garden. Senators were asked to RSVP using the link on the SharePoint site. Faculty Affairs is sponsoring the reception.
- Faculty Senate Officer Elections: An email regarding Faculty Senate officer elections has been distributed. Senators who may be interested in serving as an officer now or in the future are encouraged to respond.

### New Business

#### 3. Nomination for CIO Search Committee

- The Faculty Senate was invited by Amy Sebring, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, to provide two nominations for the CIO Search Committee, one from Faculty Senate leadership and one domain expert.
- Rachel Miles and Layne Watson agreed to serve. A call was made for additional volunteers or nominations; none were noted.
- A vote was taken. Rachel Miles and Layne Watson were selected as Faculty Senate representatives to the CIO Search Committee.

#### 4. CGPSP 2022-23C: Resolution to Create Department of Neurosurgery at VTC School of Medicine

- Monty Abbas presented the resolution for first reading. Creating a Department of Neurosurgery at VT Carilion School of Medicine will provide better stature for the department. This structure is consistent with other medical schools and will provide better opportunities for faculty to obtain funding.
- Charles Schlepner, chair of the VT Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) Faculty Governance Committee, spoke on behalf of VTCSOM. The Neurosurgery

Department is currently located under the Department of Surgery but will move the reporting of the department directly to the Dean. All faculty in Neurosurgery and Surgery advocate for this structural change. It was emphasized that the change is cost neutral.

#### 5. Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies 2022-23B: Resolution to Allow Administrative Resolution of First Time Honor Code Cases.

- Evan Lavender-Smith presented the resolution for second reading and vote. Evan introduced Jill Sible, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and Kara Latopolski, Director of Undergraduate Academic Integrity, who were in attendance to answer specific questions.
- Following discussion at the last Faculty Senate meeting, comments were presented to the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies (CUSP). The following updates were noted:
  - Language was added to Policy 6000, Section 3.2, which clearly indicates administrative review as an option.
  - Discussion of sanctions is included in Proposed Changes to the Honor Code Manual, Section III.A.
- Motion was made and seconded to approve the resolution. Motion carried. Voting: 53 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain

#### 6. Presentation and discussion on ChatGPT

- Bimal Viswanath, Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, presented "[Large Language Models.](#)"
- Large Language Models use large amounts of text from the internet and statistics models to predict the next token in a sequence. Prompt engineering involves providing a model with examples of tasks or instructions. Adding prompt engineering to large language models allows for completion of downstream tasks such as text summarization and machine translation. This is a big breakthrough but is not perfect.
- ChatGPT is a large language model. ChatGPT can predict the next token, but requires human labelers to provide information and help the system respond to tasks using a reinforced learning pattern. GPT-4 is similar but can be used in a multimodal setting, taking in both visual and text inputs to produce text outputs. There are many applications where this can be used.
- These models are advancing at a rapid pace and provide both opportunities and challenges in an educational setting.
- Discussion following the presentation included the comment that, at some point, the administration, legal department, etc., may need to comment on what a faculty member can do in regard to these models. For example, can faculty include in a

syllabus that ChatGPT and similar systems are not allowed? Could use of these systems be considered an honor code violation?

## 7. President and Provost Invitation to Faculty Senate to Discuss Academic Freedom and Shared Governance Processes

- Robert Weiss welcomed President Tim Sands and Executive Vice President and Provost Cyril Clarke. Topics for discussion included the following, with time for opening statements and interactive conversation:
  - Shared Governance
  - Academic Freedom
  - Miscellaneous
- President Sands addressed the Faculty Senate and thanked the group for the invitation. He reported that the statement on Freedom of Expression and Inquiry (I think that was the official title) was delivered to the Board of Visitors, and the board has endorsed the statement.
  - He thanked Robin Queen for leading the Task Force on Freedom of Expression and Inquiry and Provost Clarke and Robert Weiss for serving as co-sponsors. The task force prepared a list of recommendations and the President's Office will coordinate the delegation of those for implementation.
  - President Sands stated that a process of review and modification is built into shared governance, and that the university is learning as it moves forward. Comments are being compiled on what is working and where there are opportunities to make adjustments. He believes that Virginia Tech has gone to a different plateau with the new system and feels positively about that.
- The President and Provost were asked to share about their roles and shared governance.
  - President Sands explained that he reports directly to the Board of Visitors and is the board's only employee. The role of the President is mostly externally directed, while the majority of internal academic functions report to Provost Clarke and business functions report to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Amy Sebring. The President works as a team with these individuals and with other groups such as the President's Cabinet, President's Council, Academic Council and University Council. There is not just one structure, but an array of structures that participate in decision making.
  - Provost Clarke shared that the Provost reports to President Sands and serves academic areas. Shared governance structure revolves around the work of the university leadership and five bodies, each representing a

constituency group: Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate, Faculty Senate, Graduate and Professional Student Senate, Staff Senate, and Undergraduate Student Senate. The new model calls for a University Council Cabinet which does not vote as an entity but manages, streamlines, and organizes the agenda of the University Council. Each group is important to their particular experience, but the faculty through the Faculty Senate share the weightiest role due to the mission of Virginia Tech as an academic institution. The system of shared governance would not work without the full attention and engagement of faculty.

- In order to inform what shared governance means, the President and Provost were asked where shared governance ends in the progression of decision making at Virginia Tech, who determines what is and is not shared governance, and what items are outside the realm of shared governance.
  - President Sands commented that resolutions accepted in University Council come to him as a recommendation, and he must decide whether to accept them. If he does, they are passed along when required as a recommendation to the BOV. The new shared governance system helps ensure that resolutions arriving at the University Council have been viewed by the right people. Regarding concerns with new IT security programs, this is an example where communication did not go out ahead of the technology, so there was no opportunity to obtain feedback. There is an argument that this issue should not go through formal shared governance, but also an argument that Virginia Tech would want feedback on this topic from faculty, employees, and students.
  - ⊖ Discussion was held around balancing input from groups that may be impacted by specific issues and meeting operational needs. There is agreement that formal or informal conversations should be shared around issues that may impact areas of charge and that lack of communication creates challenges.
  - Provost Clarke shared his perspective. Shared governance is broad and includes interrelated components: seeking input, determining relative information, and developing a process to include appropriate stakeholders. The constitution and bylaws are robust, but the university is still working its way through this. There is commitment to continual improvement and items that need review will be addressed.
  - A question was asked about delays between the receipt of Draft Notices by the University Council Cabinet and decision. Provost Clarke acknowledges that some difficulty was experienced initially, but a specific problem was addressed with a special meeting. Since then, workflow has been streamlined and the issue will continue to be reviewed and considered.

- Discussion was held on organizational structure, including titles, position information and peer institution review. President Sands noted that Virginia Tech is much larger and more complex than it was.
- The role of the Institutional Planning Committee in respect to shared governance was discussed. Provost Clarke explained that the committee brings together critical, informed individuals within the academic domain who determine solutions around new program development. The committee was originally a functional committee that, prior to the new shared governance model, was not included in policy language. It is believed that the committee will have faculty member representation beginning in the fall.
- Recent changes to IT security were discussed. Robert Weiss asked what is in place at Virginia Tech to ensure that academic freedom will be maintained with the implementation of new and future IT security systems.
  - President Sands recognizes that at a high level there are elements in both the political landscape and in other states that would like to limit teaching and research. However, this is not a threat in Virginia currently. Diverse input is required to have a robust process for evolving knowledge and Virginia Tech will stand by this. He noted that the statement on academic freedom is important, was endorsed by the BoV, and is something that Virginia Tech can point to. The Council of Presidents in Virginia did something similar to Virginia Tech, with the governor's endorsement. These factors all put Virginia Tech in a strong position.
  - President Sands emphasized that Virginia Tech is subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and the importance of knowing these rules. Additional discussion was held regarding FOIA, information collected by the new IT security software, and data that is automatically backed-up. The following resources were provided by a senator:
    - Many state agencies post procedures for submitting FOIA requests and describe how those agencies will respond, e.g., Virginia Department of Education:  
<https://www.doe.virginia.gov/about-vdoe/foia-requests>
    - VA Freedom of Information Advisory Council offers training the members and staff of public bodies and other interested persons on the requirements of FOIA: <http://foiacouncil.dls.virginia.gov/training.htm>
- A question was asked regarding tenure and whether tenure could be eliminated. Provost Clarke has no concerns regarding tenure changes in Virginia. On an individual basis, tenure can only be revoked per steps listed in the Faculty Handbook, but this is very difficult to do.

- Robert Weiss indicated that about 90 senators are in attendance for the Faculty Senate meeting. Demographically, about 40 percent are untenured or cannot be tenured. The Faculty Senate struggles with how to involve this group in leadership when they are in positions where they do not feel the same level of security that tenured faculty members experience.
  - Provost Clarke reiterated the university's commitment to academic freedom and said that this principle is applied at a university level to tenured and nontenured faculty equally, and to all citizenry within the institution. This is an institutional tradition at Virginia Tech but also follows legal context and precedent. Everyone at Virginia Tech has equal citizenship. All who are interested in participating in governance are encouraged to get involved.
  - President Sands stated that one of the things that attracted him to Virginia Tech is the egalitarianism across all citizenry that is not necessarily seen elsewhere. For example, Virginia Tech has five Senates. While teaching and research faculty have a special role, it is not because of tenure but because they straddle multiple roles. Collegiate faculty, research faculty, professors of practice, and others bring extraordinary depth of knowledge and assets to Virginia Tech. Culturally, Virginia Tech values all these contributions.

There being no further business of discussion, motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:22 p.m.