



Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

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

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2023, @ 2:30pm

Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Rachel Miles (presiding), Montasir Abbas, Diane Agud, Susan Anderson, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Netta Baker, Joseph Baker, Azziza Bankole, Andrew Binks, Hilary Bryon, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Joshua Clemons, Carolyn Commer, Kristy Daniels, William Ducker, , Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkelstein, Zhuo Fu, Becky Funk, Howard Gartner, David Gregory, Wesley Gwaltney, James Hawdon, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Susan Hotle, Scott Huxtable, Ran Jin, Brett Jones, Eric Kaufman, Nathan King, Holly Kindsvater (alternate for Ashley Dayer), Vivica Kraak, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, GQ Lu, Jonathan Maher, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Frances McCarty, Joseph S. Merola, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero Yavar, Gregory Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Robin Panneton, Bruce Pencek, Thomas Pingel, Nicole Pitterson, Steven Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Nicholas Robbins, Adrian Sandu, Charles Schleupner, Richard Shryock, Keith Stephenson, Chi Ta (alternate for Catherine Laroche), Jay Teets, James Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Kwok Tsui, Anna Ward Bartlett, Layne Watson, Rose Wesche, Erin Worthington, Yan Xu, Diane Zahm

Guests: Jonathan Everett, April Myers, Demetria Somervell, Jerald Walz

Absent with Notice: Arthur Ball, Leigh-Anne Krometis, Aaron Noble, Robin Queen, Robert Weiss

Absent: Masoud Agah, Onwubiko Agozino, Jonathan Auguste, Tanyel Bulbul, Nick Copeland, George Davis, Rebecca Hester, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Young-Teck Kim, Holly Kindsvater, Bradley Klein, Andrea L'Afflitto, Alexander Leonessa, Caitlin Martinkus, Thomas Mills, Patrick Pithua, Hans Robinson, Tom Sanchez, Peter Schmitthenner, Stephanie Smith, Eric Stanley, Ryan Stewart, Laura Strawn, Shane Wang, Ashley Wilkinson, Angelica Witcher, Randolph Wynne, Hehuang Xie

Call to Order by the Senate Operations Officer Rachel Miles at 2:32 pm

Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Rachel Miles)

- Consent agenda was adopted:
 - Minutes for 4-7-2023 ([Link](#))
 - Agenda for 4-21-2023 ([Link](#))

Business Agenda

Old Business

1. Updates & Announcements

- The final Faculty Senate meeting for the academic year will be a reception held at Hahn Horticulture Gardens on May 5 from 2:30 – 4:15. Attendance is not required, but Senators are asked to RSVP for event planning and catering purposes.
- Please complete the governance survey that was previously distributed. This will help with committee and commission appointments.
- Links to all forms are on the SharePoint home page.

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

- Rachel Miles will send an email requesting committee and commission updates. Please respond with final updates for the academic year.

New Business

3. Presentation on Ombuds Office and past year's activities

- Mauricio Ramos provided an update on the Ombuds Office and related activities for the past year, beginning with a short history. Employees saw the benefits provided by a graduate student Ombuds Office and wanted similar services; the Virginia Tech faculty were instrumental in this process. The Ombuds Office for employees and undergraduate students was created in 2019. The original charter called for two full-time ombuds.
- The Ombuds Office helps navigate conflict and follows four principles:
 - Confidentiality, the office is not an office of notice (unless there is threat to self or others);
 - Informal;
 - Impartial, with emphasis on dedication to the community;
 - Independence (not part of HR or any formal office).
- Reese meets with President Sands once or twice per semester to discuss systemic, high-level topics that may be helpful to the president and Virginia Tech.
- A snapshot of progress and information was provided. The office processed 237 intakes in the past year, which is a 52 percent increase. An intake is defined as

when someone reaches out to request a service. Most services requested are consultations or conflict coaching, but the office also provides facilitation and mediation, workshops, trainings, and an increasing number of team assessments. The office maintains general data such as the number of employees that are served by position-type and what kinds of situations help is requested for. The overarching theme is that everything is growing; need is increasing.

- Questions and discussion following the presentation included how the Ombuds Office networks with colleagues at other universities and how they work with other university offices that provide conflict resolution support such as the Office of Equity and Accessibility and Division of Human Resources. Reese stated that the main difference is that the Ombuds Office does not keep a record; if someone is concerned about negative consequences or retaliation, the Ombuds Office can help. If an employee is looking for accountability, not just to work through a situation, they are referred to other offices. Virginia Tech's support system is robust and includes both formal help and the informal Ombuds Office.
- Questions and discussion were held about current personnel support for the Ombuds office. The original charter was to have two full-time ombuds. Reese reports that other universities usually have one ombuds for every 10,000 – 15,000 people. UNC Chapel Hill follows this ratio. A senator asked how the Faculty Senate members can help. Reese responded that it would be helpful for senators to provide information and promotion of the Ombuds Office and their services as much as possible.

4. Faculty Senate Commission and Officer Elections

- Rachel Miles presented the ballots for the election of Faculty Senate Officers, Commission Chairs, and Commission Representatives. General information from the Faculty Senate constitution regarding voting, officers, and the process to be undertaken should a position be vacated, was shared.
- Faculty Senate Officer Elections: Rachel Miles called for additional nominations from the floor. Receiving none, a motion was made and seconded to move forward with the election of the FY24 Faculty Senate Officers. Motion carried. The results of the Faculty Senate Officer elections follow:
 - President: Robin Queen (61 Yes, 2 Abstain)
 - Vice President: Evan Lavender-Smith (62 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - Operations Officer: Rachel Miles (61 Yes, 2 Abstain)
- Commission Chair Elections: Rachel Miles called for additional nominations from the floor. Receiving none, a motion was made and seconded to elect Commission Chairs for FY 24. Motion carried. The results of the vote are as follows:
 - Chair, Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies: Diane Zahm (57 Yes, 2 Abstain)

- Chair, Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies & Policies: Montasir Abbas (59 Yes)
- Chair, Commission on Research: Carla Finkielstein (59 Yes)
- Chair, Commission on Faculty Affairs: Justin Lemkul (57 Yes, 2 Abstain)
- Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies Representative Elections: Rachel Miles called for additional nominations from the floor. Receiving none, a motion was made and seconded to elect a CUSP representative for FY24. Motion carried. The results of the vote are as follows:
 - Netta Baker (57 Yes, 2 Abstain)
- Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies & Policies Elections: Rachel Miles called for additional nominations from the floor. Receiving none, a motion was made and seconded to elect CGPSP representatives for FY24. Motion carried. The results of the vote are as follows:
 - Jerald Walz (57 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - Carolyn Commer (58 Yes)
- Commission on Research Elections: Rachel Miles called for additional nominations from the floor. Receiving none, a motion was made and seconded to elect a CoR representative for FY 2024. Motion carried. The results of the vote are as follows:
 - Scott Case (56 Yes, 1 Abstain)
- Commission on Faculty Affairs Elections: Rachel Miles called for additional nominations from the floor. Joe Merola was self-nominated from the floor and was added to the ballot. A motion was made and seconded to elect CFA representatives for FY 2024. Motion carried. The results of the vote are as follows:
 - Ashley Dayer (56 Yes)
 - James Hawdon (56 Yes)
 - Ran Jin (56 Yes)

5. Discussion with the Rector of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, Letitia Long

- Eric Kaufman introduced Letitia Long, Rector of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
- Rector Long provided opening comments and shared general information about the Board of Visitors (BOV) and their current priorities.
 - The BOV has 14 members consisting of 13 who are appointed by the governor and serve four-year terms, and one ex-officio member, the President of the Board of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, who serves a two-year term. Members can be appointed for a second term. While the Board is allowed to have 2-3 members who are not Virginia Tech alumnae and 2 who are not residents of Virginia,

currently there is only one member who is not an alum, and all members are Virginia residents.

- The BOV holds responsibility for the operation of Virginia Tech including hiring, reviewing and determining pay for the university president; the oversight of budget and financial management; approving salaries; establishing tuition and fees; review and approval of new academic programs; campus and property-related oversight; and a variety of other responsibilities that can be found on the Board of Visitors website at <https://bov.vt.edu/>. The university president, administration and staff prepare materials and recommendations, but the BOV participates in discussions surrounding them and provides approval. The work of the BOV is managed through six committees and items are voted on during full board meetings. The full board and information sessions are streamed in real time. Documents for the BOV meetings are accessible to the public at <https://bov.vt.edu/Minutes>.
- A special meeting was held on April 21 to approve the recommendation of the administration to increase tuition by 4.9 percent and increase comp fees and room and board fees, with the hope that those can all be decreased when the state budget is finalized. The university does not receive full reimbursement from the state for salary increases and wants to attract and retain talent. These increases are paid for by tuition and fees. Because May 1 is a decision point for students, the BOV provided this information. Virginia Tech remains focused on accessibility and affordability for those students who gain admission.
- A question was asked about the role of the BOV in academic issues and decisions. Rector Long reported that the Board has not over-turned any decisions during the time that she has been serving. The BOV asks questions and engages in discussion but has not disapproved of anything. Virginia Tech provides the opportunity to get to know the board members and the diversity of thought and the love of the university that they bring.
- A question was asked about BOV representatives. The BOV is joined by five representatives, which include the presidents of the Faculty, A/P Faculty, and Staff Senates as well as Undergraduate and Graduate and Professional Student Representatives. The representatives provide formal reports at each meeting and bring an important perspective to the BOV. Issues presented by the representatives are tasked during the board meeting or followed-up on afterward. The representatives are essential to a fully functioning board and a fully functioning university. Additionally, the rector meets with all constituent groups during each academic year. Senators who have previously served as representatives shared comments and experiences.

- Rector Long was asked what she sees as the biggest challenges for Virginia Tech in achieving their current aspirations. The rector identified a few challenges.
 - Communication: Virginia Tech has a superb corporate communication organization. Organizing information and communicating it to applicable groups is difficult. The use of technology for communication and the need to use it to the best advantage can be difficult. The example was given of communicating to students about the many resources that the university provides; although there are many resources and many ways to find information about them, many students report that they do not know what is available.
 - Resources. The university is working really hard and seeing fundraising success. However, when comparing where Virginia Tech is to where other universities like UVA are, there is a difference. Virginia Tech must ensure that resources are focused in the right places. While the university doesn't want to grow too fast, there is a scale that will allow the university to compete better for resources such as faculty, students, grants, etc.
- A question was asked about cybersecurity concerns and the BOV position on cybersecurity. Rector Long responded that the Compliance, Audit and Risk Committee reviews security-related items. In the past, reports indicated grave cybersecurity issues across the board. Items such as cache, passwords, and two factor not being used were identified. Virginia Tech had opened themselves to cyberattacks, ransomware, etc., which put the personal information of employees and students, research information, and proprietary information at risk. A number of BOV members have cybersecurity experience and understood this risk. Deloitte was tasked to complete a review and they provided several recommendations. Virginia Tech has begun implementing the actions that were identified by Deloitte.
- In closing, Rector Long thanked the faculty for educating future leaders, completing important research and all the contributions that they make. Anyone with specific questions was invited to send those to Eric Kaufman, and he will send those to Rector Long.

Open Floor Discussion

6. This is the last Faculty Senate meeting where business will be conducted. The remaining meeting is a social event. Rachel Miles thanked everyone for serving this year and welcomed any newly elected senators who joined the group today.

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:15 p.m.