

Faculty Constituent Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
August 26, 2018

John B. Ferris, President—VT Faculty Senate

Good afternoon Rector Treacy, President Sands, members of the Board, Provost Clarke, and all others gathered here today.

Time. I have 3-5 minutes to talk to you about time. I'll give you the first punchline: there is no excess faculty time. The idea that small additional tasks can be added to faculty workload without any negative effects has long past. Those days are over. The low hanging fruit has been picked. The bucket is full. If you add even a drop, then some other drops will splash out.

Faculty are accustomed to working long hours. Before coming to the university, faculty work hard to establish themselves as experts in their field, then go through a year-long vetting process to be given the opportunity for a 6-year interview (the tenure process). Faculty are extreme type-A personalities. We need no charging. We need no winding. We come to the university revved up and ready.

However

- According to SCHEV the total undergraduate enrollment has increased about 13% in the last 4 years while the number of faculty has only increased by half that amount.
- There are numerous initiatives being implemented, EFARs, the PIBB, SGAs, DAs, ...
- There is training ranging from the changing software tools (Blackboard, to Scholar, to CANVAS) to how to handle conflicts of interest.

Teaching is essential, the initiatives are laudable, and the training is important. But be aware that they all require faculty time, and, like it or not, the bucket is full and some other important things will splash out.

We can discuss methods for improving efficiency, but the fundamental issue is that the faculty engine has been running at the red-line for too long. This is coupled with general unrest and uncertainty due to turnover in administration and a multitude of initiatives for which we have little real input or information.

If research expenditures decrease or teaching evaluations are less favorable, that should come as no surprise.

This is not complicated. We don't need more charts. We don't need more people and resources dedicated to inventing new ways to measure those of us who are performing the central mission of the university: the creation and dissemination of knowledge through teaching and scholarship. Students love Virginia Tech because of their interactions with faculty, staff and each other. Faculty love Virginia Tech primarily because of their interaction with students. We believe in the mission. Remove the hurdles. Let us focus on creating and disseminating knowledge.

I ask that every time you hear about some new initiative or program that will just take a small drop of faculty time, you consider the grant proposal that doesn't get written, the paper that doesn't get submitted, or the office hours that are cancelled.

Want faculty to be more productive? Help free us up to do our actual work: Research. Teaching. Service.

Specifically

- Faculty should focus on jobs that only faculty can do. Everything else should be done by someone else. Shouldn't someone else do the data entry required to move the information in my dossier to a database?
- When faculty time is required, sufficient planning should be done to minimize the demand. Can 2 hours of training be completed in 30 minutes?
- Let faculty manage their own time. How do you strike a balance between faculty participation and overburdening us? Ideally, participation should be open to all and required of none. Maximize transparency and access. Minimize requirements of faculty time outside our central mission.

This is critical because, as business leaders will attest, quality is most strongly a function of time and money devoted to the enterprise. We don't have excess time. We don't have excess money. We don't want quality to decline. We have to focus on the central mission.

The Faculty Senate is here to help. Last year we established a strong communication channel with the President and Provost. We recently initiated a Faculty Soundboard to learn about what is on faculty members' minds. During the next year we plan to provide concrete ideas to strip away all but the jobs that are essential to the health of the academic enterprise.

Stay tuned. More to follow. Thank you.

