

Faculty Senate Minutes
November 2, 2018
NCB 160, 2:30 - 3:45

In Attendance

Senators: Diane Agud, Mehdi Ahmadian, Robin Allnutt, Susan Anderson, Osman Balci, Michael Borowski, Brian Britt, Charles Calderwood, Kelly Cobourn, Matt Eick, John Ferris, William Galloway, Ellen Gilliland, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, James Hawdon, Dana Hawley, Bob Hicok, Eunju Hwang, Christine Kaestle, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Jake Lahne, Roberto Leon, Paul Marek, Margarita McGrath, Cayce Myers, Mike Nappier, Marie Paretti, Ford Ramsey, Susanna Rinehart, Todd Schenk, Durelle Scott, Brett Shadle, Richard Shryock, Manisha Singal, David Tegarden, Diego Troya, Bruce Vogelaar, Layne Watson. Guest: Ellen Plummer, Office of the Provost.

Absent

Monty Abbas, Alan Abrahams, Masoud Agah, Biko Agozino, Richard Ashley, Arthur Ball, Tanyel Bulbul, Robert Bush, Leandro Castello, Virgilio Centeno, Sam Doak, Harry Dorn, Stefan Duma, John Galbraith, Sierra Guynn, Kathy Hosig, Sara Jordan, Bettina Koch, Chang Lu, Zachary Mackey, Shelley Martin, Polly Middleton, Philip Olson, David Radcliffe, Hans Robinson, Stephen Smith, Eric Smith, Ryan Speer, Jim Spotila, Divya Srinivasan, Cornel Sultan, Jim Tokuhisa, Dwight Viehland, Daniel Wodak, Anthony Wright de Hernandez, Ryan Zimmereman

1. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved.

2. Approval of Minutes

- Minutes were approved pending minor edits.

3. Announcements

Term Limits

There is a Term Limits Discussion Board set up in Canvas:

https://canvas.vt.edu/courses/47213/discussion_topics/423628

Ferris asked for feedback from senators via the Discussion Board so that the cabinet can bring forward a new proposal regarding term limits for senators.

Vote to amend the Senate Constitution to move to Robert's Rules of Order

We still need a quorum. Ferris requested that people vote so that we have all voices recorded and can reach a decision. He noted that all other University committees use Robert's Rules.

Provost Search

Ferris requested feedback and noted that he has requested that candidates to meet with the full Senate rather than just the Cabinet. There is a timeline, but Ferris is not free to share that timeline at present. Very soon, there should be a public announcement of the short list and dates/times for campus visits.

4. Standing Committees Reports

Resolutions Review Committee

Ryan Speer has agreed to serve as chair.

Promotion and Tenure (Bob Hicok)

Hicok highlighted the major changes and opened the floor to questions and comments from the Senate.

- Question: Who is driving the change? Hicok reviewed the history leading to the need for revisions.
- Comments: The Senate had a substantial discussion at multiple points regarding how to best address extension work. Key points include the following:
 - The current wording of the accomplishments required for tenure and promotion focuses on research and thus excludes faculty with extension appointments that do not include research.
 - Hicok notes that there is language that speaks specifically to extension work, and that the committee is working on achieving language that addresses the broad range of outcomes and reflects individual appointment expectations.
 - The semantics of how we address extension is particularly important.
 - Extension is traditionally considered part of outreach and service. Where does it best fit? Should we add “extension activity” to the research list? Outreach activities are considered extension for those with extension appointments.
 - Extension appointments may or may not include teaching appointments.
 - The language of extension needs to be explicitly in this document. There is a clear need to create an inclusive space and a strong desire to ensure that faculty with extension appointments feel both included and visible in the document.
 - Individuals on 100% extension appointments are in a separate section of the handbook, but the proposed revisions do not address those with split appointments (e.g., extension plus undergraduate/graduate teaching).
 - Extension agents are not tenure track faculty; faculty are considered extension specialists, and they would be covered in this section of the manual.
 - Some of the issues around extension are tied to the way the state funds extension positions and, in turn, has reporting requirements for those positions.
- Comment: The department expectations documents play a critical role in the proposed revisions. Should we just say “excellence as defined by the department expectation documents”? Comments regarding the importance of the department expectations document came up multiple times.
- Question: Why do we expect departments and colleges to support a new version of the document when they don’t follow the existing rules?
- Question: Is this revision simply the process of moving things around?
- Question: Are we downgrading or devaluing the importance of teaching and service? This is a critical issue, particularly in light of the increasing service demands on faculty time as well as student concerns voiced at a previous meeting regarding student perceptions that teaching is not important to faculty. Such comments came up multiple times.
- Question: Do we have to actually specify what’s important? This seems to be a key question.
- Comment: The revisions raise numerous questions regarding enforceability.
- Question: Regarding appeals, does the faculty member have to be the one that instigates the appeal? Is it possible that in the case of a double denial (committee and administrator) there is an automatic audit of the process?
- Comment: Some people are appointed in ways that don’t include research.
- Comment: The rephrasing doesn’t match the way people are hired.

- Comment: The document prioritizes one of the three missions of the land grant in a way that doesn't effectively manage the balance across activities. How can we frame the handbook language in a way that directs people back to their departmental documents?
- Question: At one point, there was talk of including materials from peer and aspirational departments; is that still the case? Answer: No.
- Question: Must outside reviewers name a specific comparator person? Answer: No. Note that those procedures are not included in the faculty handbook but rather are part of the Provost's guidelines.
- Comment: Some colleges are instructing outside reviewers to do these specific person comparisons.
- Question: Will there be a point where the discussion goes to the faculty overall and how do we get feedback from everyone? Answer: Yes. Hicok affirmed the need for all faculty to review the proposed revisions.
- Comment: Vet Med has a similar set of issues (i.e., to the extension question) in terms of their clinical faculty. As a department, they are trying to figure out how to set the bar, and how they differentiate among different types of faculty. The issue comes back to the real importance here of the departmental/college expectations documents; those documents have been working very well in Vet Med.
- Comment: Cases that fail are often the result of lack of detail in departmental and department head letters. Those letters need to make very clear cases in the context of the expectations documents.
- Question: How does the internal expectation document align with the judgements of external reviewers? What do we do about misalignments there? Hicok notes that there has been some discussion of sharing the expectations documents with letter writers.
- Comment: We need to move away from the language of "reputation" and "recognition" to the language of "significant contributions" and "impact" – i.e., move from concepts that are more subjective and open to manipulation to concepts that are more concrete.
- Question: Where do issues of integrity, professional conduct, and ethics fit in? Hicok noted that parts of the revision are fairly solid while other parts are still in flux. Hicok raised the question of whether people want to be able to speak to behavior. Hicok is seeking a way to handle such concerns in a way that makes sense. Hicok wants to avoid dropping hearsay into cases, but there is a real concern that we are able to speak to behavior that is problematic. There are a lot of issues around people's behavior. There is quite a bit of concern over this section. One key concern is that if issues of behavior are included, how do we control it to prevent misuse? There has been a push to extend this issue to include language like civility. While the proposed language is designed to protect the candidate against spurious allegations, it puts the P&T committee in a difficult position of having to turn people in to the police or the ethics committee or something else.

Ways to value service (Ellen Plummer and Bob Hicok)

- IRB: In following up from discussions at University Council, the IRB needs more faculty reviewers. It is very clear that we need to increase the number of faculty members who participate in this process. How can this service be better valued or integrated (e.g., release from other service, release from teaching)? It's not enough to keep asking people to do more. In addition, there has to be a recognition that not all service is equal (e.g., serving on the IRB is more time consuming than some other committees or commissions).

- Some departments have high numbers of assistant professors, who are not required to do service because of the research demands for tenure. For example, Accounting has only 5 tenured faculty members, so they have limited capacity for service. And that's not uncommon across the College of Business. They need more senior faculty in departments to be able to actively engage in service.
- Can the IRB or the institution "chip in" on the service piece to help with some form of support, such as funding for a course release? The university has a severe shortage of faculty to continue to do service.
- We have to be honest about the fact that we are at saturation point on service. We all say yes to things that we don't really have time for.
- The IRB issue can serve as a test case to see if there's a way to get necessary service done more effectively.
- There's a lot of service that's not productive. We need more institutional admission about committees that are not productive/not a good use of time.
- With respect to IRB in particular, the IRB has received 5100 submissions this year so far. We've gone from about 1000 in 2010 up to 5100 and counting, with the same number of reviewers. The increases reflect both the growth of programs (e.g., biomedical research) as well as increased emphasis on research broadly.
- Plummer noted that Gender @ VT has identified service as a particular concern for faculty of color, women faculty, and international faculty. In our desire to constitute diverse committees, we disproportionately tap underrepresented faculty in ways that are not sustainable.
- We need to ask what service obligations faculty are uniquely qualified to do? What service can be better done elsewhere?
- The administration is trying hard not to replicate committees and not put out a million calls.
- The administration wants to balance demands on faculty time with the need for faculty input. That is a key tension. How do we have faculty governance and value faculty input without overburdening faculty?
- There's substantial burden for representation in our bylaws and constitution for cross-representation among committees and commissions. These policies should be reviewed.
- Are there more effective ways to use technology to support engagement? Does everyone need to be on every other committee? Are there ways that we can creatively address this problem? Please send Ellen ideas and potential solutions.
- This issue is very closely connected to time and priorities. The institution has to take responsibility for its own capacity – we have to be honest about what we actually can accomplish with what we have.
- We need conversation around these issues across constituencies. We're not having discussions about feasibility and capacity. These are issues that have to be on the table and have to be discussed openly.
- We have to decide what is important and what the things are.
- We have to be more involved in figuring out what actually has to be done. Clear out all the useless drains on faculty time.

University service

We need a representative to the Library Committee. Biko Agozino agreed to serve.

Assessment of Faculty Committee

- The committee consists of the following individuals: Beth Waggenpack, Brandi Quesenberry, Jim Kuypers, Katherine Haenschen, Claire Boor, Dorothy Connor, Emily Stallings, Polly Middleton, Sara Arena
- The first meeting is Monday, Nov. 5, 11:00 - 12:00, Durham 137

Faculty Priority/Time Committee

Volunteers are needed. Ferris noted that there is a lot of support for getting faculty to work on the things that they are really being paid for.

Employee Benefits (Todd Schenk)

The committee had its first meeting and is preparing for the second meeting. They want to be able to choose a short 2-3 item list of things to take on. The forced winter holiday closing is on the list. Senators suggested multiple other items:

- Retiree health insurance
- Housing
- Parking rates
- Tuition subsidies
- Research leave and benefits
- Contribution to retirement (the current salary percentage is not competitive)
- Childcare, including both the general need for more childcare and the need for short-term or emergency childcare (e.g., a sick child).
- Parental leave. Per the governor's mandate, we now have paid parental leave, but there are many details still to work out, and the Provost's office will continue to engage in dialogue with faculty around the issue.

The Senate also suggested reaching out to people who just came into VT to identify the other barriers that might make it harder to attract top people.

5. Equity and Access - concerns about lack of following up on workplace concerns

Paretti noted a series of reports about the challenges facing the Office of Equity and Access (e.g., very slow response times, new investigators needing additional training, etc.) and asked senators to gather information from their constituents (respecting individual privacy) to gauge the scope of the problem.

6. Other business

No other business was raised.

7. Adjourn

The Senate adjourned at 3:57 p.m.