

Faculty Senate Agenda & Minutes

October 11, 2019, 2:30-4:30pm

Location: NCB 160 (or [via Zoom](#) for those outside Blacksburg)

Present: Masoud Agah, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Mehdi Ahmadian, Robin Allnut, Susan Anderson, Richard Ashley, Leandro Castello, Virgilio Centeno, Benjamin Corl, John Ferris, Matthew Gabriele, John Galbraith, Ellen Gilliland, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, James Hawdon, Dana Hawley, Bob Hicok, Eunju Hwang, Christine Kaestle, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Jake Lahne, Jordan MacKenzie, Zachary Mackey, Paul Marek, Cayce Myers, Amy Nelson, Marie Parette, Patrick Pithua, Robin Queen, Susanna Rinehart, Hans Robinson, Todd Schenk, Yang Shao, Ashley Shew, Ryan Speer, Divya Srinivasan, Cornel Sultan, Mark Van Dyke, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

Guests: Coogan Thompson (GSA), Lisa Lee (OVPRI)

Approval of Agenda

Agenda approved by unanimous consent.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes of September 27th meeting were approved with minor edits.

Announcements

- Updates to Promotion & Tenure Guidelines: Bob Hicok shared that the Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA) was completing a final revision and the document would be available for Faculty Senate review within a couple weeks.
- Eric Kaufman reported the Faculty Senate needs to identify a new representative needed for [Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies](#). This would be a one-year commitment, fulfilling the remainder of a term started by someone who is no longer a Faculty Senator.
- [Climate Action Demands](#): Laura Lane and Heidi Hahn spoke on behalf of “Virginia Tech for Climate Justice,” and they shared information highlighting the urgency of action to counteract climate change. They reported on a conversation with President Sands following the Climate Strike on September 20th, and he indicated a commitment to reopen Virginia Tech’s climate action agreement. They asked the Faculty Senate for support with the suggestions provided (Appendix A). John Ferris indicated several members of the cabinet are drafting a resolution the Faculty Senate can consider at future meetings. Faculty may provide further input to the climate justice group by emailing BlacksburgClimateStrike@gmail.com.
 - Senators shared some initial impressions, including considerations on what Virginia Tech will be able to do with respect to the various demands.

Topic 1: Research Data Protections (OVPRI)

[Robin Queen](#) and [Lisa Lee](#) shared considerations on secure methods for collection, storage, and use of personally identifiable and private health information (Appendix B). Lisa Lee shared an organizational chart, including an update on new hires for the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). Robin Queen is serving as an OVPRI Faculty Fellow and focusing particularly on human research data privacy requirements. Mary Potter is the recent full-time hire also working in that area. The contact for HRPP is Barbara DeCausey. Lisa Lee indicated the goal of the research data protections efforts is to ensure the

university is meeting legal requirements, yet departments can adopt their own solutions that meet the legal requirements. The current discussion is focused on determining what the University needs to make available to researchers and programs that do not have the resources to provide their own solutions. Faculty Senators shared key considerations, including the importance of making the standards reasonable so that faculty are not looking for workarounds. Faculty also noted the importance of remote access to data to the highest degree possible. Faculty also asked about benchmarking practices with other institutions, and Robin indicated she is working with Mary on that. The solutions to data protection will be calibrated to the sensitivities of the data and the requirements to effectively complete the research.

Topic 2: CFA Resolution on Accommodating Religious Absences

Bob Hicok shared a resolution from the Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA): [CFA2019-20A](#). This is an update on an issue that surfaced last year, and the goal is to have a defined process for students to request accommodation for religious observance. The proposed policy (Appendix C) encourages students to work through the Dean of Students' office to obtain absence verifications. The decision for how an absence is handled remains with the faculty member leading the class. One suggestion was to change "make-up work" to "alternate work." Another suggestion was to remove "intrinsically" from the phrase about "intrinsically no more difficult," or switch the qualifying word to "significantly." Faculty Senators also discussed the merits of identifying a policy distinction for student athletes, who may work with Student Athlete Academic Support Services for absence verification. The proposed policy likely results in additional work for the Dean of Students' office, and those efforts could reduce the demand on faculty members to interpret requests. Questions remain regarding the timeline for reporting absences and requesting accommodation. The Dean of Students office does not have particular limits on when a student can request an absence verification. Faculty noted existing schedules already privilege Christian holidays, and this resolution is intended to extend consideration to important holidays for other religions. A Faculty Senator noted the issue could also be addressed through more communication from University administration to faculty highlighting holidays on the interfaith calendar. Another Senator encouraged striking the whereas line that "the Office of the Dean of Students has agreed to verify absences for religious observances in the same manner they currently verify other absences," because it could expose the Dean of Students office in circumstances where some religious holidays are verified and others are not. In general, the Faculty Senate is in favor of the resolution; the concerns expressed tend to be focused on minimizing any potential consequences from an improperly-worded resolution. At this point, the resolution goes back to CFA for further refinement/editing, based on feedback and input. It will then go to a second reading and vote with CFA. Several faculty members would like to see the final version and attach a statement of support at that stage.

Other Business

No further business presented.

Adjourn

The meeting formally adjourned at 4:26pm.

Respectfully submitted by Eric Kaufman, Faculty Senate Secretary.

Appendix A: Climate Action Demands from “Virginia Tech for Climate Justice”

Virginia Tech’s mission is to educate the next generation, a generation that will have to cope with the worsening consequences of a changing climate. The university has a responsibility to the students and the planet to claim our role as a courageous leader for climate justice. Boasting one of the top engineering schools and the top natural resources colleges in the country, Virginia Tech is poised to be a leader in climate research, activism, and innovation and should aspire to be among the top green schools nationally. We, the youth of Blacksburg, urge Virginia Tech to live up to its reputation as an innovator in the development of tomorrow's technology and to its motto *Ut Prosim* (that I may serve) by establishing strict guidelines and timelines to reduce the university’s contribution to climate catastrophe.

We demand:

1. That President Sands make a public announcement stating that we are in a climate emergency, and that he will act as an advocate for immediate climate action to include denouncing the construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, which damages our regional ecologies and would double the Commonwealth’s fixed-source greenhouse gas emissions.
2. That the Virginia Tech Foundation divest from all publicly-traded companies that hold coal, oil, or gas reserves and intend to use or sell them for the purpose of combustion, and from all financial products that include such companies.
3. That Virginia Tech’s electric supply to VT facilities (Blacksburg, Alexandria, and new Innovation campus) be generated from 100% renewable sources by 2030. That Virginia Tech Electric Service, which serves the Blacksburg campus and 6,000 residential and commercial customers in Blacksburg, provide 100% of its electric supply from renewable sources by 2030. That Virginia Tech’s steam plant be powered by 100% renewables by 2040. These transitions must be guided by principles of energy democracy and climate justice locally and globally. Once the Board of Visitors puts these commitments in place, we expect President Sands to sign [Global Climate Emergency letter](#).
4. That, beginning immediately, all new construction be net-zero energy ready according to U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) standards and incorporate best practices in green building techniques including but not limited to strategies from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) WaterSense and Indoor Air Plus programs, ecological landscape design, and construction waste-reduction.
5. That Virginia Tech appoint student representatives--selected by well-informed members of established student-led environmental organizations--as voting members on all bodies that make decisions concerning Virginia Tech’s energy use, the university’s currently outdated Climate Action Commitment, and all university issues with climate justice implications.
6. That Virginia Tech initiate comprehensive outreach, extension, and research programs for energy efficiency, renewable energy development, and job training in Southwest Virginia and Appalachia. Such programs must be guided by principles of energy democracy and climate justice locally and globally.

RESEARCH DATA PRIVACY

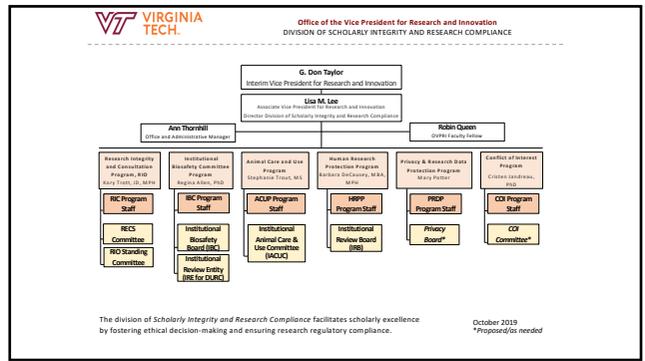
Faculty Senate Meeting

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
DIVISION OF SCHOLARLY INTEGRITY AND RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

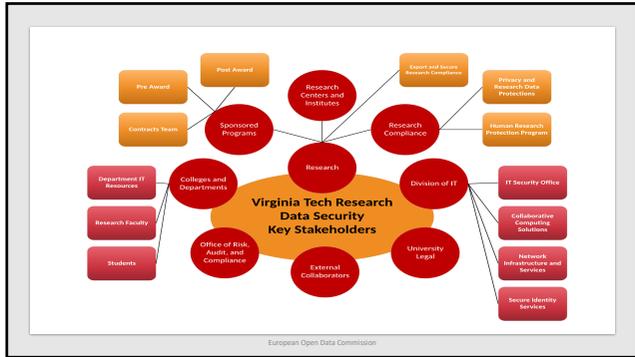
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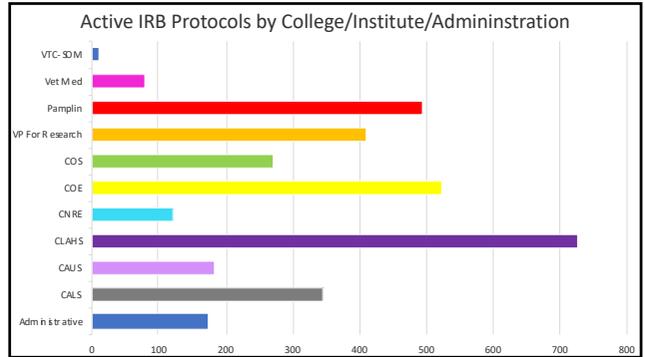
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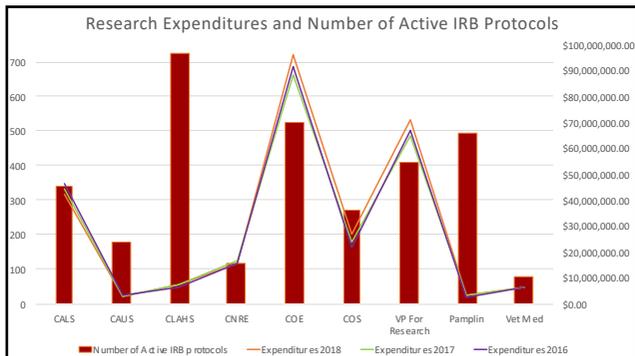
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“As open as possible.
As closed as necessary.”

European Open Data Commission

6

Continuum of Data Protections



7

Have you or anyone in your department ever had a grant or project that you wanted to submit but didn't or couldn't because of data security/management requirements that VT could not provide?

8

Research Privacy Contacts

Robin Queen
Mary Potter
pdrp@vt.edu

HRPP/IRB Contact

Barbara DeCausey
irb@vt.edu

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Resolution on Accommodating Religious Observances
Commission on Faculty Affairs
CFA 2019-20A

First reading, Commission on Faculty Affairs
Approved, Commission on Faculty Affairs
Faculty Senate Review
Staff Senate Review
Graduate Student Assembly Review
Student Government Association Review
First reading, University Council
Approved, University Council
Approved, President
Approved, Board of Visitors
Effective date

September 13, 2019

WHEREAS, students have expressed concerns to the Student Government Association (SGA) and Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) about Virginia Tech guidelines regarding absences for religious holidays; and

WHEREAS, some students have been compelled to attend classes during Yom Kippur, Maha Shivaratri, Eid, and other days of religious significance that require fasting, prayer, or repenting; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech seeks to put into practice the affirmations outlined in our Principles of Community, including mutual understanding, civility, and the value of human diversity; and

WHEREAS, students seek a broader definition of “religious holiday” that encompasses religious, cultural, ethnic, meaning-making, and faith-based beliefs; and

WHEREAS, though Virginia Tech faculty support the accommodation of religious beliefs, they are not in a position to verify absences for religious observances; and

WHEREAS, the proposed policy maintains faculty member’s ability to uphold the academic integrity of their courses while providing more guidance for students and faculty in dealing with the issue of religious absences; and

WHEREAS, the Office of the Dean of Students has agreed to verify absences for religious observances in the same manner they currently verify other absences; and

WHEREAS, in the unlikely case of a student seeking accommodations for illegitimate reasons, the Undergraduate and Graduate Honor Systems can be utilized to enforce academic integrity; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Virginia Tech students seeking observances for their religious beliefs will be able to verify their absences with the Office of the Dean of Students; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that subsections 9.6.2 and 9.6.2.1 of the Faculty Handbook will be combined and revised as follows:

Current Faculty Handbook language:

From 9.6.2:

When students cannot attend a class, it is their responsibility to make arrangements for any work missed as soon as possible. In cases of prolonged absences, students may ask their academic deans or the dean of students to notify their instructors of the reason for their absence. Staff members from the Office of the Dean of Students may verify absences from class for students who have documentation to support an absence beyond their control. The staff members send an absence verification notice to the college dean, who then forwards the verification to faculty members. A staff member from the Office of the Dean of Students reinforces with the student that he or she is responsible for contacting the faculty member to arrange make-up of any missed work.

From 9.6.2.1:

Consistent with the university's tradition of religious tolerance, faculty are encouraged to be sensitive to students who wish to observe religious holidays. The student is responsible for requesting and providing justification for a religious accommodation, preferably during the first two weeks of classes or as soon as the student becomes aware of the need for an accommodation. Faculty should inform students of their willingness to make accommodations for reasonable requests. Faculty are not required to compromise the academic integrity of the course to accommodate religious practices. Thus, the faculty member determines accommodations for religious practices that are consistent with his or her class attendance policy.

Proposed Faculty Handbook language (new 9.6.2):

If a student cannot attend a class, they may notify their instructor(s) directly or contact the Office of the Dean of Students, whose staff can provide verification of absences. The Office of the Dean of Students considers absence verification for any of the following reasons: illness or death of a family member or friend; off-campus medical appointments or hospital admission; court subpoenas; military orders; and observances of sincerely held religious, cultural, ethnic, meaning-making, or faith-based beliefs. Staff members send an absence verification notice to the college dean, who then forwards the verification to the instructor(s). Faculty are not required to compromise the academic integrity of the course to accommodate absences. Students are responsible for arranging any make-up work with the instructor. The makeup work will be appropriately related to course objectives and intrinsically no more difficult than the original exam or assignment. If upon a good faith evaluation an instructor believes that the absence negatively affects the course of study and will not provide the student an opportunity to make up coursework, students can contact the Office of the Dean of Students for further assistance.

Student athletes should contact Student Athlete Academic Support Services or the Office of the Dean of Students for absence verification.

In accordance with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community, faculty are encouraged to accommodate students when the observance of sincerely held religious, cultural, ethnic, meaning-making, or faith-based beliefs conflict with academic requirements. Students who choose to request an excused absence directly from their instructor(s) due to a religious observance should do so during the first two weeks of classes or as soon as they become aware of the need for an accommodation.

AND BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Hokie Handbook and all other relevant documents will be updated to reflect these changes.