

Faculty Senate Agenda & Minutes

October 25, 2019, 2:30-4:30pm

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

Present: Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Robin Allnutt, Susan Anderson, Richard Ashley, Arthur Ball, Michael Borowski, Tanyel Bulbul, Charles Calderwood, Virgilio Centeno, Sam Doak, John Ferris, John Galbraith, Ellen Gilliland, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, Roie Hauser, Bob Hicok, Christine Kaestle, Bettina Koch, Jake Lahne, Roberto Leon, Zachary Mackey, Paul Marek, Amy Nelson, Marie Paretti, Patrick Pithua, R. Scott Pleasant, Susanna Rinehart, Todd Schenk, Ashley Shew, Eric Smith, Ryan Speer, Jay Teets, Tess Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Mark Van Dyke, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Cynthia Wood, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

Guests: Coogan Thompson (GSA), Madelynn Todd (BOV), Jackson Ribler (JSU), Tamarah Smith

Approval of Agenda

Agenda approved by unanimous consent

Approval of Minutes

Minutes of October 11th meeting were approved.

Announcements

- Updates to Promotion & Tenure Guidelines: Bob Hicok shared that the Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA) has been working on revisions and welcomes input.

Topic 1: [Holistic Graduate Admission](#)

- Karen P. DePauw, Vice President and Dean for Graduate Education
- Grad School Holistic Admission
 - Heavily upon GPA, GRE scores, and institution that the applicant previously attended.
 - Not appropriate to use GRE as a cutoff, as individuals of diverse backgrounds are not able to demonstrate their talents through this test. The Graduate School does not require the GRE, but Faculty may use it.
 - Six questions that are asked of the applicants
 - Ability to sort applicants by characteristics to determine the best match.
 - Questions were tested through areas that predict student success.
 - The individuals who write letters of recommendation are asked questions about the student to learn more about the class rank of the student.

Comments:

- Will this create more work for Faculty at other institutions?
 - It is optional not to answer the questions. It would not take that much additional time to answer the questions outside of the written letter.
- Will asking these questions further disadvantage students? Answering questions will add to the work. It may be easier to answer these questions for students with higher GPA.

- The questions are optional, and in a perfect world everyone will fill out the questions. Therefore, faculty looking for graduate students will have an easier time finding their top candidates.
- Averaging the GRE is not appropriate because they have different metrics.
- Are you able to waive application fees?
 - Holistic admissions can come with funding, but so can non-holistic admissions. There are ways of bundling Cunningham, diversity, and department funding.
 - We waive application fees through different areas.
- Will there still be a minimum GPA?
 - The minimum GPA is 3.0.
 - Have admitted students below 3.0 for certain circumstances.
 - Provisional admission lowers ability to get student loans and scholarships.
 - Could call it holistic admission so that this does not occur.
- How will this apply to international students?
 - Declining number of admissions, and enrollments.
 - There are no fee waivers for international students at the moment.
- Respect reviewers time by making the required responses short, but also make sure that they understand the importance of their answers, as they will actually be used in the admissions process.
- How does the ranking work for the questions?
 - That is for the faculty to determine. You define the characteristics that you require.
- Most other schools only have one link to direct the user to the application site. However, the Virginia Tech graduate school website looks very old school and is difficult to navigate.
 - Some of the problems will be addressed when the site is rebuilt in the upcoming year.

Topic 2: [CFA 2019-20A: Resolution on Accommodating Religious Observances](#)

- Bob Hicok and Jackson Ribler, President of the Jewish Student Union
- The Dean of students should be a resource and mediator between the students and faculty.
 - Statements from students in the Agenda for 10/25/2019.
 - This is not just a Jewish issue, this applies to many religions, cultures, and students.
- Hicok made changes to the resolution based on the discussion at the last meeting.
- The resolution will be voted on next week, but there will likely be changes before then.
- Straw poll of support in principle: supported

Comments:

- Shryock: Those who are not religious will not be able to benefit from this policy. By broadening the understanding of religious holidays to personal days or meaning making experiences, it may take away the differentiation between students.

- The method of verification is the Interfaith calendar. Currently, the decision is made by the faculty. The resolution would give the power to the Dean of Students Office. How this plays in with the timing of the course is still up to the faculty.
- The Dean of Students will track the requests made by students.
- Strike the “Sincerely held” phrase.
- Support for Shryock’s critique: The use of the Interfaith calendar may discriminate against students who are not religious.
- 2 weeks vs. as soon as possible:
 - Faculty can still say no to the absence request.
 - Families often make decisions outside of the first two weeks of the semester, which does not allow the student much time to notify faculty of an absence.
- Why is there a need for additional accommodations?
 - The subject is very sensitive, like a death in the family or serious injury.
 - All this resolution does is give students another resource to verify their absences without being put in a potentially uncomfortable situation.
- The title should reflect the overall meaning of religious, cultural, and meaning making holidays.
- From Zoom: “Hi, Ashley Shew here. I’d like to speak in favor of this resolution. Going through Dean of Students for documentation will make the process less arbitrary and more fair - and in fact easier for faculty so that we don’t become individual investigatory units. Our current arrangement defaults toward the honoring of only one religion’s holidays, given the arrangement of our breaks around major Christian holidays. This is still not fair, given that students still have to go through a process, but making the students go through less hassle in having to justify themselves to multiple units.”

Topic 3: [Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine \(VTC SOM\)](#) and Faculty Senate

- Issues: How many members can be in Faculty Senate? Who can vote?
- Original and Current Agreement: only those employed by VT can become senators
 - 4 senators would be added if this is considered.
 - If opened to everyone in the medical school, 27 senators would be added.
- The medical school does not currently have governance organized as it is on campus.
 - By allowing the larger group to join, this may encourage them to open their governance to more members of the medical school that do not currently have a say.

Comments:

- Are the issues that we discuss relevant to members of the medical school?
- It is important that they participate but 22 additional members may be difficult to engage. Most of these people are employed directly by Carillion.
- They distinguish between professors and instructors, whereas the VT Faculty Senate does not.
- Consider the different perspectives on undergraduate and postgraduate education.

Topic 4: [Resolution in support of climate action](#)

- Resolution link on the Agenda

- Students are meeting with President Sands on November 8.
- Good timing for this resolution as the Climate Action Plan is to be readdressed by the end of this year.
- Will circulate resolution to get an official vote.

Comments:

- VT is aiming for LEED Silver. Are you asking for LEED Gold?
 - Yes.
- How are you considering the future growth of the campus?
 - Should broaden the statement to “VT enterprise”
- Student: Financial analysis that investing in renewable energy proves that this is not only a moral issue, but a good investment for Virginia Tech.
- Paper use at Virginia Tech, especially through paper signatures. Two-factor authentication may help reduce paperwork.
- Would like to see more emphasis on reduction and less about using more renewable energy.

Other Business

Adjourn

Adjourned at 4:20pm.

Minutes captured by Cameron Donaldson, with additional editing by Eric Kaufman.