

# Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2020, @ 2:30pm

Via Zoom: <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/96824189627>

*Senators Present:* Masoud Agah, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Susan Anderson, Sara Arena, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Joseph Baker, Arthur Ball, Sarah Barrett, Michael Borowski, Charles Calderwood, Benjamin Corl, Harry Dorn, Robert Dunay, Matthew Eick, John Ferris, Carla Finkielstein, John Galbraith, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, Daniel Hindman, Ran Jin, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Jacob Lahne, Evan Lavender-Smith, Roberto Leon, Justin Lemkul, James Lord, Jonathan Maher, Paul Marek, Frances McCarty, Thomas Mills, Cayce Myers, Michael Nappier, Amy Nelson, Chris Pierce, Nicole Pitterson, Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Susanna Rinehart, Todd Schenk, Peter Schmitthener, Yang Shao, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Jay Teets, Steve Thompson, Tess Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Kwok Tsui, Bruce Volgelaar, A.K. Ward, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

*Guests:* Rector Horacio Valeiras, Esther Bauer, Cam Donaldson, Shaowen Luo, Sally Morton, April Myers, Ginny Pannabecker, Ellen Plummer, Tom Sanchez, Sabrina Sturgeon, Coogan Thompson, Fidel Valea, Philip Young

## Call to Order & Guiding Questions

President Kaufman provided an overview of the Faculty Senate meeting with guiding questions:

1. What faculty perspective needs voiced related to an Open Access policy?
2. What insights can we gain from Rector Valeiras' perspective on the University?

## Consent Agenda

Susan Anderson moved to adopt the consent agenda, and a second senator seconded the motion. There were no objections; the following was approved unanimously:

- Approve and post September 18, 2020, meeting minutes.
- Elect Frances McCarty to Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs.

## Brief Updates and Announcements

- Eric Kaufman reminded senators of the topical schedule for fall meetings.
- Eric Kaufman highlighted the faculty role in success with student retention, as mentioned in a [recent VT news story](#).
- Eric Kaufman noted that to increase Living-Learning participation, additional support will be needed from the Faculty. He referred senators to a [request for Living-Learning Program proposals](#).
- Eric Kaufman noted that the [COACHE Survey Data](#) can be publicly viewed and may be helpful to Faculty.
- Eric Kaufman encouraged participation in the [Caregiving Responsibilities Survey](#) that was recently advertised.
- Eric Kaufman shared details about an upcoming Faculty Research Leave Informational Workshop, scheduled for October 15th.
- Others?
  - Eric Kaufman highlighted the [VT Relay for Life competition, October 6-8](#).
  - No additional announcements were made.
- Eric Kaufman noted that Cayce Myers is the point person for Faculty Senate records. Because he is arriving late (due to another commitment), Cameron Donaldson is taking minutes until he arrives.

## Faculty Open Access Policy

Ginny Pannabecker from University Libraries described the process of creating an open access policy at Virginia Tech, and she identified [related resources](#). The proposed policy ([COR Resolution 2020-21 A](#)) includes all Virginia Tech related authors, giving both faculty and students the right to share research for public benefit. The open access approach provides more visibility for Virginia Tech research. Eric Kaufman notes that Senators may continue to add questions and comments to the Google Doc to help shape a comment on the resolution.

- Layne Watson asked if students and faculty can deposit anything they want into the system.
  - Ginny Pannabecker said that they can.
  - Layne Watson's concern came from students posting homework solutions on public sources. Without quality control, it may take away from quality materials.
  - Phillip Young noted that people do review the uploaded material, so it should result in quality submittals to VTechWorks.
- Susanna Rinehart asked how the policy aligns Virginia Tech with peer research institutions.
  - Ginny Pannabecker noted that it is shorter and more limited than other policies, but it covers the most important basics.
  - Philip Young noted that the policy is broader than many universities because it covers students and faculty.
- Eric Kaufman noted that VTechWorks improves the visibility of research for VT faculty.

## Q&A with Rector Valeiras

The Rector of Virginia Tech's Board of Visitors (BOV), Horacio Valeiras thanked the faculty for helping deliver this semester for students. He also acknowledged long-term challenges associated with COVID19 and connected the current challenges with issues of being a global land grant university. He then responded to questions provided in advance.

- **Question:** Can you describe for us what you and the board see as the greatest challenge to VT over the next 5-10 years, and how do we as faculty work with you to address these concerns?  
**Answer:** Recruitment for faculty, recruitment of students, progress toward degree, accessibility of VT education to as many people as possible. When thinking of these issues it is all about resources. The BOV have focused on resources and prioritization of resources through mechanisms like PIBB. Faculty and students really drive expansion in Northern Virginia and new opportunities in Blacksburg and extension campuses in Virginia. BOV is doing admissions differently and considering diversity among students. Faculty is a big issue, because we know there are a lot of retirements in the next few years. One of the biggest issues as rector to get into the particulars of shortfalls in compensation to ensure retention, start up packages, and recruitment. Part of the strategy is the capital campaign, and increasing alumni contributions. These questions for the BOV are aspirational in nature. However, the question is where are we going to go after COVID? As an institution, we have to invest in technology and resources for students.
- **Question:** President Sands summarized the [Board of Visitors' recent retreat](#) with a series of what-if statements. How do you see these statements guiding the BOV's work during the year ahead?
  - What if students, faculty, and staff could be anywhere in the world engaged in learning communities and still be fully engaged with Virginia Tech?
  - What if Virginia Tech were known as the best in the world at convening diverse talent to take on challenges from a holistic human-centered perspective?

- What if Virginia Tech engaged learners from cradle to grave? (i.e. lifelong learning)
- What if wealth, income, and/or zip code were not factors for determining access and success at Virginia Tech?

**Answer:** In terms of diversity VT wants 40 percent of students from diversified backgrounds and underserved communities. We are not there yet. Our net tuition and fees are higher than than many peer institutions. This requires resources, and protection of resources from the state which have declined dramatically since 2000.

**Follow-up:** A senator asked if there would be more faculty retirements in the short term. Rector Valeiras acknowledged that the age distribution of faculty; we know there will be an increase in retirements demographically.

**Follow-up:** A senator asked if there was a goal to encourage retirement? Valerias said no. He said that there is a global market for research faculty, and it's not easy to navigate. We also have to be realistic about retirement. Thinking about administration, there has been a whole cohort that has retired. In past recessions, the general action is for people to stay in their jobs longer because they don't know the economic situation. COVID, however, is different because of health issues creating early retirements.

- **Question:** A recent article on [“Leadership Threats to Shared Governance in Higher Education”](#) noted the importance of board members’ ability to recognize “key indicators of institutional vulnerability and vitality.” How would you describe Virginia Tech’s Board of Visitors and their attention to such indicators?
  - The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) identified [best practices for faculty communication with governing boards](#), noting “faculty representation on an institution’s governing board and its committees should not be a substitute for regular, substantive communication between the faculty and the board, unmediated by members of the administration.” What avenues do you see for direct communication between Virginia Tech faculty and the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors?

**Answer:** Rector Valeiras said he has seen instances elsewhere of poor shared governance, which causes problems for institutions. He says that shared governance allows you to bring people along. It may take longer to make decisions, but you are talking about big decisions in education. The VT BOV delegates the operations of the University to President Sands. The BOV’s role is to make resource allocation decisions. Insight is provided by the Faculty Senate representative to the BOV. Board members do interact with faculty members, but if it’s about running the university they will defer to President Sands and Provost Clarke. He encourages people to reach out to Dr. Kaufman, and reach out to the board so long as this isn’t something about day-to-day management.

- **Question:** In [Land-grant Universities for the Future](#), governing boards are described as “‘guardians of the public trust’ who are supposed to ensure that universities are in fact meeting certain societal needs and demands” (p. 90). Is that how you see the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors? Why or why not?

**Answer:** At the board retreat several years ago, the board said they are fiduciaries of the university. Does that make the BOV guardians of the public trust, because VT is a land grant university? The answer is yes; because in the Commonwealth, VT is a public land grant university. Enrollment numbers suggest that VT is achieving those goals, but VT needs greater accessibility. VT students graduate with about \$27,000 in debt, so that is something the university can work on, especially in terms of accessibility.

- **Question:** Please speak to the growing concerns by members of the University and town regarding the management of COVID-19, specifically concerns about when VT will look to

change the mode of operation. Is there a benchmark at which this change will be made; and if so, what was used to identify/determine this benchmark?

**Answer:** Through random testing, we are at around a 1 percent positivity rate. VT is also upping capacity up to 2,000 a day, and engaging in wastewater testing. Utilization of quarantine space is at 30 percent. Similar to Radford, when VT came back for fall, there was spiking. VT worked closely with NRV health authority, and the BOV is pleased with the results. Transmission of COVID has happened with indoor spaces with no masks largely off-campus, where VT has limited control. To change the modality and send everyone home is thought of as a mistake because it will just transfer the spread of COVID to other places. Tendency now is to keep people on campus through Thanksgiving. There is not a single benchmark or number that VT looks at for assessment. So far, no hospitalizations of students in Montgomery County.

**Follow-up:** A senator asked about staffing levels with Schiffert and shifts in attention about mode of operation using cost benefit analysis. Rector Valeiras said closing down the campus would require furloughs and layoffs, which the university doesn't want to do. He said that this isn't a cost-benefit analysis, but a health analysis. State funding appears to be flat, so we know that we are financially in better shape than was expected. A month in, COVID is rather flat, so transmission is not out of control. Valeiras said he believes that the virus will continue, because we know some people won't be vaccinated and some people won't adhere to protocols.

**Follow-up:** Several senators asked about community spread and planning for spring semester. We will have the experience of fall to decide what to do with spring. He promises that everyone will be involved going forward.

- **Question:** The [March 2020 Strategic Plan](#) calls for the faculty to:
  - Increase extramural research expenditures to \$410M by 2024.
  - Achieve Top 10 U.S. public land-grant (WSJ/THE U.S. College Rankings) by 2024.
  - Achieve Top 13 U.S. land-grant (THE World University Rankings) by 2024.
  - Ensure 100% of academic majors have a required experiential learning component by 2024.
  - Achieve Top 1/3rd (66th percentile) of internationally and nationally recognized faculty awards by 2022.
  - Achieve Top 1/3rd (66th percentile) of internationally and nationally recognized faculty publications and citations by 2022.

Meanwhile, Faculty have been hired at half the rate that undergraduate enrollment has increased since at least 2015. (That was before the over enrollment of 2019 and freezing faculty hiring this year.) *How realistic are these expectations of faculty? What changes would you endorse?*

**Answer:** Rector Valeiras says that COVID has affected the strategic plan and the time frames on the strategic plan. Remember that the strategic plan is a living document, so there is flexibility in what the plan is offering. From the BOV perspective, they asked Menah Pratt-Clarke and President Sands to create goals and objectives. We know there are some financial aspects to this. Because of this, we need to tap some research money. The BOV also wants to provide increased rankings, experiential learning, recruitment and retention of research faculty and students. The BOV wants more information about faculty compensation by college, department, and by tenure of longevity to understand compression and conversion. The rector believes that the 33 percent is not a university wide problem, but is more an issue in certain segments of the university.

**Follow-up:** A senator asked about potential disconnect between the BOV and the core mission of the university. Rector Valeiras said the BOV today is a bit different than the previous ones. He says it takes about 3 years to learn, and then they are on 4 year appointments. The governor of Virginia appoints the members, and they only serve one term, so they have to have reappointment. Today, Valeiras says that the BOV knows that the university does not run like a business.

**Follow-up:** A question was asked if salary compression has been investigated across locations. Valeiras said this is a variable. He said that Blacksburg hires in engineering are going to be the same amount as a person in northern Virginia.

- **Question:** The [March 2020 Strategic Plan](#) calls for the University to:
  - Achieve maintenance reserve funding in the range of 1 - 1.5% of facility values for auxiliaries.
  - Maintain Debt Rating in the AA or Aa Range.
  - Maintain = or < 5% University debt ratio.
  - Increase the University's unrestricted net assets by \$20 million annually by 2024.

*If the state legislature allows Virginia Tech to move funds from E&G to Auxiliaries, would you endorse/permit such a move?*

*What financial remedies should be pursued before any faculty salaries (e.g., through furloughs) or positions are cut? Should this include incurring additional debt?*

**Answer:** Valerias said the debt rating of VT is extremely important. The 5 percent of the debt ratio is important for VT, because the state limit is 7 percent. The university is looking at making decisions to control debt rating. University assets are invested in the endowment. There are many restricted debt assets, and the bulk of the endowment is restricted. Regarding the state legislature allowing E&G funds to be moved to auxiliaries (e.g., athletics, room and board, dining, parking services, student support structure), Valerias says auxiliaries must be self-sustaining. The auxiliaries have reserves as well. Valerias says he does not support moving E&G funds to auxiliaries. That may be different in an extraordinary situation, like a need by Schiffert. The BOV gave President Sands the ability to make cuts as needed; but as part of that authority, the BOV said all potential remedies must be examined. Also, the first cuts need to come from administration, which comprises 15 percent of total budget. Incurring additional debt is tough, because it's hard to pay back if you have no new revenue unless debt is used to generate a revenue source.

### **Other Business**

- **Experiential Learning:** John Ferris provided an overview of the intended discussion on experiential learning at the next Faculty Senate meeting. Experiential learning is the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for SACSCOC accreditation. The draft document provided to senators allows for a conversation about experiential learning. Dr. Ferris will also be presenting this to the department head's executive council. This is a deliberative process, so there is no surprise when this comes to the University Council.

### **Action Items, Including Anticipated Follow-up Communication**

- Please email [mcmymyers@vt.edu](mailto:mcmymyers@vt.edu) if you are interested in serving on CAPFA.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Cayce Myers, Faculty Senate Secretary*