

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

October 30, 2020, @ 2:30pm

Senators Present: Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Robin Allnut, Susan Anderson, Sara Arena, Richard Ashley, Azziza Bankole, Arthur Ball, Sarah Barrett, Michael Borowski, Hilary Bryon, Charles Calderwood, Cathryn Copper, Harry Dorn, Robert Dunay, John Ferris, John Galbraith, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, David Gregory, Al Hagy, James Hawdon, Roie Hauser, Bob Hicok, Daniel Hindman, Eunju Hwang, Ran Jin, Daniel Karolyi, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Jacob Lahne, Evan Lavender-Smith, Douglas Lind, Roberto Leon, Justin Lemkul, Jonathan Maher, Paul Marek, Frances McCarty, Polly Middleton, Cayce Myers, Amy Nelson, Aaron Noble, Chris Pierce, Nicole Pitterson, Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Susanna Rinehart, Hans Robinson, Todd Schenk, Peter Schmitthenner, Yang Shao, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Cornel Sultan, Jay Teets, Steve Thompson, Tess Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Kwok Tsui, Bruce Vogelaar, Dwight Viehland, A.K. Ward, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Cindy Wood, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

Guests: Provost Cyril Clarke, Esther Bauer, Chad Bolding, Jennifer Case, Heather Cox, Tom Crawford, Yevgeny Dokshanky, Cameron Donaldson, Jeff Earley, Jonathan Everett, Jack Finney, David Guerin, Hehuang, Rachel Holloway, SP Johnson, Caitlin Martinkus, Ellen Plummer, Tom Sanchez, Jeffrey Robert, Brett Shadle, Derek Shapiro, Tamarah Smith, Joel Snodgrass, Debra Stoudt, Teomingchew, Coogan Thompson, Michael Walsh

Call to Order & Guiding Questions

Eric Kaufman began by addressing questions about meeting attendance by senators and non-senators, highlighting two sections of the Faculty Senate Constitution, Article VII, on Meetings and Procedures:

Section 8. Faculty Attendance: Faculty members eligible for election to the Faculty Senate may attend but not vote in Faculty Senate regular and special meetings.

Section 9. Visitors: The Faculty Senate by majority vote may exclude visitors from attending meetings.

Eric asked anyone representing an interest other than an active role with Virginia Tech to indicate their affiliation in the chat. He also initiated the attendance poll for the meeting and shared the following guiding questions for the meeting:

1. What are lingering questions or concerns about changes to shared governance?
2. What insights can we gain from Provost Clarke's perspective on the University?

Consent Agenda

John Ferris motioned to approve the Consent Agenda, and Hans Robinson seconded. There were no objections; the following was approved by unanimous consent.

- Approve and post [October 16, 2020, meeting minutes](#).

Brief Updates and Announcements

- Eric Kaufman reminded senators of the topical schedule for fall meetings.
- Eric Kaufman mentioned the Faculty Senate Cabinet is responding to student concerns for the semester, as well as questions about Election Day being an "off-day."

Shared Governance Update

- Bob Hicok shared [excerpts from the President's Committee on Governance "Proposal for Revision to Shared Governance at Virginia Tech."](#)
- The proposal has received favorable feedback from President Sands.

- The next step is a joint resolution between CSA, CFA, and CAPFA.
 - Even if approved, there is a lot of work to be done to complete it fully.

Experiential Learning Update

- John Ferris is seeking information from various constituencies within Virginia Tech. Experiential learning is the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). One big discussion item was career and professional development. We want to be inclusive of career and professional development, but also other areas of growth. The Faculty will decide what experiences are worth credit. A few faculty members from each department should be involved in these decisions.
 - Richard Ashley noted that the Faculty Senate should wait until the town halls to occur before a position is set. A senator could report out on concerns or points made so that the full senate can consider. John Ferris mentioned that he has been taking notes of the important points discussed so far in the town halls.

Q&A with Provost Clarke

- Immediately prior to Provost Clarke joining the meeting, Robin Queen asked a question regarding the at risk students, and their potential testing. She was unsure of where this issue can be raised other than HR.
- Provost Clarke began by thanking faculty for their contributions to advancing the university in these challenging times. He recognized that he received several concerns about modality of courses in response to the Provost Office message distributed earlier this week. He recognized that this email came at an inconvenient time during the semester. He was surprised that spring semester modality was overwhelmingly online only as opposed to hybrid or in-person. Because there was a short turnaround time he went ahead and sent the email without consultation with the Faculty Senate.
- Provost Clarke emphasized four points:
 1. Decisions for modality still rest with individual faculty members in consultation with chairs.
 2. Now is the time to review and consider feasibility of more face-to-face instruction with health and safety procedures in place.
 3. Protecting vulnerable individuals remains a priority.
 4. University will calibrate with the pandemic and associated risk.
- The University will remain responsible for maintaining safety and operating with appropriate measures. Prevalence testing of students and high-risk employees indicates a stability in infection rates that are lower than in September. In Montgomery County, VA, there is an uptick of infections and New River Health District data suggest most of these infections are community members, not students. New River Health District contact tracing shows that the infection is not spreading from students to community members, students to employees, or spreading in instructional settings. We know from this semester what public health measures work and which ones work very well. Universal mask wearing, contact tracing, and testing works to reduce virus spread.
- The Provost noted that Virginia Tech, like other universities with our composition and mission, is designed to be an in-person learning experience. The educational programs delivered are not designed to be wholesale delivered online. The longer we operate out of the model for which VT was designed the more difficult it will be to get back to the model of in-person education.

- Some problems are emerging with student experiences especially in asynchronous online learning. There are issues with the lack of extracurricular activities and increasing demands for adjustments in tuition and fees. Some students and families are asking if the residential experience is worth the price with so much online education. There are also mental well-being issues with students. For example, Cook Counseling Center has more data showing negative impacts on students. This issue with mental health is in alignment with national studies reflecting these initial observations. Student constituencies have asked for more in-person learning.
- The Provost noted there is a good chance that we will manage this pandemic through the spring and possibly into the fall 2021. VT as an institution will have to get back to normalcy because of expectations. How do we get back to normalcy in a way that is not incredibly disruptive? To manage this, the Provost believes we should start thinking in terms of normalcy in spring to be prepared for fall 2021.
- The Provost provided an update on the University's budgetary status. We are two weeks away from the November Board of Visitors (BOV) meeting with the 2021 budget and adjustments. The Provost does not want to preempt that conversation. Here are some important points:
 - Budgetary status is better than it was at the start of the fiscal year. Reasons are largely because of stability in state appropriations, and also enrollment of 30,020 students. This head count shows good enrollment. Graduate enrollment is lower, and the mix of undergraduates was different (more in-state and fewer out-of-state).
 - University has benefited from federal and state support from the CARES Act and potentially from state support.
 - Challenges remain around auxiliary units within the university (i.e., dining, residential). VT has now adjusted the Budget for a significant deficit in auxiliary budget. There are a number of strategies to discuss with BOV.
 - At this point in time VT has no need to activate delegated authority to President Sands to institute furloughs or salary reductions within E&G. Previously there was a 5% PIBB budget cut for colleges, and the total cut to other administrative units was 7% (2% of that 7% was for critical needs). Now the cut for PIBB is 3% (instead of 5%), and the cut for other administrative units is 5% (instead of 7%), with 2% still used for critical needs.
 - There are still "wildcards" in the budgets. The first is the auxiliary budget. It is important that students come back to the campus for a residential experience. Additionally, on a national basis, there is continued advocacy for adjusting tuition and fees. During most years we are able to take care of cost of living through tuition and fee increases.
 - Faculty salaries are still an important element of concern. There is evidence that VT is falling behind in competitive salaries. Salary increases, however, would be difficult without additional revenue increases (e.g., tuition). The current situation would not allow salary increases.
 - Colleges at VT essentially have control over the levers for the internal governance system, and they have the ability to decide how money will be spent within the college.
 - Eric Kaufman noted that PIBB has some disconnect with faculty. Faculty do not necessarily have an understanding of PIBB and its relationship with colleges.
 - The Provost noted that so much of the PIBB is related to the undergraduate growth. He believes that this is a good time to look at this issue because

there isn't going to be much undergraduate growth in the next few years because the goal of 30,000 students has been met. The goal now is to stay below 30K in undergraduate enrollment, but there is a focus on growing out of state and international as well as underserved and minority students.

- Spring Break: There is a difference in opinion about spring break, and including two three-day weekends. VT's decision on spring break is based on how this disease spreads and mitigating the spread. VT is trying its best to avoid social congregant settings. If we had some spring break, a 14-day quarantine might be required. At this point, VT is going to stick with its current plan. The point that is coming to the forefront is that students think faculty will not give them a break on these non-instructional days. Note: This break is not a faculty holiday break.
- Commitment to hands-on, minds-on learning: One of the things we will have to do going forward is defining what experiential learning is for students. This learning happens when students are placed in a context that is a real life scenario. The learner can construct knowledge and skill sets that have value going forward. Experiential learning can happen in any modality in instructional programming in a variety of classroom settings.
- Regarding the email regarding in-person learning: Provost says he's just asking people to take a second look moving forward. Provost says that some faculty are excited about increased in-person learning, but there needs to be resources. The Provost acknowledges that some students do not take advantage of in-person learning in a hybrid classroom. However, it may be that limited in-person classroom participation is because students believe the fragmented experience is disruptive.
- Regarding internal communications and emails to faculty and staff: Provost states that there is always room for improvement and feedback is important.
- Career satisfaction issues and COACHE results: The Provost noted the COACHE finding on "unrelenting pressure to perform" was interesting. The Provost considered what performance is being addressed. If the focus is scholarship (compared to peer institutions), this is not an issue that is present in the peer institutions.
 - Jack Finney noted "unrelenting pressure" is a summary label of comments. He wants COACHE to go back and look at specific comments. He says this "pressure" is a puzzling finding in the results. They have asked COACHE not to provide such a summary, but actually show the range of issues.
 - Finney noted that there is a guidance being drafted to help P&T committees understand impact from the pandemic. We know broadly from published reports that paper submissions and some grant submissions are down.
- Regarding Equity and Inclusion, a question was raised about the White House's September 22 Executive Order. Menah Pratt-Clarke responded that VT programming did not violate the executive order. VT remains committed to equity and inclusion. Provost does not have an answer for how H1B rules affect foreign researchers.
- Campus safety and Election: VT leadership has spent time thinking about what type of communications should be transmitted after the presidential election. The situation is being monitored by the university. VT personnel are coordinating with Blacksburg and the Montgomery County level.
- Testing and COVID: NRHD is currently reporting low demand for testing. Testing is available by calling this number, 540-267-8240. Nothing has changed prior to Thanksgiving for employees.

- Housing: This is an issue with town-gown relations. Housing is a problem both in terms of affordability for students and faculty. Town of Blacksburg is working for salutation for local non-profit providers. VT has been part of these conversations about housing issues.

Other Business and Announcements

- Susanna Reinhart noted the following: "It would be great for university leadership to communicate a really clear message to students and the public that many, many faculty would LOVE to be back teaching in the classroom (especially when that modality is more organic to their discipline), but that faculty also feel a VERY high level of concern and responsibility to public health and safety. In most cases, teaching remotely is FAR more labor intensive."
- Susan Anderson noted that new student housing has been built and is being built for Blacksburg, and new affordable housing for graduate students and VT staff.

Action Items, Including Anticipated Follow-up Communication

- None identified.

Adjourn

Meeting ended at 4:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Cayce Myers, Faculty Senate Secretary