

Faculty Senate Agenda & Minutes

April 3, 2020, @ 2:30pm

Meeting Via Zoom Only

Present: Monty Abbas, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Mehdi Ahmadian, Robin Allnutt, Susan Anderson, Michael Borowski, Tanyel Bulbul, Leandro Castello, Benjamin Corl, Eloise Coupey, Harry Dorn, John Ferris, Matthew Gabriele, Ellen Gilliland, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, Roie Hauser, James Hawdon, Eunju Hwang, Christine Kaestle, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Bettina Koch, Jake Lahne, Roberto Leon, Jordan MacKenzie, Paul Marek, Margarita McGrath, Polly Middleton, Mike Nappier, Amy Nelson, Marie Paretti, R. Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Todd Schenk, Yang Shao, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Ryan Speer, Cornel Sultan, Jay Teets, Tess Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Mark Van Dyke, Bruce Vogelaar, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Cynthia Wood, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

Guests: Hani Awani (GSA), Bethany Bodo, Karen DePauw, Cameron Donaldson, John Hole, Ashley Johnson, Thulasi Kumar, April Myers, Ellen Plummer, Coogan Thompson (GSA)

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved by unanimous consent.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the March 20th meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

Announcements

- Eric Kaufman reminded participants of Zoom functions, including the guidance provided for the prior meeting: <https://bit.ly/2Utrrog>
- Eric Kaufman shared plans for identifying 2020-21 faculty representatives on university governance commissions and committees. Senators received a related survey, and Eric will follow-up with non-respondents in the coming week. Appointments and nominations must be made by May 1st.

Topic 1: President's Committee on Governance Update

- John Ferris reminded senators of proposed changes to university shared governance. He highlighted the following paragraph from the proposal:
 - "Faculty Senate shall be representative of the entire faculty and have the authority and responsibility to act on their behalf through legislative recommendations concerning academic policies and regulations, educational standards, curricula, and the working conditions of faculty."
- The proposal is intended to allow more transparency, yet it requires more faculty involvement.
- Conversations are ongoing. There will be time to provide input in the future.

Topic 2: Graduate Student Support

- Karen DePauw, John Hole, and Mehdi Ahmadian joined the meeting to respond to questions about graduate student support. Many questions are answered on the Graduate School website: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/covid-faqs.html>.
- Graduate students currently on assistantship will be on assistantship through the end of this academic year. Most external funding agencies have approved of altering job responsibilities in light of the pandemic, provided the approach is consistent across the

university. For graduate students on contracts (rather than grants), bridge funding may be required, and such circumstances should be shared with Dean DePauw. She will be gathering information through the associate deans.

- A senator asked about revised grading policies. Dean DePauw noted the standard policies allow for much flexibility. However, for Spring 2020, graduate students can move to pass/fail and have up to six credits used toward the plan of study. Students are asked to work with their advisor when exploring options.
- There are different challenges with international students, due to their status. Some of them may require on-campus work through the summer. The Graduate School is aware of the issue but does not yet have a solution to offer.
- A senator asked about student examinations and the need for them to be open to the public. The policy is that the final, oral examination is open to the public, though a portion of the exam may be private. This has been achieved via Zoom. The faculty advisor must be the meeting host and be responsible for appropriate meeting settings.
- Dean DePauw is open to fielding additional questions.

Topic 3: Ideas for Altering [Student Perceptions of Teaching \(SPOT\) Questionnaire](#)

- Eric Kaufman highlighted an article from the Chronicle, "[Coronavirus and the Great Online-Learning Experiment](#)," noting that the abrupt shift to online instruction is prompting many to consider what can be learned. However, use of the standard SPOT survey might be inappropriate. University-wide changes to the SPOT need to be made within the next week. It is easier to drop questions than add them. The Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness is in the process of developing surveys separate from the SPOT to gain insight on experiences with the mid-semester shift to online instruction.
- Eric presented recommended principles for the Spring 2020 SPOT Survey:
 1. University-wide questions referencing the "physical environment" should be dropped or altered in acknowledgment of the virtual nature of the student experience.
 2. Those who have added custom questions should consider eliminating questions for which the data could be misinterpreted due to the unusual circumstances of the semester.
 3. Data collected from this semester should be excluded from administrative decision-making, including all performance evaluations.
- Some senators questioned the validity of the SPOT data and expressed concern about the data being collected and used at all. There was related interest in foregoing the SPOT survey, or at least the quantitative aspects.
- Other senators expressed that some faculty may receive positive data and want to be able to use that. The faculty member would still have access to their own data and could share it as they see fit. Some faculty who have worked hard to adjust their courses want to be able to share evidence of their success with the transition to online instruction.
- Through lengthy discussion, the Faculty Senate obtained consensus on the following guiding principles to be shared with the Provost:
 - 1) University-wide questions referencing the "physical environment" should be dropped or altered in acknowledgment of the virtual nature of the student experience.
 - 2) Those who have added custom questions should consider eliminating questions for which the data could be misinterpreted due to the unusual circumstances of the semester.

- 3) Data collected from this semester should be excluded from administrative decision-making, including all performance evaluations and decisions about future online course offerings.
- 4) Faculty may retain use of their SPOT data and share it, as desired (e.g., in their dossier).

Other business

- A senator shared a concern about faculty being coerced to meet with students in person. John Ferris suggested additional details be shared with the Faculty Senate officers or cabinet so they can help.
- A senator shared concerns about restrictions on carryover of start-up funds. This may be a department- or college-level issue based on funds that are restricted to a particular fiscal year. Some start-up funds may have an expiration set by the state.
- A senator expressed concerns about [Pathways assessments](#) and the futility of collecting such data this semester. The following motion was moved and seconded: “Recommend to Rachael Holloway that Pathways assessment be suspended for spring 2020.”
 - A senator noted the data collection and sharing is not necessarily rigorous. However, another senator acknowledged the strain on faculty who may have less institutional security.
 - Motion passed. John Ferris will forward the message on behalf of the Senate.
- A senator noted the university is continuing to employ housekeeping and dining staff, which is likely a financially vulnerable group. Faculty Senators want to offer support. Conversation with the Staff Senate may help clarify how the Faculty Senate can lend support.

Adjourn

The meeting formally adjourned at 4:07pm.

Note: Minutes respectfully submitted by Eric Kaufman.