

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2021, @ 2:30pm

Senators Present: Monty Abbas, Masoud Agah, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Robin Allnut, Susan Anderson, Sara Arena, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Joseph Baker, Arthur Ball, Michael Borowski, Charles Calderwood, Leandro Castello, Cathryn Copper, Harry Dorn, Benjamin Corl, William Ducker, John Ferris, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, James Hawdon, Roie Hauser, Bob Hicok, Daniel Hindman, Eunju Hwang, Ran Jin, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Jacob Lahne, Eduardo Lara-Torre, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Roberto Leon, Douglas Lind, Jonathan Maher, Frank May, Frances McCarty, Polly Middleton, Cayce Myers, Michael Nappier, Amy Nelson, Aaron Noble, Chris Pierce, Nicole Pitterson, Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Susanna Rinehart, Tom Sanchez, Todd Schenk, Peter Schmitthenner, Yang Shao, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Cornel Sultan, Jay Teets, Steve Thompson, Tess Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Kwok Tsui, A.K. Ward, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Cindy Wood, Anthony Wright de Hernandez, David Xie

Guests: President Tim Sands, Cameron Donaldson, Stuart Feignbaum, Edward Lener, James Lord, Gail McMillan, Rachel Miles, Alan Munchshower, April Myers, Leslie O'Brien, Camellia Pastore, Ellen Plummer, Coogan Thompson

Call to Order & Guiding Questions

1. How can we best support our community, including those who have been targeted with violence?
2. What insights can we gain from President Sands' perspective on the University?

Consent Agenda

- March 5, 2021 meeting minutes unanimously approved.

Brief Updates and Announcements

- Eric Kaufman noted that since closed captions can be integrated into Zoom, the meeting slides will no longer be used for the foreseeable future.
 - [Closed captions now integrated into Zoom](#)
- Eric Kaufman noted that emails regarding Faculty Senate Representation for 2021-22 were sent out. Some departments gained or lost senators due to the updated census and process.
- Eric Kaufman noted that those interested may view [University Commission & Committee Meeting Times](#), to determine if they would be able to serve according to the meeting times.
- John Ferris reviewed plans and the slate for 2021-22 Faculty Senate officers. The slate offered by the nomination committee is Robert Weiss for president, Robin Queen for vice president, and Ran Jin for operations officer. The election will be held at the end of the academic year so that next year's senators may participate in the vote.
- Eric Kaufman noted that if any senator is interested in joining Faculty Senate cabinet meetings through the end of the semester, they may reach out to him for the agendas.
- Eric Kaufman will be sharing [Remarks for the Board of Visitors Meeting](#). He also noted that if any senator wants something to be brought up at a Board of Visitors meeting, they may reach out to him.
- Eric Kaufman shared the [SGA Letter To Faculty.pdf](#) and encouraged senators to share it with other faculty.
- Eric Kaufman shared the following articles that may be relevant to senators:
 - [Chronicle article: "Good Grades, Stressed Students"](#)

- [Experiential learning: Bridge Experiences grant proposals due on April 9](#)
- Robin Queen shared the [Upcoming SIRC Investigator Series & Half-Day RCR Webinars.docx](#) for senators or faculty that may be interested.
- Eric Kaufman noted the [Invitation to attend two AAUP VA Conference events, March 26 & 27](#).

Reaffirmation of Support for Our Community

- Eric Kaufman shared the [VT Faculty Senate Statement on Anti-APIIDA Violence - updated.docx](#), which was contributed to by multiple senators and faculty. Richard Ashley moved to support the statement and Susanna Rinehart seconded the motion.
 - Susanna Rinehart noted that the statement was updated to reflect incidents of the last week.
 - Susan Anderson shared information about the Peace Vigil to Stop Asian Hate. “Henderson Lawn, 6-6:45 pm; Saturday; masks required; social distancing; candles provided; info: justicebburg@hmail.com”
 - Jim Tokuhisa shared “Text of an email from Silas Cassinelli: I have been asked repeatedly if I know of individuals at VT willing and interested in talking to the press about the anti-Asian attacks during the pandemic and the recent shooting in Atlanta. Rather than volunteer names, I thought I'd send a call to the group and collect names of people who would do this. This doesn't obligate you to actually talk to the press, but it might be helpful if we--the APIIDA Caucus Executive Board--know who is willing and able to speak publicly on these issues. You can reply to the listserv or if you feel more comfortable, email me directly at smooncass@vt.edu.”
 - An additional resource was offered for guiding conversations: [Stop AAPI Hate Guide from InclusiveVT](#)
 - 57 senators voted in favor of the motion, and 2 abstained. Motion passed.

Q&A with President Sands (@ 3pm)

- [Questions for President Sands 2021-03-19](#)
- President Sands began the discussion with a quick summary of updates.
 - President Sands noted that for the most part, students are doing a good job of respecting health guidelines. In response to Governor Northam's announcement, Virginia Tech is planning in person graduations in Lane Stadium for students interested. President Sands noted that these graduations would be for no more than 600 students at a time, but his team is waiting for clarifications from the governor's office. He also noted that Virginia Tech will have an in person Fall, but may reflect more flipped classroom organizations. Of course, virus variants and changing health regulations remain unknown.
 - President Sands noted that both the Commonwealth and the Federal government have provided one-time funds which have helped the budget significantly. These do not solve recurring issues, but they do help during this difficult time. The state also approved the 5% salary increase funding plan, of which Virginia Tech is responsible for contributing 60% of that increase. President Sands noted that the Board of Visitors will be discussing tuition factors at the meeting starting on Sunday. He also briefly discussed admissions, and noted that there was a 36% increase in applications from last year.

- Kwok Tsui asked: “What is the status of vaccination for VT faculty and staff members? I heard that UTA faculty members are already receiving their vaccine shots.”
 - President Sands explained that vaccines are coming through the VDH, as well as through pharmacies which are regulated by the federal government. He expects that Virginia Tech affiliated 1A, 1B, and some of 1C should have been vaccinated or at least offered an appointment by now. He noted that it is very important to be registered with Vaccinate Virginia. He also mentioned that students living in congregate settings may receive vaccinations earlier than expected because they are more likely to keep the virus alive and foster strain development.
- Brad Klein asked if there is any way for the university to require the vaccine for students.
 - President Sands noted that Virginia Tech follows CDC guidelines closely. He explained that because the vaccines were approved for emergency use, Virginia Tech cannot require them. However, the VDH may be able to override this and allow the university to require vaccines, allowing exceptions for various reasons.
- James Lord mentioned that the VDH will begin vaccinating VT Faculty within the next two weeks. The best way to get on the list is to sign up through VDH, as they will be distributing 1,000-1,500 vaccines per day.
- Eric Kaufman asked with regards to the recent violence towards Asian communities, what is Virginia Tech doing specifically in support.
 - President Sands shared that a statement was released last week and updated recently. He also noted that there are Virginia Tech resources available for support. President Sands said that the most important thing that can be done right now is listening to people in the community that are affected by the violence and how we may support them. Students have indicated that Virginia Tech’s population data should be disaggregated to reflect identities further.
- Masoud Agah asked if there was any plan for if virus variants became out of control in the middle of a semester.
 - President Sands explained that Virginia Tech has worked to set up proper responses to be dynamic. The university has a better handle on quarantine and isolation than in the Fall, but hopefully it could be handled with less disruption than in Spring of 2020. President Sands noted that he feels fairly confident that the university can adapt to variant changes.
- Susanna Rinehart asked how large class modality will be decided, as she was worried that a top-down approach would be taken without a full discussion.
 - President Sands noted that if the virus continues to decrease, anyone who wants to teach a large in person class may do so. In the end, conversations between faculty, department heads, and the Provost’s office will dictate those decisions.
- John Ferris asked, “Are there any circumstances under which the university will transfer E&G funds to Auxiliary units? If so, what are specific examples of such circumstances?”
 - President Sands noted that one of the only things that can be done is to allow auxiliaries in distress to waive the E&G payment. From multiple sources, \$58 million should be available to remedy this issue. The Board of Visitors will be discussing this

at the meeting starting on Sunday. President Sands noted that \$19 million provided direct aid to supporting 9,000 students.

- Sara Arena asked if it is possible for more university resources to be made available to support hybrid courses in the Fall.
 - President Sands noted that the Provost is aware of those concerns and he would send another note about the discussion.
- Eric Kaufman asked President Sands to comment on affordable housing for Virginia Tech faculty and staff.
 - President Sands noted that a land-trust is being discussed to support affordable housing for faculty and graduate students. Legislative support would be required, but he understands how important this issue is for recruiting. He is not as concerned about the student population as plans are in place for more on campus residences and apartment complexes closer to campus.
- Biko Agozino asked if the Faculty Senate could ever be dissolved and reorganized as a parliamentary system?
 - President Sands noted that it is not likely for the administration to make any of those changes. The support for changes within student governance were developed by leaders and worked out with the students through extensive conversations. The new governance structure seems to be providing more representation and alignment.
 - Regarding the new shared governance process, President Sands asked if there were any concerns emerging from the Faculty. Eric Kaufman noted that a potential stress point is related to the timeline because the students have less time to make changes than the faculty body.
- President Sands encouraged senators to reach out to his office with any questions or concerns.

Other Business

- Eric Kaufman noted that any concerns or ideas for future meeting topics should be suggested through respective Cabinet representatives.
- There were no additional updates or announcements.

Action Items, Including Anticipated Follow-up Communication

- There were no reminder announcements.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:03 pm.

Submitted by Cameron Donaldson, undergraduate assistant.