

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

April 2, 2021, @ 2:30pm

Senators Present: Monty Abbas, Mehdi Ahmadian, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Robin Allnut, Susan Anderson, Sara Arena, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Joseph Baker, Arthur Ball, Kemi Bankole, Sarah Barrett, Michael Borowski, Hilary Bryon, Leandro Castello, Cathryn Copper, Kevin Cheng, Harry Dorn, George Davis, Robert Dunay, Stuart Feigenbaum, John Ferris, John Galbraith, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, James Hawdon, Roie Hauser, David Hicks, Bob Hicok, Daniel Hindman, Eunju Hwang, Brett Jones, Ran Jin, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Jacob Lahne, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Roberto Leon, Douglas Lind, Jonathan Maher, Paul Marek, Frank May, Frances McCarty, Nyusya Milman-Miller, Cayce Myers, Michael Nappier, Amy Nelson, Nicole Pitterson, Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Susanna Rinehart, Tom Sanchez, Todd Schenk, Yang Shao, Richard Shryock, Jay Teets, Tess Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, A.K. Ward, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

Guests: Cameron Donaldson, Hannah Landers, James Lord, April Myers, Ellen Plummer, Emily Sarver, Tamarah Smith

Call to Order & Guiding Questions

1. What are key considerations for a working group to explore evaluation of teaching?
2. Regarding Virginia Tech's undergraduate admissions criteria and processes, what questions and considerations are of particular interest to instructional faculty?

Consent Agenda

- March 19, 2021 meeting minutes unanimously approved.

Brief Updates and Announcements

- Eric Kaufman noted that John Ferris is working on the Faculty Senate representation for 2021-22. John Ferris verified that he emailed only departments that required an election for 2021-22, otherwise no action is needed. Eric Kaufman encouraged elections to occur by the third week of April so that new senators could vote for the 2021-22 cabinet.
- Eric Kaufman encouraged senators for 2021-22 to fill out the [Survey to Fill 2021-22 Vacancies in University Governance](#). The survey helps sort senators by interests and representation. Some commissions and committees do not require a senator status, just a faculty member. These positions are to be finalized at the April 30th meeting.
- Eric Kaufman noted that the [University Governance Training Tutorials](#) can be helpful to better understand governance at Virginia Tech. They do not reflect future governance models, but the current organization. The modules may be updated as changes arise.
- There were no other announcements from the senate.

The assessment of instruction, or can we talk about SPOT scores again?

- Bob Hicok shared an overview of the update from the Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA) and referenced some related articles:
 - [Inside Higher Ed article: "Yes, Student Reviews of Classroom Teaching Have Value.](#)
 - [Inside Higher Ed article: "Who Shall Teach?"](#)
 - [Journal of Economic Perspectives article: "Staffing the Higher Education Classroom"](#)
- James Hawdon was invited to share his perspective on the issue. He noted that P and T evaluations are very robust and are only partly affected by SPOT surveys. At the

departmental level, however, Hawdon noted that faculty performance is evaluated as compared to the top and average SPOT scores. He said those scores aren't necessarily a concern unless they are significantly lower. If a score is very low, by a few standard deviations, the annual evaluation will delve deeper into specific comments and determine whether or not there was bias present in the SPOT responses.

- Eric Kaufman referred senators to a Google Doc that could be used to capture questions on the issue.
- Richard Ashley praised the CFA for its work on this issue. He also noted that it may be possible to overanalyze this issue. Due to the anonymity of SPOT scores, some survey responses are bound to be skewed.
- George Davis asked if this is an issue of the instrument itself and if there has been discussion of alternatives.
 - Bob Hicok noted that there are changes that could be made to remove bias. For example, questions could be asked about the syllabus or the course content instead of the individual instructor. In that sense, the evaluation would be of the teaching rather than the individual.
- Eric Kaufman mentioned his discussion with Provost Clarke and how to better lift up faculty that are performing well in the classroom and experiential learning. Considering that peer review is time consuming, the evaluation process can be difficult.
- Diego Troya noted that in his department, SPOT scores are reported without peer evaluation or context. He asked if this is appropriate for raises.
 - Bob Hicok noted that the submission of SPOT scores may be a product of ease. By virtue of how it is used, SPOT surveys mean something different than what was intended with performance evaluation.
- Susanna Rinehart noted that faculty members want high SPOT scores but at the same time are aware that some students do not evaluate their professors based on the quality of instruction. She also shared an anecdote about the difference between peer evaluation and student SPOT scores.
 - Bob Hicok related by noting that sometimes consistently high scores actually correlate to bad instruction.
- Amy Nelson noted that SPOT surveys are inherently biased against women and people of color. She noted that this will not improve until those groups of people have a seat at the table when discussing changes and revisions to the evaluation process.
- Evan Lavender-Smith noted that not all scores are reported in his department.
 - Bob Hicok shared that one of the possible solutions includes removing questions that the scores are not reported for. Therefore, that information can be identified as not as important as the questions that provide better information about the instructor.
- John Ferris asked what is the information that is being sought: the learning achieved by the students over the course of the class, the means by which the students were taught, or the really high and really low performing teachers?
- Arthur Ball noted that if the comments are read through in context, there is a lot of value to the evaluation. He hopes to focus more on the comments as opposed to the numbers.
- Cayce Myers pointed out that some students evaluate the course based on their grade. Additionally, there are extremes to the scores because those students are more motivated to fill out the surveys. He noted that changing the wording or removing "Question 1E" may help this issue.

- Monty Abbas noted that the statistics of the surveys should be evaluated, such as variance. Therefore, bias could be examined among different groups of faculty. He also noted that students should be accountable for their comments in some way, as there have been instances where students simply lie.
- Tess Thompson shared that patterns can be seen from the SPOT surveys. With regard to filling out the SPOT surveys, it is a good moment to teach students how to give constructive and professional feedback. For example, students can be asked what concrete actions affected their learning in the classroom.
- Robert Dunay noted that more mature students do give worthwhile feedback. However, the use of surveys continues to get more streamlined. Therefore, the comments should weigh just as much as the final number reported.
- Rick Ashley added that he does get useful information from his comments. He also noted that using medians instead of means would improve a lot of these issues. More pointed questions could be asked for valuable feedback.
- Bob Hicok noted that changes will not happen for a few years, based on how other institutions have adjusted their systems. It is up to the faculty to change the application of SPOT surveys, and we should continue to do so.

Considerations for Admissions and Use of Standardized Test Scores

- Eric Kaufman noted that the Board of Visitors may extend the optional reporting for an additional year due to COVID closures of testing facilities. However, the discussion should surround whether or not this should continue for a few years to gain more data on the issue.
- Ran Jin summarized College Faculty Associations' Perspectives. He noted that faculty were very open minded and may support extending the optional standardized testing for a few years. This could help evaluate whether or not standardized testing actually predicts student performance and graduation rates. This data may help decrease bias against underrepresented groups. There are many factors to consider, including logistics and funding.
- Eric Kaufman noted senators could add questions to a related Google Doc. He also mentioned that there is an immediate decision being made about this issue (i.e., one-year extension), as other universities in Virginia have already made an announcement.
- Michael Borowski noted that it may not be the best requirement for students transferring between majors, as a creative portfolio would not be realistic for every applicant. Therefore, the decision may be best made by each individual college.
- Amy Nelson noted that it is important to consider the financial components of standardized testing including private courses, course books, and multiple testing tries. Identifying how to level the playing field is a key issue here.

Other Business

- Todd Schenk noted that faculty that are teaching in person may need to be prioritized over others in category 1C. He asked if any of the senators knew anymore about this issue.
 - Eric Kaufman noted that this has been a discussion among grad students as well. He also mentioned that the university did not have as much say in the distribution as it had wanted to. Kaufman was surprised that there was not a more formal announcement this week about the rollouts.
 - Robin Queen clarified that in-person faculty are receiving emails, but the vaccine appointments are taken up within about 15 minutes. She recommends that faculty consistently watch their emails.

- Layne Watson noted that his colleagues in Northern Virginia have been encouraged to drive all the way to Blacksburg to get their vaccine. Virginia Tech should do a better job of identifying locations of faculty, especially as it has multiple locations.
- Michael Nappier noted that more vaccines, volunteers, and vaccination locations should become available in the coming weeks.

Action Items, Including Anticipated Follow-up Communication

- No other business was brought up.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 3:54pm.

Submitted by Cameron Donaldson, undergraduate assistant