

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

April 16, 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, Kemi Bankole, Sarah Barrett, Michael Borowski, Kevin Cheng, Cathryn Copper, Benjamin Corl, Sam Doak, Harry Dorn, Ashley Dayer, William Ducker, Robert Dunay, Carla Finkielsetin, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, Roie Hauser, Bob Hicok, Daniel Hindman, Ran Jin, Eric Kaufman, Bradley Klein, Vivica Kraak, Leigh Anne Krometis, Jacob Lahne, Crystal Duncan Lane, Eduardo Lara-Torre, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Roberto Leon, Alexander Leonessa, Douglas Lind, Jonathan Maher, Paul Marek, Frank May, Frances McCarty, Polly Middleton, Michael Nappier, Amy Nelson, Aaron Noble, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Chris Pierce, Nicole Pitterson, Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Steve Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Tom Sanchez, Todd Schenk, Peter Schmitthenner, Yang Shao, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Eric Stanley, Laura Strawn, 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

Guests: Hani Awni, Cameron Donaldson, Holly Kindsvater, James Lord, Rachel Miles, April Myers

Call to Order & Guiding Questions

1. What steps are needed to prepare for the 2021-22 academic year?
2. How might faculty be better engaged and supported in fulfilling needed services for students with disabilities?

Consent Agenda

- April 2, 2021 minutes were unanimously approved.

Brief Updates and Announcements

- Eric Kaufman shared the following link about undergraduate testing for the upcoming year. Juan Espinoza will be attending a future meeting to answer questions that were submitted by members of the Faculty Senate. If there are any additional questions, they can be directed to Eric Kaufman.
 - [Virginia Tech continues test-optional undergraduate admissions for entering class of 2022](#)
- Eric Kaufman shared the following link about Virginia Tech's student vaccination clinic. He also noted that it is helpful to report vaccinations to the university, outside of the mass-vaccination clinics. Those vaccinations can be reported using the voluntary report link.
 - [More than 7,000 employees receive vaccine through employer-arranged clinics](#)
 - [University community asked to participate in voluntary vaccine report](#)
- John Ferris sent out a reminder to departments who had not yet filled their senator vacancies. Departmental representatives should have been elected by April 15, but for those remaining it would be best to do so as quickly as possible so that they can take part in cabinet elections at the end of April.
- Brad Klein asked if the university will require that students be vaccinated once the vaccine is fully approved.
 - Eric Kaufman noted that the university cannot require vaccinations unless the Virginia Department of Health approves that requirement. It will likely depend on emergency authorization laws and whether those change in the coming months.

- Eric Kaufman shared a survey to gauge interest in the different committees and commissions. Some groups require an election, whereas others are nominated for appointment by President Sands.
- Eric Kaufman shared the following award links for those who would like to nominate a colleague or themselves.
 - [Submit a nomination for the Outstanding Teaching Scholar Award](#)
 - [Submit a nomination for the Project-Based Learning Award](#)
- Eric Kaufman shared information about the Campus Climate Survey. Those in charge of the survey responded to feedback received to properly scale the information and reduce the number of questions. To ensure that it is fairly representative of the faculty, senators are encouraged to participate in the survey.
 - The difference between this survey and the COACHE survey is that the questions presented are the same among all universities. Therefore, Virginia Tech can compare the responses directly to its peers or all groups questioned. The Campus Climate Survey is unique to Virginia Tech.
 - Richard Ashley noted that the Campus Climate Survey seemed to lump all levels of administration together. He suggested that these may be better separated.
 - Eric Kaufman noted that Bryan Garey would be a good contact to report feedback to.
 - Eric Kaufman shared related strategic planning metrics.
 - [Human Resources: Career Advancement](#)
 - [Human Resources: Work-Life Balance](#)
- Eric Kaufman shared an update on college-level support for eFars.
- Eric Kaufman will be giving an address on behalf of the faculty to the Board of Visitors in June. Input on issues that could be presented in his remarks can be passed to him.
- No other updates or announcements were presented.

Services for Students with Disabilities

- Eric Kaufman opened the floor to questions and comments regarding Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Nikeshia Arthur was unable to attend the meeting, but Eric Kaufman can send her responses from the faculty.
 - Susanna Rinehart noted that issues with SSD predated the pandemic and may have been amplified in the last year. She explained that the lack of collaboration between SSD and the faculty, both of which are serving students, is unfortunate.
 - Eric Kaufman indicated that he spoke to Nikeshia Arthur a few weeks ago. She noted that the online software is going through improvements but they could not share the updates yet.
 - Tess Thompson noted that managing a class through software would definitely be helpful since every student has a different accommodation. However, the fact that students can reschedule exams without guidance on timing of those decisions is difficult to deal with. She would like to discuss these issues through a committee.
 - Robin Queen noted that when dealing with the SSD office, she has had to fight for some of her students' accommodations. It seems like the SSD does not understand the process/guidelines as well as they should. She would like to have an open conversation with SSD about these issues.

- Richard Ashley suggested that help may be needed at the Provost level, instead of split into undergraduate and graduate. Someone could be a liaison between the students, faculty, and the SSD office.
 - Eric Kaufman noted that Bob Hicok has been drafting language to address different avenues when faculty have concerns or conflicts.
- Leigh Anne Krometis noted that she had a meeting with SSD in 2019 where it seemed like SSD was focusing on the bare minimum from a legal standpoint. It might help to have an educational representative work directly with those working on legal issues in the SSD office.
- Cindy Wood suggested that the bigger problem is that this is a time sink. Ten to fifteen percent of her students need accommodations, which takes time away from teaching and helping students. Until this issue can be resolved, faculty will continue to waste time.
- Roberto Leon conveyed curiosity about how current accommodations might be “walked back” after COVID. He noted that some of the policies seem like they are being developed on the fly and are not fair to all students. He would like to know how the SSD office will work after COVID is gone. If an exception was already made, how can that rule be changed?
- James Lord suggested that some of the accommodations are making the experience worse for other students. For example, homework solutions may be posted up to a week late in order to accommodate a student. This may hurt other students because they have less time to review the material.
- Eric Kaufman suggested that a survey may be made to pinpoint which accommodations positively and/or negatively affect different class environments and students. Therefore, major issues could be pinpointed.
- Daniel Hindman noted that not all students learn the same way, and strides can be made to focus on educational tools.
- Crystal Duncan Lane noted that the purpose of the SSD office is to allow the “1%” to stay at pace with the rest of the class. Whether the SSD office works well or not, the purpose is to help those students who really need assistance. Although it may be more tactical to work with the “99%,” it is important to even the playing field.
- Susanna Rinehart noted that this issue should not be an either/or choice, but instead a yes/and scenario. Better communication between faculty and SSD could help make the system better for all students.
- Eric Kaufman noted that there is likely no easy answer to this issue, but steps should be taken to work together and communicate.
- Amy Nelson suggested that a significant investment should be made in training faculty to better address these issues and meet learners where they are in their education. More staff could also be added to SSD to work through the legal aspects of ADA.
- Eric Kaufman guided senators to a Google Doc where they could share questions and ideas related to faculty involvement with SSD.

Other Business

- Brad Klein noted that he would like more information on Virginia Tech's plan for the Fall semester, including assumptions made about COVID conditions.
 - Eric Kaufman noted that the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will likely follow the CDC guidelines as they change. Virginia Tech will not likely be more strict than the VDH.
 - Evan Lavender-Smith noted that the QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan) and vaccines will likely be major issues in the near future.

Action Items, Including Anticipated Follow-up Communication

- In addition to the next Faculty Senate meetings, the cabinet will be meeting with the Provost in the coming weeks. Although the full Senate does not meet during the summer, the cabinet may meet and is a resource for concerns that may arise in between semesters.
- Eric Kaufman noted that new senators should attend the meeting on April 30th because they are eligible to vote on the officers for next year.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:49pm.

Submitted by Cameron Donaldson, undergraduate assistant.