

Date: Monday, May 4, 2015

Place: Newman Library Multipurpose Room

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Chair: Bernice Hausman

Minutes: Rebecca Miller

Attending: Attendance was not taken at this special Faculty Senate meeting

Guest: President Tim Sands

Meeting purpose: Special Faculty Senate meeting

Agenda items: Conversation with Virginia Tech President Tim Sands

Faculty Senate President Bernice Hausman called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Agenda item 1: Conversation with Virginia Tech President Tim Sands

This special Faculty Senate meeting was scheduled in order to facilitate a conversation between the Faculty Senate and Virginia Tech President Tim Sands. President Sands was unable to visit with the Faculty Senate during its regular meeting time, which is why this meeting took place at an unusual place and time.

During this conversation, nine major themes were discussed:

Faculty salary

The number one financial priority of Virginia Tech is to increase faculty salary so that it rests within the 60th percentile of peer institution salaries. This may take several cycles of the 3.5% faculty raises in order to bring salaries up to the median.

Salary compression is an acknowledged issue, and department heads and chairs are very cognizant of this issue. All are doing what they can to address it.

At the legislative level, higher education is considered discretionary, rather than mandatory, spending. There's been a reluctance to raise taxes, but legislators appreciate Virginia Tech's land grant value, in particular, and what we do at Virginia Tech resonates with state leaders. However, the discretionary amount that legislators apply to higher education in the state is still decreasing.

President Sands' thoughts on his first year at Virginia Tech

President Sands stated that Virginia Tech currently has all of the things that you might see in a great university, except for the resources. However, we have the most collaborative environment that he has ever seen at a university.

Growth in graduate student numbers and quality

Since Virginia Tech's strategic plan has Virginia Tech growing its graduate student population by 1,000 students, a number of senators wondered how this was going to happen with the current funding climate. President Sands noted that, although our support from the federal government may be diminishing, Virginia Tech is considering new avenues of funding, including industrial support and foundations.

A number of senators also had concerns about graduate student stipends, particularly in the Chemistry department. President Sands noted that he had been part of a number of conversations about this particular issue with an advisory group from Chemistry. President Sands recommended that a proposal go forward with the information about Virginia Tech's competitive disadvantage and peer institutions' graduate stipends.

Growth in Virginia Tech's physical infrastructure

With plans for growing the student population, Virginia Tech will also need to consider growing its physical infrastructure. President Sands indicated that there are no proposals about this sort of campus growth yet, but Virginia Tech definitely needs to consider growing its living and learning spaces.

While Virginia Tech wants its students on campus, it also wants its faculty on campus. Departments that serve undergraduates, in particular, need to be on campus. Computer Science is currently off campus, at the CRC, and President Sands would like to bring it back to campus, particularly since it serves undergraduates.

Virginia Tech's overhead rate

Senators brought up Virginia Tech's comparatively high overhead rate. President Sands reminded senators that indirect rates are auditors' determinations, and that Virginia Tech has invested more than its peers have in infrastructure, which is why it is higher. Compared to peers, Virginia Tech has a lot of very high quality research space, especially in interdisciplinary areas. This means that when Virginia Tech is audited, the number comes back higher. President Sands also mentioned that the indirect rate is only 10% of the entire research budget, which totals \$513 million.

Biomedical research infrastructure

Senators noted that biomedical research at Virginia Tech has grown in the last few years, and that the infrastructure and support managed by medical research on campus is behind. President Sands was not previously aware of the biosecurity issues, but he promised to look into it and continue to discuss it. He did mention that Virginia Tech is about to welcome a new Vice President for Research and Innovation who will be able to work on these issues.

Sexual violence and Title IX

There was general concern about Title IX issues among faculty senators. In particular, the lack of forensic nursing capabilities in the area was mentioned. President Sands agreed that working toward having a forensic nurse on call somewhere in the area is a priority and something that should be elevated, as an issue at the administrative level.

Governance

At his previous institution, President Sands had a different relationship with his Faculty Senate. The discussion about shared governance at Virginia Tech is a productive one, and one that should continue. Our current governance system is actually very inclusive, from President Sands' point of view, but President Sands has also noticed that Virginia Tech is not in alignment with its peer institutions since it does not have the Faculty Senate in a direct consulting role on academic issues. This merits continued discussion, and President Sands supports promoting the discussion.

President Sands noted concern about the students' perception of changes in the governance system. There seems to be a general lack of trust, and students are worried that their voices will be lost. President Sands encouraged the Faculty Senate to engage students in this conversation.

President Sands' communication with Faculty Senate

President Sands agreed to meeting with the Faculty Senate three times a year or so in order to continue these discussions.

Next meeting: Tuesday, May 12, 2015, 5:00 p.m., University Club

The meeting was adjourned at 6:34 p.m.