

## **Faculty Senate Constituency Report**

### **March 2023**

I want to start this report by saying how much faculty appreciate the shared governance model implemented at Virginia Tech. Having researched various governance models across the country, I believe that what we are implementing here is truly unique: it has the potential to change the culture at Virginia Tech and help us achieve our ambitious goals as a campus community.

However, it's important to note that implementation is still at an early stage. We acknowledge that "building a plane while flying" leads to missteps, and that changes are needed. The ongoing partnership among different constituency groups with the administration will help us revise the current system as we learn what works and what needs to be modified. Likewise, we acknowledge that shared governance is a process, one that cannot exist in a state of equilibrium — the phrase "mission accomplished" should not be used to describe shared governance at a university as ambitious and complex as ours. As a land-grant university, we must continually strive to evolve, to improve our community, and to strengthen our value proposition for the Commonwealth and future Virginia Tech students.

I can assure you that the faculty of Virginia Tech will never accept the status quo. We will always test the limits of what's possible: be it in research, as we constantly question our findings and assumptions to push beyond perceived boundaries of knowledge; or in the classroom, as we strive to improve our teaching and student learning outcomes; or in our service and outreach, which we perform to maintain the health, address the needs, and increase the reputations of our departments, colleges, and the university. Some administrators in the room might hold a different opinion about our faculty. If so, I challenge you to engage with faculty and develop a shared understanding of issues that require our attention. I ask that you develop a systematic method for facilitating collaboration between faculty and administrators. This method should involve identifying potential solutions to our challenges, collaborating on their implementation, and conducting a shared evaluation to assess whether they lead to positive and lasting change. What do I mean when I say, "engage with faculty"? I mean engage with the Faculty Senate, the body at Virginia Tech that formally represents faculty in the broadest sense. The Senate comprises an incredibly diverse group of faculty members with varying positions and roles at the university, which inform their opinions on various topics and provides a wide range of faculty perspectives.

The following is a list of faculty positions represented by the Faculty Senate:

- College Faculty
  - tenured and tenure-track
  - collegiate and clinical
  - professor of practice
  - instructor
- University Libraries and Extension Faculty
  - continued appointment
  - continued-appointment track
- Research Faculty
  - research professor
  - research associate
  - research scientist

- VTCSOM Faculty
  - tenured track, tenure-track
  - tenured-to-title track
  - secondary, adjunct, clinical preceptor
  - instructor

Shared governance is an ambitious concept that must be applied consistently across different scales to be successful. For shared governance to work as a tool to improve Virginia Tech, we all must accept responsibility for our mission and remain accountable to each other. Faculty responsibilities include the academic, research, and engagement enterprise. Aside from the obvious responsibilities of delivering academic programs, faculty are also responsible for setting and maintaining academic standards. Therefore, faculty must be involved in all pertinent discussions related to new academic initiatives — from their inception. Faculty involvement in these discussions should not be limited to a small group who work in a particular area, or to faculty who are preferred by a given set of administrators; we must include a broad faculty voice to understand the opinions and choices of the entire faculty, and the only way to accomplish this is through the engagement of the Faculty Senate. In addition to their teaching and service work, faculty are associated with nearly every research dollar that comes to the university, no matter the funding mechanism; and faculty are involved in outreach through formal programs — the Virginia Cooperative Extension, for example — as well as countless informal outreach activities. Active faculty participation in academic, research, and outreach programs is crucial for earning reputational capital, which is vital for Virginia Tech to improve our national and international rankings and achieve our ambitious goals. As a university community, we must improve our ability to communicate in earnest, and to identify and provide incentives for faculty to engage more fully with the university's tripartite mission. This is the only way for Virginia Tech to achieve its goals.

One example of such a discussion is the recent implementation of cybersecurity measures across campus. This topic was discussed several times in Faculty Senate, and it is clear that the way this initiative was implemented impacted faculty morale. The Commission on Faculty Affairs determined by consensus at a recent meeting that faculty must be engaged in all discussions that impact the following three areas: faculty working conditions, faculty morale, and academic freedom pursuant to the Commission's charge. Changes such as these will or could impact all three of these areas. While faculty recognize cybersecurity risks to the university, implementing new IT policies without input from or communication with faculty has resulted in faculty members' concern about the use of data collected through these new measures and the potential impact of this change on faculty morale and academic freedom. Most, if not all, of these concerns may have been addressed and avoided through discussions with the Faculty Senate during early project development and implementation — that is, through transparent and effective communication with the faculty throughout the process.

Today marks the seventh of my eight constituency reports as president of the Faculty Senate. In preparation for each report, I probe the Faculty Senate for topics. Every time, many of the same issues emerge. An issue that always arises is salary compression for faculty members who have been at Virginia Tech for decades. I am not proposing that the salary for all senior faculty members should be raised; rather, I am advocating for developing a method to assess the contributions of our university's senior faculty members that will determine whether they are paid fairly. It's important to note that many of our senior faculty members perform "invisible work" for their colleagues, departments, and colleges — work that isn't necessarily captured by the metrics we use for faculty evaluation. For example, the extra service they take on, or the extra class they teach or co-teach — this extra work can enable early-career faculty members to focus on their research, which is essential for promotion.

In closing, as we consider the best way forward for Virginia Tech, we must work together to effectively incentivize and support the outstanding faculty we have, and we must work together to effectively recruit and retain top talent in years to come. The Faculty Senate leadership looks forward to continuing our work with the administration and members of the Board to achieve these shared goals.