

## **Constituent Report by Faculty Representative Joseph Merola to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, June 10, 2024.**

Rector Baine, Vice Rector Calhoun, and all member of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke and all honored guests,

I am pleased to share a few words with you as the Faculty Representative to this Board.

Having served in this role 10 years ago, I would like to share my thoughts on Shared Governance 10 years ago and now. We have come a long way with the support of the president the provost and this board. Without going into detail, I must say that my experience this past year compared with ten years ago has been markedly different to the better. I have been active with state-wide faculty senate officials as well as the national council of faculty senates. In all those interactions, when I share information on Virginia Tech's system, I am invariably asked to give more details to help them in making changes to their systems. I was invited to give a presentation last week at the annual meeting of the National Council of Faculty Senates in which I shared the particulars of VT's Shared Governance. I was elected VP of the National Council with a view toward further sharing the expertise I have gained at Virginia Tech. Also, with the help of Anne Kroemer Hoffmann from Advancement, I published an article in THE on Faculty Senates that has garnered a LOT of attention.

The past year, Faculty Senate proceedings have gone smoothly except for an important issue that can be summed up as its role in enacting policies vs making "statements". FS Constitution makes it clear that the only resolutions that can be enacted are those that deal with university policies under the purview of the Senate. This past year, a group proposed a statement that they wanted Senate to endorse. This group did not accept the FS position that this statement did not deal with policy and so it is not in our purview. There was some lack of clarity in our by-laws and so senate allowed the statement to be considered. After lengthy debates, the resolution was defeated by a large margin. Ultimately, it became clear that the senate did not believe that it should play a role in endorsing political statements.

However, that raised the issue that faculty need a mechanism to have honest, open, and collegial discussions on issues that go beyond governance policies. Formulating such a mechanism is a high priority for the coming year.

When I asked faculty what issues I should bring forward in this report, many of the issues are tied to what is being discussed under the Global Distinction initiative. They are concerned that the emphasis on many high-level issues will not greatly benefit the bulk of the faculty. To begin with, the issue of the metrics troubles faculty, especially those faculty whose activities do not fit neatly into the metrics needed for THE rankings. One faculty member articulated it this way: "How can we, in a metric-driven world,

evaluate activities that do not show up in equations designed to evaluate programs and activities.” This past year, FS crafted a resolution concerning the Responsible Use of Research Metrics – a resolution passed by University Council and adopted by President Sands. We trust that all units on campus tasked with evaluating faculty take the recommendation in this resolution seriously to ensure faculty are fairly and responsibly evaluated.

It would appear to most faculty believe that strategic initiatives do not pay attention to the faculty in general. Allow me to quote another: “One thing I would mention from a faculty perspective is the pressures of enrollment growth on pedagogy and research. With more students comes more service to students and other supporting activities and less time to devote to innovation, research, and improvement. Further, our classes are bursting at the seams and at impossible times for rooms needed to hold higher capacity classes, and those classes are full of students with new accommodations that are the responsibility of faculty to meet. The job of all kinds of faculty (P/T, research, etc.) has grown exponentially and most of it in ways that do not enable more attention to the strategic vision of VT.”

VT Faculty have completed another outstanding academic year. Just listing highlights of accomplishments and awards would require my report to last several hours and no one wants that. Let me just say that our faculty are awesome!

With this meeting, my term as FS president and BOV rep comes to an end. In all honesty, I will miss our interactions, but I am also very pleased to say that the slate of officers for next year is an outstanding one. Rachel Miles will be President, Evan Lavender Smith will be Vice President, Justin Lemkul will be Operations Officer (Chair of CFA – amazing productivity this past year) and Alex Kinnaman as Parliamentarian.

I thank the Board for its willingness to listen to constituent representatives, both during formal presentations and through informal interactions. I am grateful for the board members’ openness, and I know you will work well with next year’s officers.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph S. Merola  
Faculty Representative to the VT BOV