

Virginia Tech Faculty Senate

Constituent Report to the Board of Visitors
Mike Ellerbrock, Senate President
March 28th 2011

Dear BOV Members,

I am pleased to update you on recent endeavors by our Faculty Senate:

I. Faculty Salary Disparities

Regarding the State budget, I wish to preface my remarks on behalf of our 1,400 faculty members with two comments: a) we are indeed grateful for our jobs, and b) we realize it could have been worse. Nevertheless, we have some concerns to share with you.

As you know, Gov. McDonnell's budget introduced a differential adjustment to faculty retirement contributions: VRS employees (1/3rd of our faculty) will receive a 5% pay increase commensurate with a 5% increase in their retirement deduction (a dollar-for-dollar offset); whereas, ORP employees (2/3rd of our faculty) receive neither adjustment. Faculty members are concerned about the long-term equity of the situation, which has several dimensions:

- Nominally, VRS faculty will receive a permanent 5% pay raise in their *gross* salary versus zero for ORP faculty, which superficially implies that one faculty member is more valued than another.
- Substantively, VRS and ORP faculty members' *net* pay will remain *almost* unchanged in the short term, since VRS faculty may rise into a higher Social Security tax bracket and incur higher benefit fees for VT Life Insurance.
- Longitudinally, VRS faculty will potentially receive higher future pay raises and significantly more retirement income based on a higher base salary; ORP benefits remain stagnant.
- Ultimately, VRS faculty members (along with other state employees) are burdened with financing the deficit in the state's retirement system via a fake pay raise, most of which must be funded by the University itself ... will this problem eventually lead to reduced VRS benefits?

In light of this odd situation, it is hard to compare the two systems, both of which have uncertain futures. Two aspects are clear:

- 1) Despite Gov. McDonnell's good intentions, an inequity not based on faculty performance has been injected into faculty compensation; and,

2) Employee confidence in government is diminished. For the State to propose changing the terms of the contract which brought us here constitutes a serious breach of trust.

We appreciate our administration's concerns and efforts to promote short and long term equity amongst a dedicated faculty.

II. Faculty Mentoring

Though VT has historically had a strong system for developing and reviewing faculty members for promotion and tenure, a challenge remains to make it more consistent and transparent. A number of faculty members assert each year that their department does not mentor junior faculty in an ongoing, proactive, direct and collegial atmosphere. The annual COACHE Survey results obtained by the Provost Office are enlightening and encouraging. Substantive progress at VT is evident regarding the criteria for earning tenure and promotion to associate professor, though some disparities remain across gender and race. However, the process and criteria for attaining the rank of professor remains inconsistent and problematic - a challenge about which our administration is aware and concerned. One strategy for improving the system is the current effort to revise and improve the process for evaluating teaching effectiveness via a holistic approach incorporating students' feedback, peer observation, and self-reflection.

III. Selection of New Integrated Communications System

We appreciate the efforts of colleagues in CNS to solicit input from Senators and Faculty at-large regarding selection of a new "phone" system, particularly CNS's positive response to Senate's request to move the demonstration site on campus to facilitate faculty and staff participation. The hard and soft technology offered by various vendors is quite impressive, with an amazing array of communication features. The acquisition and operating costs to departments are a concern.

IV. 2012-18 Strategic Planning

We appreciate the appointment of Dr. Sarah Karpanty, Senate Officer, to Co-Chair the Subcommittee on Organizational Structure & Flexibility. The Senate and Faculty at-large are committed to helping our robust institution chart its future.

On behalf of our faculty, thank you.

Mike