

## Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

### September 18, 2020, @ 2:30pm, Via Zoom

Senators Present: Diane Agud, Robin Allnutt, Susan Anderson, Sara Arena, Rick Ashley, Paul Avey, Jo Baker, Sarah Barrett, Michael Borowski, Leandro Castello, Cathryn Copper, Benjamin Corl, Harry Dorn, Robert Dunay, John Ferris, John Galbraith, Nicolin Girmes-Grieco, Al Hagy, James Hawdon, Bob Hicok, Daniel Hindman, Eunju Hwang, Dan Karoliyi, Eric Kaufman, Brad Klein, Jake Lahne, Eduardo Lara-Torre, Evan Lavender-Smith, Justin Lemkul, Roberto Leon, Jonathan Maher, Paul Marek, Eric Martin, Francis McCarty, Cayce Myers, Mike Nappier, Amy Nelson, Aaron Noble, Marie Paretti, Chris Pierce, R. Scott Pleasant, Robin Queen, Susanna Rinehart, Todd Schenk, Peter Schmitthenner, Ashley Shew, Richard Shryock, Jay Teets, Tess Thompson, Steve Thompson, Jim Tokuhisa, Diego Troya, Bruce Vogelaar, A.K. Ward Bartlett, Layne Watson, Robert Weiss, Cynthia Wood, Anthony Wright de Hernandez

Guests: President Tim Sands, Esther Bauer, Tanyel Bulbul, Ashley Dayer, Eric De Sturler, Cam Donaldson, Dana Hawley, Eileen Martin, Sally Morton, April Myers, John Randolph, Tom Sanchez, Steven Silber, Rachel Spector, Coogan Thompson

#### **Call to Order & Guiding Questions**

President Kaufman provided an overview of the Faculty Senate meeting with guiding questions:

1. What is the Faculty Senate's position related to the Climate Action Commitment?
2. What insights can we gain from President Sands's perspective on the University?

#### **Consent Agenda**

Susan Anderson moved to adopt the consent agenda, and Diane Agud seconded the motion. There were no objections; the following was approved unanimously:

- Approve and post September 4, 2020, meeting minutes.

#### **Brief Updates and Announcements**

- Eric Kaufman shared the future schedule for meetings.
- The COACHE Survey Town Hall was highlighted on the agenda.
- Eric Kaufman invited volunteers to fill the vacancy with the Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs.
- Eric Kaufman noted that Cayce Myers is the point person for Faculty Senate records. Because he is arriving late (due to another commitment), Cameron Donaldson is taking minutes until he arrives.
- Bob Hicok shared a letter on "User Support for Elements EFARS" (Appendix A).
- Eric Kaufman shared the link to a Google Doc for gathering questions for the upcoming Q&A session with BOV Rector Valeiras. Senators are encouraged to contribute.

#### **CUS Resolution 2020-21A: Climate Action Commitment**

- Todd Schenk and John Randolph shared a slide deck and highlighted contents of a Google Doc that aggregated information and comments related to Virginia Tech's Climate Action Commitment. The current resolution before the Commission on University Support (CUS) building upon work done in 2009. The working group prioritized consensus, with substance coming from 12 active subcommittees comprising 125 members. The intent is to create a culture of sustainability through 15 goals.
- Todd Schenk moved to attach the proposed Faculty Senate statement of general support (Appendix B) for CUS Resolution 2020-21A. Motion was seconded.

- One senator asked if 2030 was a practical deadline for the changes to occur. He believed that some of the goals cost money and that with state budgeting it was impossible to commit if there weren't resources available.
  - John Randolph said he thought it would be reasonable, but the committee did not take into consideration budget considerations with reduced budget.
- A senator noted an absence of words about divestment at Virginia Tech. Another expressed concern about not including methane when talking about carbon neutrality.
  - Divestment and other issues were discussed. Divestment was an important, but symbolic gesture. The committee thought it was more important to work with the VT Foundation rather than engage in symbolic measures. Outreach to committees are more detailed in Goal #11.
- The motion to adopt the proposed statement of support passed, with 50 votes in favor, 2 against, and 5 abstentions.

### **Q&A with President Sands**

- Eric Kaufman noted that the questions provided in advance to President Sands have been organized in 5 broad areas: Strategic Visioning & Navigation, Health Considerations, Economic Considerations, Equity Considerations, and Communication Considerations.
- Health Considerations: President Sands started by providing new data on COVID-19, including a chart from the Virginia Department Health (VDH), highlighting the status of daily cases in the New River Health District. Seven day trailing averages show the peak was the first week of September. Virginia Tech (VT) was expecting a Labor Day surge; however, it looks like the surge was avoided. VT has moved past the peak, but there are some non-VT related cases. Outbreaks in other facilities, such as prisons or long-term care facilities, sometimes impact Virginia Tech's capacity for processing tests. There is no evidence of spread in instructional settings. VT cases include students on and off campus, but there are more off-campus cases than we can see. Most of the cases are from unmasked indoor gatherings or from roommates. Spread from aerosols or droplets are the most concerning. There is no significant spread between students and employees or between students and community members. That, of course, can exist, but it is low. VT had Dr. Birx on campus for a 2.5 hour period. The University announced today mandatory random testing of undergraduates in Blacksburg. Mandatory testing of employees is also being considered, particularly for those in high contact roles. The problem with voluntary testing is that there are no-shows. There are some concerns about quarantining for 14 days, which comes from old CDC data. Dr. Birx suggested that VT look into the quarantine protocols. The testing capacity for VT will be doubled starting Monday. There are 15 sites for wastewater surveillance. On Monday, the dashboard will display a 7-day rolling positivity rate. There have been only four COVID-19 related hospitalizations since return to campus. There is a .9 percent positivity rate among employees.
  - A senator asked about where testing options were being posted. Sands said that VT would be providing more capacity for employee testing, but he does not know where that will be posted.
  - There was a question about asymptomatic staff testing. Sands said if you are not symptomatic you can take a walk-up test. He also suggested that some healthcare providers may authorize a test for asymptomatic individuals. However, they generally won't recommend a test unless you have symptoms or known contact.

- A senator asked about athletes being included in the data. Sands said that in the beginning there were multiple sources for tests. However, as VT moves forward there will be more unified numbers.
- A senator asked about VTCSOM students being included in the numbers. Sands said there are separate testing protocols for those students and noted there have been very few cases among graduate students.
- **Strategic Visioning & Navigation:** As you look at the year 2021, what priorities do you have for Virginia Tech, and how might those priorities impact faculty?
  - Sands noted that these issues around the financial situation, racial reckoning and social issues, and COVID-19 have all occurred at the same time. Sands is working with a Virginia committee on a post-pandemic concept paper. What is moving to the top of conversation is equity, access, and affordability. For VT, it is the financial aid; VA is a low financial aid state. As we speak to first generation and low income students, financial challenges are a real challenge. The pandemic has taught us that we can work remotely to some degree; there is an opportunity to use what we have learned from remote learning. Remote access for faculty and students is important, and this was part of the Beyond Boundaries vision. VT can become a high flex university; this is a conversation that faculty can be engaged with.
    - A senator asked about why VT looks differently than MCPS (Montgomery County Public Schools). Sands mentioned that modeling for Montgomery County is not accurate in its predictions. VT worked with MCPS in a task force. However, students in K-12 system have to go home, have less testing, and have a different dynamic in young age groups with COVID-19. There doesn't seem to be interconnectivity in outbreaks between K-12 and VT students.
    - Kaufman asked about the process for spring 2021. Sands stated that the Provost will engage the Faculty Senate about the spring. The immediate concern is the November exit; we want the virus spread to be tamped down by them, because VT does not want to be sending infected students back to their home. Things that will be discussed include discontinuing spring break, changing start dates, and testing of returning students. One thing we've learned is that VT could be doing more in-person learning now. By the time we get into October we will need to make decisions about in person. This decision will be faculty-driven, in consultation with faculty heads. Mental and emotional health issues are related concerns.
- **Economic Considerations:** Recognizing the University's financial health impacts a variety of operations, what can you share about the relationship between budget priorities, administrative decision-making, and University programming?
  - Sands stated there are weekly updates to department heads and the news seems positive. Richmond likely will be giving the same FY 2020 budget, but no additional money to base budget. There is some concern here because there is no money for new costs, and no money for increased costs. There were many things in the original budget that will not be reallocated. Census will be taken next week, but

enrollment is good. The entering class of international students (undergraduate and graduate) is minimal; continuing international students at both levels have held steady. For undergraduates, 9,500 are virtual, and we are on a level around 30,000. We also had the biggest philanthropy year. Sands does not expect salary reduction or furloughs from the university division. Instead of a 7% cut, with 2% invested in critical need areas, those numbers will be reduced. Challenges do exist in auxiliary (housing, dining, parking). They are not as bad as the worst case scenario, but there are budgetary issues and limited reserves. The biggest concern will be athletics.

- **Equity Considerations:** While *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine recognized Virginia Tech as a “Diversity Champion,” many faculty still struggle to see “where diversity and inclusion are woven into the work being done every day,” as noted in the [news release](#). What progress do you hope faculty see?
  - Sands said he felt this work was still in progress. About 4-5 years ago, VT wanted an increased number for underrepresented groups. The incoming class is composed of 20 percent underrepresented minorities, 39 percent underrepresented and underserved. VT must reduce gaps in completion. We need to make sure low wealth students are served so they have a true VT experience. Sands will send a written response of what is going on with programs available. Financial impacts of COVID-19 does disproportionately impact low wealth students.
- **Communication Considerations:** What steps are being taken to improve communication internal to the University (rather than only public facing communication)?
  - Sands said that, internally, there is a lot of work to be done on increased communication. We have increased the quality of communication with faculty. We are working on communication with students. Our COVID-19 dashboard has received some criticism; there is some concern about lack of transparency with numbers with COVID, but we get those numbers from VDH. We have also addressed some of the issues of COVID-19 with HIPPA and FERPA. We would make an announcement if there was a cluster or surge of COVID. We continue to improve to the dashboard as the result of comments. Moving out of Eggleston was an event that likely could have been better communicated; however, it was a move to create space.
- Sands responded to a question about moving E&G funds to auxiliary, if allowed by the state. Sands said that he was fundamentally against that. However, there are areas that could be revisited. Sands is not supportive of moving E&G money to auxiliary, but there are potential situations where a loan would be allowed to auxiliary for payback.
- A senator asked about data with wastewater numbers. Sands said the data would be shared if there was a need to see that data. The primary reason for wastewater testing is to see the progress of the disease. There is no HIPPA or FERPA issue with releasing those numbers. However, context for those numbers are important.
- A senator asked about a community narrative that international students are being kicked out of on-campus housing. Sands said that is not happening. The truth is that there are a lower number of international students this year. Last year, there were 10,400 students in residential halls, when the ideal number is 9,100. With the pandemic, the maximum

capacity was reduced to 8,600; in the process, there was some issuing of contract cancellations. Sands also said this may be conflated with Egelston move.

- Eric Kaufman thanked President Sands for coming. Dr. Sands said he looked forward to engaging with faculty on the shared governance model.

**Other Business (and Announcements)**

- Dr. Kaufman suggested that senators connect with college faculty associations.
- Carilion School of Medicine has identified Cabinet member Sarah Barrett.
- A senator noted the UVA-VT game is now scheduled for December 12th, during exam week.
- A senator asked about the Provost working with the Faculty Senate on spring semester planning. Kaufman said he is confident that Provost will speak to the Faculty Senate Cabinet about spring 2021 in the coming weeks.

**Action Items, Including Anticipated Follow-up Communication**

- Vacancy on CAPFA that needs to be filled.
- There is an opportunity to provide questions for the Rector for our meeting next time.
- Send any questions about access to Canvas or listserv or updates on senators for the roll to [mcmyers@vt.edu](mailto:mcmyers@vt.edu).

**Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Cayce Myers, Faculty Senate Secretary.*

## **Appendix A: [“User Support for Elements EFARS”](#)**

### **A Base Level of User Support for Elements and EFARs**

Provost Clarke,

During January and February 2020, Faculty Senate gathered faculty perceptions on entering their research, teaching, and service information into Symplectic Elements for their 2019 Faculty Annual Reports and passed the responses on to Professor Barbara Lockee, a Faculty Fellow with the Provost’s Office and the primary liaison for faculty and administrator support for Elements, and Ginny Pannabecker, Director of Research Collaboration and Engagement for the University Libraries. Faculty Senate has worked with them on issues relating to EFARs and Elements -- and Peggy Layne before them -- as far back as January of 2017.

Based on the information from Faculty Senate and other sources, Barb and Ginny concluded that the majority of issues reported by faculty in 2019 were due to lack of familiarity with the software and not limitations or problems inherent to it. While Elements does have bugs and limitations that Ginny and Barb are trying to address with Symplectic, in their estimation, we have reached the point that the majority of faculty should be able to input their data and generate a report with limited fuss, as long as they are provided timely guidance on how to use the software. They have found a marked difference in faculty experiences with Elements between faculty who have user support from their department and/or college and those who do not. This conclusion is supported by anecdotal evidence from Faculty Senate and other discussions with faculty: faculty in colleges that provide technical and/or data input support -- COB, for example -- report far better experiences with Elements than faculty in colleges that have not provided such support, such as CLAHS. Barb and Ginny have also concluded that the user support they and the University Libraries provide, though an essential part of a system of user support, is insufficient to handle faculty needs.

In addition to the negative effect on faculty morale due to insufficient user support in some colleges, there is also a marked difference in the use of the Elements database for purposes other than FAR generation between well and poorly supported departments and/or colleges. For example, because the college librarian in the COB works directly with each faculty member to ensure their activities are accurately input and verifies their reports, the college can utilize the same EFARs data that goes into individual annual reports to generate aggregate reports for accreditation needs. While there are many other ways we could be using this data, such as Decision Support, Strategic Analysis, and Institutional Effectiveness as imagined by the Office of Analytics and Institutional Effectiveness (OAIE), faculty frustrated with Elements will not only resist using the software for EFARs but are less likely to consider or be intrigued by these higher-order uses to which that data might be put, which reduces the utility of creating a database in the first place.

One example of the utility of annual faculty data that goes beyond EFARs is the creation of Faculty Workload Dashboards, which give snapshots of faculty activities, whether in teaching, research, and/or service. The Provost’s Office and Faculty Senate, in collaboration with the OAIE, have undertaken the creation of a prototype dashboard that will use Elements data and focus on faculty service, since research has shown that these dashboards can increase the equitable distribution of service. We offer the example

of a service dashboard to make the point that Faculty Senate is interested in partnering with the administration in using EFAR data to improve faculty performance, but that interest is tempered by the frustrations many faculty still feel when annual report time rolls around and they have to use Elements once again.

Officers of the Faculty Senate have previously requested that the Provost's Office require a minimum level of college support for faculty use of Elements, and the Faculty Senate Cabinet renews that request. Recognizing the differences in college finances, we believe that each college should at least have a staff or faculty member (or members) trained in the use of Elements and the generation of the college-specific report; that a portion of their time prior to and through the college due-date for EFARs should be set aside to work with faculty; that Barb and Ginny provide coordination and support for these individuals at the university level; and that we develop consistent ways of communicating to faculty the resources they do have for assistance with Elements, whether from the college, the University Libraries, or the Provost's Office.

We bring these matters up now because it is clear that discussing them nearer EFAR due dates is counterproductive. We have also run out of ideas on how to handle this perennial topic. We cannot continue to ask faculty in colleges that offer insufficient support to do the best they can when they see the substantial level of assistance faculty in other colleges receive, and have consistently stated that the cost of our current approach to EFARS in time, money, and frustration is too great. A clear and coordinated system of user support will reduce the expenditure of time and money on the annual production of faculty reports, increase the utility of the EFAR data sets for the kind of analysis and presentation envisioned for the University Data Commons and other applications, and create a broader range of data that can be linked to the PIBB, among other benefits.

The Faculty Senate Cabinet

## Appendix B: Climate Action Comment

September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

This afternoon the Faculty Senate reviewed the Commission on University Support *Resolution 2020-21A: Resolution to Approve the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment*. The Senate overwhelmingly endorsed the resolution, signaling a strong level of support among the faculty for real action to advance climate action.

The Faculty Senate appreciates the thoughtful recommendations crafted by the Climate Action Commitment working group and fully supports the overarching goal of becoming a carbon neutral campus by 2030 and fossil fuel free by 2050. There is no doubt that this will require significant changes in all aspects of our operations, but they are both necessary and possible with the right spirit and resourcing. We have a moral responsibility to act aggressively, and the time is now.

Furthermore, we wholeheartedly believe that these changes will provide excellent opportunities for education, research, and enhanced quality of life in our campus environment. They can make Virginia Tech an even better institution; one that we can all be proud of, that provides cutting-edge research opportunities, and that is more attractive to top students, faculty, and staff. We are particularly excited as faculty about the goal of integrating *the Virginia Tech 2020 Climate Action Commitment into the university's educational mission through a new Climate Action Living Laboratory*. Many of our students, staff, and faculty are already working on related issues from state-of-the-art photovoltaics to environmental justice and stand ready to contribute to a stronger future for both VT and the wider world.

We sincerely hope the University will not only approve this resolution but put the necessary support and resources behind it so that the objectives outlined are realized in practice. Looking forward to subsequent CAC revisions, we encourage the university to analyze further the climate impacts of methane leakage from Virginia Tech purchased natural gas to support the case for Goal 15: fossil-fuel free campus by 2050. We fully appreciate that finances are tight right now but believe that climate action should both be a priority and can provide new opportunities for all of us.

Thank you for your attention,

Eric Kaufman, President  
Virginia Tech Faculty Senate