Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
September 22, 2023 @ 2:30pm
Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Joe Merola (presiding), Monty Abbas, Luke Achenie, Onwubiko Agozino, Diane Agud, Richard Ashley, Barbara Allen (alternate for Jim Hawdon), A. Jonathan Auguste, Paul Avey, Azziza Bankole, Feras Batarseh (alternate for Leigh-Anne Krometis), Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Josh Clemons, Mark Coggins, Carolyn Commer, Nick Copeland, Kristy Daniels, Ashley Dayer, Jonathan Everett, Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkielstein, Bruce Friedman (alternate for Robin Panneton), Zhuo Fu, Rebecca Funk, Rodney Gaines, Scott Gartner, David Gregory, Wesley Gwaltney, Daniel Hindman, Mantu Hudait, Scott Huxtable, Eli Jamison (alternate for Karen Schnatterly), Ran Jin, Bryan Katz (alternate for vacancy on CEE), Young-Teck Kim, Alex Kinnaman, Matthew Komelski (alternate for Rose Wesche), Catherine Larochelle, Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Justin Lemkul, Gary Long, Charles Lowery, G.Q. Lu, Jason Malone, Luca Massa, Michelle Maycock, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero, Zhange Ni, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Yuchin Pan, Nicole Pitterson, Cori Ruktanonchai, Steven Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Nicholas Robbins, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Adrian Sandu, Charles Schleupner, Yang Shao (alternate for vacancy in Geography), Richard Shryock, Charles Smith, Keith Stephenson, Laura Strawn, Saied Taheri, Jay Teets, Jim Tokuhisa, Kwok Tsui, Alp Tural (alternate for Bill Green), Costin Untaroiu, Bimal Viswanath, Jerald Walz, Robert Weiss, Angelica Witcher Walker, Erin Worthington, Randolph Wynne, Yan Xu, Diane Zahm, Lizette Zietsman

Guests: Bruce Friedman (attending on behalf of Robin Panneton), Aaron Gross, April Myers, Lauren Pollard, Zarah Quinn, Demetria Somervell

Absent with Notice: Robin Panneton, Stephanie Smith, Ashley Wilkinson

Absent: Rebecca Hester, David Hicks, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Virginia Maxwell, Nino Ripepi, Hans Robinson, Eric Stanley, Shane Wang, Hehuang Xie

Call to Order by the President Joe Merola at 2:33

Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Joe Merola)

- Consent agenda was adopted:
  - Minutes for 09-08-2023 (Link)
  - Agenda for 09-22-2023 (Link)

Business Agenda

Old Business

1. Updates & Announcements from Committees, Commissions, University Council
2. Updates and Announcements
   - Details were provided for recording attendance on the attendance form. Alternates and Senators were asked to follow the instructions below to assist with accurate record-keeping.
     - Alternates attending on behalf of an absent senator: provide the name of the senator for whom you are attending.
     - Alternates filling in for a departmental vacancy: provide the name of the department you are representing instead of a senator's name.
     - Alternates attending, but not on behalf of an absent senator: sign in as "Guest."
     - Senators attending leave the following line blank: "If you are representing a voting or non-voting member…"
   - Comments concerning Randolph Hall classrooms have been received and are available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.
   - Ron Fricker, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, provided a report regarding the work of the office of Faculty Affairs and has offered to visit a Faculty Senate meeting to provide additional information.
   - A COACHE Survey Result Town Hall will be held on Thursday, October 5 from 11:00-12:00 in Latham Ballroom; anyone interested can attend in person or via Zoom. COACHE administers the Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey. The survey allows comparison of VT faculty to a national pool of respondents and self-defined groups of peer institutions.

New Business

3. Q&A With President Tim Sands
   - President Sands provided opening remarks, thanking the faculty for their participation in shared governance and their contributions that continue to move Virginia Tech forward.
     - Specific comments included growth in Virginia Tech's rankings, including ranking as a top-20 public university by *U.S. News and World Report*;

progress made toward the Virginia Tech Advantage; recent faculty elections to national academies; investment in research; and philanthropic successes.

- o President Sands discussed an area where Virginia Tech will focus on improvement: providing financial support for underserved students. As part of the Virginia Tech Advantage, Virginia Tech is working toward the goal of not only increasing financial support for these students but also providing opportunities for internships, study abroad, and other experiences that increase paths for future success.

- Questions were posed around the recent Supreme Court ruling regarding the use of race in college admissions.
  - o The main impact from the ruling for Virginia Tech is that individuals involved with admissions planning or evaluating of applications are not able to view self-reported data. Virginia Tech has seen an expansion in underrepresented populations because of recruitment efforts, allowing for a diverse student body. Other colleges are now doing many of the same things that Virginia Tech has been doing for several years.

- Questions focused on faculty compensation, benefits, and salary compression.
  - o President Sands mentioned that the state has provided increases, helping facilitate compensation catch-up following COVID. Three 5 percent increases have been provided in a row, with an additional 2 percent recently approved for this year. Data around compensation will be posted soon. Virginia Tech has seen improvements in tile percentages and is hoping to continue this progress.
  - o Discussion of compensation, compression, and ranks of assistant professor, associate professor and instructor were mentioned. Limited discussion around restricted faculty was also held. An ongoing compression study continues.
  - o If a faculty member feels that their compensation is not appropriate, they are encouraged to speak with the department head or chair, or the Faculty Affairs office.

- Faculty members expressed concern about parking availability and cost for themselves and staff. It is understood that the office is an auxiliary unit that must fund itself, but there are still questions to be addressed.
  - o President Sands mentioned the Parking and Transportation Committee, which is part of the shared governance system. Virginia Tech provided a $500 stipend for employees at or below a certain salary rate in the past, which could be used for parking costs or dependent care. The university continues to look for ways to improve and provide solutions.

- It was noted that parking also connects to the Virginia Tech Master Plan. Campus is compact and walkable, with parking on the perimeter. Efforts are ongoing to implement improvements, including improved accessibility.
- Questions were asked concerning the transition from Google to Microsoft. President Sands reported that Amy Sebring, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, and David Raymond, Interim Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer, can provide better details. He shared that one main reason for the shift is security.
  - There are many current concerns in the IT space, including wi-fi and cellular challenges. The wi-fi system has been reengineered, but some areas continue to experience problems. This academic year saw an increase in devices connecting to the network of about 8 percent.
  - Amy Sebring is trying to find better ways to gather and disseminate information.
- Questions were asked about the Innovation Campus. The Innovation Campus is scheduled to open in Summer 2024. Fundraising is on pace, with $110 million of the $250 million goal already raised. There are 230 new master's students this fall. The intent at the innovation campus is for 50 percent of learning to be hands-on and project based, which requires work with liaisons and partners.
  - Discussion was held around plans to ensure that students and employees feel that they are part of Virginia Tech's campus community. Comments were shared regarding transportation options between the various campus locations, including bus and train service. Julie Ross is leading an effort to review coordination of northern Virginia locations and their connection to Blacksburg.
- Questions were asked regarding new tools allowing for more online, virtual teaching and how to best meet student needs. President Sands encouraged faculty to communicate their thoughts on the topic, including how to best use available online tools for online teaching; advantages and disadvantages to online and in-person teaching; differences in student learning when learning online versus in-person; and the level of flexibility needed. He indicated that there is work to be done in this space and it will require input from both faculty and students.
- Discussion around graduate and professional student stipends, and the graduate student and employee unions. Dr. Sands commented that Virginia is a right to work state and cannot collectively bargain. Much effort has gone into building a shared governance system that he feels is extraordinary. Virginia Tech is currently gathering data on all graduate assistantships and

compensation, including those sponsored by grants. Work with the graduate and professional students is ongoing.

- Discussion around the issue of diminishing confidence in educational organizations was held. President Sands referred to an article that explains the college-wealth premium. He is encouraged by quarterly meetings with Governor Youngkin, and the approved statement of academic freedom. Senators provided links to documents related to the issues that President Sands mentioned, provided below.
  - o https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/05/magazine/college-worth-price.html (for Virginia Tech users who do not have an NYT subscription, use this link for access to the full text).
  - o https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/college-wealth-premium-collapsed/604579/
  - o https://richmond.com/opinion/columnists/column-free-expression-is-a-foundation-of-excellence-in-education/article_02b639f7-f3dc-52cc-a840-98b0a8434645.html
  - o Book mentioned: *The Inequality Machine* by Paul Tough: https://www.paultough.com/books_trashed/the-inequality-machine/
- A comment and suggestion from the floor mentioned a need for more cooperation and integration with faculty working at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to improve the climate and wellbeing of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty at Virginia Tech, such as a faculty exchange program with Virginia HBCUs.
- Discussion around the plans and processes in place to better support international faculty, recruit and retain them, and issues pertaining to visas. President Sands said he would research the issue further and provide a response later on.
- Comment and suggestion regarding the need to better support more admission pathways of Norther Virginia Community College students to Virginia Tech (see https://www.vt.edu/admissions/transfer/vccs.html).

4. France Belanger presented an update regarding Beyond Boundaries update from Strategic Affairs

- Dr. Belanger provided opening remarks regarding the previous (and first) report on Beyond Boundaries from 2016 and that this update will not be a rewrite of the original but a change to the overall vision due to major changes in higher education and in the world, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, political polarization, and the affordability crisis.
  - o There are two goals with respect to revisiting and revising the vision of Beyond Boundaries: 1) focusing on being a land-grant university

that addresses local and global issues, and 2) addressing challenges and opportunities from the changing landscape of higher education.

- The Co-chairs of the committee to revise the Beyond Boundaries vision are Julia Ross (Dean, College of Engineering), Sylvester Johnson (Director of the Center for Humanities), and France Belanger (Distinguished Professor and Faculty Fellow, Accounting & Information Systems).

- Dr. Belanger expanded on the work of the group: the group met in May with university leaders and stakeholders; they decided that the university vision for 2047 should change based on the rapid advancement and ethical considerations of artificial intelligence (AI), the exponential increase in costs of in-person education, increased need for different modalities of learning, importance of ensuring education is fair, accessible, and diverse; and the needs to have language changed to include 'agile' and 'adaptive' in the vision.

- Dr. Belanger asked the Faculty Senate their perspectives on the term 'agile university' and what that means to faculty members. Discussion followed, which included the need for adaptation in a changing world, the need for evidence to act effectively and efficiently, and the importance of values, competencies, and resources.

- Discussion around what it means to be a global and land-grant university. Many expressed their core belief that the university should be a leader in positive and progressive change as well as improving the human condition rather than adapting or coping with changes that are regressive or harmful to students and/or the public. One comment mentioned the need to move towards a more sustainable future, because the current university goals are not efficient to fight the climate crisis.

5. Recommendation and confirmation of a Faculty Senate representative for the Information Technology Services and Systems Committee. An election was conducted to confirm the representative to this committee, recommended by the David Raymond, Interim VP for IT and CIO:
   - Nino Repepi (53 votes, 2 abstentions)

Open Floor Discussion
6. There were no agenda items and no call for items for an open floor discussion.

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:18 p.m.