Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
December 01, 2023 @ 2:30pm
Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Evan Lavender-Smith (presiding), Monty Abbas, Luke Achenie, Diane Agud, Barbara Allen (alternate for Jim Hawdon and Rebecca Hester), Richard Ashley, Albert Auguste, Paul Avey, Azziza Bankole, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Rebecca Cockrum, Carolyn Commer, Kristy Daniels, Jonathan Everett, Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkielstein, Zhuo Fu, Becky Funk, Rodney Gaines, Scott Gartner, Aaron Gross (alternate for Jonathan Auguste), Wesley Gwaltney, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Mantu Hudait, Joseph Hughes, Scott Huxtable, Ran Jin, Bryan Katz, Matthew Komelski (alternate for Rose Wesche), Catherine Larochelle, Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Justin Lemkul, Kim Loeffert, Gary Long, Charles Lowery, Guo-Quan Lu, Amanda MacDonald (alternate for Alex Kinnaman), Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Michelle (Shelly) Maycock, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, Joseph Merola, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero, David Moore (alternate for Renée LeClair), Zhange Ni, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Robin Panneton, Nicole Pitterson, Steve Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Jane Robertson Evia (alternate for Nicholas Robbins), Syrenthia Robinson (alternate for Stephanie Smith), Cori Ruktanonchai, Adrian Sandu, Charles J. Schleupner, Yang Shao, Richard Shryock, Charles Smith, Laura Strawn, Sharon Swanger (alternate for Yuchin Pan), Saied Taheri, Jay Teets, Jim Tokuhisa, Kwok Tsui, Alp Tural (alternate for Bill Green), Costin Untaroiu, Bimal Viswanath, Jeffrey Walling, Jerald Walz, Robert Weiss, Ashley Wilkinson, Hehuang Xie, Lu Zhang (alternate for Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan), Lizette Zietsman (76)

Guests: Chris Galitz, April Myers, Zarah Quinn, Demetria Somervell

Absent with Notice: Carla Finkelstein, Rebecca Funk, Laura Strawn

Absent: James Casey, Mark Coggins, Nicholas Copeland, Ashley Dayer, David Gregory, Leanna House, Young-Teck Kim, Leigh-Anne Krometis, Nino Ripepi, Hans Robinson, Karen Schnatterly, Eric Stanley, Keith Stephenson, Shane Wang, Yan Xu (15)

Call to Order by Vice President Evan Lavender-Smith at 2:32

Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Evan Lavender-Smith)
- Agenda for 12-01-2023 ([Link](#)) was adopted
- Minutes for 11-17-2023 ([Link](#)) were approved as presented

Business Agenda

Old Business

1. Updates and announcements from committees, commissions, and University Council are available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.

2. Transportation Services provided answers to questions collected during the October 20 Faculty Senate meeting; these are available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.

New Business

3. Evan Lavender-Smith introduced Frances Keene, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Mark Sikes, Dean of Students, for discussion on student absence verifications and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) accommodations. Joe Merola added that information about religious and ethnic holiday accommodation will be introduced at a later date because this topic being considered by the Undergraduate Student Senate.
   a. Vice President Keene introduced Kiera Schneiderman, Undergraduate Student Senate President. Opening remarks were provided by Vice President Keene and Dean Sikes. Faculty input is requested regarding these two topics.
      - The Faculty Handbook, Section 9.6.2, details class attendance and the responsibilities/collaboration between the Dean of Students office, faculty, and students. The administration is aware that absence verifications can be challenging for faculty and students and noted that the number of absence verification requests is increasing.
      - The university has also experienced an increase in SSD accommodation requests, with additional increases expected in the future.
   b. Faculty offered several suggestions and areas of concern.
      i. Additional training and support: A suggestion was made for additional support that would enable faculty to work with the SSD office and students more efficiently and would facilitate quicker response to requests for accommodation. Potential improvements to the web page and tools that would increase usability were mentioned. The perspective of faculty whose classes are project-based was also shared. Current accommodations do not specifically address this type

of learning, and do not meet students' needs. Additional structure and guidance for project-based learning would be helpful.

  ii. Testing Center: Faculty currently act as the mediator between students and the testing center, which requires significant time and effort. Once initial appointments are made, students can change reservations themselves, without faculty input or approval. A more streamlined and controlled system would be helpful. Additional concerns with protocols and processes in the testing center, for example, ensuring that time is monitored for timed tests, were mentioned.

    1) Dean Sikes shared information regarding anticipated improvements to the Accessible Information Management software system which is in its pilot semester. The software includes a testing center module that is scheduled to undergo testing soon and is expected to roll out by next fall. Also on track for the fall semester is the addition of seats in the testing center, which currently accommodates 42.

  iii. Concerns were expressed with the increased number of accommodations, new reasons for accommodation, consideration regarding the reasonableness of certain accommodations, and the expansion of accommodation types. Nationwide trends indicate that universities will see continued increases in these areas generally. The responsibility for decision-making regarding accommodation requests and the associated legal requirements also creates stress for many faculty members. Vice President Keene noted that the staff who conduct absence verification and the Dean of Students office are available to provide support and information.

c. A question was asked regarding what the greatest current need is for Virginia Tech to be able to provide adequate SSD support. The Virginia Tech provost appointed a task force in 2018 comprised of members from all areas of the university. Virginia Tech has committed to significant investment in this area, and several strategies for meeting needs are under review. The greatest need currently is for resources, and input from faculty is important in determining which approaches to adopt.

d. The following suggestions and concerns were provided regarding absence verifications.

  i. To make informed decisions, it would be helpful to receive increased guidance on absence verifications and crafting class policies that meet student needs while providing flexibility and discretion. Some faculty utilize drops to cover absences and feel that this is a streamlined way

to meet both student and faculty need but questioned university policy and procedures around this approach. It was confirmed that there is no policy on this.

      ii. Providing uniformity in verifications, especially those from Schiffert Health Center, would be helpful. Verifications are received through various venues and formats and are sometimes received weeks after an absence. The reason for delays is unclear, whether due to a student's submission of information or the process itself. However, a delayed timeline is challenging for faculty.

  e. Faculty offered additional general ideas, including the following: providing ways that faculty could all present the same message on their syllabus regarding accommodations and absences; provision of a system that automatically tracks attendance and refers concerns to a student's advisor; and stepping back as a group from procedural details to brainstorm high-level ideas that may help. The following resources were provided by senators:

- Syllabus statements from the Office of Inclusion and Diversity: https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/content/dam/inclusive_vt_edu/docs/NormOfInclusion.pdf
- General syllabus requirements and advice: https://teaching.vt.edu/teachingresources/syllabi-and-learning-contracts/example-syllabus-statements.html

4. Evan Lavender-Smith presented proposed changes to the University Council Bylaws, UC Resolution 2023-24A – Resolution to Revise the University Council Bylaws.
   a. This resolution will be introduced for first reading at an upcoming University Council meeting. A summary of the changes was provided. The resolution can be found online on the Resolution Tracker.
   b. The Faculty Senate Policy and Procedures Committee has completed an initial review of the proposed changes. Commission Chairs were given the opportunity to share comments or concerns. The Faculty Senate may provide comments on this resolution to the University Council.

5. Evan Lavender-Smith opened the floor for further comments on the shared governance survey and discussion questions. The deadline for comments to be submitted is December 15.
   a. There is uncertainty across the campus community regarding the definition of shared governance, including determination of what topics should be included in governance and what topics should not. Discussion is expected across the university to attempt to answer these questions. The current

shared governance model allows the faculty to have a voice in decision-making. Other constituency groups, A/P Faculty, Staff, Undergraduate and Graduate and Professional Students, also contribute.

b. A link to a related study, Shared Leadership in Higher Education, is available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.

c. Faculty are encouraged to read the shared governance discussion questions on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site and provide any additional comments to the Faculty Senate officers. Comments gathered from previous discussions and those received by email will be compiled and provided to the University Council Cabinet.

Open Floor Discussion

6. Senators were invited to attend the inaugural Pop-up Faculty Club meeting for teaching and research faculty. Registration is required. The Pop-up Faculty Club is hosted by the Faculty Senate and sponsored by the Office of Faculty Affairs. Additional information can be found on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site under News to Share Broadly.

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:16 p.m.