



## Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

<https://www.facultysenate.vt.edu/>

# Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

## January 19, 2024 @ 2:30pm

### Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

#### Check-In:

**Present:** Joseph Merola (presiding), Monty Abbas, Luke Achenie, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Kaveh Akbari Hamed, Rick Ashley, Paul Avey, Azziza Bankole, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Josh Clemons, Rebecca Cockrum, Carolyn Commer, Nick Copeland, Kristy Daniels, Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkielstein, Becky Funk, Rodney Gaines, Scott Gartner, Wesley Gwaltney, James Hawdon, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Kristopher Hite (Alternate for Justin Lemkul), Leanna House, Mantu Hudait, Scott Huxtable, Bryan Katz, Young-Teck Kim, Holly Kindsvater (Alternate for Ashley Dayer), Alex Kinnaman, Leigh-Anne Krometis, Andrea L'Afflitto (Alternate for Ran Jin), Jacob Lahne (Alternate for Laura Strawn), Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Kimberly Loeffert, Gary Long, Charles Lowery, Guo-Quan Lu, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Michelle Maycock, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero, Zhange Ni, Greg Novack, Tommy O'Donnell, Yuchin Pan, Robin Panneton, Nicole Pitterson, Steve Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Jeffrey Robert (Alternate for Jonathan Everett), Nicholas Robbins, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Cori Ruktanonchai, Adrian Sandu, Charles Schlepner, Richard Shryock, Charles Smith, Stephanie Smith, Jay Teets, Chelsea Thompto, Jim Tokuhisa, Alp Tural (Alternate for Bill Green), Costin Untaroiu, Bimal Viswanath, Jerald Walz, Rose Wesche, Ashley Wilkinson, Randolph Wynne, Hehuang Xie, yan xu, Diane Zahm, Lizette Zietsman

**Guests:** Demetria Somervell

**Absent with Notice:** Stuart Feigenbaum

**Absent:** Jonathan Auguste, Mark Coggins, April Fu, David Gregory, Rebecca Hester, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Catherine Larochelle, Nino Ripepi, Hans Robinson, Karen Schnatterly, Yang Shao, Eric Stanley, Keith Stephenson, Kwok Tsui, Jeff Walling, Shane Wang, Angelica Witcher

**Call to Order by the President Joe Merola at 2:37**

**Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Joe Merola)**

- Consent agenda was adopted:
  - Minutes for 12-01-2023 ([Link](#))
  - Agenda for 01-19-2024 ([Link](#))

## **Business Agenda**

### **Old Business**

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

### **New Business**

2. Election of a representative for the Faculty Honorifics Committee. Any faculty member who received the Alumni Award for Research Excellence can be elected to this position.
  - a. The following nominations were received:
    - i. Martha Ann Bell, Psychology (2020 winner of the Alumni Award for Research Excellence)
    - ii. Mehdi Ahmadian, Mechanical Engineering (2023 winner of Alumni Award for Research Excellence)
  - b. Joe Merola called for additional nominations from the floor. None were received.
  - c. Elections were held. Martha Ann Bell was elected to fill the vacancy.
    - i. Voting results:
      - 42 – Martha Ann Bell
      - 19 – Mehdi Ahmadian
      - 4 – Abstain
3. Upcoming and current Senate Vacancies
  - a. The Faculty Senate Bylaws, Article II Membership, Section 4: Nominations and Elections, was reviewed. The nominations and elections process should begin in January.
    - i. Over 40 vacant Faculty Senate seats plus remaining vacant alternate seats are expected. An email will be sent later this month to College Faculty Association presidents and department and school heads/chairs and directors that are anticipated to have vacant seats, notifying them of the need to hold elections.
    - ii. Senators whose college, department, or association expects a vacant seat are asked to encourage their association president or department head to prepare for the election process.
    - iii. The bylaws state that any senator willing and eligible to serve another term must still be formally elected through an election process.

- b. Nomination and election deadlines for senators.
  - i. Associations who are notified of vacancies should generate nominees and hold elections in February.
  - ii. Colleges and departments who are notified of vacancies should generate nominees and hold elections in March.
  - iii. The Faculty Senate understands that some departments hold elections later in the semester, and requests that these departments provide information about their scheduled elections.
- c. Nomination and elections for shared governance positions.
  - i. The Faculty Senate Cabinet will begin soliciting nominations for shared governance positions on University Council, commissions and committees that must be filled by the Faculty Senate in April.
  - ii. Robert Weiss, Past President, will lead the effort to create a slate of potential Faculty Senate officers, which will be presented in April.
  - iii. Elections for these positions should be held early enough to provide election results to the Secretary of the University Council by the stated deadline, which is in early May. Completing elections by the deadline helps ensure that positions are filled and that shared governance organizations are operational for the fall academic semester.
- d. Limited discussion was held about the process for determining the number of senators for each college association and department. The Policies and Procedures Committee (PPC) is currently looking at this process and the representation required by the Faculty Senate constitution and bylaws.
- e. The recently updated Faculty Senate attendance policy found in the Faculty Senate Bylaws, Article III, Attendance, was reviewed.
  - i. Senators should ask alternates to attend on their behalf or contact the Faculty Senate officers if they cannot attend a Faculty Senate meeting. Senators who provide advance notice of an absence will be marked as 'absent with notice' on the official meeting minutes.
  - ii. The Faculty Senate will notify college associations and departments whose senators/alternates are absent without notice for two or more consecutive meetings.
- f. The Faculty Senate Bylaws were updated last fiscal year to require the election of alternate senators by all representative units (one alternate required for each unit). Senators who do not have an alternate are asked to encourage their college association or department to conduct an election for an alternate. Alternates may serve from 1 to 3 years, depending on preference. They must attend Faculty Senate meetings only if the elected senator will be absent and are a good way to learn and be involved.

4. The Faculty Senate President requested faculty input on two upcoming initiatives:
  - a. The Faculty Constituency Report for the upcoming Board of Visitors (BOV) Meeting, April 8-9, 2024.
    - i. Provide suggestions or concerns that you feel should be raised to the BOV to Joe Merola. Joe is available by email, phone, and is willing to meet one-on-one. While the constituency report is the formal method of advising the BOV on issues of concern to faculty, there are also opportunities to discuss items informally.
    - ii. Governor Youngkin recently signed an executive order regarding artificial intelligence which included guidelines for educational institutions. The BOV discussed AI during their fall retreat. If anyone has specific comments regarding this topic, please forward those.
  - b. Virginia Tech Global Distinction Steering Committee
    - i. A Global Distinction Steering Committee has been formed to identify specific actions that will advance the goal of becoming a university of global distinction. Joe Merola is the only faculty representative in a non-administrative role serving on this committee. Faculty are encouraged to provide relevant input and thoughts to Joe.

### **Open Floor Discussion**

5. Concerns regarding classroom space were shared: There have been delays with the assignment of classroom meeting space. Professors have been assigned back-to-back classes in locations across campus, requiring that they end one class early to get to their next location. Faculty have been encouraged to teach classes that begin at 8 a.m. or after 5 p.m., which is challenging for many. The lack of meeting space is having a negative effect on teaching.
  - a. These items will be added to the list of topics to consider for inclusion on the Faculty Constituency Report to the BOV.
  - b. The following ideas were offered:
    - i. Allow the Registrar access to classrooms that are controlled by departments.
    - ii. The process for finding a classroom is very complicated and time-consuming, requiring multiple layers of approvals. Updating the request process to increase efficiency would be helpful, such as a universal electronic classroom reservation system for the entire university. Much support was expressed for this idea.
6. Information about alternative semester dates adopted by other universities was recently mentioned in a committee. Some institutions have changed their semester, beginning earlier in August and ending at Thanksgiving. They have reported that this relieves stress for faculty and students and is beneficial for university operations. A

representative of the committee brought this topic forward to inquire if the Faculty Senate would like to present it for discussion. One senator suggested that it be brought forward first to the university leadership before being brought to the BOV.

7. Faculty report continued and increasing challenges with financial procedures for research-adjacent activities such as events, meals, travel, and resources. It was stated that the university will no longer reimburse sales tax, so a tax exemption must be obtained prior to expenditure. Changing financial procedures has increased the administrative burden. It was noted that this seems to be at odds with the focus on becoming a university of global distinction.
  - a. Conversations have been held with the administration about this topic. The number of regulations has increased, and Virginia Tech's approach to those has been conservative thus leading to more administrative burdens on faculty. Office transitions and turnover also contribute to the problems.
  - b. An idea was presented to explore the creation of a new position, similar to an ombudsman, who would represent the faculty as a whole when processes and procedures are burdensome and negatively impacting teaching, research, and efficiency.
8. Discussion was held around Elements. Anyone with specific questions about Elements can contact Rachel Miles, Research Impact Coordinator and Faculty Senate Operations Officer.
9. The role of the Faculty Senate as an advocate, their contribution in shared governance, and difficulties experienced in filling senate and shared governance positions was discussed:
  - a. It may be a good time to review the current structure of commissions and committees and look for efficiencies. Ensuring that the work completed by commissions and committees contributes to the university would be helpful.
  - b. The Faculty Senate has asked for and received an increased voice in shared governance. This requires faculty presence and representation.
  - c. The Board of Visitors directive to review shared governance was mentioned. This effort included a survey distributed to the university community; limited campus response was received. Additionally, senates, commissions, the Council of College Deans and the Department Heads Council were asked to hold discussions on their view of shared governance and provide comments. This data has been gathered and will be compiled into a report.
  - d. Some administrators do not support participation in shared governance because of the required level of obligation. If the highest level of the university encourages participation in shared governance, then targeted communication in the mid-level would be helpful.

- e. The Staff Senate resolution which seeks to include a statement of support for shared governance participation in job postings was mentioned. The Staff Senate hoped that other senates would consider a similar statement.

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