



Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

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

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

Month 15, 2024 @ 2:30pm

Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Joe Merola (presiding), Monty Abbas, Luke Achenie, Danna Agmon (Alternate for Nick Copeland), Onwubiko Agozino, Diane Agud, Kaveh Akbari Hamed, Barbara Allen (Alternate for Jim Hawdon), Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Azziza Bankole, Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Josh Clemons, Rebecca Cockrum, Ashley Dayer, Jonathan Everett, Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkelstein, Becky Funk, Rodney Gaines, Chris Galitz (Alternate for Costin Untaroiu), Aaron Gross (Alternate for Johnathan Auguste), Wesley Gwaltney, Daniel Hindman, Leanna House, Mantu Hudait, Scott Huxtable, E Fanny Jasso-Hernandez (Alternate for Lizette Zietsman), Ran Jin, Bryan Katz, Alex Kinnaman, Leigh-Anne Krometis, Catherine Larochelle, Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Justin Lemkul, Guo-Quan Lu, Rachel Miles, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Michelle Maycock, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, Gonzalo Montero, , Zhange Ni, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Yuchin Pan, Robin Panneton, Nicole Pitterson, Steve Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Nicholas Robbins, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Cori Ruktanonchai, Adrian Sandu, Charles J. Schleupner, Karen Schnatterly, Yang Shao, Richard Shryock, Stephanie Smith, Keith Stephenson, Annie Stevens (Alternate for Kim Loeffert), Laura Strawn, Jay Teets, Chelsea Thompto, Jim Tokuhisa, Alp Tural (Alternate for Bill Green), Bimal Viswanath, Jeffrey Walling, Jerald Walz, Robert Weiss, Rose Wesche, Ashley Wilkinson, Erin Worthington, Randolph Wynne, Hehuang Xie, Diane Zahm

Guests: Bikrum Gill, Liora Goldensher, Christine Labuski, David Moore, April Myers, Desiree Poets, Dee Dee Somervell

Absent with Notice: Virginia Beuchner-Maxwell, Carolyn Commer, Charles Lowery

Absent: Mark Coggins, Kristy Daniels, Zhuo Fu, Scott Gartner, David Gregory, Rebecca Hester, David Hicks, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Young-Teck Kim, Gary Long, Nino Ripepi, Hans Robinson, Eric Stanley, Kwok Tsui, Shane Wang, Angelica Witcher, Yan Xu

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

Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Joe Merola)

- Consent agenda was adopted:
 - Minutes for 03-01-2024 ([Link](#))
 - Agenda for 03-15-2024 ([Link](#))

Business Agenda

Unfinished Business

1. Updates & Announcements
 - a. Updates from committees, commissions, and the University Council are available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.
 - b. Joe Merola provided an overview of Article XII. Policy Review and Recommendation Process, Section 4. Senate Position Development Process, of the Faculty Senate Bylaws.
 - i. The Faculty Senate Cabinet receives and reviews potential topics for consideration. The Policies and Procedures Committee also contributes to the process.
 - ii. Article XII, Section 4 of the Faculty Senate Bylaws will undergo review by the Policies and Procedures Committee to ensure it clearly and accurately communicates the Faculty Senate position development process.
 - iii. The Faculty Senate received a statement entitled “Statement on Palestine and Higher Education,” that has also been distributed to other senates. Faculty Senators have been made aware of the statement and it is available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.

New Business

2. Joe Merola opened a Q&A session on the Virginia Tech Global Distinction. Cyril Clarke, Provost; Dan Sui, Senior Vice President for Research and Innovation; Don Taylor, Executive Vice Provost; and Ron Fricker, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, attended the Faculty Senate meeting to answer questions on research and the global initiative.
 - a. Virginia Tech President Tim Sands unveiled two priorities in a 2023 state of the university address, one of which focused on research. The initiative was renamed; it was previously called the Top Global 100 and now is rebranded the Global Distinction Initiative. A steering committee has been convened. The primary focus of the initiative is to improve Virginia Tech’s visibility at a global level.
 - b. Don Taylor provided the charges of the committee which include taking an inventory of all metrics that measure research excellence, determining where Virginia Tech is according to those metrics, identifying gaps, developing an

effective communication and marketing plan, and identifying resources needed to meet goals.

- c. The steering committee has gathered input from many sources which has led to the identification of several themes for consideration: unburdening the faculty of administrative tasks that can be completed by other systems or in other ways, growing a diverse enterprise, bolstering recognition of existing excellence, encouraging the university community to rally behind the Global Distinction vision, investing in talent, identifying and expanding differentiated areas of excellence, and making data-driven decisions and plans.
- d. A summary of questions and discussion follows.
 - i. How is feedback being solicited from faculty regarding what they need to help meet the initiative goals? Input is being requested from groups such as the Faculty Senate, colleges, institutes, and the Department Heads Council. Information is also sought informally, such as collaborations with Faculty Affairs and attending events like the Pop-Up Faculty Clubs. Senators encouraged considering additional ways to explore faculty needs and innovative ways to obtain input.
 - ii. Can more details be provided on the steps being taken to recruit and retain faculty talent? No specific decisions have been made. However, discussion is ongoing around marketing, leading and lagging indicators, faculty awards and ways of recognizing excellence. Additional topics of discussion have centered around investments in infrastructure, travel grants, and retention methods.
 - iii. Discussion was held around university support for both faculty who receive research recognition or awards and for the faculty who support their work, promoting hidden talent, and helping ensure that everyone can be successful in their individual role. Caution was expressed to not allow the mindset of teaching and research to be competing priorities. Collegiate faculty are now expected to show research activities, for example.
 - iv. Support during both pre-award and post-award processes was discussed. As part of this discussion, investments in specialized spaces, IT infrastructure, and web-based support were touched on. The ongoing IT transformation, including AI tools that can help with administrative duties, are viewed as potential ways to alleviate some of the administrative burden that is experienced by faculty.
 - v. It is understood that review and discussions are ongoing, but it was stated that it is important for faculty to see changes. Part of the steering committee's work is to identify tasks that can be done quickly (within 1-3 years) and those changes that are longer term.

- vi. Comments were shared regarding Virginia Tech's support structures (e.g., financial and administrative) and the federal regulations that impact these structures. It appears that many support structures at Virginia Tech take a conservative view of regulations while other universities take a broader view. It is understood that these structures should support the academic mission of the university. Acknowledgement was given that we are in a time of rapidly evolving regulatory compliance and that a delicate balance is required.
 - vii. A connection was made between Global Distinction and another topic that is important to the Faculty Senate: challenges with classroom availability. The university recently became aware of problems with Wi-Fi and realizes that additional large classroom space is needed. Money is invested each year in classroom improvements. Utilization of space beyond the 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. time frame is needed.
 - The Faculty Senate is gathering information and data about the challenges faculty face in obtaining adequate teaching and classroom space.
 - Funding sources were mentioned including federal, estate, industry partnerships, philanthropy (corporate and individual), and state. National trends show that states are contributing less funding, which is also the case in Virginia.
 - Moving forward, additional funding will be needed, and employee efficiency will need to be optimized. The recent reallocation exercise was mentioned.
 - viii. Provost Clarke posed questions to the Faculty Senate: If you agree that the Virginia Tech Global Distinction initiative will move the university forward, resulting in additional resources, how would the Senate spend the money that is received? What is the senate's narrative or justification for the VT Global Distinction? How does the senate suggest balancing the issues of inclusivity and exclusivity? How can teaching, research, outreach, and service be balanced?
 - ix. Senators referred to charts of metrics that reflect Virginia Tech's current standing. There is work to do to move up in the rankings. Suggestions were made to consider curriculum changes and faculty morale and the positive impacts that changes in these areas could have.
3. The discussion on classroom availability was not held due to time constraints.

Open Floor Discussion

4. Due to time constraints, no open floor discussion was held.

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