



Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

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

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

April 12, 2024 @ 2:30pm

Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Joe Merola (presiding) Monty Abbas, Luke Achenie, Onwubiko Agozino, Diane Agud, Richard Ashley, Paul Avey, Azziza Bankole, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Young Cao (Alternate for Adrian Sandu), Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Josh Clemons, Rebecca Cockrum, Nick Copeland, Ashley Dayer, Jonathan Everett, Stuart Feigenbaum, Carla Finkielstein, Zhuo Fu, Becky Funk, Rodney Gaines, Scott Gartner, Aaron Gross (Alternate for Jonathan Auguste), Wesley Gwaltney, James Hawdon, Ivan Hernandez (Alternate for Robin Panneton), Rebecca Hester, David Hicks, Daniel Hindman, Leanna House, Mantu Hudait, Joseph Hughes, Scott Huxtable, Ran Jin, Bryan Katz, Alex Kinnaman, Matthew Komelski (Alternate for Rose Weshe), Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Justin Lemkul, Gary Long, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Michelle Maycock, Rachel Miles, Gonzalo Montero, Zhange Ni, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Yuchin Pan, Nicole Pitterson, Steve Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Nicholas Robbins, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Cori Ruktanonchai, Charles J. Schlepner, Richard Shryock, Stephanie Smith, Keith Stephenson, Annie Stevens (Alternate for Kim Loeffert), Laura Strawn, Chi Ta (Alternate for Catherine Larochelle), Jay Teets, Chelsea Thompto, Jim Tokuhisa, Kwok Tsui, Alp Tural (Alternate for Bill Green), Costin Untaroiu, Bimal Viswanath, Jeffrey Walling, Jerald Walz, Robert Weiss, Ashley Wilkinson, Angelica Witcher Walker, Erin Worthington, Diane Zahm, Lizette Zietsman (79)

Guests: Sherif Abdelaziz, Danna Agmon, Liora Goldensher, Edna Jasso, Holly Kindsvater, April Myers, Kiera Schneiderman, Dee Dee Somervell (8)

Absent with Notice: Charles Lowery, Randolph Wynne (2)

Absent: Kaveh Akbari Hamed, Mark Coggins, Carolyn Commer, Kristy Daniels, David Gregory, Casey Jim, Young-Teck Kim, Guo-Quan Lu, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, Nino Ripepi, Hans Robinson, Karen Schnatterly, Yang Shao, Eric Stanley, Hehuang Xie, Yan Xu (16)

Call to Order by the President Joe Merola at 2:30

- **Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Joe Merola)**
- Consent agenda was adopted:
 - Minutes for 03-29-2024 ([Link](#))
 - Agenda for 04-12-2024 ([Link](#))
 - Faculty Senate Comments on CSPA 2023-24B: Resolution to Form a Task Force to Review Supplement Program for Eligible Staff and Compensation for Staff and Non-Student Wage Employees
 - Ratification of UC Resolution 2023-24B: Resolution to Revise the University Council Constitution

Business Agenda

Unfinished Business

1. Updates & Announcements
 - a. Updates from Committees, Commissions, and University Council can be found on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.
 - b. A Faculty Senate End-of-the-Year Reception will be held immediately following the final Faculty Senate meeting on April 26, 2024. The reception will be held in the Smithfield Room of the Inn at Virginia Tech. All Faculty Senators and Senator Alternates are invited to attend. Please RSVP to Rachel Miles.
 - c. The Faculty Senate is working to fill required faculty positions on shared governance commissions, committees, and University Council. Some of these positions require that representatives be a Faculty Senator, others are open to eligible faculty representatives. To assist with filling these positions, senators are asked to respond to the preference survey. The survey link is available on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.
2. Justin Lemkul presented for 2nd reading and vote CFA 2023-2024F: Resolution to Revise Faculty Handbook Language on Nominations to University Distinguished Professor and Alumni Distinguished Professor.
 - a. This resolution updates the Faculty Handbook, allowing either the Virginia Tech President or Provost, in consultation with deans and committees, to make nominations, providing another avenue for faculty to receive this recognition.
 - b. A motion was made and seconded to adopt CFA 2023-2024F: Resolution to Revise Faculty Handbook Language on Nominations to University Distinguished Professor and Alumni Distinguished Professor. Motion carried.
 - c. Voting: 65 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstain

3. Justin Lemkul presented for 2nd reading and vote CFA 2023-2024G: Resolution to Update the Faculty Handbook Description of Expectations for Promotion and Tenure.
 - a. This resolution includes small revisions particularly in the context of clinical faculty in Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. College deans have been consulted and are supportive of the changes.
 - b. A motion was made and seconded to adopt CFA 2023-2024G: Resolution to Update the Faculty Handbook Description of Expectations for Promotion and Tenure. Motion carried.
 - c. Voting: 64 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain

New Business

4. Robert Weiss announced the election of Faculty Senate Officers for the 2024-2025 academic year. A slate of officers was presented to the Faculty Senate Cabinet and approved.
 - a. A motion was made and seconded to vote on the slate of officers presented. Motion carried.
 - President – Rachel Miles
 - Vice President – Evan Lavender-Smith
 - Operations Officer – Justin Lemkul
 - b. No nominations were received from the floor. Nominees provided short remarks on goals and subjects to be addressed for the upcoming academic year.
 - c. Voting was conducted, and all candidates were elected.
 - President – Rachel Miles (Voting: 67, 5 Abstentions)
 - Vice President – Evan Lavender-Smith (Voting: 69, 3 Abstentions)
 - Operations Officer – Justin Lemkul (Voting: 69, 3 Abstentions)
5. Joe Merola introduced Sharon Pitt, Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer.
 - a. Vice President Pitt provided remarks, beginning with an overview of five distinct areas of focus. Goals were shared, and include creating an even more effective organization, building increased trust, actively engaging with IT professionals across the university, and increasing opportunities to obtain feedback.
 - b. Technical debt, technical liability due to old technology solutions that have become expensive to maintain and secure, and difficult to change, was mentioned. Virginia Tech's administrative systems will be reviewed, with the intention of making changes that will be more responsive, provide better data,

and be stabilizing. The first area of focus is a new student information system. Review and changes will be a multi-year effort.

- c. The process to develop an information technology strategic plan is expected to begin by the summer and be complete in 2025. Faculty will be engaged in this process during the upcoming academic year.
- d. An AI working group is being established; additional information will be forthcoming. This working group will ultimately begin to define ongoing governance structures surrounding AI and will incorporate the many areas where it may be used, from academics to research. The group includes faculty representation, Evan Lavender-Smith, who is the Faculty Senate Vice President.
- e. Upon concluding remarks, Vice President Pitt opened the floor for questions. Questions and discussion included the following topics:
 - i. Staffing levels at the unit level: processes are being implemented that will help units understand staffing and needs, and guide future decisions.
 - ii. IT Governance: a need exists for a healthy IT governance system. This area will be reviewed, and decisions will be made around adequate representation (including faculty, staff, students) and ensuring that committees encompass the correct areas.
 - iii. There has been discussion regarding the dissolution of the Information Technology Services and Systems Committee. This committee has not met in recent years. Discussion was held about this and other IT committees and the need for faculty representation. Vice President Pitt would like to receive recommendations from the Faculty Senate regarding engagement and representation, including not only committee membership but also group structure to ensure all areas are addressed.

Unfinished Business, Continued

6. Robert Weiss introduced discussion of Faculty Senate Cabinet recommendations on the Statement on Palestine and Higher Education.
 - a. The floor was opened for comments and several senators spoke. Comments included personal experiences, summaries of the current situation in Gaza, Virginia Tech, and declarations of support for the original statement.
 - b. A motion was made and seconded to adopt the Statement on Palestine and Higher Education.
 - i. Comments of concern included statements received by senators from faculty in their department, concerns with the substance and specific language/text included in the statement, and viewpoints that the

statement topic is not within the charge or scope of the Faculty Senate. Additional comments of support for the statement as originally written were shared.

- ii. A motion for the previous question was made and seconded. Motion carried. (Voting: 57 Yes, 1 No)
 - iii. The Previous Question was restated: Motion to adopt the Statement on Palestine and Higher Education. Motion was not approved. (Voting: 15 Yes, 42 No, 10 Abstain).
- c. A motion was made and seconded to extend the meeting by 15 minutes. Motion was not approved, but Faculty Senate President Joe Merola extended the meeting by executive order.
- d. A motion was made and seconded to convene a Faculty Senate work group that would draft an alternative Faculty Senate statement on Palestine and solidarity for those affected by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.
- i. Discussion was held, items of interest included the parameters of the committee and committee membership.
 - ii. A motion was made and seconded to amend the charge of the workgroup to include the following:

Committee must include faculty with expertise in human rights, political violence, war, collective trauma, genocide, displacement, politics in the Middle East. The statement must be grounded in international law and human rights law, as demanded by the senate constitution, the principles of community, and the land and labor acknowledgement. If you are opposed to human rights, support genocide, or do not believe international law applies to Israel, you should not be allowed on the committee.

Ceasefire must be immediate and permanent, will include the release of all Palestinian political prisoners as well as hostages held by Hamas, and immediate, enforceable guarantees of unlimited humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. The immediate withdrawal of all Israeli troops from occupied territories and commitment to rebuild Gaza.

Criticism of attacks on education must identify Israel as the perpetrator, as they are the only party engaging in these systematic attacks, and must talk about why they are doing it, the strategic logic and history behind it.

Our sorrow and anguish for the killing must not treat both sides as equally responsible. Israel is the only party that has "killed tens of

thousands". It must include sorrow and anguish for apartheid, forced removal, and forced starvation.

The statement of solidarity and support for members of the VT community who are affected is great, but it must include a discussion of VT's complicity in Israeli violence.

- iii. Discussion was held, including comments in support of the amendment and comments of concern about the amendment.
- iv. A motion for the previous question was made and seconded. Motion carried. (Voting: 61 Yes, 2 No)
- v. Previous Question was restated: Motion to amend the charge of the committee to include the provided text. Motion was not approved. (Voting: 13 Yes, 52 No)
- vi. A motion was made and seconded to extend the meeting by 15 minutes. Motion was not approved, but Faculty Senate President Joe Merola extended the meeting by executive order.
- vii. A motion for the previous question was made and seconded. Motion carried. (Voting: 57 Yes, 2 No)
- viii. Previous Question was repeated: Motion to form a Faculty Senate workgroup that would draft an alternative Faculty Senate statement in support of Palestine. Motion did not pass. (Voting: 28 Yes, 33 No, 6 Abstain)
- e. Section 7, Accountability, of the Virginia Tech Principles of Shared Governance, was read, which concerns exigent circumstances allowing university leaders to act outside the structure of shared governance. Some senators feel that many people have voted against the statement because it is not a legislative recommendation and exists beyond the scope of the Senate's charge and/or outside the structure of shared governance.
 - i. A motion was made and seconded to request that the University Council immediately form a committee to draft a statement on behalf of the University and that the committee includes Faculty Senate Officers as well as other faculty with expertise on the topic.
 - ii. Discussion was held, with comments both for and opposed to the motion.
 - iii. Motion carried. (Voting: 27 Yes, 25 No, 6 Abstain)

Open Floor Discussion

- 7. Due to time constraints, there was no open floor discussion.

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:47 p.m.