



Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

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

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

April 26, 2024 @ 2:30pm

Torgersen 1050 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Joseph Merola (presiding), Montasir Abbas, Luke Achenie, Onwubiko Agozino, Diane Agud, Kaveh Akbari Hamed, Richard Ashley, Jonathan Auguste, Paul Avey, Azziza Bankole, Young Cao (alternate for Bimal Viswanath), Scott Case, Guopeng Cheng, Joshua Clemons, Rebecca Cockrum, Kristy Daniels, Ashley Dayer, Jonathan Everett, Stuart Feigenbaum, Zhuo Fu, Rodney Gaines, Wesley Gwaltney, James Hawdon, Rebecca Hester, David Hicks, Mantu Hudait, Scott Huxtable, Eli Jamison (alternate for Karen Schnatterly), Ran Jin, Bryan Katz, Alex Kinnaman, Catherine Larochelle, Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Justin Lemkul, Kimberly Loeffert, Gary Long, Charles Lowery, GQ Lu, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Michelle Maycock, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, , Rachel Miles, Zhange Ni, Greg Novack, Thomas O'Donnell, Yuchin Pan, Robin Panneton, Nicole Pitterson, Cori Ruktanonchai, Steven Rideout, Susanna Rinehart, Nicholas Robbins, Jane Robertson Evia (alternate for Nicholas Robbins), Hans Robinson, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Adrian Sandu, Charles Schleupner, Richard Shryock, Stephanie Smith, Laura Strawn, Jay Teets, Jim Tokuhisa, Kwokleung Tsui, Alp Tural (alternate for Bill Green), Costin Untaroiu, Rose Wesche, Jerald Walz, Robert Weiss, Ashley Wilkinson, Erin 'Nikki' Worthington, Yan Xu, Lizette Zietsman (75)

Guests: Sherif Abdelaziz, Edna Jasso-Hernandez, April Myers, Demetria Somervell (4)

Absent with Notice: Chelsea Thompto (1)

Absent: Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Mark Coggins, Carolyn Commer, Nick Copeland, Carla Finkelstein, Scott Gartner, David Gregory, Daniel Hindman, Leanna House, Joseph Hughes, Casey Jim, Young-Teck Kim, Gonzalo Montero, Nino Ripepi, Yang Shao, Eric Stanley, Keith Stephenson, Jeffrey Walling, Angelica Witcher Walker, Hehuang Xie, Diane Zahm (21)

Call to Order by the President Joe Merola at 2:34

Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Joe Merola)

- Consent agenda was adopted:
 - Minutes for 04-12-2024 ([Link](#))
 - Agenda for 04-26-2024 ([Link](#))

Business Agenda

Old Business

1. Updates & Announcements
 - a. Senators were asked to submit any final updates from university committees and commissions. Updates are available for review on the Faculty Senate SharePoint site.
 - b. Beyond Boundaries Draft Report. Senators who want to provide feedback on this draft report should send their comments to the Faculty Senate leadership team.

New Business

2. Joe Merola welcomed Virginia Tech President Tim Sands for discussion and a Q & A session.
 - a. President Sands thanked senators for their service to the university and provided opening remarks. He spoke about the Virginia Tech Advantage and the Virginia Tech Global Distinction initiatives and mentioned challenges that Virginia Tech and other higher education institutions are facing.
 - b. Questions and discussion included the following:
 - i. Virginia Tech Global Distinction initiative.
 - Limited discussion on whether this is a good fit for a university mission initiative (UMI). President Sands reported that a committee will be assembled early in the fall semester to develop criteria and examples of UMIs, with expectations that the recommendations will be presented to University Council Cabinet by the end of the semester. He is unable at this time to determine whether global distinction is a good fit as a UMI.
 - General information on the initiative was mentioned, including information on the steering committee tasked with advancing the global distinction priority, the goals of the initiative which include attracting and retaining talent and partners, and opportunities the initiative will provide to faculty and students.
 - President Sands feels that faculty involvement is vital, that faculty input is important in defining impactful scholarship, and that departments will need to make decisions on how to elevate visibility and increase impact.

- President Sands mentioned accomplishments that have been realized in the past decade, including increased name recognition, broader and more ambitious partners, and the university's level of interdisciplinary strength and ability to mobilize across boundaries.
 - Virginia Tech's multiple campuses and the Agricultural Research and Extension Centers (ARECs) which are located across the commonwealth, along with international opportunities such as the Steger Center in Switzerland and research collaboration in Botswana, were mentioned. It is expected that study abroad will be part of the Global Distinction conversation. The Virginia Tech Advantage initiative will help students be able to participate in impactful opportunities like study abroad, research participation, and paid internships.
- ii. Climate survey findings presented by the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) at the April 22 University Council meeting. The Graduate Student Dean has been charged with convening a task force to address concerns identified by the survey. Lengthy discussion was held on this topic.
- President Sands stated that this information was only recently shared, and a detailed plan has not yet been created. Meetings will be scheduled with department heads, deans, and administration. Comments were shared indicating that cultural change, grassroots movements in individual departments, and roles taken on by administration will all be needed.
 - Senators were invited to offer their thoughts, and a variety of comments were shared, including concern that many graduate students do not file reports, not because they do not know the process but because they do not trust the process; the importance of employee relations and interactions; and the role and services provided by the Ombuds for the Graduate School.
 - An executive report, which will include more detailed information, will be distributed by the GPSS. Once that is received, it will be shared with senators.
- iii. Facilities planning, the impacts of Randolph Hall being offline, and challenges. President Sands commented on the closure of Randolph Hall and classroom capacity. The university has capacity from 8:00 – 5:00, is struggling from 10:00 – 2:00, and the number of unscheduled classrooms this year is not higher than in the previous semester. Local

departments may see differences in their individual areas. Departments are encouraged to speak with Rick Sparks, University Registrar, regarding their individual challenges.

- iv. The student protest at the Graduate Life Center. President Sands commented on the right to protest; public safety; requirements outlined in Policy 5000, Facilities Usage and Events; and the need for all groups to be treated equally. He stated that the university has frequently met with the students and works to avoid escalation.
3. Joe Merola introduced the election of faculty representatives and faculty senators to University Council, commissions, committees, and the election of commission chairs. The ballot contains a link to bios of candidates competing for positions with multiple nominees.
 - a. A call for any nominations from the floor was made. Positions for which no nominees have been received were noted: representatives to University Council for the College of Architecture, Arts and Design; the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine; and the College of Natural Resources and Environment.
 - i. A nomination from the floor was received for representative to University Council for the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine: Cori Ruktanonchai
 - b. Election results for committees:
 - i. Athletics Committee
 - Eric Martin was elected (Voting: 62 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - ii. Budgeting and Planning
 - Sherif L. Abdelaziz was elected (Voting: 61 Yes, 2 Abstain)
 - iii. Campus Development Committee (first position)
 - Brett Jones was elected (Voting: 63 Yes)
 - iv. Campus Development Committee (second position)
 - Victoria Sghomonian was elected (Voting: 62 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - v. Employee Benefits Committee
 - GQ Lu was elected (Voting: 61 Yes)
 - vi. Library Committee
 - Greg Novak was elected (Voting: 62 Yes)
 - vii. Transportation and Parking Committee
 - Jake Lahne was elected (Voting: 62 Yes)
 - viii. University Curriculum Committee for General Education
 - Marian Mollin was elected (Voting: 14 Yes)
 - ix. Climate Action, Sustainability, and Energy Committee
 - Irene Leech was elected (Voting: 30 Yes)

- c. Election results for commissions
 - i. Commission on Faculty Affairs (first position)
 - Kim Loeffert was elected (Voting: 62 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - ii. Commission on Faculty Affairs (second position)
 - Rodney Gaines was elected (Voting: 59 Yes, 4 Abstain)
 - iii. Commission on Faculty Affairs (third position)
 - Virginia Buechner-Maxwell was elected (Voting: 61 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - iv. Commission on Research
 - Nick Copeland was elected (Voting: 44 Yes, 18 Abstain)
 - v. Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies
 - April Fu was elected (Voting: 60 Yes, 2 Abstain)
 - d. Election results for Commission Chairs
 - i. Chair, Commission on Faculty Affairs
 - Justin Lemkul was elected (62 Yes)
 - ii. Chair, Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies
 - Renee LeClair was elected (62 Yes)
 - iii. Chair, Commission on Research
 - Nicole Pitterson was elected (60 Yes, 1 Abstain)
 - iv. Chair, Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies
 - Jim Tokuhisa was elected (61 Yes)
 - e. Election results for representatives to University Council
 - i. College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
 - Rebecca Hester was elected (63 Yes)
 - ii. Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine
 - Cori Ruktanonchai (54 Yes, 3 Abstain, 2 Other)
4. Joe Merola introduced Juan Espinoza, Associate Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Director of Undergraduate Admissions, and Rick Sparks, University Registrar, who presented an update on test-optional admissions.
- a. Opening remarks were given and faculty were invited to provide feedback on test-optional admissions. One additional cohort will be brought in under test-optional standards. The university must decide on test-optional admissions.
 - b. Several items related to test-optional admissions were mentioned for consideration: (1) Readiness concerns that the university is experiencing are tied to the pandemic and must be separated from test-optional admissions. (2) Test-optional admissions is an access tool. Virginia Tech, in alignment with its land grant mission, wants to remain accessible. (3) Growth in admissions and increased diversity have been experienced after test-optional admissions was instituted. (4) Test-optional practices remove barriers, reduce student stress, and encourage a more holistic view for admissions.

- c. An overview of data was presented. Data can be sorted by in-state and out-of-state/international, by college, and by population (for example under-represented and first generation). A profile comparison of students who did not submit test scores and those that did, and their GPAs was also shown; there was no distinct difference between the two categories. Data can also be filtered by individual departments.
- d. Rick Sparks discussed student success and graduation rates. While impacts from COVID are still being seen, Virginia Tech has not seen the impact that other universities have. The separation between COVID and test-optional admissions can be determined more clearly in about a year. It does not appear that there are any differences in success between students who submitted test scores and those who were test-optional.
- e. It was noted that other universities have continued test-optional admissions. Limited discussion was held about research reported from some universities that suggest success for engineering students is predicted by test scores. Responses to this report included that every institution is different, and Virginia Tech's holistic and sophisticated review process does predict success.
- f. Senators are encouraged to email comments or questions to Evan Lavender-Smith.

Open Floor Discussion

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

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 4:04 p.m.