

Commission on Faculty Affairs

RESOLUTION TO AMEND THE FACULTY SENATE CONSTITUTION TO ESTABLISH A DISCUSSION FORUM UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE FACULTY SENATE

CFA 2024-25C

Draft Notice Sent to University Council Cabinet	August 22, 2024
First Reading by Commission on Faculty Affairs	January 31, 2025
Approval by Commission on Faculty Affairs	February 14, 2025
First Reading by Faculty Senate	February 7, 2025
Approval by Faculty Senate	February 21, 2025
Staff Senate Comment	February 11, 2025
Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate Comment	February 13, 2025
Graduate and Professional Student Senate Comment	February 1, 2025
Undergraduate Student Senate Comment	None Received
First Reading, University Council	March 3, 2025
Approved, University Council	March 17, 2025
Approved, President	March 18, 2025
Effective Date	Upon Approval

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech is committed to upholding academic freedom and promoting constructive discourse and free speech; and

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech and the faculty it represents have a commitment to the education of the students of the university; and

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech and the faculty it represents are also committed to providing students with viewpoints on issues that are informed by scholarly work; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, the Board of Visitors endorsed a series of recommendations for promoting freedom of speech and free expression of ideas on the Virginia Tech campus, including inviting distinguished speakers to engage in civil debate and discourse, and to engage the senates in discussing issues, while exercising the rights of academic freedom and freedom of speech; and

WHEREAS, issues may come before the Virginia Tech community that do not belong within the scope of any senate or within shared governance more broadly; and

WHEREAS, discussing these issues with civility and respect is critical to the educational mission of the university and will allow faculty to contribute their unique scholarly

expertise, mentorship, and guidance in facilitating discussions among individuals with differing viewpoints;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech shall establish a periodic discussion forum for issues of pressing societal importance, with the stated purpose of providing a space for civil discourse of challenging topics for the purposes of educating faculty, staff, students, and the community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech shall operate this discussion forum, including coordinating moderator(s) and other contributors, identifying suitable venues in consultation with university officials, and establishing the rules of decorum for these discussions, and that Article III of the Faculty Senate Constitution be modified as shown below in red to establish this responsibility.

Proposed Article III of the Faculty Senate Constitution (changes in red)

More specifically, the functions of the Faculty Senate are to:

- Provide leadership in the formulation of academic and educational policies.
- Develop policy recommendations both within the Senate and through its assigned commissions that advance the interests of faculty and the missions of the university.
- Express the views and preferences of faculty regarding university affairs and policy recommendations that impact faculty no matter their point of origin within our system of shared governance.
- Apply the disciplinary knowledge and perspective of faculty members to the issues and aims of shared governance.
- Coordinate the efforts of and partner with the college faculty associations.
- Advise and respond to the university commissions, the University Council, the administration, and the Board of Visitors on university affairs.
- Actively communicate with the other participants in shared governance through formal and informal channels in a timely manner.
- Accept and share responsibility with the administration, staff, and students in all efforts to improve the stature and usefulness of the university.
- Elect, appoint, or recommend members to the University Council, senate and university commissions, and university standing committees.
- Provide referral for individual concerns and issues to appropriate organizations or personnel.
- Evaluate the nature and procedures of the Faculty Senate in an ongoing manner in order to improve the senate's ability to fulfill its purpose and carry out its functions.
- **Facilitate occasional discussion forums that meet outside of regular Faculty Senate meetings to discuss issues of importance to faculty, staff, students, and members of the Virginia Tech community that are informed by the scholarly expertise of the faculty.**

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February 13, 2025

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

From: A/P Faculty Senate Polices and Issues Committee

The A/P Faculty Senate Polices and Issues Committee has reviewed and approves/endorsees the Commission on Faculty Affairs Resolution 2024-25C to Establish a Discussion Forum Under the Purview of the Faculty Senate.

The following comments were made:

- That is very vague. Who determines what the issues of importance are?
- I support this but would like clarity on the purpose of this forum. Is the purpose of this body to just civilly discuss but with no resolution. There is power in providing our community with a voice, but what would be the path forward for issues? Who can bring forth issues? Only faculty? What does that process look like? What happens after the forum meets and discusses and determines there's an issue but it still doesn't fall under senate or governance?
- There could be more clarity on how this will be operationalized. Will faculty senate forums include only those topics related to teaching and research faculty? Will forums be open to the public or invite-only? Do you have to be a voting member of another senate to attend? Will forums be separated to reflect the needs of AP faculty, GP students, and UG students, as they will have different needs and perspectives? Can the other senates establish their own forums? Will the forums be recorded and shared with the community for those who are unable to attend? How will the forum moderators mitigate the loudest voices potentially being the only view point(s) heard?



Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS)

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Comment on CFA 2024-25C:

The Graduate and Professional Student Senate waives its right to comment on CFA 2024-25C:
RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH A DISCUSSION FORUM UNDER THE PURVIEW OF THE FACULTY
SENATE.

On behalf of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate,
Ronnie Mondal
President

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ADHOC COMMITTEES

Staff Senate

<http://www.staffsenate.vt.edu/>

February 11, 2025

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and overall approves CFA Resolution 2024-25C. We do have several questions for clarification and one point where it appears that an omission is present.

1. Are there current avenues for this kind of discussion already available at the University?
2. The term “periodic” is very vague. Would you consider defining this term more specifically, perhaps with a frequency or minimum?
3. What is considered an “issue of pressing societal importance”? How will it be decided what issues require this level of discussion?
4. Are there financial implications to this and who is responsible for funding?
5. In the resolution it reads as follows:
“**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech shall establish a periodic discussion forum for issues of pressing societal importance, with the stated purpose of providing a space for civil discourse of challenging topics for the purposes of **educating faculty, staff, students, and the community**; and...”

The addition to the Faculty Handbook reads, “**Host periodic discussion forums on issues of importance to faculty, students, and the Virginia Tech community.**”

“Staff” is missing in the wording in the modification to the Faculty Handbook. Shouldn’t the wording in the two paragraphs match?

Additionally, is “the community” as defined in the resolution the same as “the Virginia Tech community” as defined in the addition to the Faculty Handbook? If so, these terms should match. If not then perhaps the wording for both the resolution and the Faculty Handbook should be “faculty, staff, students, the Virginia Tech community, and the community at large” or “faculty, staff, students, the Virginia Tech community, and the broader community”.

We have no further comment.

**Thank you,
Amber Robinson, Chair Staff Senate Policies and
Issues Committee**