

Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies
Resolution to Form a Working Group to Formulate University Policy to Combat
Unprofessional Behaviors Towards Graduate and Professional Students
CGPSP 2024-25A

Draft Notice Sent to University Council Cabinet	September 23, 2024
First Reading by Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies	October 16, 2024
Approval by Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Polices	November 6, 2024
First Reading by Faculty Senate	October 25, 2024
Approval by Faculty Senate	November 8, 2024
Staff Senate Comment	October 21, 2024
Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate Comment	October 28, 2024
Graduate and Professional Student Senate Comment	October 8, 2024
Undergraduate Student Senate Waived Right to Comment	November 8, 2024
First Reading, University Council	December 2, 2024
Approved, University Council	February 3, 2025
Approved, President	February 14, 2025
Effective Date	Upon Approval

WHEREAS, fostering a professional, respectful, and safe academic and working environment is critical to Virginia Tech’s mission and the well-being of its faculty, staff, students, and employees, as outlined in Virginia Tech's Principles of Community, which affirm the *inherent dignity* and *value* of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding; and

WHEREAS, instances of bullying, unprofessional, non-collegial, and toxic behavior within the Virginia Tech community negatively impact morale, hinder collaboration, and create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation¹ that is not conducive to working or learning; and

WHEREAS, the climate survey² conducted by the Graduate and Professional Student Senate in 2024 indicates clear systematic instances of various forms of mistreatment across the university involving graduate students in their interactions with faculty, with underrepresented minority students experiencing or witnessing it to a greater extent; and

WHEREAS, the university currently lacks a standardized, institution-wide policy that clearly defines jurisdiction, protections against retaliation, or sanctions for non-student members of our community who engage in such misconduct; and

WHEREAS, addressing these behaviors in a consistent and transparent manner is essential to maintaining a healthy academic community and ensuring accountability at all levels of the university; and

WHEREAS, several universities across the country, including both peer institutions and aspirational ones as identified by Virginia Tech, have implemented such policies at various levels through similar Working Groups³⁻¹⁶; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the President and Executive Vice President and Provost of Virginia Tech shall sponsor, in accordance with the Guidelines for the Creation of Work Groups, Task Forces, and other ad hoc Committees¹⁷, and with the advice of all constituent groups, a Working Group consisting of members of the graduate student body, faculty, staff, and university administrators. The President and Provost shall choose a chair of the Working Group in consultation with the Faculty Senate, and a co-chair in consultation with the Graduate and Professional Student Senate. The Working Group shall report to the President and the Provost; and

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the function of the Working Group shall be to provide a public report and policy recommendations, by the beginning of the Fall 2025, to:

1. Formulate recommendations for a university-wide policy that includes a clearly defined centralized jurisdiction, a written set of procedures, anti-retaliation clauses, and sanctions for those who engage in these behaviors, while eliminating different standards based on rank, status or tenure, and incorporating both punitive and restorative justice methods;
2. Define bullying, unprofessional, and non-collegial behavior from research, teaching and A/P faculty, staff, post-docs, and administrators towards graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech that is consistent with definitions used across all university units;
3. Standardize a centralized grievance process and response across academic and non-academic units in Virginia Tech, while providing them guidelines on proper implementation;
4. Reconcile the policy and associated procedures with the decentralized structure of Virginia Tech while maintaining an accountable, accessible and transparent process with centralized record-keeping to enable future data-driven analysis and review of policy changes implemented while rectifying existing policy gaps or inconsistencies;

REFERENCES:

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8. University of California Berkeley. Workplace bullying prevention policy, 2024. <https://campuspol.berkeley.edu/Policies/Bullying.pdf>.
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14. Cornell University. Bullying policy draft, 2024. <https://assembly.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/bullying-policy-draftv1.docx>.
15. Ohio State University. Policy 705. hr.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/policy705-faq.pdf
16. University of California, Davis. *Abusive Conduct in the Workplace*. hr.ucdavis.edu/departments/elr/policies/abusive-conduct
17. <https://policies.vt.edu/assets/Guidelines-for-Creation-of-Work-Groups-and-Other-ad-hoc-Committees.pdf>



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Comment on CGPSP 2024-25A:

The resolution CGPSP 2024-25A (RESOLUTION TO FORM A WORKING GROUP TO FORMULATE UNIVERSITY POLICY TO COMBAT UNPROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS TOWARDS GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS) is a very positive step towards addressing one of the core concerns surrounding academic bullying and unprofessional behavior towards graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech. This draft has been written with feedback from the Faculty Senate leadership and various administrators (with thanks to Dr Ron Fricker and Dr Aimee Surprenant), with hope that only with a collaborative way forward can we even begin to address the nebulous problem that lies before us. Proactive steps such as this working group need to be implemented to create a more respectful and supportive academic environment.

We support the resolution as written in the draft.

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



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Staff Senate

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

October 21, 2024

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and approves CGPSP Resolution 2024-25A.

We do have a few comments and questions for consideration.

Our understanding is that this resolution is intended to establish a working group to help develop protections for graduate and professional students. Would these protections also be extended to post-docs? If so, can that be explicitly stated? If not, would you consider including post-docs?

Another item for consideration involves the composition of the proposed working group. How will the other group members be chosen? What is the intended size of this group? Should there be a process to ensure impartial selectivity, such as a nomination and vetting process?

We have no further comment.

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

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October 28, 2024

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 Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies Resolution 2024-25A to Form a Working Group to Formulate University Policy to Combat Unprofessional Behavior Towards Graduate and Professional Students. The following comments were provided:

- While I cannot locate the communication, I remember that this topic was brought up previously and that VT already had anti-discrimination policies and procedures in place that covered bullying and that further awareness needed to be brought to highlight those resources.
- I'm very supportive of this resolution, but I feel that it should be expanded to not only include those actions directed at graduate/professional students, but to also include these behaviors between employees as well. I have been dealing first-hand with an instance of non-collegial behavior with another faculty member, and the current policies provide no real means of redress.
- Is this something that could be handled or addressed through student conduct departments?

We have no further comment.

Renee J. LeClair, Ph.D., M.A.E.d., Chair, Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies

November 6th, 2024

Memorandum: Response to comments on Resolution CGPSP 2024-25A

Summary of comments and responses from the Commission:

Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS)

Thank you for the letter of support. No requested modifications from GPSS.

Staff Senate

Thank you for your thoughtful review of the resolution. Below are the responses to the questions posed:

- 1) Our understanding is that this resolution is intended to establish a working group to help develop protections for graduate and professional students. Would these protections also be extended to post-docs? If so, can that be explicitly stated? If not, would you consider including post-docs?
 - a. **Response:** Post-docs are considered research faculty and are beyond the scope of CGPSP. This resolution could be used as a model for other commissions to generate such a process to address the needs of this group.

- 2) Another item for consideration involves the composition of the proposed working group. How will the other group members be chosen? What is the intended size of this group? Should there be a process to ensure impartial selectivity, such as a nomination and vetting process?
 - a. **Response:** The composition of the committee will ultimately be determined by the Provost, should this resolution be approved. The composition will follow University guidelines outlines in: <https://policies.vt.edu/assets/Guidelines-for-Creation-of-Work-Groups-and-Other-ad-hoc-Committees.pdf>.

Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate

- 1) While I cannot locate the communication, I remember that this topic was brought up previously and that VT already had anti-discrimination policies and procedures in place that covered bullying and that further awareness needed to be brought to highlight those resources.
 - a. **Response:** While more awareness of existing policies would be positive it is not the focus of this resolution. Student Conduct policy applies to **students** addressing student-on-student concerns; a policy to address student-faculty conduct is lacking. This resolution seeks to address this gap. The working group will review existing policies, find gaps and inconsistencies, and recommend solutions.

- 2) I'm very supportive of this resolution, but I feel that it should be expanded to not only include those actions directed at graduate/professional students, but to also include these behaviors between employees as well. I have been dealing first-hand with an instance of noncollegial behavior with another faculty member, and the current policies provide no real means of redress.
 - a. **Response:** We agree with this concern. Once we have a model that works for graduate students, we can then use it to provide similar guidance or other parts of the VT community, but that is beyond the scope of this resolution.

- 3) Is this something that could be handled or addressed through student conduct departments?
- a. **Response:** How individual cases are handled will be part of the working group. Please see comment above regarding the gap in the student conduct policy.

On behalf of the CGPSP,
Very best,



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