Resolution was Withdrawn by the Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies on April 20, 2022, because other channels are being pursued.

Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies
CGPSP Resolution 2021-22C
Resolution to Establish a University Policy Governing Stakeholder Representation on Task Forces and Working Groups

Approved by GPSS: September 9, 2021
Approved by CGPSP: April 6, 2022
Staff Senate Review: March 18, 2022
Faculty Senate Review: November 23, 2021
A/P Faculty Senate Review: November 11, 2021
Undergraduate Student Senate waived right to comment: April 18, 2022
First Reading by University Council: April 18, 2022
Resolution Withdrawn by CGPSP: April 20, 2022

WHEREAS, task forces and working groups are a crucial part of the university workflow and are the main research and implementation mechanism for many university policies; and

WHEREAS, to date, there is no general policy for who should be represented on task forces; and

WHEREAS, this ambiguity has led, at times, to the exclusion or underrepresentation of those most affected by certain university policies from the task forces that change or implement those policies; and

WHEREAS, for example, the campus accessibility working group has had minimal representation from disabled members of the Virginia Tech community, despite the insights and relevance the disability alliance and caucus has to campus accessibility; and

WHEREAS, for example, the recent graduate education task force had only one graduate student member, the group most affected by the task force’s findings; and

WHEREAS, for example, the 2020 climate action commitment task force initially excluded the majority of climate activists who raised this issue to the university’s attention despite their expressed desire to be involved, leading students and faculty to use other channels to get onto the task force in order to participate; and

WHEREAS, most recently, when it was convened the second Sexual Violence Culture and Climate Work Group did not contain any graduate student representation nor members from the
student organization United Feminist Movement whose advocacy led to the formation of the work group; and

WHEREAS, these omissions are inconsistent with the university’s commitment to *Ut Prosim* and often exclude the most passionate and most affected members of the community from making changes to the university; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that some flexibility is necessary for providing the kind of workflow that task forces and working groups require to fulfill their charges, and so the goal of this resolution is not to limit the flexibility of working groups but rather to attune them to the university community; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED Virginia Tech will adopt a new university policy, as described in Appendix 1, that establishes task force and working group membership best practices and accountability processes to ensure more representative task forces and working groups moving forward.

**Appendix 1: Task Force and Working Group Stakeholder Policy**

The proposed policy is attached as an attachment alongside the resolution for consideration.
Task Force and Working Group Stakeholder Policy

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to improve the representative composition of task forces and working groups. The goal of working groups and task forces is to provide a flexible way of addressing or changing elements of the Virginia Tech community. As a result, the rules that regulate task forces and working groups need to be kept flexible so that those groups can be convened as problems arise and respond to them quickly and efficiently. To accomplish this goal, this policy sets up some basic guidelines including who to invite as members of task forces and working groups as well as how members from groups most affected by the products of task forces and working groups are made central to the process. The benefits gained include, but are not limited to, improving the involvement of people most affected by policies, aiding in the identification of people with expertise in the area, and offering clarity in the role/function/scope of task forces and working groups.

2.0 Policy

The membership of working groups and task forces can be from any entity across the university and even outside of it, including: students, graduate students, faculty, staff, administration, community members, and outside consultants.

At least one fourth (25%) of the voting members of a working group or task force should be those who are most affected by the proposed policy change and/or those that brought the issue to the attention of the administration. This portion of a working group or task force is hereafter named the stakeholder portion.

Due consideration should be given towards whether a policy affects a particular portion of the campus community as well as for members of the community who bring an issue to the university’s attention as a group. In such cases, these members of that community should comprise the stakeholder portion. Given the university’s land grant commitments and motto of Ut Prosim, it is recommended, where possible, to include a larger proportion of stakeholders. The size of the stakeholder portion should be proportional to the number of stakeholder communities represented, where feasible.

If a plurality of the stakeholder portion withdraws their confidence from the task force or working group (by written communication with the chair of the task force/working group and the administrator who provided the charge), then the administrator may consider actions including reconvening the working group or task force with new leadership, revising the charge to the group, or including the perspectives of the stakeholder group as a dissenting opinion. This process is intended as a mechanism for accountability to the needs of the stakeholders. This procedure is not to be used if there are simply disagreements between members of the committee and is not to be used to delay the work of a task force.
or working group. Task forces work optimally when conclusions and recommendations are reached by consensus-based decision making.

3.0 Procedures

3.1 Establishment of a Task Force or Working Group

Task forces and working groups are led by a chair or co-chairs, which have historically been appointed solely by the administration. Under the 2022 shared governance revisions, this responsibility will be broadened. The convener or body should consider which constituents are most impacted by the task force or working group when nominating a chair and consider nominating someone from the most impacted group.

Following the appointment of a chair, the chair and the convener or body who charged the committee will work to establish the voting membership of a task force or working group. While there is no minimum or maximum occupancy for a task force or working group—nor a quorum that needs to be met—considerations for the size of a working group or task force should work to balance representation and expediency. Composition of the task force should reflect considerations laid out under Policy, above.

3.2 Composition of the Stakeholder Portion

The question of who comprises the stakeholders is an important one. There are generally two criteria that should be considered when establishing the stakeholder portion, which should be discussed between the administration, chair, and community members who may be stakeholders.

The first criterion is who is most impacted by the charge. For example, as Virginia Tech continues to improve its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity initiatives, task forces addressing such initiatives should have a stakeholder portion from the underrepresented groups those DEI initiatives seek to bring to and support at the university. As another example, any task force having to do with improving the built environment of Virginia Tech should consider accessibility and bringing in disabled members of the community to participate. These two examples should serve as guides for how to select a stakeholder portion.

The second criterion is whether there was a group that brought an issue to the university’s attention. Often, a concerned community group will raise an issue to the university’s attention and call for institutional action. In these cases, that group should be included in the stakeholder portion and be empowered to suggest nominees to the working group or task force; these suggested nominees should be included, where practical. Historically, there have been many examples of these groups being included to the benefit of the working group or task force because those individuals passionate enough to bring an issue to the university’s attention will likely be valuable assets on any working group or task force meant to address said issue.

4.0 Definitions

Task Force: A work body at the university whose purpose is to fulfill a given charge by investigating an issue and producing a report for consideration by the administration.
Working Group: Similar body to a task force; as opposed to producing a report, the emphasis in a working group tends to be developing policies.

Chair or Co-Chairs: The leader of a task force or working group who has power over membership, organizes and moderates the meetings, and is responsible for carrying out the charge.

Stakeholder Portion: Those individuals for whom the task force or working group and its products are most relevant and/or who raise an issue to the administration’s attention such that a task force or working group is the product of their advocacy.

5.0 References

6.0 Approval and Revisions
November 23, 2021

Responses to CGPSP Resolutions

**CGPSP 2021-22C (or GPSS 2021-22A)**
Based on our review of the commission charge, the Faculty Senate Cabinet does not believe that the Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies has the authority to advance this resolution. Additionally, the approach advocated by this resolution is problematic, as it would give a portion of task forces or working groups control over the whole.

**CGPSP 2021-22D (or GPSS 2021-22B)**
The Faculty Senate Cabinet supports a review of our current methods of funding graduate students and the consideration of different approaches to how we support them as students, teachers, and researchers, including the duration of their funding.

We do not, however, support this resolution, which would require a substantial funding commitment based solely on the information, opinions, and references contained within the resolution, and would apply the GPSS-recommended approach to task forces and working groups that we have characterized as problematic.

**CGPSP 2021-22E (or GPSS 2021-2022E)**
Waive rights to comment

**CGPSP 2021-22F (or GPSS 2021-22H)**
The Faculty Senate Cabinet believes that Virginia Tech should do everything within its means to provide parental leave and childcare services to all its employees. The pandemic has revealed again just how important these options and services are for the health and well-being of parents and children, as well as the substantial impact that insufficient parental leave and childcare have on equity and advancement, particularly for female employees.

We do not, however, support this resolution, which would require a substantial funding commitment based solely on the information, opinions, and references contained within the resolution; would make policy alterations prior to analyzing their cost; and would apply the GPSS-recommended approach to task forces and working groups that we have characterized as problematic.

Respectfully,

Dr. Robert Weiss
Faculty Senate President

Professor of Natural Hazards
Center for Coastal Studies (Coastal@VT), Director
DRRMVT, Director
Department of Geosciences
March 18, 2022

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and approves CGPS&P Resolution 2021-22C.

We do have a couple of comments.

First, one thing that the draft policy in Appendix 1 does not address is what happens if at least 25% of those most affected by the proposed policy change and/or those that brought the issue to the attention of the administration cannot be found to serve on the working group or task force? We realize that the draft policy states that at least one-fourth of the task force or working group “should be” composed of the aforementioned people but a clarification of what happens in the case that there are not enough of these people should be included.

Secondly, in researching and reviewing the policy process (https://policies.vt.edu/PolicyProcess) and the Policy on Policies (https://policies.vt.edu/assets/1000.pdf), we are unsure if this resolution is the appropriate method to introduce a new policy. The Policy on Policies references the Policy Development Plan which is supposed to provide guidance on policy development and is supposed to be attached to the Policy on Policies but was not. We were unable to locate the Policy Development Plan for further information and investigation.

If this resolution is indeed the appropriate method for introducing new policy, we support this resolution and have no further comment.

Thank you,
Amber Robinson, Chair Staff Senate Policies and Issues Committee
November 11, 2021

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

From: A/P Faculty Senate Policies and Issues Committee

The A/P Faculty Senate has reviewed and does not endorse as written the Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies (CGPSP) Resolution 2021-22C to Establish a University Policy Governing Task Forces and Working Groups. The consensus is that this resolution needs further study and broader input from across the institution.

The following comments were collected during the review process:

- I don't really know if this is necessary but in Appendix 1, where they describe the makeup and representation on the task forces, they do not explicitly include A/P Faculty. Maybe it is assumed that we fall under "Faculty", but since we are actively establishing ourselves in the governance structure and this document is specifically calling out representation, I think it worth mentioning.

- This resolution could be fraught with unintended consequences to the efficient and effective establishment of work groups and task forces. Policy guidance does not need to exist in this arena.

- The proposed policy should be written and presented in the format of a Virginia Tech University Policy to be immediately adopted.

- In theory it's always best to include "stakeholders" in any decision, however this isn't always something that works in practice for every decision that needs to be made. I struggle to endorse this because it would limit the amount of flexibility any decision on campus would have in order to make progress on anything if a workforce had to be created and included 25% stakeholders universally.

- In the campus accessibility working group whereas statement the phrase "openly disabled person" is problematic. There are many invisible disabilities that a person may not choose to disclose.

- I agree with the premise of the resolution but feel it needs more thought.

We have no further comment.