

MINUTES

Commission on Research

May 7, 2026

3:30 – 5:00pm

Zoom

Present – Jan Helge Bøhn (presiding), Gibran Ali, Thomas Archibald, Thomas Bell, Alberto Cano, Yancey Crawford, Joseph Gaeddert, Randy Heflin, Daniel Hindman, Andrew Krum, Atharva Shashank Kokane, Laurel Miner (for Dan Sui), Albert Pan, Daniel Pauly, Jorge Reyes, Connie Stovall, Quinn Thomas, Caitlin Woodson, Jeffrey Walling

Absent with Notice: Ehren Hill, Corinne Noiro, Manisha Singal, Stella Volpe

Absent: LaTawnya Burleson, Kirk Cameron, Rebecca Cockrum, Ronald Gibbons, Dan Givens, Ishveen Kaur, Daniel Lobree, Michelle Theus

Guests: Kim Borkowski, Stacy King, April Myers, Pam VandeVord

Jan Helge Bøhn called the meeting to order at 3:33pm. A quorum was present.

1. Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the agenda. Motion carried.

2. Announcement of approval and posting of minutes of April 9, 2026.

Jan Helge Bøhn noted that these minutes have been voted on electronically and can be publicly accessed on the CoR SharePoint site.

3. New Business

Virginia Tech Transportation Institute Five-Year Review

Pamela VandeVord, Director of Research and Scholarship, Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science (Review Chair) and Jeffrey Walling, College of Engineering representative to the COR, presented on the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) Five-Year Review. Prior to the meeting, commission members were provided with the final report submitted by the VTTI Five-Year Review Committee. The presentation included an overview of the institute, committee charge, review process, data collected, and a summary of findings, including opportunities for growth. The committee developed five recommendations to leverage a coordinated strategy to enhance long-term impact and sustainability across five key areas.

1. **Strengthen Strategic Communications and Brand Amplification.** Elevate VTTI's national leadership through a more proactive and unified communications and branding strategy that clearly articulates its unique assets, impact, and thought leadership;
2. **Enhance Internal Coordination and Operational Integration.** Strengthen internal coordination by formalizing communication frameworks, improving transparency, and implementing integrated systems for knowledge sharing, resource allocation, and cross-division collaboration;
3. **Improve Long-Term Financial Resilience and Workforce Stability.** Improve through diversified revenue streams, strategic leadership hiring, proactive workforce planning, and the establishment of reserve or bridge funding mechanisms;
4. **Invest in Support Infrastructure to Sustain Research Scale.** Invest in scalable support

infrastructure; including administrative, proposal development, IT, cybersecurity, and advanced computing resources, to enhance operational efficiency and competitiveness in data-intensive research; and

5. **Formalize Talent Development, Career Pathways, and Mentoring.** Formalize talent development through structured mentoring, clear career pathways, leadership training, and succession planning to sustain a high-performing, mission-driven workforce and ensure long-term institutional continuity.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the floor opened for discussion. Topics included partnerships with the Blacksburg community, integration and collaboration with Virginia Tech, and funding expectations. The commission voted unanimously to approve all of the recommendations made by the committee.

4. Other Items

- **University Updates.** Randy Heflin gave an update on federal funding, including both trends in Virginia Tech's funding and data from the national landscape. Randy showed charts of funding obligations for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) that demonstrate differences in number of awards and amounts obligated from FY 21-26. Both agencies are well behind historical spending trends to this time in the fiscal year. This is also reflected in Virginia Tech's sponsored project portfolio for the first three-quarters of FY26. The university's externally sponsored expenditures are 9% down compared to last year, and new federal awards are down by 25%. In other university news, Randy highlighted the recent announcement that the Department of Energy has selected SURATech, a new corporation jointly owned by Virginia Tech and the Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA), to manage and operate the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility (Jefferson Lab) in Newport News. Randy mentioned that although this does not bring research money into Virginia Tech, it does bring close connections, greater visibility, and brand recognition that is indicative to moving towards our goal of global distinction.
- **Topics for next year.** Randy Heflin solicited feedback for topics to address for AY26-27 of the Commission on Research related to its charge concerning research and research faculty, noting there will be five-year institute review and policies to review, however, it would be beneficial to identify areas in which the commission has interest to further develop or pursue and raise it to the Faculty Senate. The floor opened for feedback with one member mentioning that sharing funding information on a regular basis would be helpful. Randy closed the discussion saying that if members have ideas at any time, to contact him or Laurel Miner.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 4:55pm.