



Faculty Senate

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

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

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

February 21, 2025 @ 2:30 – 4:15 pm

Torgersen 1000 or Via Zoom

Check-In:

Present: Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Rick Ashley, Paul Avey, Ela Austin (alternate for Yuba Gautam), Azziza Bankole, Kristen Benson, Jan Helge Bøhn, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Young Cao, Kevin Cheng, Sherwood Clements, Joshua Clemons, Rebecca Cockrum, Carolyn Commer, Nick Copeland, Carolyn Copenheaver, Kristy Daniels, Matt Eick, Rodney Gaines, Aaron Gross, Wes Gwaltney, Rebecca Hester, James Hawdon, Dan Hindman, Leanna House, Mantu Hudait, Scott Huxtable, Bryan Katz, Bryan Katz, Alex Kinnaman, Andrea L’Affilitto (alternate for Ran Jin), Jake Lahne, Catherine Larochelle, Evan Lavender-Smith, Renee LeClair, Justin Lemkul, Charles Lowery, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Luca Massa, Shelly Maycock, Joel McGlothlin, Harold McKenzie, Joe Merola, Marc Michel, Rachel Miles, Sherif Motaleb Abdelaziz, Phil Nelson, Gregory Novack, Albert Pan, Nicole Pitterson, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Steven Rowson, Karen Schnatterly, Mehdi Setareh (alternate for Howard Gartner), Richard Shryock, Shaniel Bernard Simpson (alternate for Candace Fitch), Annie Stevens (alternate for Kim Loeffert), Jay Teets, Chelsea Thompto, Jim Tokuhisa, Byron Tsang, Alp Tural (alternate for Bill Green), Bimal Viswanath, Jerald Walz, Terri-Ann Wattsman, Angelica Witcher, David Xie, Diane Zahm, Lizette Zietsman

Guests: E. Fanny Jasso-Hernandez, Monique Logan, April Myers, Demetria Somervell

Absent with Notice: Manish Bansal, Bradley Bowen, Maria del Carmen Caña-Jiménez, Ran Jin, Stephanie Smith, Erin Worthington

Absent: Luke Achenie, Lisa Belden, Warren Booth, Anamaria Bukvic, Mark Coggins, Logan Dandridge, John Entwistle, Candace Fitch, Scott Gartner, Yuba Gautam, Bill Green, David Gregory, Joseph Hughes, Eli Jamison, Casey Jim, Sarah Karpanty, Kimberly Loeffert, Gary Long, G.Q. Lu, Silvio Macias, Ali Mehrizi-Sani, Zhange Nicole Ni, John Richey, Nino Ripepi, Syrenthia Robinson, Adrian Sandu, Ian Shoemaker, Stephanie Smith, Eric Stanley, Keith Stephenson, Kwok Tsui, Jeff Walling, Shane Wang, Ashley Wilkinson, Yan Xu

Call to Order by the President Rachel Miles at 2:34

Approval of Agenda and Minutes (Rachel Miles)

- Consent agenda was adopted:
 - Minutes for 02-07-2025 ([Link](#))
 - Agenda for 02-21-2025 ([Link](#))

Business Agenda

Updates and Announcements

1. Rachel Miles introduced Jenn Wiggins, Director of Sexual Violence Prevention and Education for Virginia Tech. The Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Education opened in Fall 2024 and is part of the services provided by the Office of Civil Rights Compliance and Prevention Education. Their mission is to foster a safe and supportive environment by providing education, advocacy, and prevention strategies.
 - a. A definition of prevention from a public health perspective was shared along with examples of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention activities. Additionally, summaries of socioecological and social change models were provided.
 - b. The office utilizes a skills-based approach to meet needs and includes teaching in areas such as effective communication, health boundaries, conflict regulation, self-awareness, community building and accountability. A list of specific content areas was provided.
 - c. Virginia Tech's Peer Education services are now part of the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Education. Peer Educators have proven to be effective and focus on four areas: bystander intervention, consent, healthy relationships, and introduction of gender-based violence.
 - d. While the office has a set curriculum, it also seeks to collaborate with various groups to meet specific needs. Examples of recent collaborative programs were provided. The office seeks to work with faculty and can present selected topics to students in academic spaces or link current classwork to an already-

offered content area. The desire is to create spaces on campus where students learn, grow, and take their learned skills with them.

- e. Questions and discussion included the definitions of sexual and gender-based violence, ways to educate faculty on identifying concerning circumstances, and ways to train faculty about resources and responses to support students that may have experienced sexual violence.
 - f. Faculty members interested in collaborating or with questions should contact Jenn Wiggins.
2. Renee LeClair provided a Commission Chair Report for the Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies
 - a. The commission's goals for 2024-2025 were presented: Operational Goals include a resolution focused on revising the Graduate Honor System, and review of SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats) status with potential actions. Responsive Goals include clarifying free speech rights with students and reviewing Task Force recommendations. Proactive Goals include continuation of a sub-committee to streamline the process for the professional master's program, reviewing graduate certificate programs, and online/experiential learning.
 - b. The Degree and Program Sub-Committee and the Non-Thesis Master's Sub-Committee continue their work.
 3. Virginia Tech received on February 14, 2025, what has come to be known as a "Dear Colleague Letter" from the Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. A summary of the letter was provided. A group of law professors have joined together to dispute the legality of the Dear Colleague Letter and have created a letter of their own. A summary of their response was also provided. The Faculty Senate will speak to the university administration about both letters and ask for the university's response and perspective.

Unfinished Business

4. Justin Lemkul presented for Second Reading and Vote CFA 2024-25C: Resolution to Establish a Discussion Forum Under the Purview of the Faculty Senate.
 - a. Minor changes since the first reading include the following: (1) The resolution title will change to clearly indicate that this resolution is an amendment to the Faculty Senate Constitution. (2) Addition of a statement referring to the Board of Visitor's (BOV) 2023 endorsement of a series of recommendations promoting freedom of speech and free expression of ideas on Virginia Tech's campus, along with examples.

- b. Bylaws will be created to guide discussion forums. Topics for consideration will not address policy but will address subjects of broad faculty interest that are not within the scope of the Faculty Senate or shared governance.
 - c. A motion was made and seconded to approve CFA 2024-25C. No questions or concerns were presented from the floor. Motion carried (Voting: 52 Yes, 1 No, 1 Abstain)
- 5. Justin Lemkul presented for Second Reading and Vote CFA 2024-25F: Resolution to Amend the Faculty Handbook to Include a Statement on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.
 - a. Minor revisions were made following first reading.
 - i. Text was added to demonstrate the timeline of Virginia Tech's support for freedom of speech and academic freedom: Initial discussions that began in 2021; the 2022 development of a statement affirming Virginia Tech's commitment; and finally, the BOV's 2023 formal endorsement of the statement.
 - ii. A preamble including this history was added to the handbook and is located directly before the statement text itself. The statement is included exactly as it was originally crafted and approved.
 - b. A motion was made and seconded to approve CFA 2024-25F. There were no questions or discussion from the floor. Motion carried (Voting: 59 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain)
- 6. Justin Lemkul presented for Second Reading and Vote CFA 2024-25I: Resolution to Rename the Department of Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics.
 - a. No changes have been made since the first reading.
 - b. A motion was made and seconded to approve CFA 2024-25I. There were no questions or discussion from the floor. Motion carried (Voting: 58 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain)

New Business

- 7. Justin Lemkul presented for First Reading CFA 2024-25G: Resolution to Amend Articles V, VI, and XI of the Faculty Senate Constitution.
 - a. This resolution presents a collection of minor updates to the Faculty Senate Constitution in response to the continued examination of shared governance.
 - i. Language was added to Article V. Officers, Section 1. Officers of the Faculty Senate, clarifying that the elected Faculty Senate President also serves as the elected representative to the BOV.

- ii. Includes updates to Faculty Senate Cabinet membership in Article VI. The Faculty Senate Cabinet, Section 1. Membership and Functions, and a textual update specifying that the Cabinet administers the business of the Faculty Senate between meetings.
 - iii. A more substantive change is proposed for Article XI. Amendments to the Faculty Senate Constitution or Bylaws, Section 1. Development. This edit would enable self-executing updates to the Faculty Senate Constitution required by approved University Council Constitution changes. Under this process, updates stemming from University Council Constitution changes would not be required to go through approval via a separate resolution. However, changes initiated for all other reasons are still required to be approved through the shared governance process.
 - b. There were no questions or discussion from the floor.
- 8. Rachel Miles presented the topic of a Faculty Senate Statement Affirming the Principles of Community. This subject was brought forward at the last Faculty Senate Meeting and then presented to Faculty Senate Cabinet. After discussion, the Cabinet recommends either drafting a statement of support or issuing as reaffirmation of the Principles of Community. It was noted that this is the twentieth anniversary of the Principles of Community.
 - a. Potential options that could be followed were offered.
 - b. A motion was made and seconded to issue a statement reaffirming the Principles of Community to be endorsed by the Faculty Senate and open for endorsement by other senates. Motion carried (Voting: 51 Yes, 1 No, 1 Abstain)
 - c. Work will begin on crafting a statement reaffirming the Principles of Community. This statement will be opened to other senates for their endorsement.

Open Floor Discussion

- 9. Senators reintroduced the topic of the Dear Colleague Letter mentioned during Announcements. Some departments have instructed faculty to follow the guidelines in the letter and have begun implementing changes. Additional related discussion includes the following:
 - a. A university committee has been formed and meets daily to assess the landscape of higher education as it pertains to executive orders. The Faculty Senate has requested faculty representation on the committee but has not received a response.

- b. Limited discussion regarding lawsuits filed in response to executive orders around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and potential impacts that the Dear Colleague Letter could have on upholding the Principles of Community.
- 10. Graduate students have reported concerns with their ability to complete their education at Virginia Tech due to potential impacts federal changes may have on research funding.
 - a. The Faculty Senate will pass along this concern to the university administration. It was reported that the university stated they will honor their commitment to graduate students.
 - b. A suggestion was made to invite a representative from the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) to speak to and share their concerns during a Faculty Senate meeting as a show of support. Rachel Miles will reach out to GPSS.

Motion to adjourn and seconded at 3:55 p.m.