



MINUTES

Faculty Senate
December 05, 2025

2:30 – 4:15 p.m.

Torgersen 1000 and via Zoom

Present – Justin Lemkul (presiding), Luke Achenie, Joe Adams, Biko Agozino, Diane Agud, Aaron Ansell, Azziza Bankole, Kristen Benson, David Bieri, Nathaniel Bishop, Myra Blanco, Jan Helge Bøhn, Warren Booth, Bradley Bowen, Curtis Bower, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Ryan Calder, Sherwood Clements, Sarah Clinton, Carolyn Commer (alternate for Rebecca Weaver-Hightower), Nick Copeland, Carolyn Copenheaver, Maria del Carmen Caña-Jiménez, Naomi Dunn, Anna Duraj-Thatte, Bob Edmison, Ihudiya Finda Williams, Rodney Gaines, Nicholas Goedert, Aaron Gross, Wes Gwaltney, Ramtin Hagh Nazar Kouchaksaraei, James Hawdon, William Headley, Rebecca Hester, Robert Hildebrand (alternate for Ran Jin), Dan Hindman, Kenneth Hodges, Adrienne Holz, Eli Jamison (alternate for Karen Schnatterly), Sarah Karpanty, Bryan Katz, Lara Khansa, Alex Kinnaman, Andrea L'Afflitto, Jake Lahne, Mark Limes, Kimberly Loeffert, G.Q. Lu, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Stephen Martin, Joel McGlothlin, Harold McKenzie, Marc Michel, Rachel Miles, Sherif Motaleb Abdelaziz, Phil Nelson, Gregory Novack, Nicole Pitterson, Mark Psiaki, Isis Quinlan, Shelly Rhoads, John Richey, Nino Ripepi, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Steven Rowson, Caroline Saouma, Yi Shi, Ian Shoemaker, Richard Shryock, Chelsea Thompto, Nicolaus Tideman (alternate for Richard Ashley), Jim Tokuhisa, Alp Tural, Jerald Walz, Hongyu Wang (alternate for Cassandra Efke), Jeff Warford, Terri-Ann Wattsman, Donna Wertalik (alternate for Boya Xu), Erin Worthington, Gordon Yee

Absent with Notice: Anamaria Bukvic, Ran Jin, Charles “Chuck” Lowery, Lakshmi Miller, Karen Schnatterly

Absent: Rick Ashley, Anamaria Bukvic, Rebecca Cockrum, Mark Coggins, Logan Dandridge, Cassandra Efke, Matt Eick, Candace Fitch, Mark Freeman, David Gregory, Leanna House, Ran Jin, Daniel Karolyi, Bettina Koch, Catherine Larochelle, Renee LeClair, Charles Lowery, Lakshmi Madhavan Miller, Ron Meyers, Albert Pan, Karen Schnatterly, Stephanie Smith, Byron Tsang, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, David Xie, Boya Xu

Guests: Brandy Faulkner, Ann Gregus, E. Fanny Jasso-Hernandez, April Myers, Karen Eley Sanders, Wayne Scales, Amy Sebring, Demetria Somervell, Lijuan Yuan, Matthew Zimmerman

Dr. Justin Lemkul, Faculty Senate President, called the meeting to order at 2:31. A quorum was present.

1. Adoption of Consent Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the consent agenda which consisted of the items below. Motion carried.

- Approval of minutes from November 21, 2025
- Approval of agenda for December 5, 2025

2. Updates and Announcements

University Strategic Plan Meeting

Virginia Tech Senate officers have been invited to a meeting focused on updates to the university strategic plan. Information about planned updates and a request for feedback are expected to be distributed at a later date.

Meeting with Vice President for Audit, Risk and Compliance and Chief Risk Office

Faculty Senate President Justin Lemkul will attend a meeting with Sharon Kurek, Vice President for Audit, Risk and Compliance and Chief Risk Office, and her team regarding the Conflict of Interest and Commitment (COI/C). Revisions to simplify the process are expected in related policies and procedures. d

Support for Students after Fire at Foxridge Apartments

A recent fire at Foxridge Apartments displaced 38 Virginia Tech students, most of whom are international students. These students are currently housed at a local hotel. Further assistance is currently being coordinated. Once details regarding specific needs are available, this will be communicated, and any faculty senator who would like to help will be able to do so.

Virginia Tech Employee Night

A Virginia Tech Employee Night at a Rail Yard Dawgs hockey game will be held in Roanoke, VA, on January 31, 2026. Ticket prices will be \$14-\$18, and an RSVP poll will be distributed.

Feedback sought on classroom and facility issues

Faculty members can email comments on classroom and facility issues to Justin Lemkul.

General Faculty Questions and Concerns Submission Form

Faculty with general questions and concerns can submit those through the submission form; a link to the form was provided.

3. Unfinished Business

Elections to the Faculty Senate of Virginia

Justin Lemkul announced two vacancies for one-year terms from the Virginia Tech Faculty Senate to the Faculty Senate of Virginia. Meeting information was provided.

Lakshmi Miller was previously nominated to serve as a representative. The floor was opened for additional nominations. Shelly Rhoads was nominated from the floor.

A vote was conducted, and Lakshmi Miller and Shelly Rhoads were elected to serve on the Faculty Senate of Virginia.

4. New Business

Appointment to IT Service Management Working Committee

Justin Lemkul announced that a representative is needed to serve on the IT Service Management Working Committee. Meeting information and a link to the committee charge were provided.

Joe Adams was previously nominated to serve on this committee. The floor was opened for additional nominations, but no further nominations were received.

A vote was conducted, and Joe Adams was elected to serve on the working committee.

5. Presentations

Visit with Amy Sebring, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

Justin Lemkul welcomed Amy Sebring, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, to the Faculty Senate. EVPCOO Sebring opened discussion by providing updates to areas of interest to faculty.

Business Expense Assessment. Faculty have previously expressed concerns regarding the denial of approval or reimbursement requests for items that have been approved in the past. The Controller's Office is reviewing the situation including noting items routinely returned or denied, opportunities for improving customer service while maintaining compliance, and approaches and policies of peer institutions.

Capital Projects. Several projects are currently under construction, including the New Business Building, Mitchell Hall, Livestock and Research Facilities Phase I, and Building Envelope improvements. An overview of projects in the design stage was provided. Following actions and approval at the most recent VT Board of Visitors (BOV) meeting, two new construction projects that will add 1,200 new beds are now in the design phase.

Following a question regarding the cancellation of the Student Life Village, EVPCOO Sebring provided historical context, challenges, and budgeting concerns associated with that project. When this project was cancelled in March 2025, there were concerns regarding whether additional beds would be added. However, the administration worked with the BOV over the spring and summer, and the administration is comfortable with the recently approved addition of 1,200 beds.

A question was raised regarding the cancellation of four Living Learning Communities announced during the past several months. EVPCOO Sebring explained that two cancellations are in direct response to federal guidance and two are cancellations made by college deans in response to programmatic and financial concerns. It is expected that one or two new programs will come forward following these cancellations. The BOV did not take any action toward Living Learning Communities at the November BOV meeting.

Approved and planned renovations to Derring Hall and impacts from the dining center near the Virginia Tech airport were briefly discussed.

There was not enough time to cover all the topics that EVPCOO Sebring prepared to introduce. She will provide presentation slides to Justin Lemkul for distribution to faculty senators. Anyone with additional questions should email those to Justin, who will compile and submit them to EVPCOO Sebring for response.

Concerns of the Faculty Regarding Collegiality and Diversity

Justin Lemkul introduced Rodney Gaines for a discussion on collegiality and diversity. Rodney introduced Karen Ely Sanders, Associate Vice President of College Access; Wayne Scales, J. Byron Maupin Professor of Engineering; and Brandy Faulkner, Collegiate Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science. In addition to their other roles and responsibilities, these speakers also serve as members of the Black Faculty/Staff Caucus of Virginia Tech.

Each speaker provided a short introduction about their role at Virginia Tech and service on/experience with the Black Caucus. Additionally, they shared perspectives given by colleagues, overviews of their personal experiences at Virginia Tech, concerns regarding the principles of community, and information about impacts to faculty and student morale that have risen from federal regulation changes. Speaker comments as an addendum to the minutes.

In closing, Karen Sanders read from the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws which provides the ability for the Faculty Senate to establish discussion forums and statements to address specific issues of wide concern to faculty. Karen asked that the Faculty Senate sponsor such a forum focused on these concerns. A request was made that today's written statements be added to the minutes of the meeting. Justin Lemkul requested unanimous consent of the Senate to include these comments; no objections were made. Justin Lemkul invited speakers wishing to have their statements included in the Faculty Senate meeting minutes to submit them to him by email. Additionally, the request for a discussion forum should also be submitted in writing, per Faculty Senate procedures and bylaws. Once received, this request will be considered by the Faculty Senate Cabinet.

Following the discussion, several faculty senators shared their own experiences and commented on opportunities to better understand parliamentary procedures.

6. Open Floor

Suggestion to Add Poll Links

A suggestion was made to add the poll links for the two active feedback surveys to the Faculty Senate homepage for easier distribution.

Comments on UVA's Vote of No Confidence

A senator mentioned the recent University of Virginia (UVA) Faculty Senate's vote of no confidence in the UVA Board and a recent article on this topic from the Chronicle of Higher Education. Follow-up comments included the question of whether similar discussions are underway at Virginia Tech, recent Senate discussion topics, specific action items taken by the VT BOV, perspectives on actions initiated by the BOV as opposed to actions taken as a result of changes at the federal level, the work of the VT President and Provost, expected state-level board reform legislation, and board membership changes expected in August.

VHEAD 2026

Senators will be provided with information about the Virginia Higher Education Advocacy Day (VHEAD) 2026. Anyone can attend this event.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 4:17.

ADDENDUM
Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
December 05, 2025
2:30 – 4:15 PM
Torgersen 1000 or via Zoom

Karen Eley Sanders' Remarks to the Faculty Senate, Friday, December 5, 2025

Good afternoon, Colleagues. Thank you for the invitation to address the Faculty Senate today. I'm Karen Eley Sanders, and I serve Virginia Tech as Associate Vice Provost for College Access. I'm Mom to a Virginia Tech graduate, and an adopted member of the Hokie Family, as I'm approaching my 25th year as a part of the provost's division. It's my honor to serve as president of the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus this academic year.

Members of the Caucus want to share some of our observations related to Black faculty, staff and student morale, collegiality, and sense of belonging. It's important for the broader faculty to be aware of how some members of the community are feeling, and that we take time to check-in with colleagues in our departments. This aligns with the values expressed in Virginia Tech's Principles of Community – the expectations of respect, collegiality, and that every member of our community feels welcome and supported. I and two other Black Caucus members will offer brief remarks, about 5 minutes each, and perhaps we can wrap up with some discussion.

Communities on campus have differing experiences that some people don't feel comfortable sharing. Most Black faculty and staff don't feel it is professionally or personally safe or wise to share how they feel about the evolving campus climate that makes them, and me, feel unwelcome, unheard, ignored, and like we don't matter. So, we don't speak up. In the 25 years that I've been at Virginia Tech, I can honestly say that I am proud of the university's movement toward a more accessible institution, for both students and employees. I choose to be a part of Hokie family, even though it's sometimes a dysfunctional family. After more than two decades, I still love working here. Even when Black faculty and staff morale has taken a downturn, I want to be here. Because I believe that a strong contingent of engaged, open-minded employees who have a say in key discussions—helps make Virginia Tech better place for all students, and a great place for us to work.

The Caucus has a Faculty Work Group which is chaired by Dr. Glenda Scales, Associate Dean of Information Technology in the College of Engineering. She is treasurer of the and a past President. Unfortunately, Glenda is unable to join us this afternoon. In her stead, we will hear from another former Caucus President, Dr. Wayne Scales, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and J. Byron Maupin Professor of Engineering. After Wayne, we will hear from Dr. Brandy Faulkner, Director of Africana Studies and Professor in Political Science. She serves as secretary of the Black Caucus and is a past President, past Vice President, and past Graduate Student Representative in the Caucus. Dr. Trey Waller, Caucus Vice President and past President, is also in this virtual meeting.

Closing Remarks: Thank you, Wayne and Brandy for your remarks. Like Wayne, my professional experience at Virginia Tech has been overwhelmingly positive. This is not the case for all Black faculty and staff.

On page three of the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws, it states that the Senate may "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..." Given this, the Caucus requests that the Faculty Senate establish a work group to

gather information about the experiences of faculty teaching, research and service at this university, and ensure that all voices are included in these quantitative and qualitative data, perhaps through the implementation of the 2026 COACHE Survey of Faculty Job Satisfaction. That could be an opportunity for faculty to learn more about the experiences of colleagues in our departments. Why? Because understanding what we are experiencing right now will help the Faculty Senate and this university better implement strategies to foster an environment that is more representative and supportive for everyone. We will follow up with you on this request and look forward to engaging with you all as we continue our work. Are there questions or comments from the Senators?

Dr. Wayne Scales' Remarks to the Faculty Senate, Friday, December 5, 2025

Virginia Tech (VT) must determine if it is truly invested in the high-minded ideas of the Principles of Community (PoC). In essence, the PoC affirm that all groups on the VT campus have the right to have their communities respected and exist without fear and discomfort fomented by other groups or actions of the university. This should apply to both internal and external groups invited to campus. It should also be acknowledged that our nation is traversing a very tumultuous period in which there is a growing number of groups and organizations that have agendas that are not in alignment with the PoC. Many such individuals and groups have been emboldened recently and unfortunately use gaslighting approaches to conceal their true identities and agendas. All of these stressors are in addition to those all members of the higher education community are facing now.

Assuming the PoC are supported by the VT leadership, faculty, staff and students, the following should be considered.

1. A committee should be formed to reexamine the PoC to reaffirm these are strongly supported as a core value of the university as well as work to strengthen the PoC concepts as relevant to our current difficult societal circumstances.
2. The PoC should be enforced on campus to ensure all communities have a degree of comfort, dignity, and respect during this unusual period. The university must continue to use care and sensitivity on how all communities will be impacted by its decision making.
3. Any external group/speakers invited to campus should be carefully vetted to demonstrate that their past actions, activities, and overall agendas are not counter to the PoC. The leadership of such groups/organizations, both past and present, should be carefully vetted as well for PoC alignment.
4. Any group whose ideology does not align with the PoC should not be solicited or invited to campus unless an alternative perspective is also invited to provide a fair debate between the points of view. Such debate is critical for true education of VT students and will enhance empathy amongst communities on campus.
5. In general, this is a time for the University to support and strengthen these ideas for the betterment of all communities on campus. Any activities or actions of the university should be appraised for alignment with these ideas. Disregard of the PoC ideas will only lead to further isolation, division, and distrust amongst communities on campus leading to further deterioration of a vibrant and healthy university community.

Brandy S. Falkner's Remarks to the Faculty Senate, December 5, 2025

Thanks so much for inviting us to share some thoughts with you today. I've been part of the Black Caucus since the first week I arrived on this campus as a graduate student decades ago. The caucus was integral in my retention. It was difficult to navigate my Ph.D program without learning from any black professors. That certainly compromised the quality of my education, and it was the caucus members who helped fill the intellectual gaps directly linked to the low levels of compositional diversity at VT.

Now that I'm in a faculty role, I do my best daily to provide the same support for other students that the Black Caucus members gave to me. Black faculty and staff are often called on for help by Black and other underrepresented students as well as our faculty and staff colleagues. We take our organization's mission very seriously. Unfortunately, those calls for help have simply been overwhelming for the past two semesters. Living Learning Community students have had their housing taken away with no active plan to specifically assist them in transitioning from UJIMA, which is being unfairly and unnecessarily closed. Our Black Cultural Center is being defunded. Student academic programs such as the Black Male Excellence Network annual student conference and research symposium as well as SOAR (Student Opportunities and Achievement Resources) have been terminated. Black students are sitting in classes with peers whose racism has been emboldened because of the message these decisions send. Faculty are afraid to address it, and in some instances are even complicit in it. Support systems for our students and faculty are under attack and no one seems concerned enough to publicly challenge these decisions.

We are already seeing the effects of silenced voices and an intentional effort to dismantle every place, space, and process that actually keeps us here. What will this mean for the recruitment and retention of Black students? If the number of students who have reached out to me and asked for a letter of recommendation for their transfer applications is any indication, we're in big trouble. Some may not care about that at all. But the Black Caucus DOES. With the demise of Pathways 7, fewer students will engage with perspectives critical to thinking and creating in today's world. We are deliberately undoing the progress we have made at this university. It is not the majority who will suffer; this is a willful sacrificing of already marginalized students, faculty, and staff.

The faculty senate constitution calls on this body to represent faculty interests in a system of shared governance. It is not possible to do that if you are not connected to, engaged with, and actively seeking the perspectives of whole segments of faculty at the university. Our university institutions are not listening to or including the people directly affected by these racist and harmful decisions. The policy recommendations that come from faculty senate should reflect the communities present on this campus. Otherwise, it's not actually representation. We very much appreciated members of faculty senates at other Virginia universities for reaching out last semester to acknowledge the harm that Black faculty and staff are facing and to ask us directly what we needed. It's a minimum requirement for shared governance. We are not asking you to work on behalf of Black faculty. Our caucus has done well in leading inclusive work on campus in the 45 years since we were founded here with the full support of then university president William Lavery. Instead, we are calling on you to be an institutional partner that is interested in how current university policies affect the trajectory of Black faculty, staff, and students here. Our experiences in higher ed are not the same as every other faculty member. We deserve not only to be heard but also to be taken seriously as fully participating members of the Virginia Tech faculty and staff. We should not be discouraged from speaking up about what is happening to us or discouraged from pursuing faculty senate executive positions should we choose to run for them or discouraged from fighting back against the bullying and professional retaliation we face when advocating for our interests and our students' interests.

Thank you for your time. I'll provide a copy of my comments to the secretary and would like them to be part of the record for today's meeting. It's important to us that faculty, staff, and students who come after us be able to see as a matter of record that our caucus stood up for them and their educational futures and that there is no opportunity for silence to be misconstrued as acceptance.