

**Staff Senate Meeting Minutes**  
**September 19, 2024**  
**12:00 p.m.**  
**virginiatech.zoom.us/j/89618402157**

**Present:** Callan Bartel (presiding), Jasmine Boyd, Denise Crawford, Kristen Cox, Pat Donovan, Kari Evans, Nikki Gland-Turpin, Joseph Goodman, Andrea Green, Amber Hagan, Amy Ingram, Sarah Owen, Amie Pendleton, Tasia Persson, Amanda Pester, Gabe Petry, Stephanie Picado, Jennifer Pike, Amber Robinson, Sally Shupe, Mary Sullivan, Chris Whitlock, and Serena Young.

**Absent with Notice:** Misti Acosta, LaTawnya Burlison, Amanda Hill, Michelle Raines, and Tamarah Smith,

**Absent:** Angel Carter, Zai Cook, Dee Hopkins, Frank Kerr, Petie Martin, Ron Mecham, Dennie Munson, Eric Newton, Eric Tysor, and Christina Winkeler.

**Guests:** Benjamin Alden, Dave Andrews, Robert Cooley, Gwen Ghee, Sammi Kent, Annie Machner, Jamie McElfresh, Daniella Miller, Jenn Million, April Myers, Ronna Reed, Becki Smith, Dee Dee Somervell, and Chenaye Woods.

Vice President Bartel called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

### **1. Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

### **2. Announcement of approval and posting of minutes of August 15, 2024**

Vice President Bartel noted that these minutes have been voted on electronically and can be publicly accessed on the Governance Information System on the web (<http://www.governance.vt.edu>).

### **3. Presentation**

Tasia Persson, Chair of Staff Senate's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee discussed the formation and evolution of the Staff Senate's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Committee, emphasizing its mission to educate and uplift staff. She shared her personal journey and experiences that shaped her involvement in the committee and outlined its initiatives, including a speaker series and a Governance School to enhance staff participation in decision-making processes and aims to equip staff members with the tools to represent themselves effectively in governance. Tasia also introduced the Governance Launch Pad platform developed by the Office of the Vice President for Policy and Governance. See attached slides.

### **5. Other Items**

- Vice President Bartel presented the Staff Recognition award to Kelvin Bergston.
  - The winning nomination is attached.
  - Please submit future nominations here: <https://forms.gle/C65u32JJeilx7wdFA>
- Dave Andrews, Hokie Wellness' Associate Director of Employee Wellness, presented an update on the National Faculty and Staff Health Assessment, which is administered in partnership with the American College Health Association. The assessment is scheduled to open on October 21st and close on November 1st. Dave emphasized that the survey is comprehensive, takes about 20 minutes to complete, and is confidential. Participants will be entered into a drawing for one of 100 prizes. Visit [https://hokiewellness.vt.edu/employees/National\\_Faculty\\_Staff\\_Health\\_Assessment.html](https://hokiewellness.vt.edu/employees/National_Faculty_Staff_Health_Assessment.html) for more information.

- Amy Ingram, Chair of Staff Senate's Elections and Nominations Committee, encouraged others to consider serving on committees like the Commission on Research and the Library Committee, which currently need members.

## **6. Announcements**

The October Staff Senate meeting will begin at 12:00 p.m. The meeting will be hybrid, with the in-person component meeting in North End Center Room 2440. An Outlook calendar invite will be sent out prior to the meeting.

## **7. Adjournment**

There being no further business, Vice President Bartel adjourned the meeting at 12:51 p.m.

# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee Initiatives

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“WE MAY HAVE ALL COME ON DIFFERENT SHIPS, BUT WE’RE IN THE  
SAME BOAT NOW.” – MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

All about the diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (or DEIB) committee of the Staff Senate. I’ve included a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr here, which pretty much sums up how we as a committee feel: that we may come from different circumstances, but we’re all in this together. You’ll all recognize that we in Staff Senate typically have a strong sentiment that inequities experienced by any individual staff member is a problem for all of us. We’re united in our cause to educate and uplift staff.

## DEIB Committee Composition & Background

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- Origins
- Progression
- A New Name
- The Numbers



### ADVANCE SLIDE

Appropriately, a lot of diverse factors went into the current incarnation of the Staff Senate DEIB Committee:

- My own journey began with work that I did in metro Detroit with the YMCA, which is why I included a Y logo here. Fairness and respect for others, no matter who they are, was a bedrock concept in our Y branches. My role was public facing, and I had the pleasure of getting to know a wide variety of people. Incorporating that experience into a new area when my family moved to Virginia helped me connect with people in the New River Valley through my work with the Center for Diversity and Inclusion at Radford University and later with people in an academic college at VT.
- The effort to educate staff about DEI considerations began as a college-level committee in Liberal Arts and Human Sciences in cooperation with our College's Diversity Committee. That diversity committee is structured to have a faculty co-chair and I was the staff co-chair for several years – we worked in concert together to raise awareness for both faculty and staff about DEI concerns and issues in the College.

- We as Staff Senate Exec Team members were able to learn even more about the challenges of diversifying the staff workforce at VT through serving on the HR Reinventing Diversity Retention and Recruitment Cmte, which was active in the past couple of years.
- Our DEI Subcommittee profile was raised in Staff Senate when it was elevated to a full-fledged committee last year, as several may recall.
- When we discussed this change, committee members took the opportunity to rename our DEI Subcommittee to the DEIB Committee to ensure a sense of belonging was incorporated. The committee agreed that this has a specific importance for staff. For example, non-student wage employees have long conveyed that they felt that they haven't always been included in full benefits, representation, etc. at the University, so fostering a sense of belonging for all staff – not matter their HR classification – became an important goal for our committee.
- In terms of raw numbers, we began with total of 13 staff members, with 10 regularly involved in planning and programming. Overall, seven administrative units were represented on the committee from across the University.

## 2023-24 DEIB Committee Initiatives

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- Speaker Series – “Making It Work for Everyone”  
(Fall 2023 – Spring 2024)
- Committee Enrichment – Tours on campus
- Launch of Staff Senate Governance School

### ADVANCE SLIDE

What you see on this slide was our lineup of initiatives since we became a standing committee last year. The speaker series featured topics important to staff, related to: fairness at work, dealing with and resolving conflict, opposing discrimination, effective and compassionate communication, and building collaboration. And in fact, what we discovered about staff perspectives through the speaker series informed our launch of a Governance School (the final point on the slide). The connection is that the speaker series allowed us to identify perennial problems that staff members have struggled with when it comes to continuous advocacy through governance. I'll talk more about that in a moment.

As to our second initiative, it is important that we as a committee keep

ourselves informed/involved/enriched about cultural resources on campus. To that end, members of the DEIB Committee took a tour in the spring to learn more about Solitude and Fraction House. Next our committee plans to take tours to learn more about the various cultural centers at VT this fall.

# Launch of Staff Senate Governance School

- The Goal
- Background
- Plan & Timing
- Program/Curriculum



## ADVANCE SLIDE

Now I'd like to focus on the Governance School project that our committee launched over the summer. Circling back on the theme of belonging, it requires being able to fully participate and have standing in an organization, group, or institution. In that vein, the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee planned training modules for a Staff Senate Governance School in order to address some of the issues that staff have reported. To begin with, shared governance gives people in the University community the opportunity to have a voice in key decision-making.

So, let's talk about that: I mentioned that we identified several problems that staff members struggle with when it comes to continuous advocacy through governance. These issues include:

1. Lack of awareness: Some employees reported that they were previously unaware that staff could be represented through governance at VT. Non-student wage employees in particular were unaware that they could have a voice through Staff Senate.



2. Complexity: Staff from across the university have communicated that they've found it challenging to navigate the ins and outs of advocacy through governance. They expressed uncertainty as to the rules and how they could employ the governance channels that currently exist for the benefit of staff. There's a learning curve to understanding how governance functions, both at the level of Staff Senate and more broadly throughout the university.
  3. Efficacy & Motivation: Even when staff members participate in governance, they don't always see how it can be helpful for chronic communication and fairness issues that they report experiencing and observing at work. Sometimes they feel as if they have no recourse when they or their co-workers experience unfairness.
- The goal of this project is to furnish staff members with the tools to represent themselves effectively in governance, which reproduces competency in governance into the future from staff member to staff member.
  - Some background on this school: The Staff Senate President, LaTawnya Burleson, and I worked with our College's Staff Association after LaTawnya left for a different unit, and the College's Staff Association needed to be reorganized. We realized through this experience that many staff members do not have foundational knowledge on the history and inner workings of governance, and do not know how they can effectively achieve their goals and advocate for themselves.
  - Plan & Timing: A test cohort from the Executive Team and the DEIB Committee in Staff Senate already participated in an abbreviated program this summer. Our test cohort participated in a concentrated summer program, attending a session every couple of weeks. In June, LaTawnya presented the program to the Board of Visitors for the first time. We have now identified our first Governance School cohort for AY 2024 – 2025. The program will last the full academic year for this first official cohort, and we will meet once per month. There's still room in this cohort, and we are right now determining commonly held availability for meetings. If you are interested in participating, please don't hesitate to email me.
  - Program/Curriculum:
    - Summer sessions included: mock resolution building, complexities of staff associations, and how governance works for other groups on campus. I've included a screenshot from the VT University Governance website, since a portion of our program will include familiarizing cohort members with their online trainings, which we will see more of in just a moment.
    - We will add topics for the current academic year as well to round out a full academic year curriculum, including: Higher Ed Amin 101,

understanding elections and nominations, Effective strategies and paths for staff advocacy, and Ways to create and share opportunities for fellow staff members to participate in governance.

## Summer Staff Senate Governance School

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- Learning goals
- Discoveries
- Feedback on the program



### ADVANCE SLIDE

In order to assess how our summer staff senate governance school was progressing, we used a mix of feedback from surveys, discussion from a debrief meeting, and a community whiteboard.

Cohort members reported their learning goals, including what they found confusing or areas where they just didn't know enough about governance at the outset of the program.

Examples include:

- how to build bylaws and a constitution;
- the necessary parts of a resolution and at what point changes make it a different resolution than you began with;
- faculty vs. staff roles in governance;
- whether there's a quota for staff participation in governance, like on committees, commissions, or even for local bodies, such as college/departmental committees;
- the nature of communication about what's new in governance and how it flows;
- ways that staff can become more involved and be represented better in areas of authority at VT; AND

-and finally, how does it all work together?

A couple of our favorite discoveries included:

Learning about how other Staff Associations and Senates work, and how we can work together to build and maintain strong participation and uplift each other's concerns cooperatively with upper administration; and

Learning how to build a strong resolution. Lori Rose and the Governance Team gave a really fantastic mock-resolution building session, and April Myers answered a bunch of our more general, pressing questions about governance at VT.

Being part of the program was enjoyable, because we had a great cohort, with a bunch of smart people who were engaged and participating regularly. They gave really positive, helpful, and constructive feedback about the program, including ideas of things to add and improve, such as adding a mentorship component and holding a brainstorming session for identifying the most pressing problems for cohort members and coming up with creative solutions as a group.

## News from the VPPG Office

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- New online platform for governance training & resources
- Governance Launchpad ([link](#))
- Governance Corner ([link](#))



### ADVANCE SLIDE

The Governance Team from the Office for the Vice President for Policy and Governance (or VPPG) has developed a new platform to better inform the Virginia Tech community, particularly for those involved in governance roles. The **Governance Launchpad** serves as a central hub for all governance-related information, including onboarding tools like checklists, useful references, and contact information for the Office of the Vice President for Policy and Governance. Really quickly, this is what the launchpad looks like, and right away you can see onboarding and “to-do” lists to get participants in governance up to speed.

In addition, the Launchpad provides easy access to the newly introduced **Governance Corner**, a newsletter designed to share important governance updates, spotlight VT employees involved in governance, and feature new and updated training materials, such as the recently developed parliamentary procedure course.

This is just a very quick overview of in-depth information that you’ll find on these sites. Please feel free to go back and explore the Governance Launchpad and reach out to VPPG if you have any questions or suggestions. They’re continuously looking for ways to improve the site.

In terms of differentiating what Governance School offers in comparison with the Governance Launchpad, Governance School is a full academic year curriculum that allows for participants to learn in a group context, discuss ideas, and interact in real time with guest presenters. These speakers and discussions will extend the concepts that you learn in the Launchpad to the complexities of how governance operates at Virginia Tech. We also explore issues and questions that specifically relate to staff roles in governance.

## Getting to know VPPG Resources

(<https://pollev.com/tasiapersson654>)

- Definition of “shared governance”
- Scavenger Hunt
- Trivia



### ADVANCE SLIDE

So, let's do some quick activities in Poll Everywhere to familiarize ourselves with governance resources and concepts on these sites. I will linked polleverywhere in the chat, so that you can all participate and give you a moment to get to the first question. We'll answer questions about a definition, do a simple scavenger hunt, and answer a trivia question. If you'd like to participate, please stay on polleverywhere through all three questions as I transition through them.

1. Word Cloud – What one word do you think about when you think of “shared governance”: give definition: **shared responsibility and cooperation among university stakeholders like faculty, staff, and students for making key decisions, so that major groups have a voice in policy matters and that decision-making progresses with open communication and transparency.**
2. Go to Governance Corner (link in chat):  
<https://governance.vt.edu/assets/newsletters/2024-09/index.html#/>  
Answer the question – who is featured in this month's Governance Corner?
3. We end with a trivia question: **In the context of shared governance, a resolution is a**

**formal proposal that is vetted and potentially approved in the VT governance process. True or false: Every resolution must contain a policy reference.**

For those who are learning this information for the first time and want to explore tools to make change and advocate for you and your fellow staff members at VT, you may want to check out the possibility of participation in this year's Governance School. For example, the last trivia question we discussed is part of the "mock resolution" learning session that VPPG provides as part of our curriculum.



## Questions & Contact

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*Please feel free to contact me with further questions or if you know of a staff member who may be interested in participating.*

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Staff Senate DEIB Chair  
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540-231-6779



Thank you for your time, and I will leave you with a quote that I think sums up what governance can do for staff: “The most effective way to cope with change is to help create it.” I hope that each of you will embark on a governance journey of your own to find both your voice and power to effect positive change in the VT community.

**Staff Recognition Winner  
September 19, 2024**

**Winner: Kelvin Bergsten**

Nominator: John Messer

Why are you submitting them for recognition?

His work in developing others including myself.

What qualities does this person possess that you would like to highlight? (kindness, teamwork, leadership, etc.)

His leadership and vision.

Are there any specific actions, events, etc. that you would like to highlight?

He seeks out every member of his team and looks to develop their talents for the betterment of the university and the team.