

Minutes
Commission on Faculty Affairs
September 24, 2021
10:30 am – 12:00 pm
Hybrid (Newman Library 6020; Zoom)

Commission Members Present: R. Queen (presiding)
K. Albright for dean Blieszner, L. Learman (dean), A. Bond (A/P Senate), C. Boyd (undergraduate senate representative), J. Finney (provost, ex officio), Eric Kaufman (Faculty Senate), A. Kinnaman (Faculty Senate for R. Miles), A. Fox (Graduate/Professional Student Senate), L-A. Krometis (Faculty Senate), A. Nelson (Faculty Senate), T. Schenk (Faculty Senate), A. Shew (Faculty Senate), R. Weiss (Faculty Senate), R. Wynne (Faculty Senate for D. Hindman).

Not Present: R. Blieszner (dean), B. Jones (Staff Senate)

Guests: Scott Case (College of Engineering), Jacob Grohs (College of Engineering), D. Musick (VTC SOM), A. Myers (Office of Governance and Policy), E. Plummer (Office of the Provost).

Jacob Grohs, associate professor in engineering education shared process and results of a project that analyzed a select sample of teaching evaluations by students who took foundational engineering classes.

R. Queen called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. A quorum was present (50%+1 of current membership = 8)

1. **Approval of Agenda.** Members of the commission moved and voted unanimously to adopt the agenda.
2. **Approval of minutes.** Members of the commission moved and voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the September 10, 2021 meeting.
3. **Announcements.** The commission honored and thanked Jack Finney for his many years of service to the university and his support and guidance of the commission.
4. **SPOT Evaluation Work.** Commissioners reviewed a number of reports regarding Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) evaluations. The commission reviewed work done by a committee of the Faculty Senate in April 2021. The report documented the variability across the university in the use of SPOT information. For example, departments might use SPOT information to strengthen instruction, to identify outstanding instruction, to inform curricular discussions, in addition to monitoring student satisfaction. Faculty members understand that teaching evaluations are necessary and believe that some attention ought to be paid to strengthening SPOT as a tool. Commissioners shared faculty concerns with the variability across departments and colleges in the use of SPOT scores in annual reviews. In addition, the use of student comments varies across departments and colleges. Some of the comments are extreme and unproductive. Student

participation in filling out the SPOT is unreliable and varies. Non-tenure track instructional faculty have unique concerns with the use of SPOT information and have an interest in receiving additional course feedback for improvement. The senate reviewed the value of the number, type and sequence of questions used in the SPOT. Discussion included how the SPOT results are included in faculty promotion materials. One suggestion is to allow faculty members and departments access to their data such that a tailored report can be generated that is relevant for faculty members.

Members of the faculty from the College of Engineering shared information from a study conducted under the auspices of a NSF-funded grant dedicated to improving undergraduate STEM education. In addition to gathering other data, the project worked to compile and review data from SPOT. There is no way to analyze bias from the data because the data set did not include faculty demographic information. A challenge faced by using SPOT is the perceptions of students who might believe that neither Virginia Tech nor the faculty member cares about them and they have no interest in participating in SPOT. Overall, the project data indicated that students are overall happy and it is not particularly useful to focus on minute differences such as the difference between a 4.5 versus 4.7. Instructors frequently do not receive peer evaluations of teaching because departments focus on peer evaluations for faculty members on the tenure-track. The data are best interpreted and used at the “local” level because of the nature of department cultures and practices. Aggregate data wash out information that could be useful.

Commission members discussed next steps to include articulating a set of principles to guide the use of SPOT scores and comments and to gather information about how each college uses SPOT scores and comments for faculty evaluations.

5. Other business. None

6. New Business. None

7. Adjourn. The commissioners moved and voted unanimously to adjourn at 12:00 p.m.

Next meeting: October 8, 2021 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
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