

Commission on Student Affairs Minutes

September 24, 2020

3:30 PM

Zoom

Present: Victoria Dashevsky, Adil Sageer, Amanda Coleman, Anisha Hari, April Myers, Ariana Guevara, Awad Abdelhalim, Cam Roberts, Camellia Pastore, Conrad Briles, Dale Pike, Danielle Panico, Frank Shushok, Heather Wagoner, Jen Pike, Jes Davis, Kase Poling, Katie Franz, Kayla Alward, Lauren Surface, Maruf Hoque, Michelle Kim, Nathaniel Soss, Sabrina Sturgeon, Sammy Bales, Scott Nachlis, Spencer Hamilton, Steve Matuszak, Susanna Rinehart, Tahreem Alam, Tara Frank, Tim Lin,

Absent: Ariana Labat, Chapman Pendery, Grant Bommer, Jessica Nguyen, Kimberly Smith

Guests: Chris Wise and Mike Mulhare

1. **Adoption of Agenda** - Victoria Dashevsky

Meeting was called to order at 3:33pm. A motion was made and seconded to adopt the agenda. The motion carried.

2. **Announcement of approval and posting of minutes**

- April 16, 2020
- September 10, 2020

These minutes have been voted on electronically and will be posted on the University web.

3. **University Council and Commission Updates**

a. University Council - Victoria Dashevsky

On Monday, September 21, 2020 Victoria presented to University Council that CSA remains solution focused and is concentrating its efforts on getting answers to valid student questions. This included: how VT is reacting to COVID; how students are dealing with COVID; getting more dining options; Title 9 and Policy 1025; and how VT communicates with students.

b. Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity – Commissioner

Congratulations to Nathaniel Soss who will be representing CSA on this commission. Victoria offered to get Nathaniel connected with the CEOD chair.

c. Academic Support Committee – Commissioner

No update as they have not been tasked to meet as of yet.

4. **Old Business**

None

5. **New Business**

a. Feedback on VT Student News

Victoria posed the question to commission members, asking how they felt about the VT student news they receive by email? Victoria asked how many students get the email, verses how many students actually read the email. There was a larger response to those that get it, than actually read it.

Detailed discussion then followed that entailed the following: Who is reading the VT student news emails? What is it that students want to see in the VT student news emails? What kind of language do you want to see it communicated in? Is there one thing in particular you don't think is being communicated as well as other things?

6. Q&A

a. COVID-19 & VT - Chris Wise (Health and Wellness) & Mike Mulhare (Emergency Management)

Victoria opened the floor for commission members to ask questions. Questions and answers can be found below:

Q1: On the VT Dashboard, in bold, at the bottom is the positivity rate from move in week (the 9th through the 23rd) which shows is only .23% in a nice orange box, to which your eyes are immediately drawn to it. But there is no percentage of positivity rates for the total of all 7 days. Is there any way we can add that to the dashboard as it is very confusing to students? You see the positivity rate is on 023% and students think they that's so low they can do whatever they want, but in reality, if you do the math, it is closer to 5.3%.

A1: Changes to the dashboard were made earlier this week, so it is providing a 7-day moving average positivity rate, which is an analogous to what the health department provides as well.

Your point is well taken, and the information on the bottom of the dashboard is confusing. Perhaps it is time we removed it, as it is kind of old news now - as it is from August, and we are now in late September. I will take that back and see about getting that changed. Once that is removed the only information you will see will be current information.

Q2: What are the circumstances under which campus will close early? What threshold would have to be met?

A2: There's a lot of factors to be taken into account. It is not that we only look at the number of people in isolation, but rather we look at the rate of change. Meaning what we see in regards to the trends in data indicating as to whether there is a significant increase in the number of cases. Some of the metrics that we do watch very closely is what is the available capacity of the hospitals, and is that being impacted in any way – which it currently has not.

The most important metric we look at is our ability to provide services; so getting additional space for quarantine/isolation can be done. But at what point does VT not have the personnel available to provide services, both academic and support services. If VT got to this point, then we would have to start thinking about an alternative operation.

Q3: My roommate and I have been 100% self-isolating off campus this semester as I am high-risk. He got selected for random mandatory testing and he is now going through the process to see if he can get exempted from that. It's a little ridiculous that after not leaving the apartment for two months, and being absolutely certain we are as isolated as possible, that we are going to be required to expose ourselves to go on campus for testing, especially since I'm at-risk. Why are at-home testing kits not being provided to students, when they are widely available now?

A3: For folks who have never been out at all, following the exemption form is probably your best bet, as there is a chance that might work out. Regarding the at home tests, we have our own testing facility in Roanoke that can analyze the tests. There is a benefit for VT to continue to do the mass testing this way as much as possible - both from a financial standpoint, as well as, a quick return of results.

We do have a limited supply of a different test for those that might not be able to take a nose swab type test that will be made available. However, these tests are typically not made available for folks to use for lack of not wanting to participate in the on-campus program. If there is a reasonable reason for not requiring it, or not taking the test, - as that's the whole purpose of the exemption process, then all exemption forms will be looked at and evaluated very carefully.

Q4a: Would a class be required to strictly operate online if many of the students have tested positive during in person sessions, regardless of how comfortable people may feel? For teachers in situations like this, might it be recommended they move class strictly online to zoom for the rest of the semester, or are they given the free reign to decide whatever they want to do?

A4a: A lot of flexibility is given to faculty members on how their classes are constructed per the Provost Office. Typically, the way classrooms have been organized this semester, with only about 20% of the original capacity - within a classroom, really there is no opportunity for an individual to become a close contact with somebody that might be positive, that's why the classrooms are set up that way. We have not seen any data that would support there has been transmission of COVID-19 within the classrooms. The reason to do the two-week pause, was for those who may have been positive to work through that isolation period.

Q4b: I also feel like no one in the class is a health expert so whether you feel comfortable or not, you still run the risk of transmitting the disease. I actually attend a different class and there are definitely moments where entering the classroom, exiting the classroom, and even the proximity of where we were seated – I feel like there was a chance of transmission so I've not been able to pop into a class yet.

I do feel like that is still a factor, so I feel like in those cases that two weeks isn't really enough, or just the option to resume completely online would be the better option - so I was just wondering about the guidelines that were in place for that.

There's an opportunity to hold the class in person, and that can be done. Again, there are certainly many instances where the comfort level has not been there and classes have been moved to 100% online.

The isolation period prescribed by the Department of Health is 10 days, fever free if you symptomatically test positive. It is 14 days to quarantine, (meaning someone who did not test positive), but they have been in close contact to someone who was. The 14 days is the window in which you might develop symptoms. The other guidelines are what makes somebody in close contact; which is being in close proximity, greater than 15 minutes, less than 6 feet.

Just passing someone in the hallway does not constitute as close contact. It is kind of like passing somebody in the market at Kroger. Again, people wearing their masks or their face coverings, the health department would tell you that is really not an occurrence of a close contact. But yet if it is personally not a comfort level, and there is an online option, then I certainly would encourage that.

Q5: Was there a reason why only undergraduates were selected to do the random mandatory testing and not graduate students, faculty, and/or staff?

A5: There is a group of faculty/staff and other students that fall into what we call our high contact group, and that is part of our surveillance monitoring which are now being tested as well. This is approximately an additional 1200 individuals that will be tested on a regular basis. I think you will find the plan is still somewhat dynamic.

The first thought, is where do we start to develop this prevalence testing. You look at what is being done at many other universities and colleges, versus what are we doing here – and it is not that different. When Dr. Burkes was here a week ago, this was something she supported, and thought we needed to be doing more of. Again, this is where we are starting. Some other thoughts are on additional testing programs that will enhance and supplement this – to which we will look to roll out in the days to come.

You may see additional testing programs immerge and undergraduates are the natural place to start because of the number of undergraduates that we have. There was a time people wanted to get tested, and they couldn't get tested, or they didn't feel like they could get tested quickly enough. This week, for example, there have been many, many testing slots that have gone unfilled. If you want to be tested, or you know people who want to be tested – know there is a way to get tested.

Q6: Many residents are very concerned about how isolation works, and how it is being handled - (this is regarding having roommates, food, and mental health). This has caused a couple of them to instead of isolating on campus, to go home and isolate.

So many residents have come up to me with concerns regarding isolation and quarantine, and how that is working. One resident complained to me that their food was not delivered at all one of the days. Another resident stated that they were in a room isolated, and a roommate came into that room without them knowing or expecting anyone.

I wanted to know if there's a document that tells the residents what the differences are between quarantine and isolation. What the process is like if you are in those dorms? Do they get their food at certain times? If they're going to have roommates or not? Is there a document that it's presented to those students who do test positive, or are put in quarantine because of contact tracing, or is it just ever-changing throughout the time?

A6: For those who test positive, at least on-campus through Schiffert, get a phone call with information about isolation. They will also receive a follow-up email, that lists a few things they should be prepared for; things they should do; and list of contact numbers to reach out to if they need them.

This is for anyone who tests positive, or anyone who comes in and is a probable positive based on their symptoms with a medical professional. Often times this means someone who's had exposure, and has a couple of the symptoms, particularly a

loss of taste or smell. Those students go into isolation, are there for 10 days from the time of the onset of symptoms, or from the time of a positive test, or for the time the symptoms end - whichever keeps them there the longest.

Quarantine is any those students that are in close contact with a known positive, or a known presumptive positive. Often times that is a roommate, who has then moved into an isolation zone. The isolation ones are the ones that we hear a lot about that are tricky for people to understand. For one, often times people want to go ahead and get a test, and kind of test out of isolation. This is not advised by the CDC or the Department of Health and by the time you would do that with two negative tests that are 5 to 7 days from your exposure and 48 hours apart – you've pretty much served the quarantine time. No one that has a known exposure should get a test until at least 5 days has passed, based on the time that the virus might actually show up on a test. So as you can imagine someone tests too early, and tests negative, and feels comfortable and gets back out into the environment, it certainly isn't helpful for public health.

For those students that are quarantined, they often times wonder why they're there longer than the isolated person that caused them to be there. I'm the roommate, my roommate tested positive and stayed 10 days, but yet I have to stay 14 days. Again, that has to do with how long it may take the virus to show up into an exposed person, and how long that person may be contagious with the virus.

As far as our policy, there is a website that residential housing has that kind of explains how that's going to work. It certainly doesn't get into the medical piece of it, because a lot of that is physician/practitioner determined – especially around presumptive positives. Isolation and quarantine is simply a public health, and community health, opportunity to stop the spread of the virus.

When someone goes into isolation, and gets a roommate in, and then begins to worry about... what about me - and this one person that are now in the same room together...that is happening here because of hallway restrooms, and the need to move students out of common areas that have to be used if they've been exposed to someone with the virus. We have made a decision at VT that we can put people, that have similar exposures, in a room together for that 14-day quarantine; or even two positives can go in a room together because they're not going to become more positive from being in with a positive.

It helps us to keep open as much of our space as we can to continue to do this, but the one key is to remember that we're trying to protect the public and the community health - which is the bigger version of all of you all; the bigger version of the student complex mass of people. Often times the individual decisions are made with the bigger group in mind. I think sometimes folks feel like they should be by themselves the whole time, or why they can't just stay in their room. Again, we're trying to protect that larger group of students, which is the entire residence hall, the entire floor, or whatever the case may be.

In regards to roommates, my residents are not stating that they should not have a roommate - but I have been hearing complaints about is that they weren't notified of someone moving into that space. That's something that should be notified especially when a student or a resident is going through isolation and they don't know what's going on. It takes a big toll on your grades, school, mental health- especially since you can't go out, nor can you enjoy a nice walk. To bring another student into that environment without notification just adds to the problem.

In regards to the roommate we have made an adjustment where I believe we are letting everyone know they may get a roommate now. Beginning next week, isolation assistance will begin – where university staff will be reaching out and communicating with students that are in isolation or quarantine on a more regular basis.

Why are students complaining about missing food, or not getting their dinner or lunch on time?

I can't speak to the food issue very well, as I don't think that's happening often. From the conversations that I am in with the folks that oversee dining, but I'm not going to say it hasn't happened but you know I can't speak to that very well but what I would suggest is if someone I believe the meals come at a prescribed time every day and it is not delivered during that window of time, then I would reach out to Dining Services, to myself, or to someone to anyone in Student Affairs so we can follow up and make sure they get their food.

Several weeks ago, when we were putting a lot of students in isolation and/or quarantine as late as 7:30pm/8pm, that because of the amount of people there were a couple that missed a meal based on the time they got put in there. Which is no excuse,

but I think we had to correct from that realizing that if I delivery time is 6pm, and someone doesn't get put in until 7:30pm, that we still have to be available at 7:30pm or later. This issue has since been corrected.

Q7: Could you speak to the difference between what is happening at VT vs. the circumstances and recent changes/restrictions at UVA? Do you have any perspective on maybe one of the Dynamics at play at UVA that are leading them to have to make some pretty significant changes to the kinds of restrictions they're putting on their students? It seems like it would be good for us to know something about that so we can avoid it. Anything we should/could learn from that?

A7: UVA pushed back their start date a couple of weeks back from when it was originally scheduled to be. But what we have seen, and what we have heard is that almost every university of our size is on the same kind of curve. Within the first two to three weeks when you first come back that the curve really starts going up, before it starts to flatten back out.

I sit with a group that consists of Virginia schools every Friday and we talk about what we're seeing as professionals. Last Friday, UVA said they felt like they were seeing an uptick because they were later to the game. If you remember, James Madison was earlier to the game and their situation rose quicker than even ours.

I do think that the Virginia Tech response overall, and what the numbers are showing, is that it has worked. So, we probably haven't had to go to some of the different levels that some of the others went to. It's probably right on course with what happened, as we were a week behind Radford, and basically that kind of helped us predict exactly what was going to happen based on what she saw happening in Radford. We were right in that kind of same scenario you know obviously a larger school with the same kind of concept.

Q8a: Why are professors not required to notify other students in their class when one student tests positive for COVID? Particularly in a face-to-face classroom setting. I'm asking this question because there was a case recently where a student tested positive, and they did not notify any of their fellow students that they have been in contact with by the professor. I'm hoping this isn't happening very often. What are your thoughts in having professors notify their class of students?

A8a: I've had several conversations and have spoken with faculty members about how best to notify their classes when someone tests positive. This includes what they can say, and what they cannot say. We've actually put together a procedure and protocol that was distributed through the Provost Office to faculty members how to actually have that conversation.

They can certainly inform the class that somebody has been positive, and they are encouraged to do that. They can't necessarily say who, but can say there was a positive. If it is a student living on-campus that was tested through the health center - then we'll know about it and then there will be follow-up of case management provided.

If it is a student tested off-campus, and not tested through Schiffert, the University won't necessarily know that information unless that information is shared by that individual or employee, as the Health Department does not share that information with us. There are instances where we may not know to be able to follow up.

Q8b: The spread is not just being done in classrooms. I was just curious if that includes any information from classroom settings that are lab settings that are more hands-on and more close interaction between students than the typical classroom lecture setting where students are sitting six feet apart?

A8b: What has been done in those areas were those lab settings where there needs to be some closer contact for a limited period of time is that Environmental Health and Safety has worked with those instructors in those facilities, and added an additional mitigation steps to further reduce the opportunity for transmission of the virus. The approach was to put in place more mitigation strategies to promote a safe environment.

Q8c: Is there any evidence for where the spread is happening? Do we have contact tracing going on that is tracking all of this?

I think we're at a place in the University where we're trying to think about how the rest of the fall semester begins to unfold, and also thinking forward about the spring semester. We've been spending a lot of time with the White House Corona Virus Task

Force. Dr. Burkes, as well as, Noelle Bissell, who is our health department director, have looked at our data, and both have said there is no indication of any spread happening in the classroom.

Therefore, I think this is a really important thing for us to begin to share with others - that as of now, the spread is not happening in classrooms. It's happening primarily student-to-student, and it also happening in social environments; usually off-campus: churches, restaurants, parties - that's where the spread is primarily happening. There is no indication that spread is happening in campus environments, or on-campus environments.

Dr. Bissell said yesterday that a mask is tantamount to a vaccine. Until we have a vaccine, staying 6 feet away, managing your distance, wearing a mask – that's what makes all the difference in the world right now, at least from a science perspective. Dr. Burkes told us straight out, that she thought Virginia Tech needs to have more in-person classes, and do more in-person kinds of activities. People are going to feel differently about that with their level of comfort, or discomfort, but it is an important conversation that is happening about what the future looks like, and how to handle that.

This is a very complex puzzle and the landscape changes very rapidly as new information becomes available. We all need to try to remain a little flexible and work through it. Overall, we have been doing very well and we need to continue doing so collectively. Some encouraging news is Dr. Bissell showed us Montgomery County numbers and they are really on a downward curve, even for Virginia Tech and all of the county. There are a large number of students that are very careful about following Public Health guidelines, who are isolating, and being very careful about the way they manage their life.

There is a subset of students who hasn't been as committed to that and I think a lot of them have given the coronavirus to each other because of the format in which they socialize. The percentage of those students who have transmitted the virus back and forth to each other is on the decline now.

There are some hopeful signs that things are going well and that we need to keep working really hard in managing ourselves, and our individual choices for public health. It is making a difference and we are starting to see the difference now. We thought that we were going to see a Labor Day increase, but it really didn't materialize so we are seeing a lot of progress.

Thank you for helping that come to reality because people really are doing what they need to do, and it's making a big difference in putting us in a different situation than we were three weeks ago.

Q8d: Do you have local data to support all of this?

A8c: I don't have as much data as I'd like. I don't have something I can publish right now that would support what we just talked about. As that becomes available, I am happy to share it. When we look at some of the populations that we know are in those classrooms, we are not seeing transmission between faculty and students.

I don't know the circumstances of every case of COVID that has occurred within our community, but as we get more and more information and data, we can certainly have a follow up conversation on this particular issue. One of the things that actually will help us with this is the prevalence testing of students and the additional high contact testing we are doing with both employees and students in our high traffic areas where there is more opportunity for an employee or student to come in contact with somebody who is positive. I think as we learn more and more about that population that we will then have the data you are looking for.

Q9: After a positive test, are there any guidelines in place to ensure a student does not spread COVID? There have been cases in other universities where students are still holding parties and gathering. Does the administration have enforcement measures in place to deal with this?

A9: Yes, we have absolutely done a lot of enforcement. We terminated about 40 students housing contracts for violations of Public Health guidelines and we've currently suspended over 60 students for violation of Public Health guidelines. We are receiving referrals from the Blacksburg Police Department, as lots of people are involved with enforcement.

A8c: I feel like it's really important for us to continue to share that I think the vast majority of our students are really doing good work. But those that are blatantly disregarding the Public Health guidelines and put other people at risk are being held accountable.

Q10: How is the on-campus quarantine zone chosen? Currently there are 2 quarantine zone: East Egg and New Hall West. How can you ensure the quarantine zone does not affect surrounding (as New Hall West is where many the main university offices are, and East Egg is not only in the same block with several other residence halls, but also close to university library, downtown, and dining hall)?

A10: In an ideal, perfect world, we would like our isolation and quarantine space to be one person to a room, that has a private bathroom – but that's not always the case. But we did do, is the first two resident halls that we chose (New Hall West and Donaldson Brown) because the rooms have their own private bathroom. So, it is an opportunity to keep the spread out of complete hallways because of people sharing restrooms.

As we began to fill up some of those rooms, we determined we needed some more space. East Eggleston was chosen and I'm not 100% sure why. We are trying to choose places that make the isolation and quarantine experience the best that it can be both for the student, and for what we're trying to accomplish with public health. Single room restrooms was an important piece, which is why the first two were chosen.

As far as the people that work in those areas - know we've had many conversations with them, there is extensive cleaning. We've also had conversations with our facilities folks about air circulation, and all the things that might have been an issue. Early on in the summer, we chose this first two places with the understanding that we did not have those types of issues for those employees that occupy those spaces.

East Eggleston was chosen because it had the lowest occupancy of people who had moved out. It was a way to disrupt the fewest number of students so that we could have that quarter all together.

I've been in so many meetings with Public Health officials and have had to share this with my own colleagues who work in New Hall West - people who wear masks, and people who manage their distance, can safely work in our environments, as Virginia Tech week is taking so many good precautions ensuring our are environments are safe and there isn't transmission through the air of handling equipment as we've done all that testing. I don't know of any examples in New Hall West where there's been any transmission of the virus. In repeating what Dr. Burkes said to us at the national level, and what Dr. Bissell is saying to us on a local level, is that our work in classroom environments at Virginia Tech are very safe.

This is because we have taken lots of precautions and people are wearing masks. If you wear a mask, and other people are wearing a mask, and you are keeping a reasonable distance, and making good choices, the chances of transmission are near zero. Transmission is very high if you to a party off-campus, take your mask off, and cough in someone's face -you're going to get the virus. We've just got to talk honestly about how transmission happens - in what environments it happens and what environments it's not happening. We're just not seeing it spread on campus in the work environment.

We've been testing for COVID since March at Schiffert Health Center there's a whole administrative team that works one floor up from the health center, including that's where my office is, and we are not seeing it here either. Yet this is where people come to be tested for the virus and things like that so but a lot of that again goes back to the work our facilities team did all throughout the summer to prepare and make sure that that we were aware of how to protect our environments as best we could.

Q11a: With dining, what are the current rules implemented other than setting tables apart? From dining service website we see that dining-in is still an option. Should that be a concern? What about the students who have concerns with locations such as, West End Market, as they see students sitting indoors and eating food.

A11: That's correct. There's a little video clip to me can hear me talk about all the precautions that we're taking from electrostatic spray, to touchless entry for swiping your card, to all the cleaning protocols, reorganizing lots of tables, etc. 70% of our student transactions are online. Part of what we're trying to help students know is that they can actually go in and order safely without using the online services.

People have to do what's comfortable for them. What I encourage people to do is get really educated and then make decisions of what is comfortable to them.

I would never encourage a student who does not feel comfortable eating in at West End or going to West End if they didn't feel comfortable. We are trying to make sure that people understand that there's a variety of options. Turner place, which is on the academic side of campus, is 60% below its previous years volume – so you won't have to wait in line like you used to.

Q12: My roommate is an animal poultry science major, and deals a lot with cattle. One of her professors for her lab, told her they were not going to be able to proceed with class in a socially distant environment. In dealing with cattle, they have to be close to each other. She is concerned about how to proceed with that class as she obviously still wants that experience, along with the class credit. Since she doesn't know if it is safe or not, she has not gone back.

I feel like it should not just be the concern of what one individual feels comfortable with, but it should be the health of the overall student population. So even if she feels uncomfortable and doesn't attend, then what happens if transmission does happen between the other students that do feel comfortable and that are present?

A12: Sounds as if she is assessing what she feels comfortable with, and whether or not that is safe, and has decided not to participate. I think it's to be really hard for us without knowing the specific scenario to know what kind of evaluation is taking place, or what the situation is.

Tell your roommate to have this conversation with her professor. I've sat along-side the Provost Office with the Emergency Management teams all summer as we planned, and scheduled classes. I do believe that everyone was expected to make sure that the opportunity was there to be able to take any in-person class in some sort of a socially distance way. It might be important for that person to have a conversation with that professor, and try to make it clear what they're comfortable with, and what they are not. There may be others in the class that have the same concern – so maybe it is something that the professor can adjust. That is the step I would encourage initially. If something didn't work out from there then I think that is a conversation to have with that College.

Once the Q&A portion of the meeting pertaining to COVID-19 wrapped up, a detailed conversation regarding the invasiveness of some of the alternative classroom testing techniques such as the lockdown browser webcam ensued.

7. **Adjournment** - Victoria Dashevsky

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 4:57p.m.

Next meeting is Thursday, October 8th @ 3:30pm.