

Commission on Faculty Affairs

April 11, 2025

10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Burruss 330E and Zoom

Present: J. Lemkul (presiding), R. Fricker (ex officio), R. Gabriele, D. Agud (Faculty Senate), J. Lahne (Faculty Senate), A. Efird (Undergraduate Student Senate), R. Jin (Faculty Senate), R. Gaines (Faculty Senate), J. McGlothlin (Faculty Senate), V. Buechner-Maxwell (Faculty Senate), J. Hawdon (Faculty Senate), N. Connors (A/P Faculty Senate), K. Pitts (Dean), L. Learman (Dean), K. Benson (Faculty Senate).

Absent with Notice: E. Lavender-Smith (Faculty Senate).

Absent: A. Torres (Graduate and Professional Student Senate).

Guests: E. Kim (Faculty Affairs), A. Myers (Governance), E. Cooper (Faculty Affairs), Sandra Burks (ORI), Lynn Byrd (ORI).

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

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Consent Agenda

- a. **Review and Approval of Agenda.**
- b. **Approval of Minutes from March 28, 2025.**

The consent agenda was adopted without objection.

3. Reports from Senates

- A/P Faculty Senate: N/A (absent).
- Staff Senate: N/A (waiting for new representative).
- Undergraduate Senate: The Senate passed the remainder of their amendments at their last meeting. Their current focus is on the recent update from President Sands regarding the termination of SEVIS records of Virginia Tech students.
- Graduate Senate: N/A (absent).
- Faculty Senate: The Senate passed CFA 2024-25H, CFA 2024-25J, and CFA 2024-25K. Furthermore, the senate held a first reading of CGPSP 2024-25C and had a discussion with Ken Eriksson regarding reconciliation processes.

4. Unfinished Business

None

5. New Business

Discussion

Update on CFA resolutions

J. Lemkul informed the CFA that CFA 2024-25H (Resolution to Codify the Faculty Reconciliation Process within the Faculty Affairs Office), CFA 2024-25J (Resolution to Integrate Chapter 12 into Chapters 2 and 5 of the Faculty Handbook), and CFA 2024-25K (Resolution to Amend the Faculty Handbook to Codify Interest- or Discipline-Based Faculty Organizations) are scheduled for first readings by the University Council on April 21 and should be passed by the end of the semester.

Discussion

CFA representative on Employee Benefits Committee

J. Lemkul informed the CFA that one member will need to be reappointed to the Employee Benefits Committee. D. Agud agreed to maintain her position on the committee for the next year.

Discussion

ORI Project Updates

S. Burkes presented the status of the “Research Faculty Ranks Review” project on behalf of ORI. The purpose of the project was to implement a structure to support the recruitment, retention, and promotion of research faculty. Research faculty ranks, postdoctoral associates, and professorial ranks were not within the scope of this review. Results from the 2024 peer review suggested that career pathing and leveling may be available for research positions. Results from a recent stakeholder feedback meeting revealed concerns over the lack of opportunities for promotion, confusion over current promotion criteria, the need for a non-PhD track for employees, and increased transparency in pay, amongst other information. The project team hopes to launch a webpage with resources, conduct a job analysis, go through the governance process to update the faculty handbook, and align systems to support these changes. The majority of these changes will be administrative in nature to improve career planning; there should be no significant disruptions to any faculty’s day-to-day work. The ORI team encourages CFA members to share any relevant information with the working group. J. Lemkul further informed the CFA that one member will be nominated to a committee in collaboration with ORI for faculty representation.

6. Open Discussion

Topic 1: Immigration status of international members of the VT community

- Question: How can faculty members help their graduate students during these times, especially in regard to ongoing research and degree completion? How should faculty members address questions around legal counsel, contingency planning, performance evaluations, and teaching duties?
- Response: The university is not getting notification of these events; students are being directly contacted in regard to their status. If students receive any messaging relating to these events, they should immediately reach out to associate deans, department heads, direct advisors, Cranwell, and the graduate school for guidance. The graduate school has some resources to support students, but they do not have the ability to provide legal defense. Students who have their records terminated must stop working immediately once they receive notice. Degree completion will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Topic 2: Status of Instructor Working Group

- Question: What is the progress on the creation of the instructor working group?

- Response: Faculty Affairs is working with the provost to appoint a chair to the working group. Once a chair has been established, they will work to create a list of appropriate members. Once the committee is constituted, they will have a full year to conduct business.

Topic 3: Vote of confidence for President Sands and VT leadership

- Question: Should the CFA (and/or other senates) create a brief letter expressing their support or appreciation for actions taken by Virginia Tech leadership?
- Response: There is concern over how a letter of this nature may be viewed by the VT community. On one hand, faculty members are broadly appreciative of recent affirmations of the Principles of Community and support for the international community. On the other hand, if the letter is not crafted carefully, some groups may misinterpret or misrepresent the purpose of the document. R. Fricker will discuss this idea further with some CFA members.

Topic 4: Speaker series for academic freedom

- Question: Should the CFA help develop or support a speaker series to support academic freedom?
- Response: There is widespread support across CFA members for this initiative. Members agreed to further develop this plan, reach out to potential speakers, and coordinate through Faculty Affairs.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 11:57 am.