



MINUTES

Faculty Senate
February 20, 2026
2:30 – 4:15 p.m.

Torgersen 1000 and via Zoom

Present – Jim Hawdon (presiding), Luke Achenie, Joe Adams, Diane Agud, Aaron Ansell, Rick Ashley, Azziza Bankole, Kristen Benson, David Bieri, Myra Blanco, Jan Helge Bøhn, Warren Booth, Bradley Bowen, Curtis Bower, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Ryan Calder, Nick Copeland, Carolyn Copenheaver, Maria del Carmen Caña-Jiménez, Naomi Dunn, Matt Eick, Candace Fitch, Nicholas Goedert, Ann Gregus (alternate for Sarah Clinton), Barrett Gutter, Wes Gwaltney, Ramtin Haghazadeh Kouchaksaraei, Samantha Harden (alternate for HFNE), William Headley, Rebecca Hester, Dan Hindman, Kristopher Hite (alternate for Justin Lemkul), Kenneth Hodges, Adrienne Holz, Leanna House, Laura Iancu (alternate for Logan Dandridge), Eli Jamison (alternate for Management), Ran Jin, Sarah Karpanty, Bryan Katz, Lara Khansa, Alex Kinnaman, Andrea L'Afflitto, Jake Lahne, Catherine Larochelle, Renee LeClair, Mark Limes, Kimberly Loeffert, Charles Lowery, G.Q. Lu, Jason Malone, Eric Martin, Joel McGlothlin, Harold McKenzie, Marc Michel, Rachel Miles, Sherif Motaleb Abdelaziz, Phil Nelson, Gregory Novack, Albert Pan, Mark Psiaki, Isis Quinlan, Shelly Rhoads, Nino Ripepi, Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Steven Rowson, Caroline Saouma, Yi Shi, Ian Shoemaker, Richard Shryock, Tyechia Thompson (alternate for Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, Chelsea Thompto, Jim Tokuhisa, Byron Tsang, Alp Tural, Cassie Wallwey (alternate for Nicole Pitterson), Jerald Walz, Jeff Warfford, Erin Worthington, David Xie, Boya Xu, Pinar Yanardag Delul (alternate for Ihudiya Finda Williams), Gordon Yee

Absent with Notice: Logan Dandridge, Justin Lemkul, Stephanie Smith, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower

Absent: Biko Agozino, Nathaniel Bishop, Sherwood Clements, Sarah Clinton, Rebecca Cockrum, Mark Coggins, Anna Duraj-Thatte, Bob Edmison, Cassandra Efke, Ihudiya Finda Williams, Mark Freeman, David Gregory, Aaron Gross, Daniel Karolyi, Bettina Koch, Stephen Martin, Ron Meyers, Nicole Pitterson, John Richey, Terri-Ann Wattsman

Guests: Lynn Byrd, Ron Fricker, E. Fanny Jasso-Hernandez, April Myers, Julie Ross, Timothy Sands, Demetria Somervell, Lijuan Yuan

Jim Hawdon called the meeting to order at 2:32. 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 February 06, 2026
- Approval of agenda for February 20, 2026

2. Updates and Announcements

Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Survey

The COACHE survey is open and has been distributed. Senators were encouraged to complete the survey by responding to their individual emails.

University Strategic Plan survey

This survey is still open, and a link was provided.

Panel Discussion on Academic Freedom, Freedom of Expression

The Faculty Senate is hosting the panel discussion on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. in Holtzmann Auditorium and via livestream. Featured panelists include Virginia Tech President Tim Sands; Tom Ginsburg, faculty director of the Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression at the University of Chicago; and Robin Queen, chair of the Virginia Tech Task Force on Freedom of Expression and Inquiry.

3. Visit with President Timothy D. Sands and Provost Julie Ross

Jim Hawdon introduced President Tim Sands and Provost Julie Ross and welcomed them to the Faculty Senate. President Sands and Provost Ross thanked the senate for the invitation. Discussion was centered around questions previously submitted by faculty.

The first topic of discussion focused on concerns expressed by faculty from humanities. Provost Ross shared plans to engage with faculty and colleges to better understand the issues they are facing. She acknowledged the national discourse around the humanities and emphasized that Virginia Tech is a comprehensive institution. This standing requires a broad range of programs, disciplines, research, and service areas, and is even more important in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). There is not a one-answer-meets all solution, but the university must think about how to strengthen every part of the academic enterprise, and all areas must review scholarly directions, the future of academic programs, student demand, and needs expressed by both families and the workforce. The university must think about where it is today and where it desires to be, identify the gap, and determine how to close the gap.

President Sands stated that the university is trying to solve, and is sending students out to solve, complex problems that cannot be solved without the humanities. He shared Virginia Tech's unique history which includes the university's land grant model, polytechnic institute status, incorporation of military components, and comprehensive state university status which began in 1970. Virginia Tech has a unique balance between STEM offerings and the value placed on liberal arts. He feels that specifically regarding the humanities, the university is facing both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge focuses on how to evaluate scholarship in arts and humanities when the measures and metrics are not easily comparable to metrics used in other colleges. Work is underway in this area. When asked, employers report the need for strength within their specific disciplines, but also the need for durable skills such as adaptability, communication, and working in diverse teams. These durable skills are developed through arts, humanities, and social sciences. The opportunity in the long term is to focus on these needed durable skills that are provided by the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Substantive internships and bridge experiences are additional ways that students can gain significant experience in these areas. The VT Advantage seeks to support students that do not have the resources or connections for such experiences on their own. Additionally, bringing authentic environments into the classroom is important.

The next discussion topic focused on the Academic Resource Alignment process. Provost Ross emphasized that the committee report contains a set of recommendations, not decisions. The recommendations are based on an analysis of data intended to elevate areas where there may be a misalignment around resourcing and academic activity. The report is not a review of the quality of any academic program or a recommendation of how to prioritize programs across the institution. Each recommendation will be looked at individually to determine whether there is consensus on next steps, or if an adjustment should be made, or if a specific recommendation as

presented is not quite right. Provost Ross has met with the deans of colleges that have programs identified in the report's recommendations. The report provides a new perspective for deans, allowing them to benchmark their programs against others university-wide, not just others within their own college.

While the report itself recommends the same type of look every three years, Provost Ross would like to integrate a continuous and ongoing review that would allow the university to find and address areas of concern much earlier. President Sands noted that recent changes have been made at the state level and that the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) has changed the process for adding programs and for determining how programs are undersubscribed. The changes make it easier to add programs but require that institutions be held more accountable for any programs that may not meet minimum expectations for degree enrollment and outcomes. A continuous and ongoing review of programs will allow Virginia Tech to identify and correct any areas of concern before action is taken at the state or federal levels.

The third discussion topic was on progress made with the University Mission Initiative (UMI). The committee has completed their report and submitted that to Provost Ross and Justin Lemkul, Faculty Senate President. Next steps include reviewing the report, considering budgeting and financial impact, discussing required internal investments and external grants, and required changes to policies and processes. The UMI will address the entire system of graduate education on campus.

The next discussion focused on recent changes regarding the Department of Education's Dear Colleague Letter. President Sands stated that this issue continues to be complicated and to evolve quickly. He provided historical context, including the March 2025 Board of Visitor's (BOV) resolution, evaluations of risk conducted by the university, and changes within the state governor's office and administration. The university must consider both state and federal levels because it receives funding from both.

Virginia Tech is currently in a good spot in terms of protection of the institution. He acknowledged that recently, the university lost cultural celebrations around Commencement. These were identity based and funded through university funds, which was not sustainable. However, they could re-emerge as donor-funded events. Cultural and community centers continue to do good work. The university must keep an eye on the sense of community that has been built, address any challenges that may arise, and continue attracting diverse talent pools without being discriminatory or violating federal law.

The final item of discussion was the budget reduction exercise. President Sands stated that the budget reduction exercise was implemented to be prepared in case of future budget shortfalls. He provided an overview of current federal and state funding. While there are no immediate funding problems, there are unknowns as you look toward the future. Provost Ross added that exercises in planning allow the university to be more thoughtful and to better consider the consequences of choices that are made, which is preferable to having to respond to budgetary changes within a short amount of time that does not allow for careful consideration. She also stated that high performing organizations complete planning exercises and assess risks all the time, and that the planning exercise is the right thing to be doing right now given future economic uncertainty.

4. Unfinished Business

Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA) 2025-26G Resolution to Revise Faculty Handbook Section on Sanctions

Jim Hawdon temporarily stepped down as chair, and Rachel Miles assumed the role, enabling Dr. Hawdon to participate fully in the discussion of CFA Resolution 2025-26G.

Jim Hawdon presented CFA 2025-26G for second reading. This resolution stems from the fact that minor sanctions are currently being imposed by administrators at Virginia Tech, but there is no minor sanction provision in the handbook, no guidance, and no oversight. He noted that right now, most cases resulting in a formal grievance began because of the imposition of a minor sanction. This resolution includes clear processes for both minor and severe sanctions. CFA has received and considered feedback from across campus.

After providing an overview, Jim Hawdon presented the following amendments to the current text for CFA 2025-26G:

In section 3.10.1, under the heading Adequate Cause, as the final sentence in the third paragraph, reinsert the following text which was previously removed: "...or an extensive and sustained record of minor sanctions, imposed over time and through the process outlined below allowing opportunity for correction, that collectively demonstrate a significant and willful failure to meet professional obligations, standards, or assigned responsibilities."

In section 3.10.2, Imposition of Minor Sanctions, after step five, add the following text as a paragraph: "All requests for and imposition of minor sanctions will be reported to Faculty Affairs, and Faculty Affairs will provide an annual report to the President of the Faculty Senate of aggregate trends to monitor the use of such sanctions."

A motion was made and seconded to approve CFA 2025-26G including the proposed changes.

Clarification was provided on the following topics: how minor and severe sanctions connect with the grievance process and the grievance process itself; the process for selecting faculty committee members referenced in the resolution will be decided by individual colleges; the definition of unprofessional behaviors is included in Section 2.29 of the Faculty Handbook.

Senators shared their concerns and those provided by colleagues. Concerns covered several areas including: (1) The role of the administrator in the process. (2) Perspectives that this resolution could provide a new cause for sanction, dismissal, or could be abused and undermine academic freedom and constitutional rights. (3) Ambiguous language regarding what constitutes minor sanctions, severe sanctions, and adequate cause.

Comments of support were offered: (1) History has shown that guidelines are needed. (2) As written, a committee consisting of faculty members will make the decision regarding whether a sanction is warranted. Currently, administrators are making this determination with no guidelines and no oversight. (2) This revision provides safeguards that are lacking in current processes. (3) Viewpoints that the committee provides protections for academic freedom. (4) A faculty committee, not an administrator, will determine whether a number of smaller actions raise to the level of a major sanction.

A vote was taken, and the resolution was approved (Yes: 45, Abstain: 8, No: 14).

Commission on Research (COR) 2025-26A Resolution to Revise Research Faculty Non-Professorial Rank Structure in Faculty Handbook

Jan Helge Bøhn presented COR 2025-26A for second reading. This resolution merges the ranks of research associate and research scientist into one, research professional faculty. Currently, there are 6 levels proposed within the rank of research professional faculty.

Jan Helge Bøhn proposed that the following sentence currently included in Section 6.1.3 be removed: "There are six levels within the research professional faculty rank: Research Associate I, Research Associate II, Research Scientist I, Research Scientist II, Senior Research Scientist, and

Principal Research Scientist.” He explained that details for these levels have not yet been completed by human resources, and removing this list will provide flexibility. A website link is included. The link is not yet active but is part of the Research and Innovation website and will house detailed information about the levels for research professional faculty. Lynn Byrd, Human Resources Division Director for the Office of Research and Innovation, was available to answer questions and provide clarification.

Lynn Byrd explained the current process for finalizing the research professional faculty levels. The Division of Human Resources is working on the levels and has discovered the need for language adjustments. These changes will positively impact recruitment and retention opportunities and will provide career progression paths. Specific details will be finalized over the summer and will then be made available online.

Senators voiced concerns about the existence of levels outside of the Faculty Handbook. It was noted that the structure for other faculty, such as the AP Faculty structure, are contained outside the Faculty Handbook. The current processes for promotion and tenure will remain the same. A Microsoft Excel file is available in the Documents to Review section of the Faculty Senate SharePoint site that provides levels, a description, and information that is more detailed than previously provided.

A motion was made and seconded to approve COR 2025-26A including the proposed change.

A vote was taken to approve the resolution, and the resolution was approved (Yes: 53, Abstain: 3, No: 2).

5. New Business

Due to lengthy discussion on the items of Unfinished Business, New Business agenda items were not discussed and will be included in the next Faculty Senate meeting.

6. Open Floor

Due to time constraints, there was no Open Floor Discussion.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 4:30.