University Council Minutes
September 14, 2026
3:30 p.m.
2420 North End Center and Zoom

Present: Tim Sands (presiding), April Myers, Randy Heflin for Dan Sui, Bryan Garey, Heather Wagoner for Frances Keene, Kim O'Rourke, Guru Ghosh, Aimée Suprenant, Jill Sible, Mary Burrows for Mario Ferruzzi, Dan Givens, Laura Belmonte, Lu Liu, Kevin Pitts, Warren Dixon, Saonee Sarker, Lee Learman, Tyler Walters, Becky Bott, Jennifer Johnson, Tracy Rutherford, Justin Lemkul, Rachel Miles, Marlena Lester, Nikki Connors, Amber Hagan, Gabe Petry, Jasmine Boyd, Lindsay Ricci, Atharva Shashank Kokane, Robert Waugh, Gavin O'Brien, Shuvro Das, Mohammed El Kihal, Jabreel Walker, Helen Phillips, Diane Agud, Jan Helge Bøhn, Eric Martin, Jerald Walz, Ron Meyers, Kim Loeffert, Rebecca Hester, Curtis Bower, Paul Taylor, Kayla Robertson, LaTawnya Burleson, Clay Crumpler, Penelope Muelenaer, Pooja Bhagawat, Rick Sparks for Sherwood Clements, Ryan Calder, and Jake Lahne

Absent with Notice: Amy Sebring and Jim Hawdon

Absent: Julie Ross, Saskia van de Gevel, Erica Cooper, and David Xie

Guests: Janice Austin, Ron Fricker, Monique Logan, Kat Nelson, Carling Repass, Lori Rose, Dee Dee Somervell, and Lauren Surface

President Sands called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. A quorum was present.

1. Announcement of Order of the Day

Dr. Sands announced the order of the day for the meeting. Items to be placed on the agenda must be submitted to the secretary at least ten days prior to the meeting date. Follow the procedures in Section 2(2) – University Council Bylaws, Article IX, Section 2(2-3).

2. Announcement of review and approval of minutes of May 4, 2026

Dr. Sands noted that these minutes have been voted on electronically and can be publicly accessed on the Governance Information System on the governance website.

Reports from Commissions

1. Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies – Rick Sparks, Registrar

    a. Continue to gather data and possibly bring forth a proposal for a 2-day fall break for students.
    b. Define the words "attempt" and "repeatability" with regards to undergraduate student class policies and schedules.
    c. Identify items such as IClickers and TopHat that may bear a significant cost burden on the students and address whether each is required to enhance classroom success. Explore remedies if necessary.

2. Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs – Nikki Connors, Chair

    a. Ongoing grievance determination panels as needed.

b. Advance recommended changes to A/P Faculty related Faculty Handbook provisions (Chapter 7 and Section 2.18.3.1).
c. Assess the alignment of CAPFA membership with the new A/P Faculty Senate constituent areas and recommend changes as appropriate.
d. Develop recommendations for the retention, storage, and oversight of grievance files to ensure consistency and appropriate record management.

3. Commission on Faculty Affairs – Jake Lahne, Chair

   a. Review collegiate faculty series, including the description of, duties performed by, and promotion process.
   b. Review Faculty Handbook to remove mention of prior-service expectations for Faculty promotion in Chapters 2 through 5.
   c. Review and revise Chapter 4 of the Faculty Handbook, pertaining to Library Faculty
   d. Introduce consistent grievance processes into Chapter 4 and 5, following revision of grievance process in Chapter 3.
   e. Introduce consistent (minor) sanctions processes into Chapter 5, following revision of (minor) sanctions process in Chapter 3.
   f. Study faculty time-use on tasks related to University internal systems, particularly in relationship to faculty, staff, and A/P Faculty ratios at Virginia Tech.
   g. Update Faculty Handbook to reflect updates to Policy 6050 on faculty role in the curriculum and on reassignment not due to reduction in force.
   h. Review timelines for non-reappointment notification in Chapter 2 (2.14 and 2.15).

4. Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs – Pooja Bhagawat, Chair

   a. Redefine the scope of the commission with regard to university policies and other non-policy-related matters affecting graduate and professional students.
   b. Build training modules and programs for students to understand changes to and serve on panels for the grievance process, complementary to resolutions amending the grievance process in the Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies.
   c. Recommend policy and administrative changes based on findings from the 2024-25 Graduate School Climate Survey report by the Graduate and Professional Student Senate Climate Survey Assessment Working Group.
   d. Recommend policy and administrative changes based on Graduate Student Health & Wellbeing Working Group report.
   e. Explore expanding the role of the Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs to include the review of the Student Activities Fee Allocation Board policies and University Chartered Student Organizations (in coordination with the Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs).

5. Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies – Jerald Walz, chair

   a. Proactive
      - Continue a sub-committee to streamline the process of professional master's programs.
      - Review 4+1 policies and clarifying requirements.
      - Understand the role of A.I. in graduate and professional studies and establish appropriate policy measures.

- Clarifying academic freedom with faculty and students to promote understanding and appropriate expressions of research/publishing, teaching and speech.

b. Responsive
   - Implement graduate student grievance process.
   - Replacement of equity & inclusion requirement with multiple courses.
   - Timelines for completion for international students.

c. Operational
   - Draft and submit resolutions appropriate for graduate and professional policy changes.
   - Utilize SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) analysis to generate future policy proposals.

6. Commission on Outreach and International Affairs – Penelope Muelenaer, chair

   a. Continue monitoring federal immigration changes and their impact on enrollment management (graduate and undergraduate), faculty hiring, and the research enterprise. Identify challenges and develop strategies to mitigate any challenges.
   b. Review the Carnegie Classification Report on Community Engagement and explore ways to implement strategies identified in the report to strengthen Virgina Tech.
   c. Participate in the 5-year review of the Center for Economic and Community Engagement.

7. Commission on Research– Ryan Calder, chair

   a. Fralin Life Sciences Institute review.
   b. Virginia Tech-National Security Institute review.
   c. Revise Policy 13025 (Ownership and Control of Research Data, Results, and Related Materials), Policy 13020 (Policy on Misconduct in Research), and other research compliance policies as appropriate.
   d. Establish standing committee on postdocs.
   e. Develop recommendations for improving continuity of leadership of Commission on Research.
   f. Revise Policy 13005 (Centers and institutes: Establishment, Governance and Programmatic Oversight).

8. Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs– Gabe Petry, chair

   a. Address the lack of bereavement leave for staff using benchmarking for a proposal to support a resolution.
   b. To reinstitute Veterans Day as an optional compensatory day for all staff to give Veterans and families of Veterans the option to observe the holiday.
   c. Implement voluntary contributions (such as governance, search committees, and work groups) on staff performance evaluations.
   d. Update Staff Senate constituency composition to better represent University Staff populations.
   e. Form and task a new work group to create a staff handbook.
   f. Implement regular policy reviews for key policies affecting staff.

9. Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs – Atharva Shashank Kokane, chair

    a. Review and approve University Chartered Student Organizations Constitutions.
    b. Review the scope and purpose of the Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs as it exists in shared governance.
    c. Gather feedback on ways to enhance the undergraduate student experience.
    d. Serve as a collaborative platform between undergraduate students and other university stakeholders.

5. Announcement of approval and posting of UC Cabinet, Commission, and Committee Minutes

These minutes have been voted on electronically and will be posted on the governance website. Note that the purpose of voting on minutes of the University Council Cabinet, Commissions, and Committees reporting to University Council Cabinet is to accept them for filing. University Council Bylaws require that policy items be brought forward in resolution form for University Council action.

- University Council Cabinet
  April 27, 2026

- Commission on Faculty Affairs
  April 10, 2026

- Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs
  April 29, 2026

- Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies
  April 1, 2026
  April 15, 2026
  May 6, 2026

- Commission on Outreach and International Affairs
  April 16, 2026
  May 7, 2026

- Commission on Research
  May 7, 2026

- Athletics Committee
  April 23, 2026
  May 14, 2026

- Climate Action, Sustainability, and Energy Committee
  March 23, 2026
  April 27, 2026

6. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 3:50 p.m.