

Minutes
ACADEMIC, RESEARCH, AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Inn at Virginia Tech, Latham Ballroom CDEF
10:00 – 11:45 a.m.

Committee Members Present:

Greta Harris (chair), Melissa Nelson, Carrie Chenery, Jeff Veatch (electronically).
Eric Kaufman, (faculty representative), Tamarah Smith (staff representative).

Guests:

Laura Belmonte, Cyril Clarke, Karen DePauw, Corey Earles, Juan Espinoza, Jack Finney, Rachel Gabriel, Henri Gendreau, Matthew Hulver, X.J. Meng, Ellen Plummer, Judy Taylor, Paul Winistorfer.

OPEN SESSION

1. Motion to Return to Open Session.

The committee voted unanimously to move into Open Session.

2. Welcome and Acceptance of Agenda. Greta Harris, chair of the committee, welcomed committee members and attendees to the Open Session.

The committee voted unanimously to accept the agenda as presented including all items on the Consent Agenda.

3. Report of Closed Session Action Items. G. Harris reported that the committee met in closed session and approved 10 faculty appointments to emeritus/emerita status, seven appointments to endowed chairs, professorships, or fellowships, one tenure appointment, and ratified the Personnel Changes Report.

4. Consent Agenda. Approval of August 24, 2020 Meeting Minutes. Report of Reappointments to Endowed Chairs, Professorships, and Fellowships. Resolution to Revise Graduate Honor System Constitution. Pratt Fund Overview. Resolution for Approval of Reappointments to the Virginia Coal and Energy Research and Development Advisory Board. Resolution for Exclusion of Certain Officers/Directors.

5. Update: College of Natural Resources and Environment. Paul Winistorfer, dean of the college, offered the committee an overview of the progress and accomplishments of the college. In addition to programs on the Blacksburg campus, the college's Center for Leadership in Global Sustainability is located in the greater Washington, D.C. metro area. The college is ranked first of its kind in the U.S., and nationally ranked academic programs include forestry and packaging. The college is competitive in several areas including offering unique degree programs, a robust and dedicated advising center, and outreach efforts to employers. Future goals include advancing the college's presence in the greater Washington D.C. metro area, engaging with the growing Innovation Campus, and growing research expenditures.

6. Council of College Deans Update. Council of College Deans Update. Laura Belmonte, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (CLAHS) representing the Council of College Deans, reported to the committee on several items. The colleges continue to manage and respond to the additional stress on instruction, research, and promotion and tenure processes due to the pandemic. Deans are monitoring the impact of a new administration in Washington, D.C. on federal and state budgetary and policy decisions. Hiring of faculty is impacted by budget cuts and identifying essential hires for instruction and academic support. Colleges and faculty are planning for spring semester instruction and hoping to offer increased face-to-face learning. The deans are requesting that faculty and student support efforts include as many live interactions as is safe and possible. Transdisciplinary learning and discovery is a priority for all colleges. For example, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences is establishing an Academy of Transdisciplinary Studies along with interdisciplinary, cross-college minors. Deans are partnering to provide forums in which current issues are discussed. For example, CLAHS co-sponsored with the College of Science on a forum called “Living with a Pandemic.”

The College of Science has established an Academy of Data Science built upon the college’s successful model of the Academy of Integrated Science. The college is establishing collaborations for transdisciplinary work in the science of data science and data science applied to science. Within the college, the departments of math and statistics are working together on an M.S. degree in data science. The college is raising philanthropic funds to support faculty fellows.

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) increased its class size from 42 and, in July 2020, admitted 49 students. The VTCSOM launched a curricular domain called Health Systems Science and Interprofessional Practice. Clinical training resumed in July 2020 and students are on track to meet curricular requirements through a combination of in-person and virtual learning experiences. Applications for the incoming class currently exceed 6,000, which is 30% higher than the VTCSOM’s previous record.

The committee asked questions and discussed the benefits and challenges associated with requiring student attendance and the use of cameras in on-line instruction. Elements of instruction from which the university has learned this year include that students like having on-line options, teleworking for faculty and staff seems to improve productivity for some, caregiving remains a challenge for many faculty, and using zoom for guest speakers helps manage speaker costs and can draw a larger audience than what would be possible in person.

7. Provost’s Update and Discussion. Cyril Clarke, executive vice president and provost, provided information on several items. Spring semester planning is occurring within a three-fold commitment to mitigating health safety, sustaining academic quality, and accomplishing this within the university’s resource capacity.

The spring semester schedule has been announced and maintains previously established start and end dates. The semester will begin with online instruction as move-in of residential students is completed at which time in-person instruction will begin. The initial overlap of online instruction with move-in is intended to engage students and discourage social congregating that lead to a spike in infection in the fall. There will be no extended spring break. To provide students with downtime and stress relief during the spring semester, there will be five, one-day breaks distributed across the semester in which classes will not be held. Plans for spring semester align with public health advice to avoid congregating social settings.

Spring semester instruction will continue the mode of delivery used over the fall semester. Final decisions rest with faculty, in consultation with department heads, for whether courses are in-person, online, or in a hybrid format. Faculty members have been encouraged to consider ways in which to increase in-person learning while maintaining the university's commitment to mitigating health safety. Synchronous delivery is encouraged for on-line instruction. In-person instruction contributes to student wellness and positive experiences of academic quality. Approximately 30% of courses are being delivered either in-person or hybrid. The window for requesting spring classes closed on November 10 and indicate a positive trend. Residential housing contracts, including cancellations, are stable and an 85% occupancy rate is anticipated.

Undergraduate admissions applications are up. The university is committed to maintaining a 30,000 person cap on undergraduate enrollment. In addition, the university is committed to increasing out of state student, underserved, and minority student enrollments. The university is using robust modeling to manage and forecast enrollments. Undergraduate applications are down nationally, however, Virginia Tech's applications are up 30% and the university is experiencing increases in applications from students who are out of state, international, African American, Latinx, and first-generation. Reducing barriers in the application process and using the common application has been noticed by various communities and has improved the university's draw of applications.

In graduate education, the provost's graduate education task force released its report and recommendations. Fourteen recommendations are summarized in four areas:

- Acquisition of extramural funding necessary to grow enrollment
- Employment conditions for graduate students, including salary, considering not charging tuition after completion of non-research coursework, the duration of support over the years of a student's graduate career, and improved mentorship and professional development
- Assessing outcomes of graduate education
- Ways in which colleges can improve their involvement in graduate student admissions and in graduate student goals and strategies

Provost Clarke thanked Dr. Karen DePauw for her outstanding service and contributions to strengthening and leading the university's graduate education

programs and initiatives. The committee congratulated Dr. DePauw on her retirement and thanked her for her many years of service to the university and her advocacy for graduate students.

Provost Clarke introduced Dr. Daniel Sui as the vice president for research and innovation.

8. **Transdisciplinary Learning and Discovery.** X. J. Meng, University Distinguished Professor from the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, reported on establishing a new center, the Center for Emerging, Zoonotic, and Arthropod-borne Pathogens, which will address many issues of relevance to the current pandemic along with basic immunological sciences. The new center has been supported by the Fralin Life Sciences Institute.

Matthew Hulver, Professor from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Executive Director of the Fralin Life Sciences Institute (FLSI), described ways in which a large, well-funded and well-staffed institute can move life science research forward. Investments in research programs by the FLSI will be on large problems facing the nation and world. FLSI will provide experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates, professional opportunities for graduate students, and facilitate partnerships with the FLSI and relevant academic colleges. FLSI as an investment institute does not take overhead from grants, allowing colleges to use those funds to grow their research programs. The major focus is on environment and health interactions and major “wicked” problems.

Three goals for FLSI: (1) Paradigm shifting science: the most impactful issues facing society; (2) Next leaders: developing graduate students as the next scientific leaders and provide education for undergraduates to pursue graduate training; and (3) Impacting communities: both basic discovery and translational science to impact communities.

The committee discussed the exciting work represented in these efforts and the opportunities for seeking large impactful grants to address the top life sciences problems facing society.

9. **Agenda Items for March 2020 meeting.** The chair asked for topics for the committee’s agenda. Ideas include an update from University Libraries, discussion on the university’s involvement in economic development, updates on well being and mental health of the university community including student athletes.
10. **Adjourn.** Having no further business, the committee adjourned at 11:55.