

**STAFF SENATE Minutes**  
**117A Randolph Hall**  
**January 17, 2013**  
12:00 noon – 1:00 P.M.

**Attending:** Bonnie Alberts, Collin Bartos, Dan Cook, Andy French, Velva Groover, Dennis Herron, Erin Meadows, Karen Nicholson, Donna Raines, Wyatt Sasser, Becky Saylor, Amy Tanner, Sue Teel, Leslie Thornton-O'Brien, Amy Tunison, Nick Vaught, Lise Visser, Jon Wooge. **Guests:** Steven Myers

**Excused:** Susan Archer, Teresa Gallegos, Joseph Goodman, Lori Greiner, Maxine Lyons, Kathleen Richman, Angie Robinson, Sally Wieringa, Ken Wieringo

**Remote Attendance:** Northern Virginia Center in the National Capital Region connected.

**Opening:** President Sue Teel called the meeting to order. The agenda was adopted without change and the Minutes were approved electronically.

**Announcements:** Please send Leslie Thornton-O'Brien ([lthornto@vt.edu](mailto:lthornto@vt.edu)) a note if you will not be in attendance at the Staff Senate meeting so that she may mark you excused.

**Staff Senate Standing Committees - Updates**

**Policies and Issues** – Anna Hawthorne *survey for quorum – being run by the executive board before being sent out*

**Communications Committee** – Robert Sebek *No Update*

**Elections and Nominations Committee** – Jon Wooge *delegating everything back up; email to solicit volunteers for candidates has been sent to HR and that will be sent out from there; commissions require senator or alternate; committees can be any staff; exceptions to each of those. Specific seat will say who it is open to.*

**McComas Leadership Seminar Planning Committee** – Leslie Thornton-O'Brien *Inn came back with a quote of \$500 room rental fee and we will need to pay a per person rate for lunch. NO breaks. Opened to Staff Senate for discussion and majority felt that was a bad idea. We will not be opening McComas up this year to additional universities because we wish to build within VT and Staff Senate first. Leslie mentioned that it is disappointing that a lot of Senators do not sign up for this event since it is a free training event held specifically for their benefit. She asked that individuals please sign up EARLY.*

**All Senators are expected to sign up for one standing committee, per Staff Senate by-laws.**

**University Council, Commission, Committee Reports:**

Commission on University Support – Maxine Lyons, Tom Wortalik *2 resolutions to restructure parking and structure committee and building and grounds committee due to restructuring of university*

**Program:**

**Dr. Mark McNamee, Senior Vice President and Provost**

Appreciates sharing with the group

- Introductions around room
- Sense of things going on going into the new semester:
- Monday is a holiday
- President and Dwight Shelton spending a lot of time in Richmond around general assembly; not looking for miracles just no harm, hoping they support the pay raises with marginal support increase to the university; modest tuition increase; determined to make good progress to move university forward
- Provided dept.'s with their target pools for faculty normal merit process this year for anyone in faculty; when state allocates raises and bonuses the University "gets" to pay 2/3 of it; for staff, state puts restrictions on classified staff – equivalent salary program that will come in a different series of steps; staff participate in in-band adjustment process – early advance on salary increase; 2% comes in July; then an additional opportunity for in-band adjustments next year
- Hopefully it will be viewed that staff and faculty will be recognized; stories and questions may come for these adjustments
- **How much of the 2/3's trickles down to the actual dept. to pay?** The 3% bonus was 2% UNIVERSITY and 1% is dept. Faculty – ¾'s paid for by university and ¼ by dept. (non-central funds). For staff all is coming from university

- **Were in-band adjustments coming from university?** Yes – then the dept. decides who gets what; this year it's a 1% pool
- Commitment from university to recognize the recession and the modest improvements we're seeing we need to set in motion raises for employees. We have to use our own money because the state is not keeping pace. Painful because no one has extra money. Sue Teel recognized that we appreciate that.
- Drafting letter to employees that states a commitment to listen to dept.'s re: concerns. Dept.'s concern is that while the faculty is growing staff resources are not growing and operating budgets have been squeezed dramatically. When we have an opportunity to fund a new faculty position we should attach to those operating dollars so that depts. can gradually grow and the depts. can use the money to grow staff in the dept. ME is a great example. The dept. has grown significantly in faculty members but the staff numbers have not increased at all. That's not sustainable. This will be a slow painful process.
- Good news: over the break (summer and holidays) class room renovations happening; finished one in library and Deering hall – new style of teaching with round tables, etc. ; graduate life center auditorium has been renovated – has lighting and places for students to put books, etc. Go see it. Tight schedule. This will be a huge improvement for the students. Little by little being done.
- Long range/strategic plan: assigning different projects to different people so things can grow; lot of progress in health sciences and the arts initiative. Arts center opening in fall; more comprehensive view of arts program. Coherent exciting program that links all dept.'s across campus
- Working to engage people in shared governance – make sure you speak up and speak out
- Search completed for dean of Pamplin; Robert T. Sumichrast selected – coup for us. Dean of LSU and GA and now he's moving up to VT. Dr. Sorensen has been Dean for 31 years. On the search committee there was a staff member – Lee Ann Brownly; the search committee did a great job; sends a real message about the importance of staff in the operations of university.
- VET MED school will be looking for a dean.
- Reviewing candidate for outreach and international affairs position – VP

Questions from Senators:

- **How are the decisions about closing made?** Sherwood Wilson consults with police dept., facilities, and BT and they try to look at the real situation and based on safety for employees, they make decision about early closure. If classes are involved Dr. McNamee makes the decision about classes being close. If president is available they consult with him. Sherwood has leading advice.
- **How's enrollment doing at the university?** Goal is to accept all applications online this year. 5200-5300 students to come in next year. Applications are steady. Standards at VT are rigorous. A lot of self-selection goes on with approximately 20000 applicants. GPA's are ~3.8; SAT's are ~1200. Very talented class. Still "A" range. Encourage people to think of the 25 – 75% percentile. Students who lower than average score that get into the university. VERY competitive process to get into VT.
- **Research programs growing?** \$450m in expenditures last year 13% GROWTH RATE; only \$3-4 m would have made us 39<sup>th</sup>. Very pleased in the competition but questions on whether or not we can maintain/sustain growth. Hope we're strong enough across areas that we will continue to grow research efforts. Won't be 13% each year
- **With tuition rising and with students leaving with more debt is anything being done? Because it's more like a bubble that students will leave college with debt for the rest of their lives.** Concern about that; looking for solutions. Reason is that the states have disinvested in higher education. Education expenses have not gone up but it's shifted on who has paid for it. VT need not be tarred with same issues as other universities. VT has an education of value and we are so heavy in science and technology that our students are getting good jobs and going on to good graduate programs. Our financial aid program protects students against rising tuition for students who parents make less than 100k. We feel very responsible. The other thing is to keep the debt in perspective. It's about 22k for students at VT. A new car costs that much. Wedding costs 30k – 50k. The debt is not different that families are willing to incur for a one-time event. College education is worth that money. The debt is being overhyped but we can't keep doing what we have been doing where tuition goes up but economy stays stagnant. We need reinvestment by the states and acceptance that tuition will continue to increase to cover real costs.
- **In ag, extension, how does money/funding work for in-band adjustments work?** Agency 220 funds experiment station funding (vet school, ag, etc.) it's a significant part of their budget. Most of that money comes from the state and some comes from the fed's and some comes from localities and no tuition dollars flow to cover those services. They get the best and the worst of everything. Don't benefit from tuition increases, but for the salary increase comes from state for these people. State pays 95% and we pay 5%. They feel the full brunt of the cut when things happen. Hopefully confusion is behind scenes not wondering where their raises are coming from. Biggest problem is that revenue doesn't grow very fast. Stays constant or goes down.
- **Adjustments and changes to leave system, is VT making any plans towards if they make plans to leave system, etc.?** We keep a pretty close eye on the legislative bills. Don't think that will be reintroduced. They had

such a reaction from that bill; they won't do it again this session. When they approved the retirement system, the university puts more money into the system, which is the same with health benefits. They actually took more money from us than we got in a budget increase. We don't know what they'll do this year, but they will be asking us to pay more for these things. President is very concerned that they are looking at schools, localities, and university's to pay the bills and they are unwilling to make cutbacks to balance the budget. So they shift the costs and the university pays the bill and that's why the tuition goes up. Puts us in an awkward position.

**- Harder to retain people if they don't have the leave balance, etc. that state positions afford. They forget that people in state systems count on those benefits, etc. and they can't stop the benefits for existing employees without giving them some sort of benefit. At some level the feedback they get affects their viewpoints.**

**- Do you notice an increase in staff member's participating in tuition waiver program?** No idea on whether or not that it has increased or decreased. In student affairs, they felt they couldn't afford for their employees to take classes and they were cutting back on what employees could take. All auxiliary units have to pay for their own stuff so employees can't always take the classes.

**- With expansion being seen on campus, how do we fund the operational costs (staffing, etc.) for these places?** It used to be that the state would cover it, but no longer. We cover that cost. Every year we ask for money but the state does not give any additional funds, but we remind them that it's something they used to do. We are absorbing the costs with the units that are in those building and we are stretching the existing resources. We think it's unfortunate that we have to spend \$80m that the state is funding for a building but then they don't provide funds to operate the building. This is another reason tuition is driven up. We are looking forward to the construction of the new classroom building and we're keeping our fingers crossed that it stays in the Gov.'s budget. Will be behind Deering. Will also be asking for a laboratory building.

**- When does construction start?** Depends. If the legislature approves it, then we could start in July and it'll be a 2year project. Focus on new styles of learning that students have.

**- Multimodel transit facility?** Plans for it but the current thinking is that it's being moved across Perry Street and it'll be up against parking garage. Perry Street will disappear. Working on what that means right now. Meeting next week to discuss. Lot of concern from scientific groups that fumes would be sucked into Deering. New plan is much better if it happens at all.

**- How large is the new classroom building?** ~100k square feet, three stories, many classrooms. Big lecture hall, lot of smaller rooms. Will help but won't solve all the problems.

**- Dairy barn move?** Needs to be moved because of new interchange on 460, etc. Will be moved to Kentland farms. Challenge is the cost. Cost is prohibitively high. University is committed to funding the project at a certain level that is coming out of university budget. Putting out an RFP, the foundation is going to manage construction. Hoping that gives us a way to control costs. Question is what do we have to do today and what we can put off until tomorrow. And the cows can't wait.

**- New engineering building, when does that open?** It's coming along fast and it will be open this fall. Beautiful building. And the center for the arts is beautiful. Lot of opportunities for people. The staff senate should tour the building. (Center for the arts will be speaking at SS this semester)

**Provost— how is employee morale?** Still at an all-time low, but a lot of people are starting to accept that it is what it is, but it's not so much that it's working for VT, but the economy. **What can we be doing differently?** Recognition that staffs are stretched is a big thing. A lot of people are staying late and doing extra work but to hear that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and that's true for a lot of the staff. We see that they are trying to help our situation. But we are thankful to have jobs. When they start realizing that top administrators understand what is going on and appreciate what they are doing, that means more than just a raise. Money isn't a motivator. We've been so suppressed for so long, that it's hard to keep the positive can do attitude.

**Provost wishes housekeeping could visit other universities to see how well kept they keep VT. Even the old buildings.**

Wyatt – the people who've been here a long time have a lot of proud in what they're doing.

Andy – people need to see that they are valued by upper administration. Some people think that when a decision comes down some people don't realize that Dr. Steger is fighting for us and that's not always disseminated.

**Provost** – the 2% we did a few years ago, we were beaten up for giving it from Richmond. We are between a rock and a hard place. They were asking very hostile questions about VT giving the raise. Dwight did a masterful job of talking about something else.

Andy – motivation is a huge deal when we realize that upper admin is fighting for us.

**Provost** – anything that we can do to improve communication, we'll do. Some units have one or two naysayers and that's hard to deal with.

Sue does a great job of disseminating information.

Andy – WE need to do a better job of getting info out to our units.

**Provost** – Gayle Williams mom passed away unexpectedly.

**Next Meeting:** February 21, 2013

Speaker: Laura Neff-Henderson, Communications Manager, HR  
Location: 117A Randolph Hall

Respectfully submitted,  
Leslie Thornton-O'Brien  
Senate Secretary