

Staff Senate  
<http://www.staffsenate.vt.edu/>  
November 19, 2020, 2020  
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.  
Zoom  
MINUTES

**Attendees:** Amanda Villar, Amber Robinson, Andrea Kennedy, Angel Carter, Bruce Harper, Chelsea Keating, Chris Whitlock, Jackie Reid, Jamie Stein, Jennifer Earley, Jennifer Gallagher, Jennifer Pike, Jes Davis, Judy Alford, Justin Dalton, LaTawnya Burlison, Leisa Shelor, Nicole Akers, Pat Donovan, Rebecca Smith, Robena Hughes, Robert Sebek, Sally Shupe, Serena Young, Sheree Montgomery, Steven Nagle, Sue Teel, Tamarah Smith, Tasia Persson, Zerita Montgomery

**Excused:** Judy Taylor, Amy Ingram

**Call to order at 12:00 p.m. by President, Tamarah Smith**

The agenda was electronically submitted to senators. With no additions, the agenda was approved at the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes**

Approval of the September Minutes were done electronically.

**Presentations:**

**LGBTQ+ Caucus:** Jes Davis

- The LGBTQ+ Caucus at Virginia Tech is committed to advancing equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families. The Caucus seeks to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals both at the University and in the New River Valley through educational programming, social activities, public service, and outreach.
- Together with our allies, we strive to share information and initiate progressive community change as we visibly work for social justice and human rights.

**Key Programs and Events**

- Monthly Caucus Lunches at local businesses (typically 13<sup>th</sup> of the Month)
- Supporting the LGBTQ+ Resource Center Events
  - Including LGBTQ+ History Month (Oct.) and Pride Week (Apr 5-9)
- Queer in Appalachia
- Lavender Graduation Ceremony

**Recent Happenings**

- Helped with adding pronouns to students' banner profiles.
- Assisting with the LGBTQ Working Group
- Meeting with other Caucuses to explore stronger partnerships
- Critically examining the organization structure
  - Recent name change

- Establishing a more robust leadership transition process
  - Co-Chair: Jes Davis (she/her) [jesdavis@vt.edu](mailto:jesdavis@vt.edu)
  - Co-Chair: Rachel Weaver (she/they) [rlw@vt.edu](mailto:rlw@vt.edu)
  - Treasurer: Lindsey Gleason (she/her) [lgleason@vt.edu](mailto:lgleason@vt.edu)
  - Social Chair: JP Paul (they/them) [jacobapaul@vt.edu](mailto:jacobapaul@vt.edu)
  - CEOD Rep: John Gray Williams (he/him) [jxwillia@vt.edu](mailto:jxwillia@vt.edu)

## **Appalachian Caucus:** LaTawnya Burleson

### **Who We Are**

- The Appalachian Caucus convenes to discuss Appalachian campus experiences and issues and is open to all faculty, staff, and graduate students.
- Approximately 65 members
- Chairwoman: LaTawnya Burleson

### **Our Mission**

Support the faculty, staff and students of Appalachia, to encourage conversations regarding their experiences and issues, and offer community building opportunities which promote a positive representation of the local culture on campus and in the surrounding communities.

### **Where We Are Going**

- Due to COVID-19 our organization has been forced to adapt, change, and scrap existing plans
- In accordance with current public health guidelines and guidance from the university, we have been working on plans and activities for the Caucus that are safe for all members to participate in
- Some of the ideas and plans that we have been working on include, but are not limited to the following:
  - Facebook Live event
  - Book club event with guest speaker
  - Appalachian Celebration week
  - Social media campaign to elicit response from Appalachian community

## **Goals for the Future**

- Increase awareness about the organization
- Create social media accounts to target a younger audience. This will help us increase membership and share the stories of young people in Appalachia.
  - Instagram
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
- Use social media presence to carry out aforementioned events (Facebook live, Appalachian Celebration Week)

## **Update on Governance Changes: Serena Young**

A joint resolution with CFA leading the charge and with CAPFA, CSPA, and CSA for VT Governance Restructure. CSPA's first reading of CSPA 20-21A, took place on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020. I will keep Staff Senate informed as the process continues. Two major changes with this resolution concerning staff is the reporting structure for CSPA. Instead of CSPA reporting directly to University Council they would report to Staff Senate and then the second change is that Staff Senate would be able to vote on things coming from CSPA before moving forward to University Council. Also, University Council membership will be reduced a little and a University Council Cabinet will be created.

## **Board of Visitors Report: Tamarah Smith**

Please see that attachment labeled Staff Senate Constituency Report

## **Committee Updates:**

Communications – No Updates

Elections & Nominations – we are continuing to solicit nominations for Senator/Alternate service on the Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs (CAPFA). Please find further information linked in my original message below. If you or a fellow Senator/Alternate you know would like to serve on a commission but have not yet had the opportunity to do so, please contact me and my Elections and Nominations co-chair Judy Taylor as soon as possible to submit a name for nomination.

Policies and Issues – 2 Highlights

School of Education has 2 resolutions

Elementary Education

Secondary Education

McComas - Working on Speakers, if you know of any potential speakers please get send recommendations to Jennifer Early

Child Care/Care Givers – Please see attachment labeled Child Care Update

Strategic Planning – Will start back up after the Holidays. Please let LaTawnya Burleson know if you are interested.

**Next Meeting Date:**

The next meeting date is December 17, 2020

**Adjourned**

Respectfully Submitted:

Angel Carter

## Child Care Update

A search team has formed for the university's care giving coordinator position. There's a staff rep on it.

HR is still investigating Backup Care providers and may do an RFP.

The Women's Center is continuing to hold discussion groups. Elder care has been the most attended.

The quantitative analysis of the Task Force's survey has been completed; qualitative analysis of the comments continues. It asked about impacts Covid has had on work, resources utilized, and barriers employees and students have faced. About 2000 people responded to the survey with about 1200 providing meaningful responses. Some highlights:

- people are seeing 16-20 hr/week additional time towards care giving
- people with pre-school aged kids don't feel they have sufficient options
- people with school aged kids are spending significant time with school-related work
- many concerns around elder care
- pre-tenure faculty feel constrained by timelines and work and feel unable to use provided resources
- staff had less concerns about work/life balance and are mostly satisfied with work arrangements
- grad students have very shifting arrangements and are concerned about affordability of out-of-home care options

I said I was concerned that staff (particularly wage staff) who left employment because they had no option but to remain home with their children weren't surveyed and that could paint a rosier picture because we lack their data. HR will review what exit data they have (it's mostly for full-time employees).

The full report will eventually be made available university wide.

## Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

November 15-16, 2020

Presented by Tamarah Smith, Staff Senate President

Good afternoon Rector Valeiras, Board of Visitors members, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Administrators and distinguished guests.

I am grateful to be here today to present on behalf of our staff. First, I want to thank Tracy Vosburgh and her team for the transparency in the communications that we are receiving. One of the hardest things for any of us, is to not have the information that we need to succeed. The communications coming from the university (all areas of impact) has been helpful and informative. In addition, the staff would like to extend a thank you to Bryan Garey and his team for delivering information about how spring semester will be managed.

I would like to speak briefly about diversity. We have a large diverse campus, yet there remains much fear felt by faculty, staff, and students. There are fears of hate crimes, sexual harassment and abuse, bullying, and fear of saying the wrong thing that can and will offend someone. A good start to addressing some fears is our mandatory diversity training, but we need more. When I participated in the Diversity Ally, Advocate, and Ambassador training years ago, I learned a lot about others and myself. The training presented us with the opportunity to be in class with other faculty and staff and engage in conversations that are critical to our growth. These types of programs need to be brought back to the forefront.

In terms of work and mental health, there are some staff that are doing well during this pandemic, the majority, however, are not (please read, [The Staff Are Not OK](#), by Lee Skallerup Bessette, October 30, 2020, Chronicle of Higher Education). Our staff are the frontline that have had to help students, answer the calls from upset parents, be a sounding board for struggling faculty, learn yet another software program, become good enough at new programs to teach others, keep up with our jobs, while also managing our children's school schedules that are in constant flux, arrange child and elder/dependent care, serve as the first point of contact for faculty as they struggled to get their classes online and a huge amount of the success of that goes to the staff that are there willing, able, and without credit to do the job that needs to be done. More meetings are set up back-to-back, advising is at an all-time high, inboxes are flooded with emails which makes staff in those positions working harder than ever.

And let's talk about our staff in wage positions. My colleagues in wage positions worry about a layoff due to COVID19. The university is sending students home in November to not return until spring. With many wage employees being on single incomes, working either on or off campus, trying to find affordable/quality childcare and or elder/dependent care, all of these pressures have mentally drained staff. The commitment to everyone that is working through a pandemic should be commended. I am happy to hear the work that departments are doing to ensure as many staff

as possible are placed into other positions to ensure they continue to get a pay check while the students are away. Staff are grateful. Our Essential employees have willingly been here through this entire pandemic. I would love to see more acknowledgement and praise be given from the administration and the entire university for the work of our essential employees who have been put at risk as they clean our facilities, repaint and clean dorms, cook and serve the food, and provided other numerous services to this university in ways that I can't even fathom.

Staff do not have the same autonomy as faculty have, so when emphasis is constantly put on faculty and students, let's not forget the staff and all that they bring to the table. Staff should be recognized, rewarded, and encouraged to continue to do the great work that they are doing. We have staff from all walks of life and each bring a different flavor to our work places. They are essential to Virginia Tech and are a part of what makes Virginia Tech so great.

I am a resource for this university advocating for staff, working beside our faculty, undergraduate and graduate student constituent leaders. I welcome encouragement and input on how we can work together to make our university stronger and work towards meeting the goals of our strategic plan.