Minutes for Meeting of December 7, 1999

Meeting in the Forum Room, Student Commons

Present: Abbey, Abubaker, Andrews, Bilyeu, Bowling, Briceland, Brilliant, Burton, Byles, Canavos (alt), Coffman, Chatterji, Coleman, Corey (alt), Costanzo, Dolan, Fauri, Festa, Forsyth, Garcia, Heldberg, Henry, Jackson, P. Kirkpatrick, M.A. Kirkpatrick, Klinker (alt), Koerin, Leone, Little, Merchant, Moon, Moxley, Nadder, Olbrisch, Page, Palmer, Peel, Philipsen, Pitts, Poindexter, Poynor, Ream (alt), Ripley (alt), Roberson, Rossi (alt), Schmitt, Simons, Steel (alt), Szari, Turner, Vallarino, Van Tuyle, Weaver (alt), Whitehead, Wu-Pong, Harvie.


Faculty Senate President Wes Poynor went over the minutes. He noted that there is a deadline of December 15 for faculty who wants to apply for the FERIP retirement program. The Office of Information Technology restructuring plan is due out by next week the Provost says.

A motion was moved, seconded, and affirmatively voted on to approve the minutes of the November 2 meeting as appeared on the web.

Faculty Senate President Wes Poynor went over the actions of the November University Council meeting. The School of Engineering MS and Ph.D. proposal was approved; the libraries will be called the VCU Libraries. The Cauley report (Year Round Programming) was presented to the Council of Deans for discussion this morning and will be presented to President’s Council tomorrow and the University Council in January.

Governor Gilmore reappointed Steve Markel to the Board of Visitors, and added three newcomers: Bill Axselle Jr., Stephen Long, MD, and Monty Plymale.

Mr. Ed Flippen, member of the Board of Visitors and Chairman of Governor Gilmore’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education will present and discussion
the Commission’s report which is to be released on January 17. The meeting will be in the Forum Room at 4 on January 18, 2000. The meeting is open to the VCU community.

There was a question about the School of the Arts and making two new divisions; music and theater. The motion to do this passed University Council 2 months ago. Since then the faculty of the Department of Music filed a grievance. The Provost took up the case and decided not to do this. An interim Chair of the Music Department has been appointed starting December 25 for the next 18 months.

Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Dr. Henry Rhone gave a report on "Retention is everybody’s business." There is a large task force working on this issue. The group has been divided into subgroups that are working on specific topics. They will assemble a combined report in the spring. Two different groups are collecting a lot of data about the students.

- Alan Sack is the university outreach coordinator under Sam Messmer. His job is to look at how many students graduate within 4, 5 and 6 years and how many first time freshmen return the second year. He reported that over the last few years the retention rate for first time freshmen is in the high 70%. The six-year graduation rate is in the low 40s percent. (This figure does not include transfer students). Alan Sack told us that there were 399 students of all classes with a greater than 3.0 GPA who did not return this fall. A follow up survey is being conducted to find out why. Mr. Sacks said that if any faculty member has a specific question on graduation or retention rates to please email him at arsack@vcu.edu with your question. He will be pleased to try and answer it. In response to a question about how we compare to other universities, he said that in comparison to the Urban 13 (which has 22 universities in the group) VCU is 3rd highest with regard to first year retention and in the middle of the pack regarding 6 year graduation rates. Transfer students graduate in the low 60%. We don’t know of those that leave, how many transfer elsewhere. Overall, about 6% of VCU students transfer elsewhere. About half of those that transfer into VCU come from community colleges.

- Chip Byrd from Institutional Research talked about the surveys they are doing on the issues of graduation and retention. They want to know why things happen. They have four surveys underway.

1. We are part of a national freshmen student survey where we get information about demographics, expectations, parents’ etc. VCU students look like their
national counterparts; only 58% could identify a planned degree. They chose VCU because of a good financial aid package.

2. A student satisfaction survey is also a national survey. Here also VCU students look a lot like the national norms. Safety and security is the number one concern and parking the biggest area of dissatisfaction (noting that the last survey given was in spring 1997 before the new parking garages). The survey also finds academic disengagement.

3. Alumni survey asks graduates two years after they have left VCU about their experience at the university. Eighty-two percent were working full time or in graduate school full time. Ninety-six percent were very satisfied or satisfied with their VCU experience. Again, parking was a source of dissatisfaction.

4. Telephone interviews are being conducted of eligible non-returning undergraduates. Of those contacted, 90% were very satisfied or satisfied with their experience at VCU, 75% would consider coming back, and 82% felt the VCU education was a good value for what they paid. Seventy percent of the students said personal reasons (conflict with jobs, family, etc.) were why they did not return, and the second reason was finances.

In response to a question about what is "academic disengagement" Chip Byrd explained that it was not attending class, missed assignments etc. A national study is following up on this asking what the student does and how happy they are.

In response to a request from the Graduate School a set of exit interviews is being conducted this spring. The return rate for the paper and pencil surveys are about 50% and the Dillman method is used. There is a 3-5% margin of error. In looking at the characteristics of non-responders they are very similar to the respondents. The data are available for further analysis.

The faculty Senators followed up with a series of questions that the data could be used to answer. It was pointed out that the problem could be looked at from an epidemiological perspective and that perhaps logistic regression should be used to look at the contributions of the different factors to the decision to leave or graduate.

Jean Yerian is heading up the culture and community subcommittee of the retention task force. At the February first meeting, Senators from the academic campus will be asked to come a half-hour earlier to meet with her.

Other data reported: About 8% of first semester transfer and first semester freshmen don’t return. About 30% of freshmen are on academic warning at the end of the first year. About 3/4 of non-returning freshmen were regular admits, and about 27% were conditional admits.
Faculty Senator Christina Turner introduced Delegate Viola Baskerville, (D-71), invited by the Legislative Committee to speak to the Senate. She told the Senators they should invite all the legislators from the capital region caucus. Panny Rhodes has been a strong supporter of Higher Education, so she would be an especially good guest. Faculty Senators brought up a number of issues including:

- the tuition freeze;
- the different missions of the state univeristies;
- library services need more resource librarians;
- indigent care funding is needed again this year;
- older buildings need to be brought up to standard,
- the dollars that come in federal grant overhead should all go directly to the University, instead of the present policy which returns a substantial portion to the General Fund of the Commonwealth.

Delegate Baskerville said that last year the medical students had a visible presence in the legislature and that had piqued the legislators’ interest. She also mentioned that the report of Governor Gilmore’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education, chaired by Ed Flippen, will be released in January, but that the recommendations will probably not be rushed to the General Assembly this year – rather they will be given time to be discussed.

*It was moved, seconded and passed unanimously to ask Faculty Senate President Wes Poynor to bring up at the next President’s Council meeting that the faculty were unhappy that they had not been consulted regarding the policy decision to require freshmen to have computers.*

Meeting was adjourned at 5:50pm.

The next meeting is at 4pm, February 1, 2000, in the Lyons Dental Building Student Lounge.

Margot W. Garcia,
Secretary of the Faculty Senate