Minutes of the Faculty Senate

May 2, 2000 DRAFT

Meeting in the Forum Room, Student Commons


Faculty Senate President Wes Poynor opened the meeting at 4:05.

The minutes of the April 4, 2000 meeting as posted on the web and handed out were approved.

Faculty Senate President Report

Faculty Senate President Wes Poynor reported on the University Council meeting of April 6, 2000. The Disruptive Student Policy revision from May, 1999 is on the University Council agenda for May 5, 2000. This is the final step in its approval process. The Board of Visitors will meet on May 11 and 12. The Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education has been published and is available on SCHEV’s web site at http://www.schev.edu/html/reports/final_report.pdf. You may also call SCHEV and request a copy. The University Executive Budget Committee has finished meeting and the highlights of its report were attached to the
The minutes of the meetings are on-line at


The Senate Executive Committee will work over the summer. They will be working to help with the legislative priorities and year round programming.

**Delegate Panny Rhodes**

Delegate Panny Rhodes of the 68th District since 1992 was introduced. She is a strong supporter of higher education, and is a member of the Advisory Board for the School of Engineering.

Delegate Rhodes stated that higher education is front and center of the legislative session year after year, but it always comes out under-funded. Some of the legislative actions taken are counter-productive, but the vast majority of Virginian legislators went to school in Virginia. One tough issue has been to understand what it costs to educate a student. The Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education (Governor’s Commission) has worked to get the numbers equivalent so that universities can be compared. The recommendations of the Governor’s Commission revolve around Institutional Planning Agreements (IPA), however the legislature can’t think about those until we have the base funding set up. There are billions of dollars of unfunded maintenance and that has to be fixed first. Another goal of the legislature is to keep faculty salaries at 60% of national peer group. The biggest discussion concerns not paying K-12 teachers enough. Virginia is below the national average. Next year the legislature will have to send dollars to K-12. Balancing funds going to higher education and to K-12 will be an ongoing tension.

Delegate Rhodes pointed out that a big debate in the legislature this year was transportation. The problems have also been put off. This year the legislature tackled it and used some of the surplus dollars to help.

Delegate Rhodes stated that she was always ready to listen to anybody. She felt that it is important for faculty to establish a relationship with legislators, recognizing there is going to be give and take. Legislators hear stories from all over and not often enough from those actually involved. VCU staff has represented the university well and worked hard for the faculty, but it is also helpful to hear from the faculty directly.
It is important to remember, Delegate Rhodes said, that the legislature has a fixed amount of money to spend. When it spends money on one issue, that money is not available for the other issues. The current surplus is needed to fill in holes left from past deferment. "We are torn supporting all the interests," she said.

In answer to a question about whether people are willing to pay for the services they get from higher education, Delegate Rhodes said surveys show most people are willing to pay. The problem is to explain the 52% increase in higher education over the rise of inflation. Legislators know that it comes from having older schools acquire new technology, which is very expensive to keep up, and other such costs. Not all students cost the same. However, the University has to continuously look at how to be more efficient. Delegate Rhodes noted that North Carolina spends more than Virginia on higher education, yet in-state Virginia tuition is nearly as high as out-of-state North Carolina tuition. The University of North Carolina only takes 10% out-of-state students. How many students is North Carolina educating?

Delegate Rhodes pointed out that the legislature gives funds in line with enrollment growth. The past predictions for enrollment growth have been way off base and that has hampered good budgeting. The legislature needs to get a real enrollment figure from each university. The legislature recognizes that because funding is based on students, in small departments with small classes it is not the same cost to add one student as adding several. Some universities have said they won’t grow. There needs to be a look at which universities should logically grow. The student growth expected in the 1990s didn’t materialize.

**Student Computer Initiative**

Phyllis Self, Vice Provost for Academic Technology and Jim Fajohn, project coordinator for the Student Computer Initiative (SCI) reported on the progress of the initiative. Nine working groups were established in late January and they have issued their preliminary recommendations at the end of April. There are about 80 recommendations from 7 groups. The Financial and Policy groups are now beginning their work based on the preliminary recommendations from the other 7 working groups. A matrix
is being created of time, cost, responsibility, one time or continuing. The matrix has been presented and the Provost has begun discussions with the Deans on what this means. Many of the recommendations don’t fall under the SCI. Saturday, May 6 at the leadership institute, discussions will begin with the Department and Program Chairs of the implications of the initiative. (It was noted that the School of Pharmacy is going to start a similar initiative for its graduate program.)

There will be specification for hardware and software. Each School and College will have a page on the specifications for its freshman students (vcu.edu.sci). Freshman classrooms are being wired to be able to use the computers there. There is a preliminary list of which rooms will be upgraded.

Some of the work group issues that Phyllis Self brought up are:

1. Student work group. A help desk for software and hardware needs to be created and that will be established by fall 2000. They are working with the police to figure out a way to register each computer. The financial aid information will be on their web site and resnet, the residency hall point of contact is being set up.
2. Procurement work group. This is an ongoing group working with vendors and investigating issues such as extension of site licenses to students for Norton anti-virus, SAS etc.
3. Infrastructure work group. All freshman lecture rooms will be wired and equipped for on-line presentations by fall 2001. There will be an advanced network.
4. Training work group. A survey being developed to assess computer skills is being pilot tested at STAR 2000. This will allow the group to assess the need for training. There will be on-line tutorials. We will be using all Microsoft packages starting fall 2000.
5. Information/communication work group is addressing problems of communicating within the university. This includes issues of having special computers for the hearing impaired and blind with captions and/or voice.
6. Faculty working group. A set of recommendations from this group was passed out. There are 7 imperatives:
   1. All VCU classrooms networked (with dynamic IP addressing)
and equipped with projection capabilities.

2. Implementation of an easy-to-use Web-based e-mail system available to all VCU staff, faculty and students.

3. Computing and network access for all faculty and instructional staff including adjuncts and graduate teaching assistants; computers/software at a minimum meeting students SCI specs.

4. A reliable and robust ISP available to all VCU staff, faculty and students; nationwide service option.

5. Open computer labs upgraded to meet SCI hardware/software specs; printing capacity enhanced in labs.

6. Sufficient availability of resources for student instruction in basic computing skills, including courses, workshops and online tutorials.

7. Sufficient network security measures for faculty on-line materials and application servers.

Regarding the issue of students having better computers than the faculty, the students will be purchasing out for 3 or 4 years, with leasing options as well. The University sets the base, then the department has to set level for themselves and support the faculty. We could use $20 million to do this, but are not getting it. There is money for this initiative in E and G funds and also HEETF. The University is planning to replace faculty computers every 3-4 years.

Faculty need to require the students to use their computers or they set themselves up for dissatisfaction. We have 12 months to prepare. What will drive students is the faculty expectation of universal access to computers. An example is to send assignments in as e-mail attachments.

Physical Teaching Environment Report

Dan Ream, Chair of the Academic Support Services Committee and Dianne Simons went over their report, which was handed out and is on the web. The committee met with a variety of people in the fall such as Pat Jones who schedules classrooms, the School of Humanities and Sciences Technology Committee and others. In the spring they did a survey and got back 168 responses. This is not a random sample. There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the physical teaching environment. The biggest complaint is the temperature of the rooms. The committee looked at the
dissatisfaction, where it was, what departments and what they found was that it was quite universal.

The committee put forward a series of recommendations as a motion that the faculty senate passed unanimously.

1. The Faculty Senate recommends that all VCU classrooms should be brought up to a standard that is satisfying to the students and the faculty who use them.

2. The Faculty Senate recommends that the VCU Administration develop a short-term and long-term plan for assessment and comprehensive refurbishment of all classrooms currently identified as unsatisfactory.

3. The Faculty Senate recommends that the VCU Administration charge the appropriate unit with investigation and adoption of more effective environmental control solutions for VCU classrooms.

4. The Faculty Senate recommends that the VCU Administration significantly increase the funding and staffing of centralized classroom support units to insure a baseline of quality.

5. The Faculty Senate recommends that a way be found for faculty to access help and a list of "support" telephone number be posted prominently to enable teaching faculty to immediately summon computing, audiovisual or classroom supply assistance day or night.

6. The Faculty Senate recommends that the VCU Administration build or create through renovation additional classroom that accommodate 30-50 students and a number of small "breakout" rooms for small group discussion.

7. The Faculty Senate recommends that the Office of Academic Technology facilitate communication between School and Department technology coordinators and technology committee Chairperson for the purpose of information and resources sharing and to prevent unnecessary duplication of effort.
8. The Faculty Senate recommends that the Survey Research Lab conduct an annual survey of VCU faculty to monitor satisfaction with teaching environments and that students be queried on their satisfaction with the classroom environment through inclusion of a standard question on all student course evaluations.

These recommendations should be sent to the University President and the Provost, and all Vice Presidents and the Senate Faculty President is charged with soliciting a response by October 1.

**University Budget**

Faculty Senate Wes Poynor presented the preliminary 2000-2002 University Budget. There will be a fee increase an average of 2.2%. The major new initiatives are:

- Student Computer Initiative with a budget of $500,000;
- Life Sciences Initiative with a budget of $1.8 million, strengthening
- University’s Research Enterprise at $3.4 mill in the first year and $3.1 million in the second year, and
- Faculty and staff salary increases of 3%;

There is a $315,000 reduction for selected graduate schools. The cuts are to raise funds for the initiatives. Parking rates are going up. They will even out rates between academic and MCV campus over the next five years.

**General Business**

Faculty Senate Vice President Sue Brilliant asked Senators to fill in committee preferences and give them to her. She would also like Senators to indicate if they would be willing to chair a committee.

Faculty Senate President Wes Poynor thanked those Senators rotating off for their service. To those staying he asked them to come to meetings and
to get involved with a committee.

A question was raised that we had heard from more administrators over the past year than those representing the faculty. Do we need so many administration reports? President Poynor responded that other committees are still working and he feels that the Senate needs to hear from the administration about initiatives that are coming down the track like a freight train. The faculty initiatives come more in the summer. He felt that one advantage of having the administrators come to the Senate is that they can hear our concerns. They can also answer questions in more detail than he can.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15.

The next meeting is September 5, 2000 at 4pm in the Student Lounge, Lyons Dental Building on the MCV Campus.

Margot Garcia
Secretary to the Faculty Senate.

Return to Senate Home Page
Neil W. Henry, web editor
August 30, 2000