

Dear Colleagues,

Near the end of last spring President Sands formed the ad hoc “President’s Committee on Governance” and charged it as follows:

“In order to align our governance with the needs of a twenty first century university and the Beyond Boundaries vision for Virginia Tech, an ad hoc committee will be formed and charged with defining a set of guiding principles for effective and equitable governance and outlining any changes to our existing system of governance required to put these principles into effect. The committee will be composed of a representative cross section of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, and will report to the president. Upon the president’s approval of the committee’s recommendations, they will be taken through governance in the usual form of a resolution. The committee will be co-chaired by the Executive Vice President and Provost and the President of the Faculty Senate.”

After meeting over the summer and into the start of the current semester, the committee has completed a draft of the principles. We write to ask that you share the “Virginia Tech Principles of Shared Governance” with your constituency and gather feedback to pass along to the committee. We hope to have your input one month from receipt of this letter.

In future meetings the committee will discuss the preferred characteristics of governance and propose and debate hypothetical structures that embody those characteristics. As the work of the committee proceeds, we will seek your input repeatedly as part of an iterative process through which we will reconsider our ideas and proposals in light of the feedback from the wider community.

Thank you,

Cyril Clarke
Executive Vice President and Provost
Co-chair of the President’s Committee on Governance

John Ferris
President of Faculty Senate
Co-chair of the President’s Committee on Governance

Virginia Tech Principles of Shared Governance: a draft document from the President's Committee on Governance (9/7/19)

We believe that the essential purpose of shared governance is to further Virginia Tech's missions of teaching and learning, research and discovery, and outreach and engagement; that shared governance is the means by which we organize the components of the university into an interdependent whole; that collaborative decision-making is the foundation of strategic and coordinated effort; that governance is a key component in advancing diversity; that periodic evaluation of shared governance improves its operation and increases its adaptability to evolving conditions; and that shared governance should operate within the framework of the following principles at every level of Virginia Tech's various locations:

1) Respect, collaboration, and trust

We recognize that the Board of Visitors, administrators, faculty, staff, and students have differing roles, scopes of authority, and accountability; that these differences are necessary and productive; and that a mutuality of respect for our varying roles and responsibilities is essential for good faith dialogue, collaborative decision-making, and trust in the processes of governance.

2) Clarity of roles and authority

We commit to maintaining a shared understanding of Virginia Tech's system of governance, including clear guidelines for our separate and mutual areas of responsibility for determination, recommendation, and consultation on particular matters, and recognize that the roles and authority of the Board of Visitors, administrators, faculty, staff, and students can vary depending on context and topic.

3) Inclusiveness

We will employ democratic processes, including the use of representative bodies, to ensure that the views of all constituencies are reflected in our decisions and increase the likelihood that a course of action will be broadly supported and implemented. Revisions to and the creation of new initiatives, policies, and programs will be carried out within our formal system of governance, except when exigent circumstances require university leaders to act outside the structure of shared governance.

4) Communication

In order to capture and reflect the scope of opinions across our various constituencies and locations, we expect honest and respectful communication and that every component of governance will maintain clearly defined channels for reciprocal communication within and between constituencies.

5) Accountability

While recognizing that the Board of Visitors and President are legally accountable for the condition and operation of the university, we affirm that when acting as participants in governance we are accountable to each other, as individuals and constituencies, for our actions, statements, and the proper execution of our duties in a timely fashion.

6) Commitment

We believe that shared governance requires a commitment of good will on the part of all participants, the broad recognition of shared governance as an important activity, and sufficient resources for the effective operation of shared governance.