



**Vanderbilt University Faculty Senate  
Faculty Life Committee**

***Report for the 2015-2016 Academic Year***

**Committee Chair:** Brian L. Heuser, Ed.D., M.T.S.  
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**Standing Committee Members:**

Mel Zeigler, Ph.D., A&S  
Stephanie Spottswood, M.D., Medicine  
Mark Cannon, Peabody  
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**Ex Officio Members:**

Ginny Shepherd, M.D., Medicine  
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Greg Barz, Ph.D., Blair  
Katherine Anderson, Ph.D., A&S Econ

**Committee Charge #1: Review of Faculty Surveys and Related Data**

**Goals:** Communicate results of the 2012, 2014 Faculty Senate surveys. Develop motions as necessary for recommendation to the Provost. Consider the role of faculty surveys broadly to ensure that changes in faculty attitudes, preferences, and experiences are adequately assessed, benchmarked and communicated. Communicate results and procedures campus-wide. See also Recommendation 3 from the Senate Affairs 2014-15 Committee report.

**Major Findings from Review of Faculty Senate 2012 & 2014 Faculty Concerns Survey:**

In Fall 2014, Faculty Senate emailed a brief survey to the faculty about their concerns, in response to comments and individual emails that were being sent to the Executive Committee. The survey asked “INSERT QUESTIONS”. Responses were received from 1,075 faculty members (est. 37% of 2,880), from all schools. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee categorized all of the responses, discussed them, and used them for setting priorities this year.

*The following categories of concern were reported by the faculty:*

- Faculty life, salaries, and benefits issues, including raise transparency, raises not keeping pace with inflation, raise inequalities, summer salary issues, benefits (health, child care, retirement), parking, unrealistic work schedules, lack of mentoring.
- Faculty governance and Faculty Senate specific issues, including need for more information, perceived poor communication, lack of shared governance, concern re lack of Senate power.
- VU administration issues, including centralization, perceptions of micromanagement and corporatization threatening scholarship and academic freedom, poor communication;
- VUMC specific issues, including low morale and job satisfaction, consequences of the staff reductions, lack of support for clinical care, research, and education.
- Academic promotion and student issues, including lack of clarity regarding promotion, inequalities in promotion and associated raises across campus, staff reductions putting burden on faculty, lack of support for junior faculty and graduate students.
- Diversity/gender equality issues including discrimination, promotion inequalities for women, poor treatment of LGBT faculty, concerns about recruitment, mentoring, and retention of faculty of color.
- Campus safety and sexual assaults issues.
- Travel and reimbursement system issues (multiple).

## **Committee Charge #2: Evaluate Perceptions of Faculty Governance and Quality of Life**

**Goals:** Begin the process of systematically evaluating the role of faculty in governance and decision making at Vanderbilt. Use available data and collect additional information as needed to understand the overall professional status and quality of life of the Vanderbilt Faculty.

### **Outcomes:**

In attempting to gather the necessary data from existing sources to move forward with this charge, we identified numerous critical issues with the previous administration of Vanderbilt-conducted faculty surveys and faculty data management:

- The 2006 VIRG Faculty Survey data (the oldest file on record) was reported (by VIRG) as being “corrupted”. They informed us that it was not possible to retrieve or repair any parts of the data for use.
- Because of the corrupted data file, we were told that systematic comparisons between the 2006 data and more recent data are impossible.
- The 2012 Faculty Survey was administered from 2/2012-3/2012. The announcement of Survey results from Vice Provost’s office did not follow until August of 2013, seventeen and a half months later.
- The announcement of those survey results stated that the administration would follow up with VU faculty regarding needed improvements in different areas of faculty satisfaction. There is no record that the Senate, Deans or department chairs were ever consulted about these results.
- No member of the FLC believes that the 2012 Survey is an accurate picture of faculty life at Vanderbilt.
- No member of the FLC believes that we currently have adequate data on faculty experiences to accurately describe those experiences across various domains.

In light of these pressing issues, the Faculty Life Committee unanimously put forward the following expectations for future assessments of the faculty:

- Any and all assessments of Vanderbilt faculty members must be anonymous for the results to be reliable and offer adequate protection to respondents.
- The Faculty Senate should have the ability to survey faculty in accordance with its own objectives and purposes.
- A new faculty survey must be developed and adopted that uses existing qualitative data to inform the domains for assessment. Transparency, reliability, relevance, and validity must be our guiding principles moving forward.

To address these issues, we met with the new Vice Provost, John Geer, in September of 2015 and suggested the following motion as a way to move forward with assessment of the faculty:

***Faculty Life Committee Motion: 9/2015***

- Whereas the Faculty Senate has determined that it is of considerable importance for the Senate to design, gather, and maintain its own data on the satisfaction, workload, and professional quality of life of the Vanderbilt Faculty
- Whereas it is of significant concern that this data be not only confidential, but also anonymous in order to provide the necessary level of trust that permits faculty members to respond to a survey of the faculty as candidly and completely as possible
- Whereas this data should be gathered with enough frequency to ascertain changes in faculty attitudes, preferences, and experiences, but not so frequently so as to create survey fatigue
- Whereas the Vanderbilt Faculty should be afforded the autonomy to assess and monitor the overall standing of the faculty members at Vanderbilt

- The Faculty Life Standing Committee unanimously recommends that, beginning in the Fall Semester of 2016, the Vanderbilt Faculty Senate develop and administer an anonymous survey of the Vanderbilt Faculty. This survey should be designed by the Senate Faculty Life Committee, on the basis of best practices in faculty assessment and with significant input from VU Deans, Department Chairs, faculty senators, and administrators.

- The VU Faculty Survey should be administered by the Faculty Life Committee on a triennial basis and the VU administration should provide any necessary resources to administer the survey and analyze the results in accordance with Senate protocol.

- The Faculty Senate, in collaboration with the VU administration, will provide for the timely distribution of the survey results to the Vanderbilt Faculty and administration. To ensure the integrity of data over time, identical copies of the Survey, survey dataset, statistical fact sheet and final report should be stored on the secure Senate portal and by the administration in a location of their choosing.

Vice Provost Geer, Provost Wenthe and Chancellor Zeppos supported and approved the motion and the Faculty Senate passed it. Shortly thereafter, the Administration adopted the use of the COACHE survey.

### **Committee Charge #3: Follow Up on Faculty Club:**

New faculty club in space previously occupied by Health Plus. Current faculty club location likely to be eliminated.

**Goals:** Ensure the new space will meet the faculty's needs and interests. Should be accessible by Emeriti. Eric Kopstain is point person.

**Outcomes:** In light of the year being dominated administratively by the separation of Vanderbilt University from Vanderbilt Medical Center, this issue seems to have been postponed. We recommend that it be added to the new charge of the incoming Faculty Life Committee.

### **Committee Charge #4: Follow Up Retired Faculty Association**

Retired Faculty Association (memorandum forwarded with committee reports for last two years). We need to consider other issues related to funding, will there be dues, will the RFA use "free space" periodically for meetings, will there be some sort of web presence and, if so, how will that be updated and maintained.

**Goals:** Develop motions as necessary for recommendation to the Provost. Communicate results and procedures campus-wide.

**Outcomes:** In light of the year being dominated administratively by the separation of Vanderbilt University from Vanderbilt Medical Center, this issue seems to have been postponed. We recommend that it be added to the new charge of the incoming Faculty Life Committee.

### **Additional Committee Work**

In the spirit of shared governance, the Vice Chancellor of Finance's Office brought forward a proposal to honor faculty desires to update University travel policy related to meal and incidental expense reimbursement. Brian Heuser and Brett Sweet brought the following motion to the FLC and then the full Senate for approval in April of 2016:

#### ***Senate Faculty Life Committee Motion: 4/2016***

- Whereas the Faculty Senate and Vice Chancellor of Finance have determined that it is timely to revisit the University policy on Meal & Incidental Expense Reimbursement,
- Whereas it makes good sense to extend to faculty members multiple, flexible options for reimbursement of Meal & Incidental Expenses due to University travel that are also in compliance with IRS guidelines,

- The Faculty Life Standing Committee unanimously recommends that, beginning in the Fall Semester of 2016, the University adopts a "hybrid model" of meal and incidental expense reimbursement for Vanderbilt University employed faculty that includes the following characteristics:

1. For travel on all sponsored research Vanderbilt University employed faculty must submit actual, itemized expenses.
2. For travel on unrestricted, non-sponsored research Vanderbilt University employed faculty may opt for reimbursement of actual, itemized expenses or for a Vanderbilt per diem of US \$75 per day for meals and incidentals, with no receipts or itemization of expenses required. This election is made on a per-trip basis.
3. For both sponsored and non-sponsored University travel, the receipt threshold will be increased to be equal to or greater than US \$75.
4. Each Dean of Vanderbilt University's colleges and schools retains the prerogative to maintain a more restrictive reimbursement policy.

The motion passed the Senate but the policy was later amended – in light of IRS Form 463 guidelines – to cap the per diem reimbursement rate at \$51 per day. This alteration was done so as to avoid IRS complexities and potential employee tax reporting risk.