

Senate Affairs Committee
Vanderbilt University Faculty Senate
Report for Academic Year 2014-2015
Chair: C. Buddy Creech, Medicine

Committee Members:

Buddy Creech, Chair, Medicine
Ann Price, Medicine [Executive Committee Liaison]
Sarah Rohde, Medicine
Marc Hetherington, A&S
Peter Martin, Medicine
James Wittig, Engineering
Jeffrey Blume, Medicine
Leslie Hopkins, Nursing
David Cliffler, A&S
Erin O'Hara O'Connor, Law

Committee Charges

1. Continue to utilize MyVU and MyVUMC for campus-wide news coverage of Senate meetings, recommendations, and actions.

At the outset of the 2014-15 AY, committee members discussed the most effective strategies for campus-wide communication of Senate meetings and actions. MyVU and MyVUMC remain visible ways in which communication can occur; however, school-specific communication strategies, based on the needs of individual schools and departments are an important way to reach the faculty.

During committee meetings, various strategies of Senate communication were discussed, including:

1. Email distributions separate from MyVU and MyVUMC that are school-specific
2. Presentations at school/department faculty meetings
3. Town hall meetings

Recommendations:

Since communication with faculty was a clear area of importance on the recent faculty survey, the SAC recommends that Senate actions be featured monthly in MyVU and MyVUMC. Moreover, the SAC should consider developing a list of 'best practices' by Faculty Senators for communicating with faculty.

2. Provide a secure portal for Senators to access materials related to Senate meetings (e.g., agenda, presentations, etc.)

The SAC, along with the diligent assistance of Andrea Hewitt, established a secure portal for Senators to access materials related to the Senate. This website contains agenda, minutes, and presentations, where appropriate.

Recommendations: A motion was committed to committee that would 1) alter the order of business so that Senate business precedes scheduled remarks and 2) would encourage posting of materials, such as power point presentations, either in their original format or in a redacted form. The Senate may take this up at the first meeting of the 2015-16 AY.

3. Collect, analyze, and evaluate data from the Faculty Concerns Survey.

Under the leadership of Senators Blume and Rohde in AY 2013-14, the SAC considered various mechanisms for identifying faculty concerns. With the assistance and guidance of the Vanderbilt Institutional Research Group (VIRG) staff, the drafted survey questions were edited to improve the collection of data and the ease with which it could be analyzed. A ten-question survey was administered to the faculty in May 2014.

The SAC analyzed survey results, with assistance from VIRG. A high-level summary of survey results is attached to the committee report (Attachment 1). In total, 2,880 faculty were surveyed; 1075 (37%) responded. The schools most represented include Medicine (~600) and A&S (~210). A majority of faculty respondents stated they were unfamiliar or only slightly familiar with the activities of the Faculty Senate and 77% reported no written or oral updates from the Faculty Senate representative. The SAC identified 8 categories into which faculty concerns may be grouped based on a remarkable number of free text responses (1/3 of respondents). These categories, listed in alphabetical order, include:

1. Academic Promotion and Student Issues
2. Campus Safety
3. Concur Travel and Reimbursement
4. Diversity and Gender Equality
5. Faculty Life, Salaries, and Benefits
6. Faculty Governance
7. VU Administration Issues
8. VUMC-specific Issues

Recommendations:

Given the substantial number of free text responses, the SAC recommends that the eight major categories of concern identified in the survey be addressed systematically over the next academic year. The SAC recommends the creation of a Task Force that will specifically address the issues addressed in the survey. Additionally, we recommend that items related to current standing committees of the Senate be referred, noting that Academic Promotion will be handled best by the APS Committee and issues related to faculty life, salaries and benefits may go the Faculty Life committee. It is also recommended that VUMC-specific issues, which appear to now be focused on the division between VU and VUMC, should be addressed within a School of Medicine/School of Nursing caucus within the Faculty Senate.

4. Facilitate collaborations between the Faculty Senate Committees, Senate Task Forces and the University Standing Committees.

The SAC continued the work of facilitating communication between the USC's and Task Forces. During a spring 2015 SAC meeting, representatives from standing committees on Athletics, Calendar, Faculty and Staff Benefits, Religious Affairs, Technology Review, and Traffic and Parking provided updates on their charges for the year.

Recommendation:

One meeting of the SAC, each year, should be dedicated to receiving reports from the USC's and, if necessary, Senate Task Forces. When issues arise that overlap with these committees, every effort should be taken to include the USC's to avoid duplication of efforts.

5. Sustain communication with the leadership of the University and Medical Center Staff Advisory Councils, including serving as advisors to the C.A.R.E. committee.

For AY 13/14, the USAC specifically asked the SAC to assist with their work to improve workplace civility, an issue that impacts both faculty and staff. To address this issue, the USAC formed an *ad hoc*, workplace civility committee, now known as the C.A.R.E. Committee (Civility, Appreciation, and Respectful Environments Committee). The USAC requested SAC participation in this committee.

For AY 14/15, Senator Wittig represented the SAC and Faculty Senate for continued endorsement of the CARE Committee and its workplace civility Spring Event. The event was again held in Light Hall in March 2015. Presenters from the School of Medicine, University Central, and Peabody discussed issues of trust in the workplace. The Faculty Senate officially co-sponsored the event.

Recommendations:

A member of the SAC should represent the Faculty Senate on the CARE Committee to encourage dialogue and to assist in the planning of the spring event. The Faculty Senate should continue to co-sponsor the event as a way to show support of our staff.