Minutes
Commission on Student Affairs
341 Squires Student Center
March 13, 1997
3:30 p.m.

Present:  Mr. John Aughenbaugh, Dr. Bruce Chaloux, Mr. Jay Hulings, Ms. Lisa Furjanic, Ms. Aimee Rhodes (for Ms. Jennifer Ginther), Mr. Jim O’Connell, Mr. Raphael Castillejo, Mr. Adam Boitnott, Mr. Terry Lo, Ms. Catherine Wattendorf (for Mr. Mike Rush), Mr. Cordel Faulk, Ms. Erin Graham, Mr. Jim Friel, Ms. Delia Grenville, Dr. Dave Ostroth, Dr. Edward Spencer, Dean Andy Swiger, Dr. Johann Norstedt, Dr. Terry Redican, Ms. Phoebe Crofts, Dr. Delores Scott, Mr. Robert Moser, Mr. Chris Bunin, Ms. Monica Ko, Mr. Brian Wiersema

Absent: Dr. Lanny Cross, Mr. Gary Markle, Mr. Robert Kottkamp, Ms. Ningling Wang, Dr. Kenneth Rystrom, Ms. Melinda Crowder, Dr. Cathy Goree

Guests: Ms. Sharon Yeagle, Ms. Betty Eaton

1. Call Meeting to Order and Introductions. Mr. Aughenbaugh called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. Introductions were made at this time.

2. Approval of Agenda. Motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

3. Approval of CSA Minutes of February 27, 1997. Mr. Aughenbaugh noted that the date of the CSA Minutes should read February 13, 1997. Motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes as amended. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

4. Chair's Comments. Mr. Aughenbaugh distributed a copy of an article from "Newsweek Magazine" that deals with grade inflation and Duke University's method of dealing with the problem. He asked that the members quickly peruse the article before the grading reform discussion under Old Business.

Mr. Aughenbaugh announced that the March 27 meeting will have a full agenda. Dr. John Fulton has been invited to this meeting to discuss the new academic eligibility policy; Ms. Darlene Grega will present comments in regards to international student concerns; Dean Cathy Goree will give an update on drug usage on campus; the Student Budget Board will present their annual funding recommendations to be approved or amended; the three finalists for the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Visitors will be introduced, and will make some brief remarks; and lastly, we will be discussing the "Must" statements regarding student affairs associated with the university's self study. Mr. Aughenbaugh asked that the Commission be aware that the meeting may last until 5:30 p.m. on March 27.

5. Old Business.

Submission of Top 6 BoV Applications List. Mr. Aughenbaugh asked that the members submit their recommendations for the top six candidates for the Undergraduate Student Representative to the Board of Visitors. Mr. Aughenbaugh reminded the members that only voting members may submit a list. Ms. Sharon Yeagle was asked to tabulate the votes and report back to the Commission prior to adjournment.
Class of 1997 Constitution - 2nd reading. Mr. Jim O'Connell distributed copies of the Constitution and stated that there are only minor changes to the constitution regarding responsibility of each officer. He stated that the Class of 1997 Constitution was never approved, and this is why it is being presented to CSA. He told the members that the class system plans to make a general constitution for future classes so that each class will not have to come before CSA to get a constitution approved. Members were asked to review the Constitution, and there being no questions or discussion, motion was made and seconded to approve the Class of 1997 Constitution. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Self Study "Must" Statements Distributed. Mr. Aughenbaugh asked the members to peruse the cover memo and attachment, which are related to the university's self-study process. Part of that process involves responses to statements that the university must achieve in order to be accredited. The Commission on Student Affairs has been asked to review the responses created by the self-study regarding student affairs, and either approve those responses or modify them accordingly. Mr. Aughenbaugh asked that the members review the document and if there are any modifications, they should be brought to the March 27 meeting for discussion. CSA must achieve consensus before the document is returned to the self-study team.

Grading Reform Resolution. University Registrar Wanda Dean was asked to speak to some concerns in regard to the grading reform resolution, which asks that professors be given the option to assign an A+ weighting on a 4.0 scale. Mr. Aughenbaugh reminded the Commission that this resolution has been discussed at two previous meetings and to keep discussion on point and concise.

Ms. Dean reported that in 1992 the American Association of Collegiate Registrars updated their study which is done periodically and includes two-year institutions, and four-year private and public colleges and universities. In 1992, 10.2% of those schools had grading scales other than 4.0. Of those who have a 4.0 grading scale, in the four-year public institution area, 39% offer plus and minus grades. It is much higher in the four-year private institution -- 63%. The resolution speaks to benchmarking institutions, of which there are 19 -- University of Arizona, University of Southern California, Illinois, Purdue, Iowa State, University of Maryland, Boston University, Michigan State, Cornell, North Carolina State, University of Cincinnati, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Tennessee, University of Texas at Austin, University of Minnesota, Ohio State, Penn State, and Texas A&M. Of the benchmarking institutions, one has a 4.3 and weights the A+ higher than an A, and that is Cornell. There is one other that has higher than a 4.0, and that is Illinois, which has a 5.0, but they do not have plus and minuses, and they weight the A as if it equates to the 4.0. Dr. Chaloux remarked that Illinois has recently gone to the 4.0. Ms. Dean noted that Virginia Tech is one of the few within our benchmarking institutions to offer plus and minus. N.C. State, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, and the University of Minnesota offer an A+, but it is weighted the same as an A. Within the Commonwealth of Virginia, UVA, George Mason, William and Mary, Old Dominion, and James Madison were looked at. Only the University of Virginia offers an A+, but that is weighted the same as an A, which is a 4.0. James Madison does not have a plus/minus. Texas A&M, Purdue, and Illinois have a 4.0, but no plus/minus. Penn State has a 4.0, plus/minus, but no A+. 
Ms. Dean reported on the issue of what does this mean at Virginia Tech as far as competing to get into graduate school or competing for jobs. The most recent assessment by our Institutional Research Department of the graduation class of 1994 indicates that there are only 2.4% who are seeking employment and are yet to find a job. Data cannot be found that supports the idea that the GPA at Virginia Tech is detrimental to finding employment. Regarding the issue of entry into graduate school, the Registrar's Office has not had direct contact from students that they are having difficulty in entry into other levels of graduate work because of the university's grading scale. The associate dean of admissions at UVA Law School was contacted to determine if he perceived that Virginia Tech applicants' admissions to law school were hurt by Tech's grading, and he replied in the negative. They do not just look at the GPA, but the whole package of information that they review. They look at the class rank and the profile of the institution. Nationally, the issue in higher education right now is grade inflation. Virginia Tech, in law school circles, is not considered an institution that suffers from grade inflation. The grading scale is considered an integral part of the identity of an institution.

What does it mean to get an A from Virginia Tech? What does it mean to be an A student? Virginia Tech has just passed a resolution on the eligibility policy that states that in order for you to continue enrollment at Virginia Tech, you should have a C average. To have an A at Virginia Tech has some bearing, because we are not defining our A's as we have to have 50% of our student body with the earned credit. And when you speak to the grade point average, you are speaking to the philosophy of grading at Virginia Tech. Ms. Dean stated that if she would offer any advice as far as this resolution goes, it might be to change the focus of it, because unfortunately, the data does not support what is said, that the GPA is detrimental and that we need to move to a 4.3. When you raise the scale, you will raise the threshold for the distinction of students.

Ms. Dean reported that she spoke with Mr. Jack Dudley in reference to the University Honors Program. The threshold to get into the Honors Program is a 3.5, and is going to move to a 3.6. Dr. Dudley indicated that a grading scale of 4.3 would mean that a student would have to have a 3.9 to get into the University Honors Program. The average overall QCA of students enrolled fall semester who were classified as seniors was 2.8. The top 10% enrolled fall semester is a 3.57; the top 40% is 2.96; top 30% 3.12; top 20% is 3.32. Ms. Dean remarked that Mr. Dudley stated that in this year's graduating class, we have the highest number ever accepted to UVA medical school, and we have the highest number ever of national scholarship recipients.

Ms. Dean stated that faculty at Virginia Tech have the option of using plus and minus, so if we were to move to a plus and minus, there would not be 100% utilization of it. You might have some professors who would award an A+ and others who would not. So if you have a scale of 4.3, you would not have 100% participation and that again would be a negative. Ms. Dean stated that she had spoken to an associate dean in the College of Veterinary Medicine as to how they look at applicants to the Veterinary School, and would an A+ make a difference. He indicated that if they would look at someone who is entering with a 4.3, they would recalibrate it to a 4.0.
After lengthy discussion, Mr. Hulings asked the Commission to table this issue to a subcommittee of the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies for study of this in more detail, and have them report back to CSA. He stated that the reason behind this is when this was presented, it was never really considered that this would be used very often, and still does not think it will have much of an effect at all on grade inflation. But, Hulings contended it was still a good thing, and is a motivational tool to get students to work harder for a higher grade. He indicated that someone should study this in detail, and CUS&P seems to be the most logical group to study it.

A motion was made to table further deliberation of the of this resolution and for the Commission on Student Affairs to ask a subcommittee of the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies to study the issue and report back to both CUS&P and CSA. The motion was seconded, and discussion followed regarding the motion.

Dr. Spencer offered a friendly amendment that because there is one academic grading system for the whole institution, it will also have to go to the Commission on Graduate Studies.

Ms. Grenville asked that if we are going to move this to these commissions, could we also ask them to study not only the A+ scenario, but perhaps putting ranking on the transcript as one of the distinguishing features. Mr. Hulings accepted Grenville's request as a friendly amendment and asked that the subcommittees also look at other academic indicators as well.

After much additional dialogue, the question was called. Mr. Aughenbaugh stated that the motion on the floor is to table the resolution and ask subcommittees on the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies and the Commission on Graduate Students and Policies to study the issue and other academic indicators and report back to the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies, Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies, and the Commission on Student Affairs. The motion carried with 11 in favor, 8 opposed, and 1 abstention.

Mr. Aughenbaugh stated he would contact the chairs of the two commissions and will set up arrangements with them.

Written Reports on Unfinished Items from Last Semester. Mr. Aughenbaugh asked the Commission to look at the written reports, which included the Special Purpose Housing Resolution, and Seating At and Ticket Distribution for Football Games, and decide whether closure is wanted on these items or if there are future actions to be taken on these issues.

6. New Business

Class of 1998 Constitution, 1st reading. Amy Rhodes distributed the Class of 1998 Constitution. Mr. Aughenbaugh asked the members to examine the document, and at the next meeting, the second reading will be on the agenda under Old Business.

Selection Process for 1997-98 CSA Chair/Vice Chair. Mr. Aughenbaugh remarked that he had asked for input from Commission members concerning the selection process. In past years, the selection process for the chair and vice chair of the Commission on Student Affairs has been somewhat difficult. Part of the difficulty has to do with the unique nature of who
could be chair and vice chair of the Commission. The Commission on Student Affairs is the only university commission where a student or a faculty member can serve as chair. All other university commissions and committees have to be chaired by faculty members. Where this has become a problem in terms of selection is the fact that we have such a large turnover in particular of the student leaders on this Commission, and there is a concern that we would not necessarily have the kind of informed interest necessary to have a competitive selection process. Ten members responded to the request for input; one suggested a nominating committee; another suggested a full discussion of the selection process and have the Commission make a decision at a meeting. The remainder of the individuals who responded, suggested that the process be kept as is. The basic process is that at a future meeting, nominations are held and selection is made of both chair and vice chair. Mr. Aughenbaugh stated that the time commitment and what the chair actually does has been a concern for interested persons in the position. The chair of CSA must represent the Commission at University Council two Mondays out of each month. The job is not that time consuming, but it does require paying attention to what is going on with student affairs on campus. The Commission members agreed that elections will be held for the chair and vice chair at the April 10 meeting.

7. Announcements:

Ms. Yeagle announced the six finalists for the undergraduate student representative to the Board of Visitors. They are Carlton Davis Bailey, Cynthia E. Conn, Kimball W. Green, Krista L. Johnston, Keith E. Knipling, and Sarah Catherine Nau. Mr. Aughenbaugh inquired as to how many Commission members voted; Ms. Yeagle responded that twenty-four responded.

Ms. Yeagle also announced that there is a committee reviewing the Honors Program at Virginia Tech. She asked for student leadership input by interviewing approximately twelve students to give their perspective on the Honors Program, and asked that the members consider volunteering for this project.

8. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Eaton
Acting Secretary