

## Faculty Senate

### Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom Year End Committee Report 2021-2022

**Date:** April 24, 2022

**Committee:** Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom

**Chair:** Saralyn Williams

**Members:** Brooke Ackerly, James Booth, Lutz Koepnick, David Lewis, Paul Miller, Courtney Pitts, Jan Price, Jacob Sauer

**EC Liaison:** Ryan Middagh

**Standing Charges for 21-22 AY:** To be concerned with the long-term strategic planning and governance issues of the university. To be concerned regarding professional ethics, conscience, and academic freedom under Article II, Section 3e of the Senate constitution

**New Standing Charges as of 4-7-22:** To be concerned with the impact of university-wide strategic planning on faculty self-governance and on the ability of faculty to perform their teaching, research and creative expression, service, and other professional responsibilities effectively. To be concerned with the policies regarding professional ethics, conscience, and academic freedom under Article II, Section C. 5 of the Senate Constitution.

## Committee Charges

### Charge 1

- **Background:** SPAF has less impact on the overall strategic planning and governance of the university which creates a dilemma on its overall identity as a committee
- **Goals:** Assess SPAF standing charges and provide recommendations for changes to charges that will better engage the committee in the work of the Senate. Propose a solution as appropriate.
- **Actions:** The committee discussed the interpretation of the two standing charges of the committee. The committee felt that the second charge was in alignment with the constitution of the faculty senate and important to retain given the emphasis on academic freedom. The first charge generated the most discussion and the committee felt that the intent was more about serving as a faculty voice for the impact of current or future strategic planning or changes in governance.

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- Outcomes and/or recommendations: A proposed language change constituted the following:  
“To be concerned with the impact of university-wide strategic planning on faculty self-governance and on the ability of faculty to perform their teaching, research and creative expression, service, and other professional responsibilities effectively. To be concerned with the policies regarding professional ethics, conscience, and academic freedom under Article II, Section C5 of the Senate Constitution.”

This was presented to the Faculty Senate on Feb 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Feedback provided and will be reviewed at the SPAF meeting on Feb 1<sup>st</sup>. Presented to the Faculty Senate on March 3<sup>rd</sup> for a final vote on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The vote as in affirmative for the motion and the Rules of Order for the standing charges for SPAF were modified.

### Charge 2

- Background: The separation of VU and VUMC has consequences that affect the VUMC SOM faculty who are mostly employees of VUMC while having a faculty appointment with VU.
- Goals: Work with the Senate Affairs and Faculty Life committees to consider the need for a new standing committee, or a change in the charge of a current committee, that would monitor on an ongoing basis the academic relationship between the VU and VUMC.
- Actions: The SPAF committee discussed several options. The Executive committee, Chair of SPAF, and the Co-Chairs of the Senate Affairs committee met in December 2021. The group felt that the issues related to the VU/VUMC interface would continue to pose challenges to the ideal of “One Vanderbilt” and would likely be longitudinal in nature. Establishing a standing committee is an option but would require a change in the rules of order. Creation of a Task Force is alternative initial strategy to begin identifying issues that need to be addressed and to discuss and recommend whether a standing committee should be established.
- Outcomes and/or recommendations: This issue was brought to the Faculty Senate on Jan 13<sup>th</sup> and will be further discussed by the Executive Committee, Co-Chairs of Senate Affairs, and Chair of SPAF on February 4<sup>th</sup>. Senate Affairs Committee created charges for a working committee.

### Charge 3

- Background: There are challenges in the longitudinal continuity and accountability between years on the committees

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- Goals: Consider best practices for Faculty Senate leadership specific to term and tenure. Propose motion if appropriate.
- Actions: The committee discussed several issues that need to be addressed. There are several examples of initiatives that did not come to full fruition for discussion given the challenges in senators having 3 year terms and variable documentation by committees to ensure “institutional memory”.
- Outcomes and/or recommendations: Institute a warm handoff between the outgoing Chair/Co-chairs and the incoming Chair/Co-chairs to discuss issues/concerns. Continue the Co-chair model with a junior and 3<sup>rd</sup> year senators to enhance the “institutional memory” from one year to the next. Design a system for longitudinal tracking of charges that extend beyond the academic year to ensure that charges and committee issues are completed. Need to ensure that there is close loop communication with the general faculty about issues/concerns and their resolution. The Faculty Senate needs to create a route of communication with the general faculty in each of the schools. Some VU schools may have an active faculty council that can be the interface with the senators. Other schools may need direct communication with faculty via departmental faculty meetings. The Faculty Senate Portal needs an outward facing site on the Faculty Senate website to encourage use by Faculty. Meanwhile, consider additional routes of communication of concerns to SPAF and the Executive Committee that would be synergistic with the Faculty Senate Portal.

### Suggestions for 2022-23 SPAF:

Create a process to monitor and survey for issues arising from policies or incidences that affect faculty self-governance and academic freedom. Consider if there are issues that should be directed primarily to SPAF without designation to SPAF from the Executive Committee.

Provide support to the working group that is identifying issues involving the VU/VUMC interface that affect the ability of faculty to effectively perform their duties. Identify structural institutional arrangements that hinder open communication from the faculty to the leadership. Identify the mechanism by which these issues are communicated to VU and VUMC leadership and track how these issues will be resolved.

Consider creation of a webpage tool that can track issues and motions to their resolution or vote with intent to promote longitudinal accountability, transparency and communication to faculty.