Faculty Handbook

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The role of faculty at the University of Virginia has evolved directly from the ideas of Thomas Jefferson, who conceived the faculty as a peer group responsible both for instruction and administration of the University. He provided for a faculty chair to convene and preside at meetings, to identify matters affecting institutional governance, and to act as a public spokesperson for the University. Each member of the faculty was to take a turn as chair so as to understand university operations and to share the burdens of administration. This system continued until 1904, when the Board of Visitors elected the first president. Administrative functions have diversified during subsequent growth of the University, but the tradition of faculty participation in governance continues.

The original faculty met for the first time on April 12, 1825, elected a chair, and organized the instructional program. From its founding until 1856 the University changed little. Then, as now, student enrollment determined the number of faculty, and during the first twenty years the average attendance was only 190. By 1860 there were thirteen faculty and three major divisions: the literary and scientific schools, the School of Law, and the School of Medicine.

When student enrollment recovered from the hiatus of the Civil War and began to grow, major changes started to occur. Virginians became a majority of the student body for the first time. New needs of society led to instruction in applied sciences, such as applied mathematics, biology and agriculture, and engineering. Analytical and applied chemistry, geology, and astronomy rounded out the sciences. A separate professorship of English language and literature was established. Independent professorships of modern languages, history, and economics were established. In 1898, the course in medicine became four years in the School of Medicine. Additional clinical experience had to be gained elsewhere because clinical laboratories, operating rooms, and hospital beds did not become available in Charlottesville until 1901. By then the faculty of medicine included ten professors and numerous assistants. A training school for nurses was established in 1901. By 1901 the Bachelor of Laws degree required two full years of study. Business Administration and the faculty of law was increased to four professors and several assistants.

The system of faculty ranks that we have today began in 1899, when an associate professor was appointed to help with instruction in romance languages. When the number of students grew too large for the professor of romance languages to instruct both undergraduate and graduate students, the work was divided and an adjunct professor was appointed to help with the load. Later the adjunct professor became an associate professor and, finally, a professor. In this way the faculty ranks diversified as the number of students increased. The undergraduate program became known as the College, and the graduate program was identified as the University.

General Faculty

The term "General Faculty" came into use around the turn of the century. The faculty as a whole still governed the University, but committees of professors had assumed independent oversight of students and curriculum in the various specialized areas of study, especially in the professional schools. Soon the General Faculty formally recognized and delegated its powers over students and curricula to these school faculties. After 1903 the faculty as a whole was known formally, as it is today, as the General Faculty of the University. As the number of administrative and supporting staff with faculty status grew after 1970, the term "general faculty" was used to identify those who were elected to the General Faculty of the University but not to the tenured ranks of faculty of the schools. In 2006, the University ceased to use this term officially and now distinguishes this category of faculty as "non-tenure-track." The primary policy governing the employment of non-tenure-track faculty is maintained by the Office of the Vice President and Provost, although non-tenure-track faculty are responsible for reviewing all policies regarding faculty employment (see section 2.3).

Faculty Senate

Growth in enrollment and faculty numbers led to diversification of curricula, formation of schools, and creation of departments as we know them today. When the faculty numbered ninety-seven, President Alderman expressed his
belief that it had "become too large to function successfully as a legislative body." The General Faculty recommended formation of a university senate, which first convened in 1926. This body was named the Faculty Senate in 1971 when a new constitution was adopted. With its powers delegated to the senate and to the faculties of the schools, the General Faculty began to meet only to confer degrees on candidates recommended by the schools.

The Faculty Senate derives its authority from the General Faculty of the University and performs the functions delegated to it by the General Faculty. The Faculty Senate approves the establishment of new degree programs, major modifications of existing degree programs, and any action affecting all faculties, or more than one faculty, of the University. In addition, the Faculty Senate may advise the vice president and provost, the president, and the Rector and Board of Visitors concerning educational policy and related matters that affect the welfare of the University. Among these is the responsibility to oversee the educational program planning process as a basis for recommending allocations of the University's resources.

The Faculty Senate is a representative body consisting of eighty members elected from the schools. Its presiding officer is the president of the University, who with the vice presidents of the University and the deans of schools comprise the twenty ex officio members with voice and vote. The senate has an elected chair and an executive council. The chair has the power to call meetings of the Faculty Senate on behalf of the executive council. The chair's role, therefore, is analogous to that of chair of the faculty in Jefferson's original scheme of faculty organization.

School Faculties

Faculty whose primary responsibility is teaching and research are elected to one of the following school faculties: architecture, arts and sciences, commerce, continuing and professional studies, education, engineering and applied science, business administration, law, medicine, and nursing. They are also members of the General Faculty of the University.

The faculty organization of each school consists of the president of the University, the dean of the school, and all professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and instructors in the school. The vice president and provost is an ex officio member of each school’s faculty but votes only in that school in which he holds tenure. Instructors, lecturers, visiting professors, and those elected to research or clinical positions are not normally voting members of the school faculties, unless their school faculty grants them voting rights. A school faculty may nominate a faculty member of another school to its membership.

The College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences administers graduate degree programs in the basic medical sciences, architectural history, the Ph.D. in nursing, and all graduate programs of the departments in arts and sciences. Other graduate degrees are awarded by the respective schools.

Each of the school faculties formulates policies governing admission of its students, approves all courses, establishes all degree requirements, enacts and enforces rules governing academic work, approves candidates for degrees, and exercises jurisdiction over all other educational matters pertaining to that school, subject to the authority of the General Faculty of the University and the Faculty Senate in matters affecting general policy.