

'Responsible use of *what?*'

*Navigating US university governance to
approve an institutional statement on
the responsible use of metrics*

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Background

Responsible Research Assessment Internationally

- Declaration on Research Assessment = first international initiative on responsible research assessment
 - Started in the US by a group of cell biologists
 - In US, 1 university & 4 units within universities have signed it
 - In Canada, 5 universities & 2 units within universities have signed
- Many other responsible research assessment initiatives have emerged
 - Leiden Manifesto
 - Metric Tide Report
 - Hong Kong Principles



Responsible Research Assessment in the US

Why the slow uptake in the US?

- No national system or model for universities to comply with or follow in the US, especially as it pertains to budgets and funding
- Funding is dependent on the individual state and on tuition dollars
 - Tuition dollars are dependent on cost of tuition and enrollment
 - State funding is dependent on the politics of the state, which includes who is governor and the makeup of the state legislature
- Within each state: budget models, funding allocations, and governance structures are typically unique to each university
 - Some universities have state-specific Boards that oversee all their state universities while other universities each have their own Boards

In other words: it is a highly decentralized system



In contrast...

UK Research Excellence Framework (REF)

- Highly centralized national funding allocation system for UK universities
- The scores from the REF determine funding for the next seven years
 - Scores based on publication metrics, citation metrics, and qualitative assessment of research assigned a rating

The Dutch Recognition & Rewards Program

- Centralized but bottom-up approach to modernizing the recognition and rewards system by focusing on a holistic assessment of individuals and their careers

Universities Norway (National Consortium)

- Structure for hiring and career progression is relatively uniform and framed by government regulations
- Working group formed to make recommendations on improving research evaluation
 - Motivated by transition to Open Science and widespread support for DORA





However, university rankings
or league tables affect all

*External evaluators affect most
universities worldwide*



Environment at Virginia Tech

Strategic Plan is focused on four areas:

1. Advance Regional, National, and Global Impact; milestones include increasing:
 - Research expenditures
 - Achieve WSJ/THE Top 10 US public land-grant and Top 13 US land-grant
 - Awards
 - Faculty publications and citations
 - Invention disclosures
 - License agreements
 - Startup companies
2. Elevate the *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) Difference
3. Be a Destination for Talent
4. Ensure Institutional Effectiveness

And...the “unspoken” goal(s)!



Environment at Virginia Tech (continued)

New(ish) Project for an Incentive-based Budget (PIBB) Model

- Linking budgets more directly with activity levels
- Tied directly to enrollments, instructional outcomes
- Meant to incentivize activities that generate further resources, such as enrollment growth, instruction, philanthropy, research
- Some control with PIBB model with performance bands, allowing those who exceed or fall short of goals an adjustment to resources
- Began allocating funding to colleges last year for scholarly publications and citations
 - Data from Academic Analytics: relies on Crossref for peer reviewed journal publications and Baker & Taylor and the British Library for books and book chapters
 - Very small allocation of the budget overall





Climate at Virginia Tech among Faculty Members



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2019 Faculty Senate Research Assessment Subcommittee

Surveyed and explored faculty sentiment towards:

- Research metrics
- Fairness of research assessment at Virginia Tech
- Time allocations towards research, teaching, and service
- Salaries

Big takeaways

- Diminished levels of trust in higher levels of the university regarding assessment of research
- Expectations of time commitments, especially for service, feel unreasonable for most
- Metric usage & views
 - Journal metrics and journal reputation = highly used metrics
 - Journal metrics primarily used for institutional reasons while reverse true for journal reputation
 - Faculty view books as undervalued and not rewarded or incentivized
 - *h*-index seems more trusted among those who don't use it as much (in the humanities)



2020 Faculty Senate Assessment on Assessment Subcommittee

Focused on assessment of faculty in:

- Teaching
- Research
- Service

Research assessment group (myself and another faculty member) reiterated recommendations from 2019 subcommittee work, which include:

- Develop a brief, department-level driven, university-wide, inclusive, and carefully-written **responsible research assessment statement of principles** to support and drive diverse research production.
- The university should provide departments the resources to reduce teaching, service, and administrative expectations
- Consider “**faculty research liaison**” positions between faculty and administration
- Allow departments and perhaps colleges to opt out of eFAR where overly-burdensome and of lesser value, or **provide administrative support**





Advocacy Efforts

2022-2023 Faculty Senate Responsible Research Assessment Task Force

Started and chaired by me (Rachel Miles) as an effort to follow-up on previous Faculty Senate work in this area

Formed in 2021 but work did not start until 2022

Faculty representatives from all colleges

Representatives explored the advantages, disadvantages, relevance, and applicability of: DORA, Leiden Manifesto, Institutional statements, DORA case studies

Using some of the institutional statements as a guide, I began drafting a statement in November 2022 based on the Leiden Manifesto

Navigating Virginia Tech Faculty Senate

Statement is or would be aspirational in nature, not policy

First step: Faculty Senate should approve / endorse the statement

Spoke to the Faculty Senate President and VP about statement and its progress; they recommended:

Bring the first draft to the Faculty Senate Cabinet (FS leadership and representatives from each college)

FS Cabinet's only remarks: make it shorter

Navigating Virginia Tech Faculty Senate (continued)

Brought the latest draft of the statement to the entire Faculty Senate

Emailed senators encouraging them to communicate with their constituents about the draft statement and provide feedback

Received feedback from five faculty members plus a few others who expressed gratitude and compliments on the statement

Sent a follow-up email to all senators about the changes to the statement based on feedback; asked for final feedback

Two FS meetings later, April 7, 2023, we held an official vote, which passed 53 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain (must have 51 for quorum)

Statement is now available on the Faculty Senate website:

<https://www.facultysenate.vt.edu/Statements/responsible-research-metrics.html>



Next steps & goals



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FY24 Goals: Navigating University Governance

In order to have the University Council vote to endorse and approve the statement, it must first go through a commission as a resolution

- The Faculty Senate oversees four commissions:
 - Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA)
 - Commission on Research (CoR)
 - Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies & Policies (CGPSP)
 - Commission on Undergraduate Studies & Policies (CUSP)
- Commission on Research is the most appropriate avenue
 - In early fall, I will speak with the incoming Chair of CoR, who was formerly a member of the Responsible Research Assessment Task Force

Actively involved Faculty Senate subcommittee and task force members also recommend other advocacy efforts



FY24 Goals: Speaking with Deans & Directors Council

- To ensure understanding and actual implementation of the principles outlined in the statement, we need to speak to administrators at all levels
- How we communicate is just as important as what we communicate
- Will coordinate and collaborate with faculty members who have been involved with this work with me over the years

YOU DIDNT COME THIS
FAR TO ONLY COME
THIS FAR

FY24 Goals: Creating a Faculty Liaison

One former Faculty Senate subcommittee and task force member has applied to be a faculty fellow with the university

If accepted, they would act as a liaison to communicate faculty needs to admin related to the principles in the statement

Importantly, this work could have a ripple effect on cultural norms and practices in the university (we hope)

The application was specific on its purpose: to improve well being of faculty members and build more meaningful bridges between faculty and administrators.





Big takeaways



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What have I learned?



- Change, especially cultural, takes a long time in academia; patience is key.
- Communication of the issue itself is just as important as the attempting to shift the culture.
- Communication with leadership is key to implementation but not guaranteed

Image by [Gerd Altmann](#) from [Pixabay](#)



Thank you! Questions?

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