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**Graduate and Professional Student Senate  
 GPSS Resolution 2021-2022A  
 Resolution to Establish a University Policy Governing Task Forces and Working Groups**

First Reading by GPSS:	August 26th, 2021
Second Reading by GPSS:	September 9th,
2021	
First Reading by CGPSP	date
Staff Senate Review:	date
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Approved by Board of Visitors:	date
Effective:	upon approval

**WHEREAS**, task forces and working groups are a crucial part of the university workflow and are the main research and implementation mechanism for many university policies; and

**WHEREAS**, to date, there is no concrete policy for how task forces ought to be run or who should be represented on them; and

**WHEREAS**, this ambiguity has led to the exclusion of those most affected by certain university policies from the task forces that change or implement those policies; and

**WHEREAS**, for example, the campus accessibility working group has had minimal representation from disabled members of the Virginia Tech community, with only one openly disabled person on the working group at any given time, despite the insights and relevance the disability alliance and caucus has to campus accessibility; and

**WHEREAS**, for example, the graduate education task force had only one graduate student on it at any given time, which is insufficient representation from those most affected by the task force’s findings; and

**WHEREAS**, for example, the 2020 climate action commitment task force initially excluded the majority of climate activists who raised this issue to the university's attention despite their expressed desire to be involved, which forced the students and faculty to use other channels to get onto the task force in order to participate at all; and

**WHEREAS**, these omissions undermine the university's commitment to *ut prosim* and often exclude the most passionate and most affected members of the community from making changes to the university; and

**WHEREAS**, we recognize that some ambiguity is necessary for providing the kind of workflow flexibility that task forces and working groups require to fulfil their charges, and so the goal of this resolution is not to limit the flexibility of working groups but rather to attune them to the university community; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** Virginia Tech will immediately adopt a new university policy, as described in appendix 1, that establishes task force and working group membership best practices and accountability processes to ensure more representative task forces and working groups moving forward.

### **Appendix 1: Task Force and Working Group Best Practices Policy**

The goal of working groups and task forces is to provide a flexible way of addressing or changing elements of the Virginia Tech community. These range from improving the accessibility of our documents, reevaluating our sustainability policies, adapting our Title IX procedures to meet the needs of the students, and more. As a result, the rules that regulate task forces and working groups need to be kept vague so that they can be convened as problems arise and respond to them quickly and methodically.

The convening and charging of task forces and working groups is solely up to the discretion of the administration; however, faculty, staff, and graduate students can be appointed as chair of a working group or task force.

The membership of working groups and task forces can be from any entity across the university and even outside of it, including: students, graduate students, faculty, staff, administration, community members, and outside consultants. At least one fourth (25%) of the voting members of a working group or task force should be those who are most affected by the proposed policy change and/or those that brought the issue to the attention of the administration. This portion of a working group or task force is hereafter named the *stakeholder portion* and shall have special privileges within a working group or task force as defined in the following paragraphs.

The question of who comprises the stakeholder portion is an important one. To give an example, if the work of a social movement results in a task force or working group being formed to address their concerns, then that social movement should be the stakeholder portion for the resulting working group. If a policy affects a particular portion of the campus community (such

as how accessibility affects disabled members of the Virginia Tech community), then that community should be made the stakeholder portion. Given the university's land grant commitments and motto of *ut prosim*, it is strongly recommended that more stakeholders are involved outside of this portion; the 25% minimum requirement should not be taken as the maximum number of stakeholders to include. There can be multiple stakeholder portions, each invested with the power described below, or one large stakeholder portion depending on the needs of the task force or working group.

If a plurality of the stakeholder portion formally withdraws their confidence from the task force or working group (by emailing the chair of the task force/working group, the administrator who provided the charge, an ombudsman who can relay that information safely, or otherwise note it in writing), then the working group or task force will be reconvened with new leadership. This is effectively a "hard reset" of the task force, with the exception of the stakeholder portion who retains control over the 25% of voting members that are sent to the task force or working group and can be the same as the first iteration. Simple abstention or absence is not considered formal withdrawal, only a written notification is formal withdrawal. This process is intended as an accountability mechanism that invests the most affected portion of the community with the power to restart a task force or working group if it is not sufficiently addressing their needs. This power is not to be used if there are simply disagreements between members of the committee and is not to be used indefinitely to delay the work of a task force or working group.