Chair Carbonell began the town hall meeting on the Virginia Campus by reviewing the charge given to him by the Board to form the faculty governance task force in May of 2013. The task force, composed of members of the faculty, Administration and Board of Trustees, had met with the faculty of nearly all of GW’s ten schools to gain input on the Faculty Code’s alignment with the Strategic Plan. 1 Throughout Phase I of this process, the task force has met with faculty, department chairs, deans, as well as the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and the Faculty Senate’s Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom Committee. Utilizing the robust feedback garnered from school-based meetings, the task force has initiated Phase II of the process in holding town hall meetings, open to all faculty, to gain additional perspective on five recurring themes of Phase I meetings: participation; academic freedom; appointment, promotion and tenure; appointment, review and retention of administrators; and school, departmental, center and institute rules and procedures. These five themes form the draft guiding principles that the task force will bring to five initial town hall meetings on the Virginia, Mount Vernon and Foggy Bottom Campuses for input. Finally, the task force will issue recommendations to the Board of Trustees concerning the alignment of the Faculty Code with the Strategic Plan, all while consulting the Faculty Senate.

Chair Carbonell reinforced the fact that the Board of Trustees is not a part of the Administration of GW. The Administration serves at the pleasure of the Board of Trustees. While the Board of Trustees has not recently had much interaction with the faculty, the formation of the faculty governance task force was designed to elicit feedback from faculty members on the Faculty Code’s alignment with the Strategic Plan.

The faculty governance task force introduced the first draft guiding principle: “participation.” Under this principle, Chair Carbonell stated that the task force had repeatedly heard from faculty members that they would like to have faculty voting rights across the University reviewed. Under current governance rules, several different types of faculty are excluded from casting a vote within their schools, e.g. research, clinical and special service faculty. Faculty noted that these types of faculty often feel like second class citizens within the schools, as they can have a seat at the table but are not permitted to cast a ballot. At the same time, the task force recognizes the need to make exceptions to expanding governance, e.g. excluding non-tenured faculty’s involvement in granting tenure. One faculty member gave the example that they served at three different institutions as a tenured professor, but now served as a contract employee. In this capacity, despite a record of tenure, this professor would be excluded from participation in governance. Another faculty member noted that not everyone aspired to be a tenured professor, as some focus on research or clinical excellence, and it was just as important to find ways for non-tenured faculty to be valued within the institution as much as tenured faculty.

Second, the task force introduced the draft guiding principle of “academic freedom.” As GW grows as a global university with both a physical and online presence, the current provisions for academic freedom should be evaluated to determine if they adequately protect the University’s faculty and students. This is most important for GW faculty and students teaching and studying abroad and online. Faculty noted that the University should consult other universities to determine best practices, rather than repeat the mistakes of peer institutions. Chair Carbonell agreed with this statement, and noted that the task force

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1 As of March 4, 2014, the Faculty Governance Task Force had not met with the faculty of SMHS or CPS. These meetings are scheduled to occur later in March 2014.
has commissioned a study with the Education Advisory Board to determine how other market basket institutions protect academic freedom in a rapidly changing global environment. Another faculty member stated that her school conducts several programs within Latin America and the Caribbean, and protecting faculty member rights to engage in multi-disciplinary and cross cultural activities was important to the future of the school’s partnerships.

The tertiary draft guiding principle introduced by the task force was “appointment, promotion and tenure.” Under this principle, the University must assess if the current appointment, promotion and tenure metrics support the ambitions of the institution, especially in the area of cross disciplinary collaboration. GW will continue to grow and compete for the best faculty. However, competing for the best faculty is difficult when granting them tenure is difficult. To this point, a faculty member suggested the formation of a committee that would be educated in multiple disciplines that looked at the tenure application of a faculty member in a similar discipline to their own. Another faculty member noted that they would like to see a means to take the fear out of promotion and achieving tenure. This faculty member continued, stating that they would be cautious of creating different standards for tenure, with the process still having a basis in the department. Finally, a faculty member noted that they would like to see increased transparency for tenure applicants throughout the process and shed more light on how the process works.

As the fourth draft guiding principle, Chair Carbonell introduced “appointment, review and retention of administrators.” Throughout the task force’s school based meetings, an issue that continued to resurface was that searches for deans were confined to tenured faculty only. While some schools have had non-tenured faculty or undergraduate students involved in the search process, they are not afforded a vote when selecting a dean. Further, faculty members voiced their support for a consistent process to encourage feedback on their administrators and not just in a time of crisis, noting that management structures vary on a school by school basis.

Finally, “school, departmental, center and institute rules and procedures” was introduced as the fifth draft guiding principle. For this principle, it is clear that schools across the University define faculty in different ways, as the duties and responsibilities of research staff in the School of Public Health and Health Services and the Columbian College vary quite differently. For this reason, the task force has heard from faculty that they would like to see more uniform titles, policies and procedures for different classifications of faculty across all schools, while being mindful of meeting accreditation standards. This would also hold true for centers and institutes to align them more closely with schools to foster increased cooperation. A faculty member noted that different schools, even different departments, have different values and cultures which contribute to how different types of faculty operate.