Chair Carbonell opened the morning session of the Foggy Bottom town hall meetings by reviewing the charge given to him by the Board of Trustees in May of 2013 to form a task force designed to assess the alignment of Faculty Code with the University’s Strategic Plan. Following the introduction of the members of the task force, representing the Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty, Chair Carbonell summarized the task force’s previous meetings with the majority of the University’s ten schools. The substantial feedback gleaned from school-based meetings illustrated several recurring themes among different schools and different faculty. The task force used this feedback to begin its second phase in holding town hall meetings open to all faculty in order to gain additional perspective on five draft guiding principles: participation; academic freedom; appointment, promotion and tenure; appointment, review and retention of administrators; and school, departmental, center and institute rules and procedures. The task force will hold town halls on the Foggy Bottom, Mount Vernon and Virginia Campuses to gain additional input from faculty. Additionally, a survey will be sent to faculty to gain their input on the draft guiding principles. Finally, the task force will issue recommendations to the Board of Trustees concerning the alignment of the Faculty Code with the Strategic Plan. Chair Carbonell noted that the task force has been in communication with the Faculty Senate’s Executive Committee and Professional Ethics and Academic Freedom Committee throughout the process and will meet with the full Faculty Senate in late March.

A faculty member asked why the task force was beginning the second phase of meetings before meetings with all schools were completed. Chair Carbonell noted that several meetings were forced to be rescheduled due to winter weather. The task force will have met with the two remaining schools before it meets with the Faculty Senate in late March. A secondary question was asked regarding the composition of the task force and how task force members were selected. Chair Carbonell noted that each of the trustees on the committee served in leadership positions for the Board’s Governance, Diversity and Inclusion, and Academic Affairs Committees. From the University’s administration, the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs was asked to serve on the task force. Three faculty members serve on the task force from different disciplines (law, chemistry, public health). Chair Carbonell noted that several faculty members were asked to serve on the task force but declined to participate.

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 voting in their own schools, e.g. research, clinical and special service faculty. Chair Carbonell noted that the task force has heard from faculty in several different schools and that their faculty feel like second class citizens. Additionally, the task force recognizes that non-tenured faculty would need to be excluded from some aspects of governance, e.g. procedures that grant tenure. One faculty member from the Columbian College commented that while non-tenured faculty were not completely disenfranchised from governance within the school, that they were not against expanding the role of these faculty in governance. Another faculty member stated that they were non-tenure track faculty with positions in two schools. With this joint appointment, they felt as if they were a second class citizen and not valued as much as their colleagues because of their inability to be in the faculty senate. This faculty member noted that non-tenure track faculty would like to participate but recognize that there should be additional requirements for participation, e.g. number of years contract faculty member has been at University.
The task force introduced the second draft guiding principle of “academic freedom.” Chair Carbonell highlighted the need to protect academic freedom for faculty as the University changes and expands globally and online, including protecting GW faculty and students teaching and studying abroad and online. Furthermore, it was noted that the task force wants to assure that all faculty have adequate academic freedom, not solely tenured faculty. Faculty members in attendance noted their support for ensuring academic freedom was protected, and also suggested that there are cases where more senior faculty influence the work of more junior faculty. Chair Carbonell stated that the task force has heard from faculty members in several schools that bullying from senior faculty is a problem.

The tertiary draft guiding principle introduced by the task force was “appointment, promotion and tenure.” Under this principle, the University needs to determine if the methods in which appointment, promotion and tenure are managed meets the needs of the institution, specifically in the area of cross disciplinary collaboration. The University grants tenure to faculty that it believes support its long-term mission and commitment to excellence. To this point, granting tenure to faculty that perform multidisciplinary research can be difficult. Furthermore, within large departments, tenured faculty can mentor junior faculty and have a broad range of people involved in the tenure process. At the same time, smaller departments do not have the same benefits as their larger counterparts. A faculty member noted that tenure is a very important element to departments, regardless of their size. They continued, stating they would suggest expanding tenure-granting bodies to tenured faculty members within similar disciplines or the same school. Another faculty member asserted that as the University has put a large amount of resources into a renewed push for research, they are concerned that this move may compromise teaching and service. Chair Carbonell responded that the while the University is undertaking major investments in research, the Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining focus on teaching and service as well. A faculty member stated that they would like to discuss providing different tracks for different faculty to be promoted, e.g. a clinical track for faculty not completing research or a teaching track for faculty from industry or think tanks. This faculty member continued, noting that while these faculty members do not conduct research, they are highly valued within the University and should not be ignored.

Fourth, the task force introduced the draft guiding principle of “appointment, review and retention of administrators.” A recurring theme within school-based meetings was the desire to have input from more diverse stakeholders for deans searches, beyond tenured faculty. Faculty noted that they were concerned that excluding research, clinical and special service faculty from voting on new deans created a monolithic perspective from only tenured faculty members. A faculty member noted they would like to clearly define the responsibility and authority of the dean as the role of a dean has changed to be split between running a school and fundraising.

Finally, the fifth draft guiding principle of “school, departmental, center and institute rules and procedures” was introduced. Chair Carbonell stated that based on meetings with schools, the classifications, duties and responsibilities of faculty with the same title are different across the University. A faculty member noted that they believed having a more uniform definition of types and levels of faculty would be helpful. Further, Chair Carbonell noted that the task force had heard from faculty that they would like to see unifying themes within each school. Faculty members in attendance noted their support for the idea, but stressed that it would be critical for each school to maintain its own identity and flexibility to operate. Faculty also noted that they would like to see the same level of expectations for professors of the same title within each school, regardless of discipline.
To conclude the meeting, Chair Carbonell explained how the process would move forward, stating that two more town hall meetings would be conducted in Foggy Bottom today, with a rescheduled town hall meeting in Mount Vernon to take place before late March. Further, the task force will meet with the Faculty Senate on March 21st to gain their thoughts on the draft guiding principles brought before town hall meetings.