Chair Carbonell began the afternoon session town hall by going over the charge given to him by Board of Trustees in May of 2013 to create a task force to assess the alignment of Faculty Code with the Strategic Plan of the University. Chair Carbonell then reviewed the members of task force, noting that several were present in the audience, and 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.

To begin, the task force introduced the first draft guiding principle: “participation.” Under participation, the task force had received feedback from faculty members across many schools that they would like to expand voting rights to full-time faculty throughout the University. Currently, many different types of faculty are excluded from voting in their own schools, e.g. research, clinical and special service faculty. In addition, the task force recognizes that non-tenured faculty would need to be excluded from some aspects of governance, e.g. procedures that grant tenure. During this town hall meeting, different faculty held opposing opinions on expanding governance. One faculty member noted that tenured faculty have the long-term interests of the University in mind more than non-tenured faculty. In response, a faculty member noted that their colleague has been at the University for more than two decades on a contractual basis and was as committed to the University just as much they were. On the issue of governance, faculty noted that they would like to see participation rights expanded to have their voice heard at the faculty senate as well as on committees. One faculty member noted that a possible solution for expanding participation would be to allow non-tenured faculty who solely perform research and teach classes to participate in those areas of governance.

The task force introduced the second draft guiding principle of “academic freedom.” Chair Carbonell underscored the need to ensure that academic freedom for faculty was preserved as the University changes and expands globally and online, including protecting GW faculty and students teaching and studying abroad and online. To continue, the task force would like to assert that the academic freedom of all faculty is preserved, not solely tenured faculty. For example, classified research cannot be done at GW because faculty have colleagues that do not want them to perform it. At the same time, a faculty member noted that many faculty object to animal experimentation but they would not stop others from doing it. Faculty members noted that they would encourage the task force to be very careful in issuing specific recommendations concerning academic freedom.

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, especially with the different processes used by large and small departments within schools. Faculty noted that they would like to see more consistency with APT criteria between schools after reviewing the work of candidates from different schools who were held to vastly different standards. Chair Carbonell noted that the purpose of talking about APT was not to remove the process from the department but to begin a conversation on the best way to recruit and retain the best faculty at the University while maintaining deference to the department and school. Another faculty member noted that they support the goal of a consistent and transparent process for granting appointments, tenure and promotions.

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 would like to see a consistent feedback mechanism to voice their concerns with their dean. Chair Carbonell noted that the task force has seen different methods used by different schools, with some developing a method for review at the dean, associate dean and department chair levels, while others only review a dean as a reactive move. Further, faculty noted that they would like to continue to play a role in the selection of a dean beyond their school’s submission of its top choices to move forward in the process. Furthermore, faculty noted they would like to understand the checks and balances on a dean and the administration of their school, as deans must now become fundraisers as well as academic administrators.

Fifth, “school, departmental, center and institute rules and procedures” was introduced as the concluding draft guiding principle. Chair Carbonell stated that the task force had heard from faculty that the different definitions of faculty were confusing between schools. Faculty members in attendance were in accord with this statement, especially in the area of what constitutes a research faculty member. Moreover, Chair Carbonell noted that while schools should retain their own identity and means of operation, some schools have legislated sets of rules and regulations on issues that were not governed by the Faculty Code. The task force has heard from faculty in many schools that they would like to see a unified set of ideas that each school must make rules on while maintaining the identity of their institution. Faculty members stated their support for further exploring this idea.

Chair Carbonell concluded the meeting by explaining that there would be another town hall in Foggy Bottom in the evening, and a rescheduled town hall meeting in Mount Vernon to take place before late March. A survey would also be available to faculty to gain their input on draft guiding principles within the next few weeks. 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.