Strategies for Increasing Diversity and Inclusion at Virginia Tech

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Faces of Change: The University Diversity Plan 2000-2005 identified five strategic goals, which remain critically important to guiding renewed institutional commitment and investment:

- Develop and implement activities and programs that are designed to increase and enhance student, faculty, and staff diversity at all levels of the university, with particular focus on racial/ethnic and gender differences.
- Develop and implement activities and programs that are designed to improve the university climate for students, faculty, and staff and that are aligned with one or more of the University Core Values.
- Identify and/or develop and implement a comprehensive program of education and training opportunities, made available to students, faculty, and staff and designed to include a review of legal issues, best practices, and research related to recognizing, valuing, and effectively managing differences.
- Design, develop, and implement a comprehensive system of responsibility, accountability, and recognition for increasing campus diversity, improving campus climate, and advancing the knowledge base for creating and sustaining a culturally diverse community of learners, teachers, researchers, and workers.
- Develop both internal and external collaborations and partnerships that are designed to build capacity for extending diversity and multicultural education and related research to the broader community, businesses, and other organizations affiliated with and/or serviced by the university.

Our drive toward excellence is inextricably linked to achieving these diversity goals along with other critical goals that define a major research university in the 21st century. Our graduates must be culturally competent, our faculty and staff must more nearly mirror a rapidly changing demography, and our programs of instruction, research, and outreach must reflect the breadth of perspectives, approaches, and issues of vital importance to the future growth and development of the state, nation, and world.

The working document on diversity suggests four areas for transformative change: Policy, Personnel, Pedagogy, Programs. The proposed strategies are organized under these four general categories. These are issues and projects intended for both immediate and longer-term attention.

Policy:

- Develop a brief statement of the university's commitment to become a more diverse and inclusive community. Adopt the statement through university governance and share with the Board for their endorsement. Widely publicize the statement both within and outside the university. Use the statement as a foundation for administrative written and verbal comments to internal and external groups.
- Revise and update the harassment policy to bring it into compliance with current legal understanding and to ensure its effectiveness within the university setting.

- Review existing policies and develop new policies designed to create and sustain a work environment where women and people of color can thrive and succeed—dual career hires, worklife policies and programs, flexible faculty career paths, benefits for part-time employees, and so on.
- Reposition VT as a leading higher education institution in diversity matters: embed the diversity commitment into university "branding" efforts; create multiple vehicles for communicating information on diversity efforts to targeted constituent groups, including alumni, clients, and current students, faculty, and staff.
- Assess progress on tasks and strategies in Diversity Plan. Revise and update plan to address current and future initiatives and issues.
- Develop guidelines for faculty to report involvement in significant diversity related programs and activities on the annual faculty activity report and as part of the promotion and tenure review process. Identify and support additional recognition and rewards for significant accomplishment in diversity and international issues.
- Utilize and, if necessary, refine the Standards for Inclusive Policies, Programs, and Practices adopted by the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity as a university-wide guide to ensure inclusive and legally viable programs.

Personnel:

- Identify and develop potential academic, administrative, and research leaders, drawing from the talents of a diverse population.
- Analyze exit survey data to determine issues that led to faculty and staff departures. Disseminate the findings and address those issues under institutional control at multiple levels.
- Conduct a comprehensive survey of current faculty and staff to identify issues critical to worklife and climate.
- Establish an office to handle dual career hires.
- Revitalize the EO Office so that it becomes a significant resource in identifying and recruiting diverse candidates for faculty searches.
- Develop and implement an accountability plan for outcomes of searches.
- Make significant progress in increasing the diversity of the faculty, staff, and student body over the next five years.

Pedagogy:

- Create a diversity certificate program. Promote this among students to engage them in deeper learning, to develop their multicultural competencies, and to prepare them for a global work environment.
- Implement critical recommendations from the International Strategic Plan concerning undergraduate and graduate education, such as removing barriers to faculty participation in internationalization of teaching, research, and outreach; increasing the number of students, faculty, and staff involved in international and cross-cultural experiences; and building foreign language and cultural programs available on campus.
- Incorporate discussion of cross-cultural course work into the current review of the undergraduate core curriculum.

- Provide opportunities for faculty and graduate student researchers to showcase and share diversity related research, both on and off-campus, and at the local, national and international level.
- Establish a Diversity Research Initiative to stimulate scholarly inquiry and problem-solving activities among the faculty/staff and undergraduate and graduate students.

Programs:

- Significantly increase equity/diversity/multicultural education and training for students, faculty, and staff.
- Develop a regular, periodic diversity program summit to share plans, initiatives, and outcomes, thereby increasing visibility, coordination, and potential impact of programs.
- Increase and focus resources to establish and/or sustain programming that recognizes and celebrates the university's ethnic, cultural, racial, gender, and international assets
- Create a task force to identify additional child care options and recommend strategies that will result in affordable child care for many additional children within five years.
- Revitalize Diversity Committees and Taskforces by establishing an accountability process that links the activities of these groups directly to the Diversity Strategic Plan and/or its related operational plans.
- Increase funding for scholarships and fellowships that support increased diversity of the undergraduate and graduate student body.
- Continue additional investments in programs designed to support student recruitment, retention, and achievement. Measure results and communicate these broadly in the university community.
- Seek additional grants to support diversity recruitment and programming.
- Increase staff and resources available to build and nurture connections to alumni of color and external groups and partners.
- Implement key recommendations of the university international strategic plan such as identifying departmental liaisons for international matters and investing in international university partnerships of strategic importance.
- Coordinate existing pipeline programs and create additional ones to introduce underrepresented populations to Virginia Tech and help prepare them for college enrollment.
- Establish a summer bridge program to assist the successful transition of admitted underrepresented students into Virginia Tech.
- Assess needs and develop programs to serve populations that have traditionally received less attention, such as Hispanic, American Indian, Appalachian, and LGBT faculty, staff, and students.
- Increase visibility and coordination of programming and services for individuals with disabilities.

Transformative change will require the involvement and full participation of the entire university community. This draft document lays out projects and priorities for the next several years that, if accomplished, will have a demonstrable positive impact on members of the university community and the way Virginia Tech is viewed by both internal and external audiences. The

document will be shared with the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity to solicit their input. It will also be shared broadly throughout the university community to create awareness of and build support for the strategies proposed here.

This listing is a beginning not an end. Others are invited to contribute their ideas, energy, commitment, and resources to accomplishing the important goals identified in the diversity strategic plan.