

Questions and Answers Concerning Diversity Issues and Programs

Prepared by the Office of the Provost

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A number of questions were raised at a recent meeting with students hosted by the president. The provost's office has prepared this Q&A to provide information on these issues to the university community.

What is Virginia Tech doing to recruit and retain more students from underrepresented groups?

New Investments: In July 2004, the Provost made a three-year commitment to increase the staff and resources to several critical units. Four additional staff members and additional operating funds for materials and travel have been committed to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. Three additional positions and operating funds have been committed to the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence to support pipeline programs and Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program. In addition, the Presidential Campus Enrichment Grants, which provide undergraduate scholarships to students who have a demonstrated record and continued interest in diversity-related activities have been substantially increased—\$188,500 will be added to the existing allocation for this program. These new commitments total nearly \$1 million.

Recruitment Strategies for Undergraduates: The Office of Undergraduate Admissions uses a variety of strategies to build a diverse freshman class: working with guidance counselors, building networks with churches and communities, extensive traveling (both in state and to other states), and special events on campus.

Every guidance counselor in the state gets an undergraduate admissions information packet from Virginia Tech and is invited to an event called "A Day in the Life of Virginia Tech Admissions" so they can learn how we do recruiting and admissions. Admissions staff also attend professional meetings of guidance counselors in various parts of the state to make connections, answer questions, and encourage them to refer their students to Virginia Tech.

A newly appointed recruitment task force has met numerous times this fall and identified strategies to pursue, including identifying churches and community groups that have pipeline programs for middle and high school students. Members of the Admissions Office staff will make themselves available to such groups to present information on preparing for college. The Office of Undergraduate Admissions and the Office of Multicultural Affairs are also networking with Virginia Tech black alumni and alumni from traditionally underrepresented communities to engage them in recruitment and yield efforts this spring.

In 2003-04, members of the undergraduate admissions staff traveled to 293 college fairs and 445 high schools. Virginia Tech admissions counselors participated in all 74 college fairs organized by VACRAO as part of the annual "Virginia Tour." These fairs ensure that any student in Virginia has access to information on a variety of colleges. Through the fairs and high school visitations, the admissions counselors visit prospective students in every Virginia county every year.

Admissions has also identified programs and areas that might enhance our diversity, and scheduled new travel to Alabama, Atlanta, California, and Texas, and attendance at Alcanza and National Scholarship Service events.

Invitational on-campus programs, such as Fall Visitation and Gateway, for recruitment and yield respectively, are annual programs designed with the needs and interests of underrepresented students in mind.

Graduate Student Recruitment Strategies: A wide variety of strategies are also used to build a diverse pool of applicants for graduate programs, including summer research internships for undergraduates from a wide variety of institutions, recruitment trips and building connections with faculty from regional historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), co-sponsorship of events such as the Emerging Leaders Workshop designed for honors students from HBCUs, on-campus recruitment weekends, special mailings, attendance at graduate school fairs and national conferences for students from underrepresented groups, the McNair program, the VT-PREP program for students planning graduate study in the biomedical and behavioral sciences, assistantship support, and others.

What is Virginia Tech doing to improve the climate?

The university has committed funding beginning in 2004-05 for significant enhancements to the Office of Multicultural Affairs over the next several years including: a new professional position and additional operating funds to design and coordinate diversity education and training opportunities for faculty and staff; several graduate assistantship positions to develop and carry out initiatives; funding for a Coordinator of Disability Services; and a full-time position to support alumni programs. These commitments total nearly \$375,000 in base funds, plus an additional \$67,000 in one-time funds.

These new positions and resources are in addition to the considerable programming efforts already provided through Student Affairs, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Women's Center, the Provost's Office, and other committed university partners. Professional staff members have worked closely with student leaders in the last several weeks to design and carry out a variety of special events and meetings to engage the campus community in meaningful dialogue concerning hate crimes and racism. Please see the Office of Multicultural Affairs Web site for a summary of the university's response to the recent hate crime incident.

Please see the Diversity Web site for some of the many on-going programs supporting diversity and multicultural education at Virginia Tech, including programs and organizations designed to address the needs and interests of women, individuals with disabilities, international students/faculty/staff, and a wide variety of other populations and interests.

How has the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Michigan cases affected Virginia Tech's admissions practices?

Policies that treat individuals differently on the basis of race or ethnicity are inherently suspect

under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and are therefore subject to strict scrutiny. To be legal, race- or ethnicity-conscious practices must meet a compelling interest of the state. In the *Grutter v. Bolinger* case, Justice O'Connor held that the educational experiences of university students can be enhanced by the presence of individuals with differing backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, and that universities could claim under their broad first amendment rights that there is a compelling interest in creating this type of academic environment.

Thus, the court upheld the use of race as one factor among many to be considered in order to achieve the educational benefits of a diverse student body. Admissions reviewers cannot make *carte blanche* assessments based on race (for example by setting different SAT cutoff scores by race). However, race may be considered in undergraduate admissions and is one of the factors taken into consideration at Virginia Tech. This is the position that Virginia Tech adopted before the Supreme Court ruling, and university officials were pleased to have it confirmed by the highest court. To underline the importance of creating a diverse educational experience for all students, the undergraduate application for 2005 invites students to complete a personal statement describing how they, as an individual, can contribute to the educational benefits of a diverse freshman class.

What is “narrow tailoring”?

In order to take race into consideration, an institution must not only show it has a compelling interest, it must also show that the means employed to achieve that interest are narrowly tailored. To meet the conditions of narrow tailoring, the activity must: consider the feasibility of alternatives that do not take race or ethnicity into consideration and may be used to achieve the same ends; consider the whole individual in making decisions for selections; have a limited impact on third parties; and have a limited duration. These constitute the four-part test for narrow-tailoring. The university's internal review conducted during 2003-04 examined all activities that considered race or ethnicity in any way and made recommendations to bring activities into compliance as needed.

So what impact has narrow tailoring had on programs targeted for minority students at Virginia Tech?

Undergraduate Admissions is the one area where the university remains committed to using race/ethnicity as one factor among many in the selection process. Virginia Tech also remains in compliance with regulations or restrictions surrounding federal grant programs for underrepresented groups, where applicable. The review process confirmed that almost all student support activities were not race-exclusive and, in accordance with federal and state law, they are open to eligible students of any race or ethnicity.

Virginia Tech has maintained, even enhanced, those programs serving the needs of students from underrepresented groups. Narrow tailoring has not changed their fundamental missions. The Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program (MAOP) and the Center for Enhancement of Engineering Diversity (CEED) are just two academic support programs that remain strongly committed to meeting the needs of students from underrepresented groups. These programs are critical to achieving and sustaining a diverse student body, and they are part of a wide array of

support programs available to all students.

Privately-funded scholarships were also reviewed; most were not race exclusive. Where necessary, we have worked with the donors to modify the scholarships to continue to support their intentions to enhance diversity. No funds have been returned, and the scholarships are being made available to students.