

August 17, 2007

Dear Faculty and Staff Colleagues:

You are probably noticing that the students are moving back to Blacksburg this week. (It is a good time to stay away from Washington Street.) The start of the fall semester is always an exciting time and we will be welcoming over 5000 freshmen in the great new class of 2011. We will also be welcoming approximately 100 new faculty colleagues across all eight colleges. The first day of class will be a memorable adventure.

Many departments and colleges have been busy this week with pre-semester retreats, planning sessions, and orientations. I realize that you are receiving multiple forms of communication about ongoing and new activities. I am going to highlight a few key issues and events recognizing that you have heard or will hear more about each of these items in different ways.

1. The three internal reviews requested by President Steger will be presented next week. James Hyatt chaired the group looking at infrastructure and security; Erv Blythe chaired the group looking at networking; and Jerry Niles chaired the group looking at the relationships among the academic, judicial, counseling, and legal systems. Each group will provide an overview of existing structures and programs and will make recommendations for enhancements. Some of the relevant items have been or are being implemented already (such as VT Alerts), and a comprehensive summary and outline of additional security enhancements was prepared by Executive Vice President James Hyatt. A note of immediate relevance to faculty instructors: the general assignment classrooms are being fitted with hardware that will allow rooms to be locked from the inside with automatic unlocking features when exiting.
2. The dedication ceremony of the memorial on the Drillfield will be held at noon on Sunday. All members of the university and extended community are invited. Faculty and student representatives will provide brief comments.
3. Human Resources and the Cook Counseling Center are coordinating efforts to provide counseling support to faculty, staff, and students next week. There will be two primary sites staffed by trained professionals: a tent on the Drillfield and Squires Student Center. Counselors will be able to travel to other locations as needed. In addition, counselors will be specifically assigned to a few key locations (including Norris Hall). In April, faculty members implemented a plan to invite a faculty colleague to attend class on the first day. The colleague was available to provide collegial support and to be available, if needed, to help with any issues that came up. The college deans' offices are helping to promote and encourage a similar system next week. Last spring we relied on the good judgment of faculty members to decide how best to address and respond to the events of April 16. We will do so again. I anticipate that most students and faculty in the classroom will be eager to focus on what we do best: teaching and

Invent the Future

learning. CEUT held some sessions for faculty this week and will have follow-up sessions over the next few weeks. Your feedback about your experiences and the experiences of the students will be helpful.

4. You have received advice about media attention early in the week. You are free to talk with the media, but you are under no obligation to do so. Also, you can decide what issues you want to discuss. You have control over who is admitted to your classrooms.

5. The "Concert for Virginia Tech" on Thursday, September 6 is going to have an impact on classes that evening. As of now, we are planning to cancel classes beginning at 5PM so that all faculty, staff, and students may attend the concert if they wish. Unlike the situation with football games, the parking lots are open to regular use and no one will be expected to vacate spaces in specific lots. As provost, I am never thrilled when the regular academic schedule is affected by non-academic events. We are going through an important phase of the healing process and I hope you will embrace the positive features of this unique contribution to the Virginia Tech community.

6. One of the highlights of the academic year will be a special program that brings emphasis to our commitment to the unique responsibilities and opportunities that come from being Virginia's senior land-grant university, as well as highlights the Student Engagement component of our Strategic Plan. The program, which we are calling VT-ENGAGE, is a university-wide initiative that reaffirms our motto, *Ut Prosim*, by facilitating and leading opportunities for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members to participate in community service, service learning, and volunteerism. During its inaugural year 2007-2008, VT-ENGAGE will honor the victims of the tragedy of April 16 and the commitment to service they demonstrated within their communities worldwide.

A Steering Committee, which includes broad representation of faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community leaders, is working diligently on the planning for VT-ENGAGE. The committee has established a goal of at least 300,000 hours of service/service learning. Each member of the university community will be challenged to commit at least 10 hours during the academic year. We hope that each of you will choose to participate and that you will find creative ways to include the spirit of VT-ENGAGE in your teaching, research, and outreach.

A major event will be held on the Drillfield the evening of October 16 to kick-off VT-ENGAGE. Community organizations are being invited to have displays and to sign-up volunteers. The event will be festive and feature stories of how Virginia Tech students, faculty, staff, students, and alumni make a difference in communities around the world. Much more to come.

We believe VT-ENGAGE will send another positive message that Virginia Tech is a very special community with a spirit that does indeed prevail.

Best wishes for a successful start to the new academic year.



Mark McNamee
University Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs