

April 11, 2008

Dear Colleagues:

With Spring Break a distant memory I recognize that all of us are gearing up for the whirlwind from now until the end of the semester. Students and faculty are fully immersed in the excitement and challenges of the teaching and learning process. The remembrance events on April 16 will provide us with an opportunity to pause and reflect upon an event that transcends our understanding. The collective strength of our university community continues to be a source of pride and hope as we take special time to remember and honor those we lost last year.

Below is a summary of issues that are developing this spring. Please feel free to send me comments or suggestions related to any of the items.

April 16, 2008. The commemorative events are fully described on the Day of Remembrance website (www.remembrance.vt.edu). Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to participate as fully as they wish in the various events. Hopefully, the message of work-time flexibility has been fully communicated and embraced, and individuals will be able to make appropriate arrangements. I have complete confidence that the faculty will continue to use good sense and good judgment in helping our students next week. Counseling services will be available on the Drillfield and at other selected locations. In the spirit of remembering and honoring the vibrant lives of the 32 individual whose lives were taken last April, we hope that individuals and groups will respect the purpose of this special day.

Related Activities. The university has completed arrangements to open a Resource Center primarily for faculty and staff as part of the continuing recovery and support efforts for the university community. The center will provide a place for group programs, referrals, discussions, etc. The center is located in the Collegiate Square office complex on Turner Street. Hours, programs, and services are listed on both the Provost's Office and Human Resources websites. In addition, the Dean of Students Office has developed a new online tool for faculty and staff members to communicate concerns about students in distress. This new option will complement existing methods of communication. Complete information and guidance will be provided by the Dean of Students Office soon.

Budget. The final details of the budget process for 2008-09 will be set following the legislative veto session on April 23, 2008. Based on our analysis of the budget reductions, the anticipated increases in salary, program, and fixed expenses, and the recovery expenses, we are proceeding with the original plans for a 3.5% base budget reduction at each senior management level (with a few exceptions for the libraries and the police department). The specific plans developed by each senior level will be adopted with minor adjustments. Tuition adjustments for 2008-09 have not been determined and will be set within a few weeks. Vice President Dwight Shelton will continue to provide the university community with detailed updates on the budget.

Invent the Future

Administrative Changes. The retirement of Mr. James Hyatt as Executive Vice President earlier this year provided an opportunity for President Steger to review the organization of the senior administrative offices. During the past few years, the academic and administrative units have worked more closely together than ever to support and implement the university strategic plan.

In an effort to streamline and simplify the administrative structure and to reinforce the academic and administrative partnerships, the position of Executive Vice President has been eliminated. Each existing vice president or vice provost has assumed additional responsibilities. Some titles have been changed and we are using vice president as a common title for the senior administrators. My title has been changed to Senior Vice President and Provost and I will continue to focus most of my time and attention as the Chief Academic Officer in my role as Provost. These changes help us absorb our share of the budget reductions and provide an opportunity for each senior unit to operate with more responsibility and more accountability.

Undergraduate Education. One of the most notable changes in administrative titles is the conversion of Dr. David Ford's title from Vice Provost for Academic Affairs to Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education. The change more accurately reflects the leadership role David Ford has played in helping to support both the academic and administrative aspects of undergraduate education. We want to provide senior level visibility and expanded attention to undergraduate education, one of the primary missions of the university. The strategic plan lays out ambitious goals for enhanced learning and the education of the whole student.

In partnership with the faculty and staff in the colleges and the Division of Student Affairs, we plan to focus attention on the need for additional well-designed classrooms, increased support for instructional faculty and staff, enhanced advising support, undergraduate research, learning outcomes, and expanded opportunities for student development. The ongoing SACS reaccreditation process and the associated Quality Enhancement Plan are providing us with the opportunity to shape the future of undergraduate education at Virginia Tech.

As a major land-grant research university we will continue to support scholar-educators who combine a commitment to discovery and research with a commitment to teaching and outreach as part of our learning, discovery, and engagement missions.

Race and the Institution Task Force Implementation Plan. Vice President Kevin McDonald and I are co-chairing the Implementation Team to develop specific action items in response to the Race and the Institution Task Force recommendations. I have been impressed by the dedication and determination of the team members who have worked in groups to address each of the priority areas identified in the report. The team has developed a realistic, multi-year plan with budgets, expected outcomes, and assigned responsibilities. The proposed plan will be distributed to the university community for review and comment on approximately May 1. As promised, the work of the task force will result in actions.

Closing Reflections. In closing, I want to express my thanks and appreciation to everyone who has stepped forward this year to help us. The kind notes and words of thanks that I have received mean a lot to me and I hope you will reach out to your friends and colleagues who have given so much of themselves this year. We all continue to work hard in our normal activities related to university and professional affairs while responding to and processing the events of 4/16.

I have felt privileged to get to know some of the students and families most affected by 4/16 and I feel inspired to do the very best I can in the years ahead to provide leadership for this wonderful university.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark G. McNamee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark G. McNamee
Senior Vice President and Provost