

September 29, 2010

Dear Colleagues:

I want to take this opportunity to update you on several issues that will be a focus of special attention this year. For the first time in several years, budget uncertainties and reductions are not at the forefront. The university has made the difficult choices necessary to adapt to the new budget realities, and we are now focusing on how best to sustain quality and generate the new resources to advance our mission over the long term.

We are seeing the emergence of exciting proposals for new undergraduate programs and majors across the university. The growth and enhanced prominence of our research and graduate programs are having a direct effect on the evolution and direction of our undergraduate curricula. The synergy between cutting-edge research and high quality undergraduate education helps to define the unique strength of a major research university. Our faculty members are not only involved in discovering new knowledge; they are also integrating their work into courses and new areas of learning. Among the new undergraduate majors or programs under development are: biomedical engineering, meteorology, nanoscience, neuroscience, computational science/systems biology, nuclear engineering, and interdisciplinary real estate. Vice President and Dean of Undergraduate Education Daniel Wubah will be working closely with the colleges and the various governance commissions to facilitate the reviews. In parallel, we are continuing to emphasize the value and opportunities for undergraduate research across all the disciplines at Virginia Tech. A draft copy of the strategic plan for undergraduate education is currently available online for download and review at the following web link: <http://www.undergraduate.vt.edu>.

Significant progress is occurring in our broad-based arts initiatives. The new Center for the Arts is rising from the ground near Shultz Hall and an affiliated research and outreach center/institute will provide opportunities for linking technology with the arts with a goal of enhancing pedagogy at both the PK-12 and college levels. A strategic plan for the arts has been drafted and will be circulated for review and comment very soon.

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute represent bold new frontiers for Virginia Tech. The inaugural class of 42 students is exceptionally strong and they are fully embracing a curriculum that emphasizes patient-based learning and research. The research institute is attracting international attention with the arrival of prominent neuroscience researchers who are probing deeply into how the mind works. The linkages with faculty and students in Blacksburg are very strong and one of the three state-of-the-art functional magnetic resonance imaging research instruments will be located here. The university is discussing plans for a Division of Health Sciences to provide a framework for evaluating how best to organize and plan our long-term strategies in the medical sciences.

Invent the Future

This fall we have a rare opportunity to appoint several faculty members as University Distinguished Professors and Alumni Distinguished Professors. These appointments, which represent the highest honors for our faculty, are a visible symbol of the extraordinary accomplishments of faculty members dedicated to our mission of learning, discovery, and engagement. We expect to make selection announcements after the review process is complete and the Board of Visitors (BOV) takes action in November.

Next spring we will have the grand opening of the new research facility in Arlington. The building is a striking landmark in the Ballston area and is close to the National Science Foundation and DARPA. We anticipate expanded research opportunities that will link National Capital Region expertise and experience with broad segments of the Virginia Tech community in Blacksburg and throughout the state.

On a more immediate timescale, we can look forward to the one-time 3% bonus payment in December. Guidelines for eligible faculty, staff, and graduate students have been developed. It is too early to determine what the next steps will be in terms of salary adjustments. At every level of the university, including the BOV, there is recognition that competitive salaries are essential for our continued success. We will probably need to assess how the General Assembly plans to address salary issues before we can determine our course of action. Also, the ongoing work of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education may offer some new ideas related to compensation.

Last week we held a forum to hear reports from the various groups that received support to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Race and the Institution. When I received the task force report in 2007, I pledged that actions would follow and we would monitor progress. We have completed the three year implementation plan and I am pleased to see that the units involved have responded well. With the adoption of the new Diversity Strategic Plan, the ongoing efforts are being incorporated into the assessment and evaluation elements of the plan. Our new Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion William Lewis is working closely with Dr. Karen Sanders during the leadership transition.

From all accounts, the semester is going well and the mid-term break will soon be upon us. On a personal note, I had the pleasure of seeing my younger daughter Katie married in late August at beautiful Historic Smithfield on campus. Both Katie and her husband Nick are Hokies and we all had a grand time, including my 2-year old grandson Adrian. As we all try to balance work and life, please enjoy those special moments that make life and work so rewarding.

Sincerely,



Mark G. McNamee
Senior Vice President and Provost