

May 4, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

As we approach the end of another academic year, I want to extend my appreciation to all of you who continue to make Virginia Tech a special place for our students. The commencement ceremonies next week will be a time of celebration for more than 5,000 students and their families.

This year is providing us with renewed optimism about the future vitality of the university. The Commonwealth of Virginia is emerging better than most states from the recession and higher education is receiving high priority attention from Governor McDonnell. For the first time in four years, we will receive a budget increase from the state (albeit modest) rather than a series of reductions. It will take us many years to recover from the harsh impact of the budget reductions, but we have managed to remain focused on our core missions of learning, discovery, and engagement and we have not abandoned essential initiatives that will help to define our future success. In the weeks ahead, we expect to announce some financial actions that will have a direct positive impact on our faculty and staff.

Some academic highlights this year include the following:

- Full 10-year reaccreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- The new Center for the Arts is rising from the ground in impressive fashion, and the groundwork for programmatic initiatives is proceeding under Executive Director Ruth Waalkes. The Vocal Arts and Music Festival in late June, a joint venture with the Metropolitan Opera of New York, establishes Virginia Tech as an arts destination now and into the future. A founding director for the affiliated Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT) will soon be appointed.
- One hundred thirty-seven faculty searches are in progress this year, a dramatic increase over the past few years. Most of the searches continue to embrace the cluster concept designed to build critical mass and national distinction in key areas.
- The Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute has launched a major expansion of our research programs under the leadership of Executive Director Michael Friedlander. Five different Virginia Tech academic departments serve as academic homes for the new faculty members. In addition, the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine matriculated its first class of 42 students and is preparing for the second class.
- Faculty and students continue to receive distinctive awards, thus highlighting the emphasis on quality throughout the university. Examples of accolades include Dr. Gary Downey's receipt of the Virginia Outstanding Faculty Award, Dr. Romesh Batra's honor of the Virginia Outstanding Scientist Award, Dr. Fred Lee's election to the prestigious National Academy of Engineering, awards of six Fulbright grants, Goldwater and NSF Graduate Research Fellowships, and six NSF CAREER awards. The Scieneering Program, funded by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, was initiated last fall; the program focuses on interdisciplinary undergraduate studies and research.
- Our students, faculty, and staff continue to demonstrate a true commitment to Ut Prosim through many unselfish acts and projects such as Relay for Life and the dramatic story of our engineering students who built a bridge connecting two communities in Haiti.

***Invent the Future***

- The new ICTAS at Washington Street expansion opened this spring. This new laboratory building is already supporting a number of interdisciplinary research teams and expands the university's capacity for large scale research.
- The new Academic and Student Affairs Building under construction near McBryde Hall will provide critically needed space for new classrooms and student support services as well as dining services to the north side of campus. Plans for a major new classroom building continue to be at the top of the priority list for state capital funding.
- Our new research building in Arlington, Virginia will open in June and will provide a base to link advanced research opportunities in the National Capital Region with the strengths of the Blacksburg campus. The building itself is stunning and places Virginia Tech as a high profile player in the midst of NSF, DARPA, ONR and other agencies.
- Additional endorsement of the university's growing reputation in international research and development is provided through the announcement of the largest single sponsored international project ever secured by the university. The \$28 million USAID grant supports Virginia Tech's leadership role in an initiative to revamp agriculture curricula at Senegal's five universities and five technology centers, making it more relevant to today's needs.
- We will be completing our successful capital campaign and entering into an interim fundraising period. The university recently accepted the largest single donation in our history, a \$25M anonymous gift toward construction of the Signature Engineering Building, a facility that will significantly advance the university's teaching and research capacity.
- The university celebrated the restoration and reopening of its oldest structure, Solitude, in early April. As cited in the official press release in late March, the 1872 purchase of Solitude and approximately 250 surrounding acres provided a home for the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College—what is now known as Virginia Tech. During its long history, Solitude has served in many capacities including an infirmary for the college in the 1880's, a housing complex for faculty for 60 years, a clubhouse for returning World War II veterans attending VPI, and a venue for the Hokie Club in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1974, academic programs started using the building and it currently houses the Appalachian Studies Program and an office for a historic preservation professor in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies.

Each year also brings transitions and challenges, and this year is no exception.

- After 43 years of outstanding service, Alumni Distinguished Professor of History James "Bud" Robertson is retiring. Bud is a superb example of a dedicated faculty member who combines a love of teaching, research, and service for the benefit of thousands of students and the public.
- General Jerry Allen is retiring after 12 years of distinguished leadership of the Corps of Cadets. The Corps is larger and stronger than it has been in generations and future prospects are excellent.
- This year marked the fourth anniversary of the April 16 tragedy and the university continues to remember our lost students and colleagues with a deep sense of sorrow, a special time for reflection and special events, and a commitment to help make the world a better place in their memories.

There are a number of ongoing actions that will lead to a successful new academic year (which will be here before you know it!)

- A new university strategic plan is being developed under the guidance of University Distinguished Professor Paul Knox. "Planning for a New Horizon" is a bold effort to frame major issues of local, national, and international importance in higher education so that Virginia Tech can be well positioned to make good choices as we aspire to remain among the very best innovative universities in the world. The Diversity Strategic Plan and the Vision for Undergraduate Education Plan provide an excellent framework upon which to build parts of the new plan.
- We are continuing to advance plans developed by our faculty to create new majors, minors, programs, and educational initiatives both at the undergraduate and graduate level. The governance system will be kept very busy next year ensuring that our proposed new programs meet the high standards of quality and relevance we expect. We are seeing the full benefits of integrating world-class research expansion with cutting-edge educational programs by allowing our faculty to put their creative talents to work. After the horrors of the weather patterns this spring, our new meteorology undergraduate major promises to be a wonderful new addition to the curriculum. New undergraduate initiatives in nanoscience, neuroscience, biomedical engineering, systems biology, real estate, and others will add new value to a Virginia Tech education. The Interdisciplinary Graduate Education Program (IGEP) initiative is catalyzing the efforts of hundreds of faculty members and graduate students committed to interdisciplinary education and research.
- The university will be continuing with the second year of our successful First Year Experience quality enhancement program. This effective program helped a significant portion of our fall 2010 entering class chart their pathways through the university. The second year will provide the same experience, customized by colleges and programs, for even more students.

Throughout next year, I will be continuing my round of visits to every department, a cycle I began again this spring. The insights we gain from these visits are extraordinarily helpful in guiding decisions to advance the long-term aspirations of the departments. With the opportunity to begin making new investments in our programs, it helps to have as broad and deep a perspective as possible.

On a personal note, I am looking forward to several brief trips this summer. Immediately after commencement, I will travel to Boston and New York to visit my daughters and my 3-year old grandson. For the first time in 30 years, I plan to go a Broadway show. I will also be participating in several professional events in June and July (in Asheville and Colorado Springs) and I hope to carve out some time for a completely free-time holiday somewhere, sometime.

I wish all of you a successful end to the 2010-11 academic year, and I hope you find the best way to celebrate the end of another great term even as we move seamlessly into a new year.

Once again, thank you for your dedication and your commitment to excellence.

Sincerely,



Mark G. McNamee  
Senior Vice President and Provost