

September 29, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

The fall semester is in full swing and our students appear to be in excellent spirits. More than 100 new tenured or tenure track faculty members are joining our ranks this academic year.

These additions represent one of the largest new faculty groups we have welcomed to campus in many years. We are looking forward to another substantial recruiting effort this year as we slowly rebuild capacity after several years of significant budget challenges (see the [Office of the Provost](#) website for information about this year's faculty hiring). In parallel, the critical importance of addressing staffing and compensation issues is reflected in the budget decisions we made this year, and we will continue to focus attention on the welfare of our current faculty and staff.

Enrollments continue to be strong across all the disciplines, and the Undergraduate Admissions and the Graduate School are to be commended for achieving our planned enrollment targets. Enrollment management is an increasingly important activity as we attempt to match our resources with student demand and academic priorities. As new undergraduate and graduate degree programs are developed, we expect to maintain and perhaps enhance the demand for Virginia Tech admission.

A major effort this year revolves around the creation of our next university strategic plan. The current 2006-12 strategic plan is serving us well, and has helped to guide our remarkable progress despite the turbulence we encountered. The next six to 10 years promise to be even more challenging as we face the uncertainty of federal funding policies, unpredictable economic trends, and increased expectations for efficiency and effectiveness.

The long-term planning task force commissioned by President Steger and chaired by University Distinguished Professor Paul Knox is working aggressively to identify key issues, scenarios, and strategies that will shape the next university strategic plan. Every member of the university community is encouraged to follow the progress of the task force and provide input using the [Long-Range Planning](#) website and the joinable Scholar site (Office of Long Range Planning).

Colleges and other senior management areas are prepared to create focused strategic plans that will build upon and enhance the high-level university plan. You can expect to see most of the work on the university plan completed by the spring of 2012.

A new academic year provides an opportunity to remind you of the importance of the [Undergraduate Honor System](#) and the [Graduate Honor System](#) in support of academic integrity. Faculty support is necessary to make the honor systems an efficient and effective means of handling academic violations, and faculty members are expected to follow the appropriate procedures. However, the honor systems are not just about turning cases in. More importantly, they should stimulate a faculty and student dialogue on ethics and integrity in the classroom, laboratory, and society. Expectations described in your

Invent the Future

syllabus and your comments in class will hopefully open a positive and ongoing conversation with students.

Construction cranes will be dominating the Virginia Tech campus this fall. In addition to the ongoing work on the Center for the Arts and other projects, construction will soon begin on the Signature Engineering Building, renovation of Davidson Hall, and the Human and Agricultural Biosciences Building. The new research and teaching space will have a significant impact on the quality and impact of our academic missions. Going forward, we are working hard to gain state support for a major new classroom building. Both my office and the planning and budget offices on campus will be working with the university community to make sure the new building anticipates the pedagogical needs of our students and faculty for many, many years.

On Oct. 1, Dr. Ben Knapp will be joining us as the director of the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT) and as a professor of computer science. Ben brings many years of experience in arts, technology, business, and administration to our campus. Our shared vision for a center that promotes research at the interface of the arts and technology and applies the research in many ways, including improved learning in PK-12 schools, will position Virginia Tech as a leader. ICAT is our seventh and newest university institute designed to catalyze research growth on a large scale across the disciplines.

The opening of the Honors Residential College in the newly renovated East Ambler Johnson Hall this fall signals a new effort to enrich the experience of undergraduates by linking residential living with the academic life of our campus. A second residential college accessible to all students will open next fall in West Ambler Johnson Hall. We have a strong tradition of linking living and learning, and the residential colleges represent an expanded opportunity to enhance student success. The Graduate Life Center at Donaldson Brown, which represents a unique combination of living, learning, administration, and community, received the Outstanding Innovative Program Award from the American College Personnel Association/College Student Educators International (ACPA) for 2011.

The Office for Diversity and Inclusion will host a formal kickoff of the Virginia Tech Principles of Community "*Strong Together Initiative*" with a reception on Friday, October 7 from 1:00-3:00 p.m. in the Latham Ballrooms at The Inn at Virginia Tech. The "*Strong Together Initiative*" is a year-long effort to promote inclusion and unity at Virginia Tech and will include a variety of programming and promotional efforts geared toward raising awareness and application of the Principles of Community among faculty, staff, and students.

A new event this year will be the [University Open House](#) on Saturday, Nov. 12. More than 60 areas are preparing exhibits and/or tours that will showcase the broad array of programs on campus. Specific details are available on the open house website. When I was at UC Davis, the annual open house typically attracted 50,000 visitors to campus, including most of the faculty and staff and their families. We have incredible programs at Virginia Tech that are rarely glimpsed up close and the open house will provide a unique opportunity for us to explore how we are inventing the future.

Throughout this year, I will be continuing my round of visits to every department, a cycle I began last spring. Our academic departments are at the center of academic activity, and the diverse perspectives offered by the departments play a key role in shaping our plans for the future.

On a personal note, I had the privilege this fall of offering two lectures in an innovative new course in the College of Natural Resources and Environment. Our students are learning about strategies for communicating science as leaders to a broad audience, especially to pre-college students. They are developing team-based materials that they will present at several different schools. A parallel course is being taught at the University of Georgia, and students are actively collaborating across our two universities. I shared my experiences and background as an academic leader, and I responded to an array of penetrating and thoughtful questions. I am always impressed by the commitment, sophistication, and enthusiasm of our students.

I wish all of you continued success in the 2011-12 academic year, and I welcome ongoing feedback as we work together to make Virginia Tech as good a place as we can for all of us.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark G. McNamee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M' and 'G'.

Mark G. McNamee
Senior Vice President and Provost