

## Letter from Senior Vice President and Provost to university community

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BLACKSBURG, Va., Jan. 23, 2013 – *The following is a letter to the university community from Senior Vice President and Provost Mark McNamee.*

Dear Colleagues:

The recent snowfall welcomes us into a new semester. For those of us in Blacksburg, the morning sun created spectacular reflections that captured the profound beauty of our surroundings.

The well-deserved break was quiet on campus, but there will be some surprises for our students. The auditorium in the Graduate Life Center at Donaldson-Brown was renovated during the break with a much needed transformation into a well-lit, freshly painted, comfortably seated, and outlet-filled classroom. We have also expanded our inventory of interactive learning spaces with the on-going construction of a new SCALE-UP classroom in Newman Library, the reconfiguration of a large classroom in the Surge Building, and the opening of renovated Integrated Science Curriculum instructional labs in Derring Hall. We are actively working with the legislature to secure construction funding for the new classroom building to be located adjacent to Derring Hall, and we continue our ongoing efforts to update and improve our classrooms, instructional labs, and informal learning spaces across campus.

During the holidays, we successfully concluded the international search for the dean of the Pamplin College of Business. [Dr. Robert Sumichrast will be returning to Virginia Tech](#)<sup>[2]</sup> on July 1 after 10 years as a dean at Louisiana State University (2003-2007) and the University of Georgia (2007-present). Robert's experience, vision, and proven leadership skills will propel the college to the next level of excellence. He can build upon 31 years of extraordinary leadership by Dean Rich Sorensen.

We are in the midst of the search for the vice president for outreach and international affairs and we will soon be launching a search for the dean of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. [Dr. Gerhard Schurig announced his decision to step down](#)<sup>[3]</sup> this summer after 10 years of exceptional service. He will continue to serve as a faculty member and will assist us in advancing a number of projects, especially in the area of academic partnerships in South America.

The break also brought us some good news about additional honors bestowed upon our faculty. Drs. [Patricia Dove](#)<sup>[4]</sup> (geosciences) and [Harold Burkhardt](#)<sup>[5]</sup> (forest resources and environmental conservation)

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were selected as the Virginia Outstanding Scientists by the Science Museum of Virginia. They were honored at an elegant awards dinner on Jan. 17 at the museum in Richmond.

The big task ahead for us this spring is to mobilize efforts to implement the [long range plan](#)<sup>[6]</sup> — “A Plan for a New Horizon” — in coordination with the accompanying strategic plans from each senior management area. The Office of the Provost is working closely with the Office of Long Range Planning to address both the academic and administrative aspects of the plans. The implementation plan will strongly influence priorities for: allocation of new funding; strategic repurposing of existing funds; teaching, research, and outreach initiatives; administrative streamlining and efficiency; diversity initiatives; and enhancements in the quality of the Virginia Tech experience for students, postdocs, faculty, and staff. A draft of the proposed implementation plan will be developed by mid-February for review and discussion. For the academic dimensions of the plan, the Academic Affairs Council (consisting primarily of deans and academic vice presidents) will be the lead group in the review.

Some of the goals in the long range plan require university-level action and leadership in partnership with the colleges and other administrative units. For example, we are moving forward with a regularized faculty merit salary program in response to a universally recognized priority for the university. Our staff will also be beneficiaries of salary progress using established state procedures. In order to facilitate immediate progress in some key academic areas, I am asking several of our current leaders to assume additional leadership responsibilities relative to the implementation.

Vice President Karen DePauw will help to assess how quickly we can grow graduate enrollment by 1,000 students. Vice President Bob Walters will assess our capabilities for reaching the \$680 million research expenditure target. Vice President Daniel Wubah will assess faculty progress in the creation of an improved general education program including incorporation of computational thinking across the curriculum. Efforts like these will require full consultation with the deans, directors, and the faculty.

I am asking Ruth Waalkes, executive director of the Center for the Arts, to simultaneously serve as associate provost for the arts. She will help me develop an overall strategy for the various arts-related programs to maximize our success and to fully leverage the opening of the Center for the Arts.

I am asking Michael Friedlander, executive director of the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute) to simultaneously serve as associate provost for health sciences. He will formalize the creation of a “Faculty of Health Sciences” and will guide the creation of a significant new university-wide graduate program focused on translational medicine and biology.

I am asking Randy Collins (American Council on Education Fellow from Clemson University) to help develop a plan to position Virginia Tech for success in the rapidly changing environment of online education. The needs of existing programs will be considered (including hybrid courses) in addition to fully online offerings. Models to ensure financial stability and appropriate incentives will be part of the charge.

Please note that these new assignments do not create new positions nor do they incur additional administrative costs. They represent a focused commitment to progress by tapping into the talents of our existing leaders.

To clarify different kinds of responsibilities and the use of titles, I am changing the titles of Jack Finney and Ken Smith from associate provost to vice provost. Both Ken and Jack will continue with their current responsibilities and will assist me in all aspects of the implementation process.

By working collectively and constructively during the next few months, we will forge a realistic plan that helps bring “A Plan for a New Horizon” to life.

Fresh from the recent celebration of Martin Luther King’s birthday, I hope you will join me in recommitting ourselves to a successful semester guided by our [Principles of Community](#)<sup>[7]</sup>.

Mark G. McNamee  
Senior Vice President and Provost

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## Links

- [1]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/media-contact/owczarski-mark-res.html>
- [2]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/01/010913-pamplin-deansumichrast.html>
- [3]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/01/011113-vetmed-schurigstepsdown.html>
- [4]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/01/011813-science-scientistofyear.html>
- [5]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/01/011713-cnre-burkhartoutstandingscientist.html>
- [6]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2011/10/102411-president-planupdate.html>
- [7]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2012/12/121212-odi-pocreaffirmation.html>