

Letter from Senior Vice President and Provost to university community

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BLACKSBURG, Va., Sept. 24, 2013 – *The following is a letter to the university community from Senior Vice President and Provost Mark McNamee.*

Dear Colleagues:

As we begin to enjoy the cooler days of fall, I want to bring you up-to-date on a number of issues affecting the university.

All of us are following the search process for the next president. The search committee has held numerous in-depth sessions with constituent groups within and beyond the campus during the past few months in order to understand the aspirations and listen to the advice of the university community. The online survey also provided us with an opportunity to offer opinions and advice on the process, and you may continue to obtain updates on the [presidential search website](#)^[2].

The process requires a high level of confidentiality at this stage since potential candidates may already hold key positions at other institutions. We are fortunate to have an exceptionally strong and diverse search committee we can all trust to guide the process. I am confident that we will find a candidate who has the vision and leadership skills to build upon President Steger's extraordinary record of accomplishments.

Late last week, we formally posted the "[Academic Implementation Plan](#)"^[3] as a follow-up to "A Plan for a New Horizon." The implementation plan focuses on eleven specific items with detailed goals and actions to guide us during the next few years. The plans were developed last spring with active participation from deans, vice presidents, vice provosts and others. Our ongoing budget development process, faculty search efforts, and program initiatives will be strongly influenced by the plan.

One major topic that remains an active item for additional work involves the Curriculum for Liberal Education. During the discussions leading up to the creation of "A Plan for a New Horizon," a number of ideas for dramatically improving our general education program were discussed. The inclusion of "computational thinking" as an important component of any new program appears to have broad support along with a continued commitment to effective composition and communication skills throughout the curriculum.

On all other issues we are far from consensus. Under the direction of our newly appointed Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, Dr. Rachel Holloway, we plan to review and assess a full range of options and provide a report to the university community by the end of the calendar year. We will consult broadly with many groups, including the existing committees charged with overseeing our curriculum.

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Collectively, I am convinced that we can develop a bold, progressive plan that focuses on clear learning outcomes consistent with the highest ideals expected of a general education program.

On October 1, we will welcome the arrival of Dr. Cyril Clarke as the new dean of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. Cyril's strong scholarly record and his experience as dean at Oregon State University have prepared him to be an ideal successor to Dean Gerhardt Schurig.

We are conducting off-campus interviews with semifinalists for the Vice President for the National Capital Region this week, and expect the finalists to be announced in early October in preparation for the public phase of the interview process. Our programs in the National Capital Region are remarkably diverse and dynamic. We plan to select a leader who can help us advance key strategic initiatives that leverage the combined strengths of the Blacksburg and National Capital Region campuses.

We are also searching for an Executive Director for the newly configured Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS). TLOS represents the next phase of our commitment to high quality online and technology-rich learning opportunities for students both on campus and at a distance.

TLOS replaces two former administrative units, the Institute for Distance and Distributed Learning and Learning Technologies, by forging a new partnership between the provost's office and the information technology division. With this consolidation, we seek to better support faculty efforts to design, develop, and deliver innovative courses and modules.

Last spring, Virginia Tech hosted a unique [conference](#)^[4] focused on contemplative practices in a technological society. The response to the conference was remarkable and groups of faculty, staff, and students are exploring ways to expand opportunities to support contemplative practices on campus. I am very supportive of these efforts and I encourage you to stay tuned and mindful of future developments.

The opening of the Center for the Arts later this fall will fulfill a long-cherished dream of generations of Virginia Tech and community supporters. Ruth Waalkes, Executive Director of the Center for the Arts and Associate Provost for the Arts, has done an extraordinary job of providing leadership for a very complex project, and the inaugural program for 2013-14 is spectacular.

In combination with the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT), we are positioned to be leaders in embracing the arts and building linkages to other disciplines. Every student at Virginia Tech will have an opportunity to explore and experience new connections with the arts as part of our goal of educating the whole student. In addition, our commitment to using the arts and technology to enrich the overall learning experience for PK-12 students throughout the region will strengthen our role as a land grant university. The upcoming [open house](#)^[5] on Sunday, November 3, 2013, offers a chance to visit this great new addition to our campus.

Students will soon be able to enroll in our new Winter Session, which is designed to offer courses during the late December-early January interval between fall and spring semesters. Winter Session provides an opportunity for students to explore new areas of study, catch up on existing requirements, participate in study abroad programs, and more. Online, in-class, and hybrid modes of instruction will be used to optimize both convenience and high quality instruction. Combined with our expanding summer session programs, we hope to meet the changing needs and expectations of students and faculty while making full use of our facilities.

Each day, I scan the Virginia Tech Daily News and other online and print publications. I am consistently impressed by the accomplishments of students, staff, and faculty. The dedication to undergraduate and

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graduate education, research, and outreach is captured eloquently in the personal stories that reflect the true spirit of Virginia Tech.

Best wishes for the continuation of what appears to be a smooth and successful start to the 2013-14 academic year.

Mark G. McNamee
Senior Vice President and Provost

Links

[1]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/media-contact/owczarski-mark-res.html>

[2]. <http://www.presidentialsearch.vt.edu/>

[3]. http://www.provost.vt.edu/resources_planning/academic_planning/implementation_plan_sep2013.pdf

[4]. <http://www.cpe.vt.edu/cpts/>

[5]. https://tickets.artscenter.vt.edu/online/default.asp?doWork::WScontent::loadArticle=Load&BOParam::WScontent::loadArticle::article_id=B45AA322-D666-4DAA-81C8-23F2AEF90D13