

Letter from Senior Vice President and Provost Mark G. McNamee to university community

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BLACKSBURG, Va., Jan. 21, 2014 – *The following is an open letter to the Virginia Tech community from Senior Vice President and Provost Mark G. McNamee.*

Dear Colleagues:

We have emerged from the Polar Vortex freeze into the start of a promising spring semester.

[For the first time, our winter "break" included wintermester offerings](#)^[2]. Just under 1,100 students were enrolled in a wide variety of online, in-person, and hybrid classes. The anticipated growth of our special session programs provides one example of our efforts to meet the needs of our students and fully utilize the instructional capacity of the university.

As we look ahead, we can anticipate many changes in the next few months. President-designate Tim Sands will be making a number of visits to the campus in anticipation of the start of his appointment on June 1. President Steger is stepping down at a time when the university is in excellent shape as a result of his visionary leadership.

Our research profile, international and outreach impact, and the academic quality of our programs continue to grow stronger. Dr. Sands will have the opportunity to lead us forward with his own proven skills. I am looking forward to working with him as we continue to move aggressively ahead with ["A Plan for a New Horizon."](#)^[3]

Sue Ott Rowlands, former dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, has assumed her new position as provost at Northern Kentucky University. Sue was a strong, effective, and creative leader and we will miss her vibrant presence. The search for a new dean is well underway and the college is being ably led by Dr. Joan Hirt from the School of Education during this interim period.

The restructuring of our separate online and learning technologies units into a single new organization called TLOS (Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies) is complete and we have successfully recruited an executive director.

Dr. Dale Pike from Boise State University will be joining us in early March to assume this leadership position. Dale has a strong record of accomplishments and we are confident that he will provide the leadership that will propel us forward. John Moore is providing experienced interim leadership during the transition.

The new organization is designed to be more efficient and better positioned to respond to the varied

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needs of our faculty and staff as they engage even more fully in online and technology-enhanced educational ventures. The recent announcement that our [online Master of Information Technology degree is ranked #2 nationally](#)^[4] is a solid indication that we can offer quality programs that are financially sustainable.

A major initiative this spring will be the next stage of the revision and revitalization of our general education program.

Vice Provost Rachel Holloway and Assistant Provost Jill Sible have mobilized a broad group of dedicated faculty to help shape a new approach to undergraduate general education with a focus on clear learning outcomes, multiple pathways, and appropriate attention to both breadth and depth. The incorporation of computational thinking into the curriculum for all students represents a clear commitment to one of the principal strategies outlined in "A Plan for A New Horizon."

At the graduate level, the plan to increase overall graduate enrollment by 1,000 students during the next six years provides unlimited challenges and opportunities.

The newly approved [Ph.D. program in Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health](#)^[5] is one example of an innovative new program that is a key element of our growth strategy. The program has already won two national awards for innovation based on the design and vision for the program. More than 120 faculty members from 25 different departments have been appointed as members of the Faculty of Health Sciences and will be available to help support the program under the leadership of Mike Friedlander, the executive director of the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute and Associate Provost for Health Sciences.

Our growing presence in health and life sciences research and teaching helps to broaden and strengthen our capabilities and leverages our already preeminent programs in engineering and computational sciences. The first cohort of students in the independent Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine will graduate this spring. Our partnership with Carilion Clinic continues to demonstrate the entrepreneurial success of the university.

Linkages between student affairs and academic affairs continue to strengthen across multiple programs. A notable new venture this past fall was the creation of ["Innovate"--a living-learning community for students committed to entrepreneurship](#)^[6]. Blacksburg is becoming a hotspot for innovation and economic development and Virginia Tech is catalyzing local, regional, and statewide efforts to create the jobs of the future.

A major highlight this fall was the opening of the Moss Arts Center, the home of the Street and Davis Performance Hall, several visual arts galleries, and our Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology. I have attended nearly all the performances thus far and I am overwhelmed by the quality of the facilities and the programs. Virginia Tech can take great pride in the success of our growing presence in the arts, both from an academic and a cultural perspective.

Thousands of K-12 students have already had a chance to participate in programs at the center as part of our ongoing commitment to educational enrichment. A wonderful example of ICAT's impact on the arts was a fall production of a unique opera using the Minecraft computer game as a foundation. The project involved a powerful collaboration among high school students, music faculty, and computer scientists. Ruth Waalkes and Ben Knapp deserve special recognition for their remarkable efforts to launch our new programs with professional flair.

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I encourage you to embrace the Arts at Virginia Tech and hope that you attend and participate in not only events at the Moss Arts Center, but also in the rich assortment of student and faculty performances and exhibitions that occur throughout the year in a variety of venues.

On a personal note, I had the opportunity to participate in another research study in the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise. The effect of resistance training on a number of muscle and physiological markers in older adult males was the focus of the study. The supervised workouts were an inspiration and I am continuing to work with a trainer long after the study was completed.

I am happy to report that the study is a key part of a Ph.D. student dissertation and an undergraduate student's research project. I am less weak than I was, and I have a long way to go before I catch up with our remarkably fit students who populate War Memorial Gym. I encourage you to keep your eye out for future studies led by various faculty members both here and in Roanoke.

A new horizon is truly opening up before us and I hope you will join me in embracing this new semester with enthusiasm.

Mark G. McNamee
Senior Vice President and Provost

Related Links

- [Board of visitors appoints Timothy D. Sands as next president of Virginia Tech](#)^[7]

Links

- [1]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/media-contact/owczarski-mark-res.html>
- [2]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2014/01/010314-provost-wintersession.html>
- [3]. <http://www.longrangeplan.vt.edu/>
- [4]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2014/01/010914-engineering-onlineusnewsranks.html>
- [5]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/06/060713-provost-tbmh.html>
- [6]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/07/070913-dsa-innovate.html>
- [7]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2013/12/120613-president-timothsands.html>