

Vision Statement
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Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences Position, Virginia Tech

Administrative Background and Experiences

My unique background and set of experiences in agriculture administration would provide the perspective and ideal skill set required to be a successful Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) at Virginia Tech. As a faculty member, I have developed statewide, national, and global programs in food safety. In the past 15 years, I have held an aggressive 4-tiered appointment in research, teaching, outreach, and international programs and have been recognized for excellence (at Purdue University and nationally) in all core areas. I am most known for my interest and abilities in developing integrated programs and bringing important stakeholders together to create effective resolutions to challenging issues. From an administrative standpoint, I have held two significant leadership positions. In 1998, I led a major initiative to build an interdisciplinary program across colleges on the Purdue campus. In 1999, the concept of building a multidisciplinary research program focusing on microbial detection in foods was born with the acquisition of a \$1 million grant. In 2001, I led the creation of the Center for Food Safety Engineering, where I still serve as the Center Director. The center currently involves five colleges on campus, over 85 faculty, staff, and students, and has received over \$25 million in grant funding. This was a tremendous “ground floor” experience that involved all the key elements of leadership including relationship building, integrated program development, acquisition of competitive funding, and establishment of a strategic and nationally recognized program. The other key position that I currently hold is Associate Director of Agricultural Research Programs - Integrative and Competitive Programs. Within the College of Agriculture, I am charged with fostering interdisciplinary research and outreach programs with other schools and colleges on campus, as outlined in the College of Agriculture strategic plan.

Development of a Supportive Administrative Leadership Team

One of the most important elements I have learned about leadership is to “start the process off right.” A primary function of the Dean should be to create a professional working environment that the administrative leadership team of the College (i.e. associate deans, department heads, center directors, other college leaders) believes in and supports. All of us need to be headed in the same direction, working together, and supporting each other to reach our shared goals. It is the Dean’s job to make this happen. When developing an effective leadership team, an important component is to create a climate that fosters and values diversity. With diversity comes the opportunity to grow and learn in new ways. Nurturing a mindset of respect and appreciation among students, faculty and staff from various cultures and backgrounds, enhances the understanding and benefits of diversity.

The College Strategic Plan and the Planning Process

It is my understanding that the last cycle of the strategic plan in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences was completed in 2005, and that an updated University strategic plan has been created more recently. There have been significant changes in Agricultural and Life Science initiatives and priorities since 2005, and, our economical framework is completely different today. As a starting point, the college will need to evaluate where we are in terms of meeting essential metrics of the existing strategic plan. In turn, a carefully designed

planning process will need to be undertaken to enhance and grow our programs, which will be critical to our overall success. The strategic plan in the CALS should be aligned upstream with the University strategic plan and downstream at the departmental level, center and institute level, and for individual faculty/staff planning. As part of this process, we should also be reviewing and evaluating strategic planning of key stakeholder groups in Virginia, such as the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences, so that we can meet many of their needs, align with their strategic plans, and ultimately meet the needs of Virginia citizens.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The development, maintenance, and fostering of key partnerships and strategic collaborations should be a vital leadership function of the Dean. Partnerships and collaborative efforts become even more critical within a struggling economy and Virginia Tech will need these relationships. Collaborations should be created to: a) help us plan better as a college for our Research-Teaching-Outreach-International (RTOI) efforts, b) complement RTOI expertise areas, c) share financial resources, d) provide better RTOI outcomes, and, e) establish increased funding opportunities. There are ample opportunities to foster these collaborations across departments in CALS and other colleges on campus. I am enthusiastic about existing collaborations with the College of Engineering, the College of Forestry and Natural Resources, and with Public Health- and Medicine-related departments. These are smart strategic alliances already in place. There are also a vast amount of opportunities available with other land-grant institutions (regionally and nationally) and state organizations (commodity groups, state agencies) for program development. These partnerships are important for complementing efforts, expanding expertise and being more efficient in our RTOI work. Additionally, the relationships are critical for obtaining high-dollar competitive grant funding offered by USDA, NSF, NIH, etc. While we know partnerships and collaborations are critical to success, quite often unintended obstacles at universities do not allow for successful integration. It is important for the administrative team of CALS to devote support and resources encouraging partnerships and collaborations as it will pay significant dividends in the future growth of the college.

Fostering an integrated Research/Extension/Teaching/International Program

I have been responsible for leading a strategic integration initiative in the College of Agriculture at Purdue University, working jointly with the offices of Agriculture Research Programs and the Cooperative Extension Service. Our overall vision is to better integrate our research and Extension programs; from a planning, implementation, and accountability standpoint. As part of the process, the following was completed:

- A research/Extension integrated USDA Plan-of-Work was created
- Funds were secured (\$250K) for an internal grant process for integrated projects (called the Mission Oriented Grants Process)
- Support staff were added to facilitate collaborative grant writing and assistance with grant budgetary processes
- An endowment was obtained to recognize successful faculty (Spirit of the Land Grant Award) who have effectively created integrated programs
- An electronic reporting system was developed to highlight individual faculty and team accomplishments (called "FAIR," or Faculty Accomplishment and Impact Reporting)

Interestingly, this was the first time that there was a strategic initiative to have these offices moving in the same direction....together. The integrated research and Extension effort has resulted in a tremendous positive impact in competitive grant funding, the College's ability to respond to immediate Agriculture needs (i.e. flood disasters, economy, food safety and protection), and the College's ability to strategically design competitive programs in leading scientific fields (i.e. bioprocessing/biofuels, environmental sustainability). At Purdue, we have just begun an effort to more formally integrate teaching efforts and international programs in Agriculture. I have seen the extensive potential of integrated programs and would work hard to develop and foster similar programs at Virginia Tech.

Increase the Competitiveness of Virginia's Agricultural Industries

An ongoing primary goal for CALS should be to develop basic knowledge, applied science, and technology to support Virginia's agriculture, plant systems, animals systems, environmental programs, food systems, and health-related programs. Enabling them to compete nationally and worldwide, if so desired, would provide maximum benefit to Virginia's economy. To do so, we need to work with key stakeholder groups for input on research priorities and financial support opportunities. Strong fundamental and applied research programs need to be developed to advance the scientific foundations of agriculture and life science investigation. As a start, we will need to work toward attracting leading faculty and acquiring state-of-the-art facilities to maximize competitive opportunities, all while maintaining fiscal responsibility. A proactive outreach and engagement strategy must also be undertaken to help us solve critical agriculture problems and to successfully market our programs and Virginia's agriculture industry.

Attract and Produce High Quality Students

To maintain a solid foundation, the CALS must attract and provide world-class undergraduate and graduate student education programs and experiences. Virginia Tech should be networking throughout the State and establishing competitive fellowships/assistantships in order to attract the very best students. Core student outcomes should include strong research experiences, multi-disciplinary skills, communication skills, effective teaching experiences, international and study-abroad opportunities, grantsmanship, professionalism, and teamwork. Faculty should provide students opportunities to serve their communities and be involved in real-world situations. A key measure to evaluate student achievement is their competitiveness for initial employment and a follow up measurement tracking success in their career path.

Deliver Knowledge to Citizens around the State, Nationally, and Globally

Delivering information about what we do, who we are, and what services we can provide in the CALS is critical to our success. A proactive engagement office and an effective Cooperative Extension network are fundamental elements in information creation and dissemination at the country, state, national, and international levels. Development of distance education programs, whether for traditional students, non-traditional students, or other stakeholder groups, should be evaluated and used where appropriate as an important outlet for knowledge dissemination.