

August 7, 2007

Dear Colleagues:

As we approach the start of the new semester, I will be sending a series of updates to keep you informed of the many activities designed to ensure a successful academic year. We have all been profoundly affected by the events of April 16. We will move forward with renewed energy as we create the "new normal" for the university while not forgetting the deceased, the injured, the traumatized and their families. One of our tasks is to take care of one another and to seek out whatever support we need. I sincerely hope that the wonderful sense of community we shared in the spring will be a permanent part of our journey together.

I will be posting all the updates on the Provost's Web site; the specific activities, events, programs, and services will be communicated in a variety of ways and coordinated across the campus as effectively as possible. The learning, discovery, and engagement domains of our strategic plan provide a strong foundation on which we can continue to make sustained progress as a great university.

Over the summer, on and off campus, support has been provided to the victims and survivors of April 16. In this letter I will describe some of the specific steps we have taken to care for the injured and the families of those who were killed. The Division of Student Affairs and the Graduate School worked primarily with the students and their families. I will focus special attention on the faculty families since my office has been more directly involved in these efforts. President Steger and his staff have been actively engaged in all aspects of family relations in addition to the ongoing reviews and analyses of the events. The university has created a new Office of Recovery and Support headed by Jay Poole to help provide greater coordination and sustained attention to the ongoing needs of the families and our community.

Nine of our faculty members were most directly affected by the April 16 tragedy. Five were killed, one was injured, and the daughter of one faculty member was killed. The spouses of two of our faculty members were among the deceased faculty. In all cases, faculty, staff, and student colleagues have provided incredible amounts of support to all seven families. I have no doubt that the continued support of the Virginia Tech community will provide ongoing comfort and assistance.

The administration has worked with each individual or family to facilitate benefit issues and to assist with all aspects of dealing with the events and the aftermath. Dr. Anna Beth Benningfield has joined my office as a Special Assistant to the Provost to focus on the seven faculty families and to provide additional assistance the departments and programs that were most directly affected. Dr. Benningfield is a trained psychologist and taught previously at Virginia Tech in the marriage and family therapy program.

Invent the Future

The needs and situation of each affected faculty member are different and the path forward will take different directions. Without revealing anything specific about an individual family, I wish to outline some of the things we have done. All faculty families are receiving continued health care benefits through Virginia Tech. In some cases, the continuation is automatic because of employment status. In others, the university is assuming responsibility for the premiums. We have facilitated employment opportunities at the university for several spouses who wish to work. The Benefits Office has coordinated all the complex issues associated with life insurance, worker's compensation, and other benefits. Doug Martin has provided steady and compassionate assistance in this process.

We are committed to making sure that the dependent children of the deceased faculty members have opportunities for funding for a college education, at least at the level of a four year undergraduate program at Virginia Tech. Tax-deferred college accounts are being set up and some of the families are eligible for a state-funded educational benefit as part of the overall state benefit plan. TIAA-CREF has specifically donated funds to help with the college plans for the dependent children of the deceased faculty. We have offered the new Virginia Tech "modified duties option" to the faculty members who are eligible, and we are working with departments to make sure all the policies that could benefit a faculty member are made available.

Campus and community individuals and companies have helped voluntarily with many specific needs, such as lawn mowing, roof repairs, etc. Expenses incurred as an immediate result of the tragedy, including travel for family members, funerals, etc, have been covered from a variety of funding sources. The plans being proposed by Mr. Ken Feinberg to distribute the Hokie Spirit Memorial Funds directly to the injured and to the families of the deceased should provide a way for the families to continue to make choices about how best to meet some of their needs or to set up or expand endowments or educational funds without the university serving as an intermediary.

Many of the injured students will be returning to campus this fall. Last month a team of experienced Victim Witness Assistance personnel called all students who were injured or who were enrolled in the classes in Norris Hall at the time the shootings occurred. The outreach efforts are being extended to other students and to staff. The interviews are shaping the specific support systems that will be available to these students and are shaping the broader levels of support that will be available to all faculty, students, and staff.

We have worked closely with the College of Engineering to address the needs of the departments most affected by the physical dislocation from Norris Hall. The Department of Engineering Science and Mechanics is in the process of moving back into the building, and we have assigned additional space to the college to address some space needs that were evident even before 4/16. The former classroom space on the second floor front wing has not yet been reassigned. At President Steger's request, I am convening a university task force to explore the best options, and we will seek advice and input from all interested groups, including families. We will make recommendations to President Steger, taking into account an ongoing feasibility study about the capabilities of the physical infrastructure of the building.

My next letter will address the specific plans for the start of the semester, including special briefing and training sessions for faculty, plans for counseling and advising support, enhanced security and policy actions, and special events. For the most part, we are returning to our regular academic policies, procedures, and governance practices, although I hope we can maintain the spirit of cooperation and

communication we developed last spring. Plans are emerging for a major event on October 16 designed to focus attention on opportunities for everyone in the community to make a commitment to a service activity in the spirit of *Ut Prosim* in honor of our deceased loved ones.

[Please send suggestions or comments](#) that you believe can help us launch a successful new academic year.

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

Mark McNamee
University Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs