

January 22, 2008

Dear Colleagues:

The spring semester is well underway and I hope you had good holidays and a restorative break. The spring promises to bring us new opportunities to demonstrate our resilience and reaffirm our commitment to being a university dedicated to learning and teaching, research and discovery, and engagement. We completed a successful fall semester with record enrollments and significant achievements across all mission areas of the university. I want to commend and thank all of you for your outstanding contributions.

I would like to update you on a number of issues that will affect all of us over the next few months. There are four major items I will cover in this first note and I will preview some topic for follow-up messages.

1. April 16, 2008 planning activities and ongoing support services for 2008.
2. VT ENGAGE
3. Budget Update
4. Organizational Changes

APRIL 16, 2008:

As we approach April 2008, we individually and collectively should remain sensitive to the need to balance a focus on the future with attention to the needs of our families, colleagues, students, staff and others who continue to feel the direct impact of the events of April 2007. Each of us has our own trajectory for dealing with our experiences of sadness and loss. Over the fall semester The Cook Counseling Center, Office of the Dean of Students, Human Resources, ValueOptions and off-campus mental health and other support organizations all experienced increases in requests for services for individuals and groups. This is a good sign of the resilience of our community - individuals and groups are accessing the resources they need to be successful. Throughout the fall semester we worked with departments, programs, and individuals to facilitate the healing process. We held training sessions and workshops for faculty and staff to enhance our ability to respond to the needs of our students and colleagues. The Office of Recovery and Support has worked steadily with the families of the deceased and with the injured students and their families to provide support in many different ways. I believe that all the injured students who were enrolled this fall had academically successful semesters. With support from the U.S. Department of Education and the university we have added counselors and case managers to our staff. We have some initial funding from the U.S. Department of Justice for victim support and we are seeking additional funds from them. Several committees have worked to evaluate and prioritize plans that extend our investments in the security, infrastructure, and human dimensions aspects of the 'new normal' situations we face.

Invent the Future

We have also listened to suggestions about how we might best provide support to the many individuals and groups who may not seek individual counseling, but may benefit from opportunities for informal discussions, training programs, etc. In order to respond to and anticipate needs leading up to this April 16, we have created a professionally staffed "Resource Center" that will be available to faculty and staff. Specific details about location, hours, programs, etc., will be communicated separately. We appreciate the ongoing support and flexibility of managers at all levels to allow employees to take advantage of support resources within the normal course of business.

President Steger has asked me to help plan and coordinate the primary university commemoration of April 16 for this first year anniversary. Working closely with Jay Poole, Director of the Office of Recovery and Support, I have appointed a broad-based Steering Committee that will develop the specific plans. We have already received many thoughtful ideas and suggestions about ways in which we can honor and remember those we lost and we welcome additional suggestions. Our goal is to have an outline of the plans developed within a few weeks. As you know by now, we have cancelled classes on April 16, 2008. We are aware that many university and community groups (clubs, churches, etc.) may be planning specialized activities around the same time. We will work to maintain an overall list of activities. The Steering Committee will not attempt to organize or control independent activities, but we encourage groups to notify the Office of Recovery and Support (231-0062) of plans as soon as possible. We will ask that groups avoid time conflicts with the principal university commemoration on April 16 once we announce the plans.

VT-ENGAGE:

I continue to encourage you to get involved with our ambitious service initiative, VT-ENGAGE. Pledging and performing volunteer work through VT-ENGAGE helps to meet community needs, shows proof of our motto, "That I May Serve," and continues to honor those we lost April 16, 2007. Any kind of volunteer work you do counts for VT-ENGAGE, such as helping a local school, volunteering at your church, serving as a volunteer on a non-profit board, or working at a food pantry.

To begin, simply go to the VT-ENGAGE website (www.engage.vt.edu) and click on the orange button that says "pledge/record your volunteer hours." First-time visitors need to create a new account with a user i.d. (your e-mail address) and password. Keep checking back to see how the university community is progressing towards reaching our goal of pledging and performing 300,000 hours of volunteer work by the end of the spring semester.

Please record your volunteer work today! Volunteer service is a big part of life at Virginia Tech and we would like to be able to show the world the full significance of our Hokie Spirit.

BUDGET UPDATE:

The General Assembly session began recently. This year is the "long session" in which the budget for the next biennium will be developed. The state and national budget scene is not encouraging and most states are anticipating significant funding problems. We have reviewed and analyzed the budget proposals that were submitted in the fall. We will be announcing budget decisions in early February and hope and expect that the targets we developed last fall will be the final targets.

Governor Kaine's budget included a proposal for a General Obligation Bond to fund capital projects at the state's colleges and universities. Some (but not all) of Virginia Tech's high priority projects are included in the proposal. We are working hard to add some projects and to evaluate alternative options depending on the progress of the bond bill during the session. We expect that the General Assembly will make substantial changes to the Governor's overall budget proposals and we will keep you informed once the overall shape of the budget becomes clearer. Vice President Dwight Shelton and I will create opportunities for open, comprehensive forums to discuss the budget during the next few months.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES:

In light of the budget challenges and the retirement of Executive Vice President James Hyatt, President Steger and I are working together to streamline and simplify the overall senior administrative structure so that we can address both the academic and administrative needs of the campus as effectively as possible with reduced administrative resources. We will be announcing specific organizational changes as they occur over the next week or so. The University Strategic Plan continues to provide strong and clear guidance to us as we set priorities and assess our progress. This spring we will undertake a detailed 'reality check' and make whatever adjustments are necessary to ensure that the plan and our operational capacity are in alignment.

FUTURE UPDATES

In the next update, I will provide additional information about our ongoing progress in the areas of diversity, faculty development, undergraduate education, academic program enhancement, and the progress of the new Virginia Tech-Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute. In a separate letter, you will be receiving an update from the Implementation Team appointed to advance the recommendations of the Race and the Institution Task Force.

Although we face challenges of many kinds, I am convinced that we can and will make sustained progress and continue on the path to become a stronger, better university. I welcome feedback on any issues of importance to you.



Mark McNamee
University Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs