

Letter from Senior Vice President and Provost to university community

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BLACKSBURG, Va., Oct. 10, 2012 – *The following is a letter to the university community from Senior Vice President and Provost Mark McNamee.*

Dear Colleagues:

The fall 2012 semester is in full swing and we are all looking forward to a successful academic year. We welcomed the arrival of 103 new faculty members this year and we expect the total size of the faculty to show real growth to levels last seen in 2008. Total student enrollment across the university is 31,100, a figure that is in line with our multi-year projections.

As of Oct. 1, all of the academic units submitted their strategic plans for the 2012-2018 period. My office, in partnership with the Long Range Planning Office, will be analyzing the plans and assessing the options for setting priorities and determining the costs of implementation. Based on discussions leading up to the plan submissions, it is apparent that the units are very responsive to the themes outlined in the “Plan for a New Horizon.” As the year progresses, we will provide updates to the university community and will offer opportunities for feedback and discussion.

I am nearing completion of my visits to each academic department (on Oct. 1, I made visit 58 of 65.) The visits provide me with a first-hand view of the opportunities and challenges as experienced in the life of a department. Although specific issues vary across departments, I am always impressed by the pride the faculty and staff take in their programs, the commitment to providing our students with the best possible education, and the passion to make things stronger and better. I will continue to do my best to find ways to enable all of us to fulfill our high expectations.

The search for a new dean of the Pamplin College of Business is underway. The search firm Isaacson, Miller is supporting the active recruiting and initial screening of applicants. Information and resources related to the search can be found on the [Provost's website](#)^[2]. Finalist candidates will be hosted for on-campus interviews shortly after Thanksgiving, and the itineraries will include an open forum session. More information on specific interview schedules and candidate forums will be shared widely in advance. Based on preliminary discussions with the firm, we are attracting a large, strong, diverse, and motivated pool of candidates.

The search for a new vice president for Outreach and International Affairs is getting ready to launch. The search committee has been announced and is posted to the [Provost's website](#)^[3]. We will hold an initial

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charge meeting at the end of October. The position will be advertised starting in early November, with a review date in mid-January. We expect to host finalist candidates on campus during the last two weeks in February.

Many of you may have read the feature article in the Roanoke Times describing progress on the Center for the Arts and the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology. We are well on our way to establishing Virginia Tech as a place that not only supports strong arts programs, but also helps to create, understand, and influence all modes of creative expression in our complex, highly technical world. One distinguishing feature of our initiatives will be a commitment to the arts in the PK-12 education community. We believe that the arts are intimately linked to our efforts to strengthen the learning process, and the arts can enhance efforts to advance our initiatives in the STEM areas.

Based on the recommendations included in the "Plan for a New Horizon," we are moving forward to create a Faculty of Health Sciences. Dennis Dean and Michael Friedlander are leading an effort to develop an implementation plan, which will guide our decisions about next steps. One of the key ideas under consideration is creation of a new interdisciplinary graduate program with a strong emphasis on biomedical/health sciences and translational medicine.

In mid-October, we will be announcing the launch of the next faculty survey designed by COACHE, the Harvard-based Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education. COACHE has expanded its research efforts beyond tenure-track faculty to include faculty at all ranks, including nontenure track faculty. We use the COACHE data to benchmark our faculty-related programs and policies and we provide useful feedback to the colleges about strengths and weaknesses that can be addressed. I encourage everyone who receives a survey request to place high priority on responding to the questions.

Last month I had the opportunity to participate in two events that reaffirm the special privilege I have to serve as provost at Virginia Tech:

The College of Science held a reception to honor Dr. Patricia Dove's election to the National Academy of Sciences. For a scientist, election to the academy is an enormous achievement that reflects well on the individual and the institution. Trish Dove is an outstanding scientist and she is also a wonderful colleague and a warm and generous individual. Serendipitously, Trish's election was announced at the moment I was visiting the Department of Geosciences last spring. Trish's election is the latest in a trend of growing national recognition of the accomplishments of our faculty.

I also had an opportunity to represent Virginia Tech at the inauguration of Dr. Raphael Reif as the President of MIT. As an alumnus of MIT, the event was especially meaningful for me. In listening to the inaugural address, I was struck by the similarity of MIT's goals to those outlined in our long range plan. Both institutions are committed to addressing major issues that will affect the quality of life for the world's citizens. MIT even talks about inventing the future, following the lead of Virginia Tech.

I am anxiously looking forward to the special event Sheer Good Fortune: Celebrating Toni Morrison that will take place on campus on the evening of Tuesday, October 16. Our own Nikki Giovanni along with global renaissance woman Maya Angelou, and Joanne Gabbin, professor of English at James Madison University, had the great insight to recognize the joy and value of celebrating the life and important works of Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, editor, and professor, Toni Morrison. We are truly fortunate to have these literary giants with us for a special evening of tribute.

As the leaves continue to turn, I hope all of you can enjoy the beauty of fall in the New River Valley even as we find ourselves fully immersed in the intensity of life at Virginia Tech.

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Sincerely,
Mark G. McNamee
Senior Vice President and Provost

Related Links

- [New Horizons: President Steger's open letter to the university community regarding long-range plan^{\[4\]}](#)
- [Search committee announced for vice president of Outreach and International Affairs^{\[5\]}](#)

Links

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

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

[3]. <http://www.provost.vt.edu>

[4]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2012/09/092412-president-strategicplan.html>

[5]. <http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2012/09/092412-provost-oiasearchcommittee.html>