

**Remarks to the Board of Visitors
by President Timothy D. Sands
November 9, 2015**

Despite the churn in our local and national economies, the many elements of higher education under scrutiny, and the transitions internal to Virginia Tech as highly valued members of the Hokie Nation retire from their active roles, Virginia Tech is barreling ahead into a bright future.

A few months ago, we welcomed our largest and most diverse incoming first-year class, numbering 6,270. Despite the larger numbers, this class is as academically qualified as any previous class. Among the class of 2019 are 438 international students and 4,209 in-state students (439 more than in the class of 2018). 12.7 percent of the U.S. students in the class of 2019 identify as under-represented minority students, and 15 percent are the first in their immediate families to go to college. In addition to the class of 2019, we are joined by nearly 1,000 transfer students, about 2,100 graduate and professional students, and hundreds of new faculty and staff.

Virginia Tech's research enterprise continues to grow in impact and in scale. With over \$500M in annual research expenditures, we are now ranked #38. In the past decade, we have passed 14 of our peer institutions, and no institution has passed us. Our early embrace of interdisciplinary research and the outstanding faculty and graduate student scholars we have recruited to and retained at Virginia Tech account for much of this sustained momentum.

Speaking of rankings, Virginia Tech and our academic programs continue to be rated by the established surveys among the best in the nation. We have learned just very recently that the College of Architecture and Urban Studies was ranked #3 in the nation for its undergraduate program, and the graduate program was ranked #9 in the nation. In the past few years, however, a bevy of new analyses focused on financial return on investment (ROI) and societal impact have emerged. Those familiar with Virginia Tech's mission will not be surprised to learn that our institution really shines in measures of value. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard cited Virginia Tech among one of 15 public institutions with both high graduation rates and high alumni salaries. Virginia Tech was also ranked third behind MIT and Cornell among public and private land-grant institutions and first among public universities with more than 20,000 undergraduates in "value added" by the Brookings Institution. No doubt, our alumni see one of the highest returns on their investment of any university in the country.

Despite these high marks, we all know that financial ROI does not by itself describe the full impact of a college education. Our engagement with Gallup has allowed us, for the first time, to relate the experiences of our alumni at Virginia Tech to their engagement in the workplace and well-being in the dimensions of financial, physical, social, community and purpose. We learned from this survey that Hokies thrive in these five dimensions at rates that are markedly higher than those of college graduates in general. By a wide margin, Hokies are also emotionally attached to their alma mater to a higher degree (42

percent) than the national average (18 percent). And while we can take some comfort in the validation of what we know to be a special community and an institution that serves its students well in preparing them for the future, we also learned that we can do more to promote guided experiential learning and mentorship, as these elements associate strongly with well-being and engagement. We can also do more to engage our devoted alumni, whose giving rate at 9 percent is strikingly disparate from the alumni attachment rate of 42 percent. I encourage you to read the full report.

Among our most significant challenges is the one we share with nearly every public institution in the country: the gradual disinvestment by the state in the education of in-state undergraduates. Our funding from the Commonwealth per student is half what it was in 2000 on a real-dollar basis. The last generation's 75-25 split in funding between the Commonwealth and the student has been reversed. Although the prevailing argument has been that this transformation reflects a shift in the public perception of the beneficiaries of public universities from the public good to the private good (i.e., the student), I think the decision to put higher education on the discretionary side of the ledger is one of budgetary expediency rather than a fundamental philosophical shift. Almost everyone understands the importance of educating the next generation to participate in our economy. Certainly, the impact of our research and engagement on the development of our regional economies has never been more evident. Although there is no evidence to suggest that these trends will be reversed, there is compelling evidence that the future of higher education will be based on deep and long-term relationships between universities, industry and government. These cross-sector partnerships are exemplified by Virginia Tech's partnership with Carilion Clinic in Roanoke. Analogous partnerships are emerging in the National Capital Region, Hampton Roads, and Southern Virginia.

While we are well positioned as an institution to build partnerships that will sustain Virginia Tech in the long term, the shift in funding support puts acute financial pressure on the institution, our students, and their families. With a graduation rate of 83 percent and an acceptance rate of 70 percent, Virginia Tech is among the national leaders in access and success, yet we struggle to remain affordable for those from middle- or low-income families. About 75 percent of our in-state and 85 percent of our out-of-state undergraduate students are from families whose incomes would be among the top 40 percent in Virginia. To stay true to our historical land-grant mission, we must restore a level of affordability that will allow a talented and academically prepared student from any income level to attend Virginia Tech and succeed as a student. Enhancing productivity is part of the answer. Engaging our alumni and friends is the other essential component. You will be hearing more from me in the near future about our shared obligation to lift our communities, the Commonwealth, and the nation by ensuring that more first-generation and low/middle-income students have access to a Virginia Tech education – an education that is rooted in preparing each individual to serve humanity at the highest levels of his/her ability.

The past year has brought a flurry of activity in student entrepreneurship and innovation. Our students started 56 companies in 2014. Clarity around student-owned intellectual property, the rise of the Apex Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and projects

such as the NSF I-Corps are releasing our talent and their spirit of *Ut Prosim* on the world. The importance of student entrepreneurship is not limited to starting companies; it is also about building the personal skills necessary for career resilience and fulfillment.

We are now at the halfway point of the period defined by the current strategic plan, “*A Plan for a New Horizon.*” This plan is serving us well as we make decisions about the near term. Yet, strategic plans generally do not reflect the realities of longer-term trends, nor do they facilitate discussions about aspirations for the next generation. To provide this important underpinning for future planning, we have embarked on an ambitious visioning process called “*Envisioning Virginia Tech: Beyond Boundaries.*” One of our Board members, Mr. Dennis Treacy, serves on the Steering Committee. We are seeking to answer two questions as an institution and as a community:

1. If our wildest dreams for Virginia Tech are realized in a generation, what will our global 21st-century land-grant university become?
2. How will the landscape for higher education have changed in a generation?

The answer to the second question requires our consideration of several possible scenarios incorporating long-term trends in which we are already immersed. Of course, history shows that we will not be able to anticipate every important shift, but those we can foresee must be included among the scenarios that we must accommodate if we are to become the university we envision.

As the future plays out, we will need to make adjustments to stay on the envisioned trajectory. Hence, it is essential that we become a dynamic and resilient university. Provost Thanassis Rikakis has launched an effort within *Beyond Boundaries* that seeks to enhance the nimbleness of the academic enterprise by identifying cross-cutting themes that will define Virginia Tech as a global “destination” for faculty, staff, student, and partner talent. These themes will be less permanent than our departmental structure, and they will evolve over time. The themes will permeate all aspects of the university mission, expanding beyond the research institutes into our curricula and our relationships with communities and government and industry partners.

While the results of *Beyond Boundaries* are not predetermined, there are some elements in our vision for Virginia Tech that are essentially unassailable. One such imperative is the need to access the broadest possible pool of talent in Virginia, nationally, and globally. Furthermore, all of our students benefit from exposure to students, staff, and faculty with lived experiences different than their own. Institutions that ignore demographic trends and the globalization of our economies are doomed to irrelevance. Central to ensuring access to talent is creating an inclusive environment, the primary goal of the InclusiveVT initiative. If we are successful, the university we envision one generation into the future will be distinguished by its people, who will be insatiably curious, intellectually vibrant, and committed to applying their talents to the service of humanity. We can be that university.

Recent Developments:

Eric Greitens, a former Navy SEAL, best-selling author, and candidate for the governor of Missouri, visited Virginia Tech on November 5 and discussed his life, part of which is detailed in his book, "The Heart and the Fist," Virginia Tech's 2015-16 Common Book.

There will be an opportunity to show solidarity and support with our Muslim community at an event on the Drillfield on Tuesday, November 10, at 6:00 p.m., precipitated by graffiti threatening Muslims that was found in a campus bathroom.

Status of Searches:

Ms. Tracy Vosburgh is the new Senior Associate Vice President for University Relations at Virginia Tech. Ms. Vosburgh was Associate Vice President of University Communications at Cornell University. She succeeds Larry Hincker, who retired earlier this year. Ms. Vosburgh began her new position on September 15.

Mr. Matthew M. Winston Jr., formerly Assistant to the President at the University of Georgia, was named Senior Associate Vice President for Alumni Relations at Virginia Tech. Mr. Winston succeeds Tom Tillar, who announced earlier this year that he would step down from his position after 40 years of serving Virginia Tech alumni. Mr. Winston began his new position on November 1.

Dr. Menah Pratt-Clarke, Associate Chancellor for Strategic Affairs and the Associate Provost for Diversity at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has been named Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity and Vice President for Strategic Affairs at Virginia Tech. Dr. Pratt-Clarke will start her new position on February 1, 2016. She will also hold a faculty appointment as a professor in the School of Education in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

In the search for a Vice President for Research and Innovation, we are very close to making a final decision; there will likely be an announcement within the next couple of weeks.

In the search for a Dean of the College of Science, finalists will interview on campus between late January and mid-February. It is hoped to have the new Dean in place by July 2016.

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