

President's Open Session Remarks, Tuesday, June 6, 2023

I'd like to start by providing an update on our two top priorities: Access and Affordability, and our pursuit to be among the top 100 global research universities.

Our Access and Affordability initiative that we began designing last fall is now branded as "The Virginia Tech Advantage." And it really is exactly what the name suggests. Virginia Tech has long been a great deal for students who come from wealthier families. For too long, really a generation or more, Virginia Tech has not been affordable for students from low- and middle-income families. We need to change that. It is a land-grant mission imperative.

Of course, it is to **our students' advantage** to have an affordable Virginia Tech education – one that not only limits a student's loan burden, but also does not require a student to work multiple jobs in fields that are not related to their career path just to attend Virginia Tech. We know that students who have to work more than about 20 hours per week do not have access to the experiences that are so critical to a successful transition to a career or graduate school.

It is to **Virginia Tech's advantage** to make Virginia Tech financially accessible to students from every background – to expand our talent pool and therefore our generational impact on economic and social mobility. One of the main reasons that our application numbers have soared, doubling over the last decade, is that we have lowered some of the small barriers to applying to Virginia Tech. We need to take that to the next step by lowering the financial barriers to completing a degree and going on to a fulfilling life and career. Thanks to Dr. Menah Pratt and Dr. Matt Holt and their teams for their leadership in constructing a framework for the Virginia Tech Advantage. Greta, thanks for representing the BOV and contributing your own deep experience. The financial goals are ambitious but achievable - ultimately, about \$51M per year in today's dollars funded from several sources, including a \$500M philanthropic campaign over a period of about a decade to ensure that there is an endowment to sustain this commitment indefinitely. Just as important, we are committed to making sure our students can graduate in four years and have access to paid internships and research opportunities in their fields of study.

Our second overarching objective is to advance Virginia Tech into the top 100 of global research universities. Our current rankings range from #92 in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (released last week) to the band of 251-300 in the Times Higher Education World Universities rankings. Given that there are several thousand global research universities, one might say that we should be happy to be top 300. The reality is that somewhere around the top 100, we have access to talent and partners that are not available to lower ranked institutions. 100 is not a magic number, but it is about where we would enter into the realm of the top 10 U.S. land-grant universities, especially those that are members of the American Association of Universities (AAU). Top-100 global is a proxy for excellence. It is not a perfect proxy, as we would not want to sacrifice what makes up Virginia Tech's mission as Virginia's land-grant research university. On the other hand, by attracting global talent and partners to Virginia, we advance our mission.

One of the most important indicators of research excellence is faculty membership in the National Academies. This year, three of our faculty have been inducted, including Dr. Linsey Marr who was elected to the National Academy of Engineering before our March meeting, and Drs. Robert Bodner and Shuhai Xiao, both faculty in our esteemed Department of Geosciences, who were elected to the National Academy of Sciences in April. I believe this is the first time we have had three faculty members elected

into these two academies in one cycle. We have several more faculty who are deserving and many more who are on track, so stay tuned.

Our Innovation Campus in Alexandria and our partnership at the Children's National Research and Innovation Campus in DC are part of this plan as well. One of the most exciting things about these campuses is the potential to serve as front doors for global talent and partners. Despite the idyllic surroundings of our Blacksburg campus, it can be difficult to coax new partners to the mountains for a first visit. Our Innovation Campus in Alexandria located in an emerging tech hub that is known for attracting diverse talent and is adjacent to the nation's capital and Reagan National Airport, represents an inflection point in Virginia Tech's history. That's why we were so excited last month to help celebrate the opening of the new Potomac Yard – VT metro station just yards from the first academic building of our Innovation Campus, and within a few metro stops of 60,000 Hokie alumni. Needless to say, the HokieBird stole the show.

One of the issues on which our leadership team and the Board has been focused is the setting of tuition and fee rates for the coming academic year. Given inflation and what we know about the state budget at this time, we decided in April with Board approval to increase the in-state undergraduate tuition rate by 4.9%.

As it stands now, the total revenue per in-state student – the combination of tuition and fees and General Fund appropriation from the state - will be slightly lower (about \$240) in the coming year compared to the average revenue per student over the past six years in inflation adjusted dollars. The bottom line: we have been able to enhance the quality of education without spending more per student. The even better news is that the proportion of that sum that was covered by tuition and fees has decreased from 60% to 50% due to tuition mitigation funds appropriated by the Commonwealth over the last few years. As a result, since FY 19, we have been able to keep tuition increases to about 14% in nominal dollars compared to about a 25% increase in inflation over that same period. We are hopeful that the final outcome of the 2023 General Assembly session will result in additional funds from the Commonwealth that will allow us to make another step in enhancing affordability. It is unlikely that we will have an update in the budget before the new fiscal year starts on July 1, but we will keep everyone posted.

And staying on the topic of affordability, I am pleased that we are able to take a first step toward more competitive graduate assistant compensation. Raising the stipend floor to \$2,420/month in combination with three years in a row of 5% stipend increases is putting us in a stronger position to improve the well-being of our graduate students and to become more competitive with peers in recruiting graduate student talent. There is more to be done, but given the tight fiscal environment this year, we were happy to make graduate assistant compensation a priority.

As you heard during the report from the Academic Research and Student Affairs Committee, the incoming class of first-time-in-college students for this fall – the class of 2027 – is looking very strong. We expect over 7,100 to have matriculated at the time of census. To keep our class sizes at this level, on-campus housing needs to be prioritized. Since the 1990s, the percentage of undergraduates housed on campus has decreased from 44% to 34%. Just to hold our ground in light of needed renovations and decommissioning of older residence halls, combined with our commitment to add a living learning community to the Global Business and Analytics Complex, we need to add at least 1,750 beds over the next six years. Thank you for approving planning for the first phase of the Student Life Village. Without it, we would have to make very difficult choices downstream, including potentially reducing the size of our

incoming class to ensure that all first-year students and our students in upper classes in living learning communities can be accommodated. In a time of growing application numbers at Virginia Tech, this would indeed be a very difficult decision. Of course, reducing the size of our in-residence entering class would reduce Blacksburg undergraduate enrollment and the economic vitality of the region.

I would like to conclude my report with a few updates on broader societal issues that impact Virginia Tech, or even more accurately, on societal issues that Virginia Tech can impact as we prepare the next generation of U.S. and global citizens. Each of these three topics deserves a longer discussion but let me start those conversations here.

First, as we have discussed over the past year or so, Virginia Tech is committed to the ideals of free expression and inquiry. To the Board, thank you for helping craft our statement on this topic and for endorsing the final product. The task force made several recommendations beyond the statement. Each of those recommendations, ranging from policy updates to educational programs, is being directed to the committees and individuals responsible for action. I'll just highlight one here in my remarks, and that is the partnership with the Constructive Dialogue Institute. We have joined a group of 12 institutions in a CDI cohort coordinated by SCHEV. Asset mapping and a survey across the cohort has been completed. Some emerging recommendations include faculty training, practice opportunities for students, and integration of those opportunities into residential life and orientation. We will keep you informed as we move forward.

The second broader issue is sexual violence. The Sexual Violence Culture and Climate work group has made significant advances over the past year, including activating the "Safe at VT" website, developing and implementing several workshops for students and staff, and holding our first Summit with the authors of "Sexual Citizens." Yet, sexual assault and harassment remains at untenable levels. There is much more work to do, and we are committed to making steady progress. We have engaged an external consultant to review our policies and procedures and identify several areas for improvement. That work is nearing completion. A couple of notable opportunities have already been identified, including organizing advocates as our front-line support to help survivors negotiate the complex set of options ahead of them, and more and earlier educational intervention. We are also looking at ways to restructure the SVCC work group to be more effective. I will have more to say on this topic after the report is completed and socialized.

The third topic I would like to highlight is the intense scrutiny of DEI nationally and in some states. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, or DEI, has become a lightning rod for some, many of whom feel that DEI puts them at a disadvantage. Others feel that it is time to move beyond affirmative action – the concept that we have made enough progress as a society and that it is time to look forward and not backward. Of course, we are awaiting a Supreme Court decision that is widely expected to end the practice of considering race and ethnicity in college admissions.

For decades, Virginia Tech has focused on diversity and inclusion as a proactive effort to address the injustices that are propagated, if not originated, at our historically White male institution. Our first Black student was admitted 70 years ago after 80 years of resistance. Still today, despite doubling the number of Black students over the past decade, only 6% of undergraduates identify as Black. There are still many talented and qualified Black students in Virginia who do not consider Virginia Tech. The way I see it, that is a talent resource that is not yet fully embraced at Virginia Tech, and employers have not been shy about admonishing us for not doing better – not just in representation, but also in the development of highly-valued cultural competency for all of our students.

I highlight Black students here because of Virginia's unique history of more than 400 years since the first enslaved Africans landed on our shores. A similar assessment can be leveled in our service to rural, low-income, low-generational-wealth, first-generation and veteran students, not to mention women in Engineering and especially Computer Science. If we are passive in our efforts to create an inclusive environment that is conducive to the success of all of our students, and we are passive with respect to creating pathways for historically underrepresented and underserved students, we will most certainly backslide, guaranteeing another century or more of a steadily shrinking pool of talent from which we draw to develop.

At Virginia Tech, we have relied on a holistic admission process that includes race and ethnicity among many other factors. Of course, we will obey the law, but at the same time, we are committed to InclusiveVT now more than ever. Does the current political environment make our work more challenging? Of course it does, but it also makes it more important. And frankly, I think the harder work ahead will make us better.

Finally, after those heavy topics, I will use my final remarks to congratulate our Women's Basketball Team and Coach Kenny Brooks. It seems like their trip to the Final Four was a long time ago, but recall that as of our last regular board meeting in March, they were just advancing to the Seattle Regional, which they won of course! We will never forget this team, not just for their achievements, but for the character and class they showed along the way. Over 3.4 million viewers watched their Final Four game. Everyone who tuned in now knows what it means to be a Hokie.

Thank you.