

**Remarks made during the BOV Information Session**  
**Susanna Rinehart**  
**President, Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech**  
**6 November 2005**

Thank you Mr. Rector; and good afternoon, members of Virginia Tech's Board of Visitors, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Well, last night's game was a lesson... in something – humility, perhaps? A reminder that we are, as it turns out, only human after all. A hard loss, no question. There is extraordinary power in that kind of collective energy and passion around a single goal. Power in 70,000 human beings gathered in one place at one time with a shared vision. That is an overt communal demonstration which is often only dreamt of by those among us engaged in the day-to-day and slightly less overtly glamorous task of leading this institution in its ongoing commitment to excellence in higher education. Imagine a world (and I say this as someone who has watched every VT football game so far this season) where the kind of consolidated and electrifying energy present in Lane Stadium last night might be focused on academic, and other creative, and community-building pursuits. There is something astoundingly beautiful and powerful in the witnessing of such energy focused in one direction. It reminds us of what we are capable of, and simultaneously of the very real potential for setbacks, failures and disappointments. And... the necessity of continuing our work despite obstacles.

The fall semester at Virginia Tech has been marked by engagement, information-sharing, dialogue and action. It has been a distinct honor to experience the integrity and energy with which my fellow community members – administration, staff, students and faculty – are engaged in addressing the challenges before us, on all fronts. I continue to see real evidence of our growth and evolution. Additionally, the semester has been marred by some dark and disappointing moments.

So, what have we been up to?

Along with the preparation of restructuring documents, strategic planning has been in full swing, with its attendant challenge of how to truly engage all of its stakeholders in the dialogue. I am encouraged by the university's commitment to the strategic plan as a living, developing document, founded in actual available resources. Not easy. I appreciate Provost McNamee's leadership, and acknowledgement that growing faculty salaries must be part of the strategic vision.

In addition, the Senate responded to faculty concern regarding the differences between state and optional retirement benefit plans and the selection of funds, by inviting Doug Martin to speak with us at our October meeting. We are grateful for Doug's time, and look forward to ongoing faculty input on these important issues for the faculty.

Dixon Hanna and his committee continue to work on the critical challenge of classroom renovation and building new teaching facilities, so necessary to providing and delivering the quality education to which we aspire; and the infrastructure and facilities expected of a great university.

Engineering professor Dr. Bill Knocke is leading the Research Space Committee, and he and Dr. Fenwick have been engaging the faculty in dialogue about the real need for increased state-of-the-art space, a critical asset if we are to support our growth in research and graduate education, and attract and retain the best and the brightest students and faculty. There has also been ongoing concern and conversation regarding plans for indirect cost distribution.

In keeping with our commitment to all three parts of our mission, Dr. John Dooley and his office hosted a very successful and extremely well-attended Forum on the Scholarship of Outreach. Keynote speaker, Dr. Martin Jischke, President of Purdue University, shared valuable insights into the initiatives and struggles of other land grant universities in the area of outreach.

We are just beginning a campus-wide exploration of faculty work-life issues at Virginia Tech, arising out of a series of surveys and discussion groups conducted by our Advance VT team in partnership with the Commission on Faculty Affairs. As Provost McNamee, Associate Provost Pat Hyer, and I learned at a recent conference on this subject, we are part of a growing national dialogue of some urgency. We must deepen our understanding of flexibility as a strategic tool to realign the structures of academia with the needs of a changing and more diverse workplace. To put it bluntly, this is not your grandfather's university. Increasingly, different expectations are separable by generation rather than gender. If we don't engage, we will continue to place ourselves at a competitive disadvantage with industry and other non-academic sectors, as well as risking the mental and physical health of our faculty. In short, innovation and flexibility in this area pay off in recruitment, retention, productivity, engagement, satisfaction, morale and mental health. Flexibility as a strategic tool manifests itself in our becoming the employer of choice, an institution of recognizable excellence, increased productivity, reduced health costs and job satisfaction. This is not just a question of policy, although that is certainly part of it. It is a question of creating a supportive culture, where flexibility and creativity are the norm, and where the energy, talents and creativity of our employees are released.

I spoke of dark moments. Our community was once again confronted with some ugly truths about ourselves earlier this fall, a reminder that we have a ways to go in making Virginia Tech a safe, inclusive and welcoming community. Student leadership of the VT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance submitted a report that chronicled ongoing incidents of harassment, threats, violence and intolerance against their community. The list included verbal harassment in dorms, classrooms, on campus and in town; graffiti on doors; semen on dorm doors; a car with "faggot" scrawled on it; flyers for LGBT events torn down repeatedly and immediately (some by parents); intolerant literature on the door of the LGBT offices; "get out of hell free" cards left on doors; and a young man almost being run down by a car while the driver screamed "faggot" out the window.

Not long afterward, one of three male visitors – accompanied and hosted by VT students – wrote racial epithets on residence hall doors, and was later also arrested for an incident of assault and battery.

As disturbing as these incidents are, I am pleased to report that there has been an unprecedented, sustained and proactive response by the administration, faculty and staff since that time. Part of that response is the development of the "Safewatch Project", a comprehensive set of strategies to create and sustain a hospitable, safe, and secure environment for students, faculty, staff, and guests of the university, of which you will hear more from Dr. Dixon (and others) in the Academic Affairs Committee meeting tomorrow. I want to state very clearly that the VT Principles of Community, and the new Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Prevention and Workplace Violence Prevention Policies have been of vital importance in addressing these issues seriously and effectively. I commend the Board of Visitors for their part in the creation and approval of those policies. In addition, I commend Charles Steger, Mark McNamee, Ben Dixon, Karen DePauw, Zenobia Hikes, Kevin McDonald, Kurt Krause, Ed Spencer, Karen Sanders (and many more) and the members of the faculty and student body who have responded with such pro-active energy to these events. It is critical that we remain vigilant, vocal and vehement in our commitment to, in

Dr. Steger's words, "ensuring that Virginia Tech is a welcoming, non-discriminatory and harassment-free environment where all individuals can work and learn."

Thank you for your time.