

**Remarks made during the BOV Information Session**  
**W. Samuel Easterling**  
**President, Faculty Senate of Virginia Tech**  
**13 March 2005**

Thank you Mr. Rector. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

During our meeting last November, my remarks touched on *Campus Climate, the Chartered University Initiative, and the Faculty*. I'd like to frame my comments around these three subjects again today.

**Campus Climate**

Last November we were unfortunately talking about disturbing events that had occurred on campus and the things we needed to do to address such occurrences. I'm pleased to say that we have positive things to talk about today. On January 21<sup>st</sup>, a very successful Diversity Summit was held with over 300 members of the University community participating. Thanks and credit are due to many people, but in particular I'd like to acknowledge Mr. Ray Plaza, Chair of the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity, and Dr. Ben Dixon, Vice-President for Multi-Cultural Affairs, for their leadership. Mr. Rector, your participation in the event did not go unnoticed. Several positive comments pertaining to your attendance were shared with me and on behalf of the Faculty I would like to publicly thank for your participation and support of the event.

A product stemming from the work of the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity, as well as those participating in the Diversity Summit, and many others on campus is the *Virginia Tech Principles of Community*. A resolution related to this document is on the agenda for tomorrow afternoon. On behalf of the Faculty, it will be my pleasure to participate in the signing of this important document.

Another very exciting program that in part is focusing on campus climate is the ADVANCE VT project. As you know, a primary focus of the ADVANCE project is to increase the participation of women in science and engineering. As part of this work there are efforts underway to improve aspects of campus climate and life that will be beneficial to everyone - women as well as men, engineers and scientists as well as those in other disciplines. This is exciting work and I'm personally proud to be a small part of the effort. I know you'll be hearing more about the success and impact of this project on our campus community in the future.

**Restructured Higher Education Financial and Administrative Operations Act**

What a difference a year makes! A year ago we were frustrated by our state government's continued inattention, or perhaps better stated – lack of proper attention, to higher education. A year later we sit hear today having heard from Dr. Steger, Mr. Hyatt, Mr. Byers and Mr. Ridenour a report on the outcome of a legislative session that, in my opinion, can be described as truly remarkable. Through a broad, concerted effort, members of the legislature were *educated* to the benefits of supporting the legislation. A strong consensus of democrats and republicans, members of both the house and senate, and the Governor and his staff supported this landmark legislation that I believe will empower Virginia Tech, as well as other state colleges and universities, to improve the quality of our institution and to better enrich the lives of our students. To not have supported it would most assuredly have resulted in an erosion of the quality of higher education in Virginia. While many contributed to the effort, there is no doubt that the

leadership provided by Virginia Tech was instrumental in the success. During my visit to Richmond for Higher Education Advocacy Day in January, my faculty colleagues and I discussed the pending legislation with virtually every legislator with which we met. It was clear to me from those conversations that Virginia Tech had led the charge.

Our challenge will be to show everyone that we can fulfill the commitment to improving the quality of the institution, given the increased flexibility and control of our finances and administrative operations. I can assure you that the Faculty is poised and prepared to do our part. I'll repeat what I said in November – support the faculty and we'll be successful at the things we do best, thus enabling the University as a whole to achieve the stature envisioned by the plans that President Steger and Provost McNamee have laid out and that this Board has endorsed.

## **Faculty**

First I feel I need to address the situation regarding the pending resignation of Dean Aref. I would be remiss in not doing so, given that an article appeared on the front page of the Roanoke Times yesterday, which didn't cast the situation in a positive light. As you are aware, a significant level of frustration exists among some members of the faculty in the College of Engineering. I believe in large part this frustration stems from the fact that, as faculty, we are data driven. We are accustomed to fully analyzing a situation by looking at all the data, then drawing conclusions. In this case, there was public data that indicated significant accomplishments within the college, thus there was a disconnect between the data and actions. It is also clear to me that given that this is a personnel matter, most of the details must remain confidential between Dean Aref, the President and the Provost, thus all the "data" cannot be made available. I know that President Steger and Provost McNamee are committed to the goals of establishing Virginia Tech as a top-30 institution. I also know they fully understand the role that the College of Engineering needs to play in this journey, and I believe they are committed to helping the College be successful. I know they didn't consider this recent matter lightly. Could the communication between the college faculty and the central administration have been enhanced? Yes, as is almost always the case in situations such as this. Does there need to be further conversation regarding the future direction of the college within the strategic plan of the University? Of course, and I know there will. Should we all work in a collegial manner for the benefit of Virginia Tech as a whole? Absolutely. We should learn from this and move forward. I will certainly do all I can do to help facilitate our progress.

A significant concern among some of my faculty colleagues was that we would have great difficulty attracting anyone of high quality in our search for a new dean. I'm happy to say that as it turns out, nothing could be further from the truth. Both the pool of candidates overall and the quality of the finalists, which Provost McNamee announced last Friday, are outstanding. We, as faculty in the College of Engineering, can feel confident that our new dean will be a strong scholar and leader.

I regret that my comments have focused so much on one college within the University. There are certainly many positive things occurring within the Faculty ranks campus wide. I'd like to mention just a few of them.

France Belanger, Associate Professor of Accounting and Information Systems in the Pamplin College of Business, has been awarded a Fulbright Distinguished Chair.

Michael F. Hochella Jr., a Professor in the Department of Geosciences, was named Virginia's Outstanding Scientist for 2005 by Governor Warner and Science Museum of Virginia Director Walter Witschey.

Ann Kilkelly, a Professor of Theater Arts and Women's Studies is working with Mill Mountain Theatre and Circuit Productions to present "Jazzing Women," which is an evening of jazz music, dance and song at Mill Mountain's Waldron Theatre.

Nancy Love, an Associate Professor in the Via Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and an adjunct professor of Biology, was appointed to the Governor's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee.

Nathaniel White, the Jean Ellen Shehan Professor and Director of the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center in Leesburg, was awarded the American Association of Equine Practitioners' "Distinguished Service Award" during their recent annual meeting in Denver.

Last month Governor Warner recognized 12 outstanding faculty members from Virginia's colleges and universities for their excellence in teaching, research and public service. Three of the 12 are from Virginia Tech. These outstanding faculty members are Rick O. Claus, Lewis Hester Chair of Engineering in the College of Engineering; E. Scott Geller, professor of psychology in the College of Science; and Lucinda Roy, Alumni Distinguished Professor of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

These are but a few of the many recent accomplishments and honors received by my faculty colleagues. It is an honor for me to share these remarks with you today on their behalf.

Thank you Mr. Rector.