

Faculty Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

November 4, 2018

John Ferris, President—VT Faculty Senate

Good afternoon Rector Treacy, President Sands, members of the Board, Provost Clarke, and all others gathered here today.

Buckets. I welcome the chance to talk with you, again about metaphorical buckets. The last time I spoke to you, I said that if faculty time were a bucket of water, that bucket is full. I also said that I would keep you up to date with progress and ask for help when needed. In the hope of keeping too much from splashing out of the faculty time bucket, Faculty Senate is actively working on identifying and solving some of the issues concerning demands on faculty time. In partnership with key administrators, the faculty are engaged in solving administrative problems by teaming with Theresa Mayer and Lisa Lee on a plan to get more reviewers for the IRB, coordinating with Peggy Layne on the Elements software that faculty use for annual reports, and working with Kim O'Rourke to identify approaches to governance that bring key issues before our various constituencies so faculty can be an integral part of the development process for policies and initiatives *before* decisions are made and implementation strategies are created.

But today, rather than buckets of time, I'd like to talk about buckets of money. I understand that the universities budget is complex and comprised of many financial buckets and the money in these buckets must be spent on items for which the buckets are intended. Extension money is separate from athletics, is separate from parking, is separate from buildings. Today I want to talk about how the buckets are filled in the first place and the need for us to identify ways to add more money in the "people" bucket.

In August, as a board, we asked ourselves the question, what makes Virginia Tech special? What makes us great? We learned that the students overwhelmingly identified their interactions with other *people* here on campus is what makes their Virginia Tech experience unique and memorable. Faculty, staff, and other students. It's the *people* that make Virginia Tech great.

Now, some of us in the university community are compensated quite well, but many of our colleagues are not. At one end of the spectrum, one of us makes \$77,000 a week with retention bonuses. At the same time, the minimum annual salaries for pay bands 1 and 2 are less than \$25,000 a year, which, according to the Census Bureau, is the poverty threshold for a typical family of four. Clearly the spectrum is wide and we can find examples of discrepancies and inequities between and among employee types.

Before I go any further, I want to be clear, I am *not* a liberal. I believe in capitalism, democracy, and keeping what you earn. I have a very simple-minded moral compass. Not one university employee should be making less than \$25,000 a year when one is making \$77,000 a week. Not one of us should be making less than the \$25,000 poverty threshold when millions are being spent on new buildings.

Therefore, I'm asking that the Board of Visitors

1. Find a way to ensure that the minimum annualized salary for all university employees is *above* the Census Bureau's poverty threshold for a typical family of four, currently \$24,858, and
2. Secure the funds to do as the University of Virginia has done and enact a \$450 annual supplemental benefit credit to all full-time and part-time benefits-eligible employees with annualized salaries at or below \$42,000 per year (ref: <https://tinyurl.com/UVa-Supplement>)

The implementation of these ideas may seem out of reach. And this brings me back to buckets.

My colleagues in the Faculty Senate believe that university and classified staff and instructors should be prioritized to receive salary increases over salary increases for faculty members. Don't get me wrong. Members of the Faculty Senate know that on average faculty are compensated at the 35th percentile when the university's goal is the 60th percentile relative to the university's SCHEV peers. My colleagues in the Faculty Senate also understand that it will take about \$40 million a year to correct the faculty compensation problem and I believe faculty deserve to be properly compensated. However, university and classified staff and instructors are struggling to make ends meet. Our colleagues at the lowest ranks of our pay scales report having multiple jobs and juggling decisions that include how to pay for child and elder care, how to pay for extraordinary medical expenses, or paying tuition for their children. A campus parking permit runs \$338 a year, and a single CT scan is \$400. If your annual salary is \$25,000, those two expenses alone cost 3.4% of a year's take-home pay. Just to park your car to go to work and have one diagnostic procedure.

Clearly, as a university, there are many competing factors for limited resources and none of the financial buckets are as full as we'd like.

What makes Virginia Tech great is our people, and my colleagues in the faculty senate are calling on the Board of Visitors and Administration to identify ways to fill the people bucket first, beginning with those in greatest need.