

**Faculty Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
August, 2019**

John Ferris, President—VT Faculty Senate

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

To get where I am going – where I hope we are going -- we need to look back.

Last fall I spoke about time, money, and people. I said we were well beyond the point when even small tasks can be added to the faculty workload without negative effects; that the faculty bucket is full; that each new drop pushed an old one over the edge; that every additional form to fill out or committee to serve on pulls faculty away research and teaching; that if research expenditures decrease or teaching evaluations are less favorable, it should come as no surprise.

I noted that total undergraduate enrollment had increased by about 13% in the previous 4 years while the number of faculty had only increased at half that rate.

I also said it is people who make Virginia Tech great; that students love Virginia Tech because of their interactions within our community; Advancement depends on continued attachment of students to Virginia Tech; and that faculty, who are called to serve the core missions of the university -- teaching and learning, research and discovery, and outreach and engagement – are central to the personal experience that students so highly value.

I also talked about financial buckets, as I will again by contrasting the Fall 2018 projection for faculty salaries is around the 33rd percentile, and slightly decreasing, to the long-stated goal of bringing us up to the 60th. I have heard that money in these financial buckets must be spent on items for which the buckets are intended, and while I understand that, the time has come to ask, *How are the buckets filled in the first place*, and more generally, *What can we do to improve faculty morale?*

In the past year, just as we were thrilled to hear that nearly a billion dollars would be devoted to an expansion of our inclusive state-wide campus, we also learned that two out of the three lowest responses on the employee survey had to do excessive workload and work-life imbalance, and now we face a significant undergraduate over-enrollment. Rather than a drop in the bucket, this splash comes at a time when the faculty engine has been running above the red-line for far too long.

Forgive the mixed metaphor: I am an engineer, not a writer. I reach for these images in an attempt to convey the faculty mood and out of concern that faculty frustration is turning into faculty disengagement. While there seems to be broad and long-standing recognition that the faculty workload is increasing and that our

pay is below where it should be, faculty wonder when Virginia Tech will take concrete steps to alleviate these problems. Consider salaries: I can't recall a year when either the BOV minutes or a presentation by the president or provost in Faculty Senate did *not* include a statement about the disparity between our goals for and actual faculty pay, as well a commitment to do something about it, yet the disparity remains. I believe this awareness-without-action, in this area and others, has built up a level of frustration that undermines the trust faculty need to have in our collective willingness to engage all of our problems, including those faced by faculty. When *any* issue is repeatedly acknowledged but not addressed to a degree that shows measurable progress toward a solution, it becomes illogical to trust that a solution will be found, and in this case, that faculty and the administration are truly partners in a shared endeavor.

The issues I have raised must be addressed by actions, not words.

Our focus over the summer was on preparing to house, feed, and teach the unprecedented number of students arriving on our campus as we meet. These actions were necessary and urgent and proper but we are now at a critical juncture in our development when I believe that faculty engagement is key.

It is time to address faculty workload, work-life balance, and pay.

Specifically, I'm asking the Board of Visitors to support

1. **Efficient use of faculty time.**

Faculty should only work on things that only faculty can do. Streamline training and meetings. Staff up and train staff to handle all non-faculty-required items so faculty can serve our core mission.

2. **Respect for faculty life outside of Virginia Tech.**

Create time when faculty are free from Virginia Tech obligations. Specifically, from 5pm on Friday to 8am on Monday - No contact, No meetings, No work required by our university during these hours (recognizing very few notable exceptions, such as existing professional degree programs). This is somewhat philosophical, but action by the Board of Visitors supporting this philosophy would drive a change in culture at college and department levels.

(Thanks to Board for moving to a later start time on Sunday, or Monday starts, for BOV meetings.)

3. **Compensation of faculty workload and commitment with commensurate pay.**

A billion dollars is being spent primarily on buildings and infrastructure, but faculty are still not paid at the 60th percentile. I'm not suggesting one big step, but with inflation at 2.9%, 2%-3% cost of living allowances do not move the needle. I've learned of a plan to increase faculty salaries 4.6% over the next six years (and that some tweaking is possible), but I am asking Virginia Tech to commit to 6% raises, at least 3% over inflation, every year until faculty are paid at the 60th percentile.

What makes Virginia Tech great is our people and it's time to walk the walk before faculty walk away from our great community.

Thank you