

Faculty Constituency Report to the Board of Visitors

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Rector Rocovich, Vice Rector Davis, Members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, and Chief Operating Officer Sebring:

When we last met in August, I spoke of the uncertainty that the faculty, and indeed all members of the university community, faced. As we approach the end of the fall semester, we have gained some clarity on important issues while acknowledging that there is still important work ahead. I have come to appreciate that the most important duty in my position as Faculty Senate President and faculty representative to the Board is hearing directly from my colleagues, learning what drives and inspires them, and what gives them pause. I have spent recent weeks in every corner of the campus discussing issues and helping to navigate solutions. What I would like to share with you today is the perspective I have gained in this process through the lens of the daily life of a faculty member.

Our day often begins in classrooms furnished with equipment and desks that haven't seen a significant upgrade in decades. The contrast is hard to ignore: student-athletes, some benefiting from lucrative NIL deals, sit in these aging spaces while their athletic facilities receive multimillion-dollar renovations. This disparity between our working conditions and the investment in athletics weighs heavily on faculty morale, underscoring a sense of being undervalued and overlooked.

In the classroom, we have a front-row seat to the "eureka" moments when everything comes together for a student who has been giving their best effort all semester. At the same time, we carry the weight of knowing that same student was in our office, struggling with the fact that their parents have been laid off from their jobs and wondering if their tuition will be paid.

After class, we learn of a faculty member at another institution who has been attacked online and fired or reprimanded in a politically motivated attack. By doing their job, they have been punished. In the era of social media, AI-generated false content, and eroded discourse, this scene is becoming all too common.

We return to our office to find an email invitation to speak at a premiere scholarly conference. Such an invitation is a great honor and one that will serve our scholarly mission to disseminate our findings globally. Reduced availability of travel funds and research dollars that don't go as far as they have in years past make it questionable as to whether we can attend, let alone have sufficient financial support to finish the research project before the presentation.

The current moment is a test of whether Virginia Tech will remain a place where research flourishes, and students are prepared to lead globally, or whether it will succumb to short-term pressures that erode its mission.

The faculty soldier on, perhaps out of a sense of duty, perhaps out of an underlying professional imperative in an environment in which it is increasingly hard to succeed. Time and time again, despite external forces that malign and willfully misrepresent what we do, we choose to serve the mission of Virginia Tech. In the name of our students and colleagues. In the spirit of our land-grant ethos and *Ut Prosim*.

As the season changes and semester draws to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the institutional change that is upon us, and to thank Provost Cyril Clarke for his steady leadership over the past eight years. I have had the privilege of working directly with Provost Clarke on many important efforts and engaging with him directly on matters impacting the academic mission of Virginia Tech and the livelihood of its faculty, including the ongoing University Mission Initiative regarding doctoral student enrollment and funding. This effort reflects shared governance at its best, working with faculty on their priorities in concert with the vision from leadership, to advance a common purpose. On behalf of the faculty, thank you for your steadfast commitment to shared governance, academic freedom, and the land-grant mission of Virginia Tech. And from me personally, thank you for your wise counsel and the many opportunities you've given me to make a difference at a university I love.

It is auspicious that we find ourselves in Northern Virginia today, realizing the vision led by Dean Julie Ross, who is to be our next provost. The faculty look forward to working with Dean Ross in this new role, and we are confident that she will continue to serve Virginia Tech admirably as she has in her current role. Congratulations to Dean Ross on her selection as provost; we have much work to do together.

In closing, my colleagues from across campus and the entire innovation network of Virginia Tech have one message. Amidst societal and political unease, we ask for the support of the Board in championing our Principles of Community and our academic traditions, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression, continuing to rely on a system of shared governance that draws from the wisdom of the faculty to inform the leadership vision set forth by the Board and our administration, and providing support for faculty and related infrastructure in the context of responsible enrollment growth while maintaining a high-quality and supportive student experience. Only by demonstrating an unequivocal commitment to these principles will we achieve a common purpose for advancing the future of the university.

Thank you.