

March 2025 Faculty Senate Constituency Report

Rachel Miles, Faculty Senate President

Good morning members of the Board, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Chief Operating Officer Amy Sebring, administrators, and guests. Thank you for your time and attention today.

In 2005, the university and the Board of Visitors collaboratively authored the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. In celebration of its twentieth anniversary, the five Senates at Virginia Tech recently reaffirmed their commitment to these Principles. As we navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world, upholding these values is more essential than ever. The Principles of Community describe the identity of our Virginia Tech community as a welcoming and supporting place for all. The faculty of Virginia Tech don't just affirm these principles—we embrace, celebrate, and live them. These shared values are at the core of who we are and what we do as we support our students, our colleagues, and the mission of the university.

Faculty have pressing questions about the future of Virginia Tech. Chief among them is whether the Board of Visitors and university leadership will actively uphold the Principles of Community—not just in spirit, but as a guiding force for decision-making. Amid growing pressures on higher education—both perceived and real—faculty look to the Board to reaffirm its commitment to academic freedom and the vital protections of tenure. These are not abstract ideals; they are essential to Virginia Tech's ability to serve its students, foster innovation, and thrive.

We live in volatile times, and this uncertainty makes many uneasy. Faculty are no exception. We recognize that university leaders may not always have immediate or definitive answers to pressing questions. However, it is essential for the Board and university leadership to remain steadfast in upholding the Principles of Community and ensuring that freedom of expression and academic freedom continue to guide decision-making. While the future remains uncertain, we can take proactive steps to prepare for what lies ahead. As a university community, we must unite to establish clear messaging, effective communication channels, and strong leadership that values shared governance to navigate the path forward together.

At the same time, we acknowledge the necessity of complying with laws as a fundamental tenet of serving the public interest and maintaining and building public trust. However, legal frameworks are often open to interpretation and subject to challenge. This complexity demands thoughtful, transparent, and adaptive leadership that carefully balances legal obligations with the university's commitment to fostering a fair and supportive academic environment for all.

Equally important is our duty to uphold our land-grant mission, which for over 150 years has defined Virginia Tech as a community of knowledge, discovery, and creativity dedicated to improving the quality of life and the human condition within the Commonwealth of Virginia and throughout the world. Embodied in our motto, *Ut Prosim (That I May Serve)*, these words are both literally and figuratively etched into the limestone walls of our buildings. They remind us of our shared responsibility to one another and our pursuit of common goals. Fundamental to this mission is academic freedom—the ability to engage in scholarship and teaching without interference. This freedom, safeguarded by tenure, is what allows Virginia Tech to prepare the

leaders of tomorrow. A commitment to both academic freedom and legal compliance is essential to fulfilling our land-grant mission.

Now more than ever, collaboration, transparency, and shared governance are critical. We are grateful for the communications and transparency from the university administration thus far, and we hope we can continue to build our trust in one another. We must remember who we are and what we stand for. By fostering mutual respect, we can create stability amidst uncertainty, reinforcing what makes the Hokie Nation great. This respect calls for open communication, genuine engagement, and patience as we work together to uphold our shared values.

Let me close with this. In moments of challenge, we return to Nikki Giovanni's words: "The Hokie Nation embraces our own and reaches out with open hearts and hands to those who offer their hearts and minds," reminding us of the strength and unity that define our community. No matter the obstacles we face, there is nothing we cannot accomplish—nothing we cannot overcome—if we listen to one another and work together. Professor Giovanni concluded, so emotionally, so fearlessly, so hopefully: "We will prevail! We *will* prevail! We will *prevail*! We are Virginia Tech."