

Virginia Tech Faculty Senate

Constituent Report to the Board of Visitors

Mike Ellerbrock, Senate President

June 6th 2011

Dear BOV Members,

I am pleased to offer an end-of-year report on endeavors by our Faculty Senate:

- Last Summer, we sent three letters/emails to Departments without Senators (all but ten responded) and recruited two new Senate officers to fill vacant roles.
- We nominated to President Steger 32 Senators and at-large faculty to fill open seats on 28 University-level Commissions and Committees.
- We endorsed a procedural plan drafted by Dean Karen DePauw - Vice President and Dean for Graduate Education on how to systematize reporting by Graduate Assistants who seek outside employment.
- We worked with the College of Engineering and University Admissions Office to understand the administrative rationale and campus-wide implications of the freshman bubble that resulted in an influx of 1,580 new freshmen in COE this year.
- Faculty and Staff Senates collaborated with the Offices of Transportation and Campus Services (TCS) and Vice President for Finance on possible ways of reducing the financial burden of annual parking fees, especially on modestly-paid employees. With additional support from the Department of Athletics and Budget Office, fees will increase only slightly for next year.
- Senate officers worked with campus officials in TCS to explore ways to accommodate faculty and staff who teach/work during home football games. TCS will emphasize its ongoing willingness to try to accommodate individual employee needs by advertising *available* lots (in addition to its regular list of *unavailable* lots) and by highlighting the phone number to call (231-3200) at the top of its campus email Announcement, as well as continuing to defer to the President and Provost's Offices to make any suggestions about faculty changing class schedules.
- We worked with the Division of Communications Network Services to solicit faculty input on the selection of a new integrated communications system.
- We met with campus colleagues to discuss various programs - *Faculty Reconciliation Program* – Ken Eriksson, Chair; *Diversity & Inclusion Program* – William Lewis, Sr., new Vice President; *VT Strategic Plan for the Arts* – Ruth Waalkes, Executive Director; *VT/Carilion Research Institute & Medical School* - Mark McNamee – Senior Vice President & Provost, Mike Friedlander – Executive Director & Professor of Biology, VTCRI and Cynda Johnson – President & Founding Dean, VTC School of Medicine; *Proposal to Create an*

- Online Archives for Faculty Papers* - Philip Young, Newman Cataloger; *Governor's Proposed Changes to Faculty Compensation* – Dr. Hal Irvin, Assoc. VP for Human Resources; *New Student Evaluations Process* – Sen. Debbie Smith, CFA Chair; *Update on Undergraduate Honor System* - Jason Thweatt, Chair; *Interdisciplinary Research Centers* – Bill Knocke, Assoc VP for Research Programs; *HOKIE Helpers* - Leon McClinton, Dir of Residence Life; *Conflict of Interest Task Force* - Sen. Tom Burbey
- We are pleased to have VP-Elect Sarah Karpanty appointed to co-chair the Organizational Structure Sub-Committee of the University's *Strategic Planning Task Force*.
 - Senate officers met regularly with President Steger and Provost McNamee to discuss faculty/administrative concerns, campus issues, and institutional policies.
 - Ellerbrock published an OpEd article (below) in *The Roanoke Times* clarifying public misconceptions about the magnitude of state-level cuts to VT's budget over the past decade and articulating the exemplary commitment to maintain productivity by VT employees.

Higher Education in Virginia: Faculty Keep Doing More With Less

Mike Ellerbrock, VT Faculty Senate President
(*The Roanoke Times*, April 10th 2011, H-3)

When Abraham Lincoln established the land grant university system, he groomed a public racehorse to deliver higher education throughout the countryside. With a prolific legacy in urban neighborhoods and rural villages, that racehorse runs today on a low-carb diet.

I am afraid that this reality was downplayed in Wade Gilley's commentary (*Virginia's doing well by higher ed*, April 4th). In his commendable attempt to contrast and compare academic versus auxiliary budgets at Virginia's public universities, Gilley's figures obfuscate the fact that our academic resources funded by the state have fallen in absolute, not just relative, terms.

Today, Virginia Tech functions with \$51 million less state support for academic programs than in 2000-01. In this last decade, state support per Virginia student at Virginia Tech has dropped by 35% in absolute terms and by more than half when adjusted for inflation. This has created significant stress on the institution as well as increased the share of the cost borne by students.

Our faculty are pleased to see higher education resurface as a priority in the Virginia budget resulting from the 2011 session, especially in the current economy. However, it will take more than one session to turn the tide.

Even with the additional state support from the 2011 Session of \$3.4 million, the Commonwealth will only support 28% (less than half of Gilley's inaccurate assertion) of the Educational and General program of the University Division, the core budget by which we will educate students at Virginia Tech in 2011-12. Larger budget cuts loom in the near future. Unless alternative revenue can be secured, state budget reductions mean fewer course sections, more students per faculty member, and increased teaching loads for instructional faculty.

Auxiliary programs such as athletics, dorms and dining, etc., are integral features of campus life, yet separate self-sufficient enterprises, as they should be. The fact that they have grown significantly in recent years does nothing to fund academic programs.

In light of the General Assembly's commitment to free enterprise and reduced government, it is a violation of conservative political principles to supervise the tuition rates set by individual institutions. To simultaneously cut budgets and urge restraint on tuition rates – while pushing us to increase enrollments - ties both arms behind our backs.

Our faculty and staff are grateful for our jobs. We appreciate Gov. McDonnell's commitment to halt the bleeding. However, let it be known that Virginia Tech thrives not because we work for the money, but in love of advancing students, knowledge, and future generations' quality of life, sustaining Lincoln's vision.

My peers maintain high spirits, pursue principled endeavors, and uphold noble values despite a decade of erosion in public financial support. Though we appreciate last year's one-time bonus of three percent (primarily funded internally by the university), we have not received a permanent pay raise since 2007.

With good intentions, Gov. McDonnell enacted this year an increase in retirement contributions made by state employees into the Virginia Retirement System to protect its solvency. However, no adjustment was made for the majority of our faculty enrolled in privately-managed Optional Retirement Plans, which involve more risk. This odd situation creates a disparity in long-term compensation that is not based on individual faculty merit.

Our faculty, staff and administrators are all doing more with less, becoming ever more "efficient" as Richmond has relentlessly requested. Many of our colleagues have departed to other institutions for more lucrative positions, leaving unfilled faculty offices throughout our hallways. Undaunted, Hokie professors refuse to do less with less.

Personally, my salary is \$11,000 less this year than last year due to budget cuts that necessitated a reduction from twelve-month to nine-month contracts for me and many fellow colleagues. With one-sixth of a secretary to assist me, I teach five large courses per year. Despite class enrollments of 150-250, I remain committed to learn my students' names and give them the attention they deserve.

We strive to prepare students and the Commonwealth to be globally competitive in the 21st century economy. Faculty members throughout Virginia's colleges and universities remain one of the Commonwealth's Most Valuable Players.

Virginia Tech amazes me. By all measures, the fruits are evident. Applications continue to rise, incoming students' qualifications soar, professors earn prestigious awards in their fields, burgeoning sponsored grants verify our scholarly reputation, donors' contributions bespeak admiration for the institution, blooming diversity enriches our vision, employers praise our graduates, and our campus culture manifests love and compassion around the drillfield. Abraham Lincoln knows our soul. This racehorse won't quit.

Closing Comments

It has been my experience during the past 20 years here that VT is blessed with people of character from top to bottom, including our students and BOV. Bigger than any of us, this institution thrives because of us. Insights gained in my year as Faculty Senate President have deepened my sense of privilege at being a Hokie. In gratitude, I shall close with my Commencement Invocation:

With hopeful hearts we chose this vibrant campus as the field of inquiry on which we transform facts into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom;

With humble hearts we thank the family and friends who formed us, donors and taxpayers who invested in us, and colleagues who inspire us;

With healthy hearts we reap the harvest of Tech's fertile labs and fruitful fields;

With heavy hearts we mourn the loss of fellow classmates and teachers whose journeys ended short of that hallowed stage;

With holy hearts we wisely bow to the sacred presence in those we meet;

With happy hearts we celebrate the academy's eternal gifts of learning, discovery, and engagement with creation;

And with Hokie hearts we pledge as alumni to use heaven's grace to forever live Ut Prosim in service of others!

Amen