

The VP Is In

November 10, 2010

As part of my effort to give the campus insight into what is on the minds of our students, here is the latest report from my "The VP is In" session on November 10.

During the first part of the session, I again heard high praise for the expansion of the McComas recreational facilities and for the dining program. Students thought the possibility of switching D2's Sunday hours from noon-8:00 to 11:00-7:00 would be a good move. They enthusiastically endorsed some of the energy reduction approaches we are using in campus buildings. Of special interest was our decision to build a new student center and turn Squires into an academic center. As you might guess, the next questions were "Where?" (we're currently considering at least three possible sites) and "When?" (probably not until 2017 due to the university's debt capacity ratio).

It was exciting to hear that the some of the profits from the sale of Hokie Effect shirts this year will be going to cancer research and that students will help select next year's Hokie Effect shirt designs by voting as part of the SGA elections in the spring (talk about great student input!).

We had a long discussion about alcohol misuse and abuse and covered: the alcohol scene when I was in college in the mid-60s vs. the scene today, the need for concrete consequences for inappropriate behavior, the possibilities for more community service, how students tend to respond on the basis of what they see rather than what they know, Good Samaritan approaches, bystander intervention, and the phenomenon of "I only had one drink...a 'Rail'" (actually equivalent to six drinks!).

Parking is always on students' minds. This month there were kudos for how well the new parking garage is helping to address parking problems, but the complaint was "why are parking ticket fines so high?" (Answer: Parking Services is an auxiliary and must raise its own revenue to meet all of its expenses. So, parking fines could be lowered, but doing so would require raising parking fees even higher. Parking Services has to strike a balance between how high fines are vs. how high fees are.)

Sometimes I hear about pet peeves. This month the one I heard about was "the constant drip in the Pamplin Atrium-why can't it be fixed so that the bucket can be taken away?" I'll refer that to my colleagues in Facilities to work on!

Several faculty members were singled out for praise for their excellent teaching: John Boyer, "Roger" Chang, and Art Keown. At the same time, the students were very vocal in wanting more applied approaches to teaching, more interactive classroom environments, and the elimination of classes which are "boring, recitative, and irrelevant." It concerned me that so many of the students at the session expressed an opinion that even though they "love the atmosphere at Virginia Tech," they feel that their "real opportunities are not in the classroom."

Let me encourage some dialogue about this as I see you around the campus!

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