

NEWS & INFORMATION

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A message to the Virginia Tech community from President Tim Sands

The following is a message to the Virginia Tech community from President Sands sent on Nov. 28.

More than a year ago, we began an important conversation about our future, one without the constraints of today's perspectives and perceived barriers. Thousands of you participated in *Envisioning Virginia Tech – Beyond Boundaries*, led by an outstanding steering committee and several work groups whose dedication and enthusiasm exceeded my expectations. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and resources to this initiative. The outcome so far, including the “contained chaos” I mentioned in my State of the University Address, exemplifies the Virginia Tech spirit of innovation.

I have reviewed the committee's work and am pleased to present the Beyond Boundaries Visioning Report to the university community. I know this exploratory vision will evolve as we experiment with new models and alter existing practices, but the report provides a useful framework to guide our planning efforts. The report also provides a clear path for how Virginia Tech will navigate the changing landscape of higher education to enhance our standing as a global land-grant university.

As I noted in my letter to the university community last spring, the Beyond Boundaries work will not sit on a shelf. Many of the ideas that evolved during the visioning process have already gained traction and are having a wide-ranging impact on our community.

--The concept of the **VT-shaped student** has become the cornerstone of our vision for the future. Our graduates will have exceptional disciplinary preparation and interdisciplinary capabilities driven by deep purpose and engagement. Experiential learning and service in the spirit of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) will continue to be a hallmark of the Virginia Tech experience.

--We are exploring new curricular designs through **Pathways to General Education and Destination Areas**. The Beyond Boundaries vision includes interdisciplinary efforts through which Virginia Tech will address global problems in the future. Destination Areas and related external partnerships and faculty synergies will help make this concept a reality.

--The importance of **Cross-Sector Partnerships** with external organizations has been a recurring theme. We are working to develop an even greater blend of living, learning, and research environments with partner organizations that leverage shared resources on a global scale. This includes establishing the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine as our ninth college and the expansion of the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, forming the centerpiece of a new Health Sciences and Technology campus in the Roanoke Innovation Corridor. In addition to providing experiential learning opportunities for an estimated 500 undergraduate and 500 graduate and medical students, the campus will strengthen our ability to drive transformative research at the intersection of health sciences and technology.

--We are advancing research commitments in the **National Capital Region** (NCR) and will continue to develop this area as a platform for global partnerships. We are already seeing Beyond

Boundaries-focused partnerships, including the announcement this fall of the Qualcomm Thinkabit Lab at Virginia Tech and the MetroLab Network for “Smart Cities.”

--We are accelerating our efforts to become more **inclusive and diverse**. For our vision to succeed, we must be more accessible to the best and the brightest prospective students and faculty, and our campus must reflect the diversity of our commonwealth and the world in which our graduates will live and work.

I am confident Beyond Boundaries will expand upon these achievements in the months to come. I have asked Alumni Distinguished Professor Rosemary Blieszner to remain engaged as the chair of an advisory group that will advise me on ways to move the Beyond Boundaries vision toward implementation. In year two, I have asked the advisory group to recommend metrics to monitor the success of Beyond Boundaries outcomes and to design a continuous planning structure that removes existing barriers and boundaries to individual, team, and university-wide action. Going forward, I have taken the following steps to support the success of the Beyond Boundaries vision.

--The provost and I have established the Beyond Boundaries Scholars program, a one-to-one match for current-use gifts to Virginia Tech to create operating scholarships for high-achieving students and students from underrepresented groups. This will double the impact of current-use gifts and create scholarships ranging from \$4,000 to \$13,000 per year. It will provide immediate support for our efforts to lower barriers to highly qualified and underrepresented applicants.

--We will reconsider the ways in which we offer experiential learning. How is experiential learning defined, implemented, and assessed? And, how will we scale up these experiences so that all students have the ability to participate in meaningful experiential learning without financial or other barriers? I have asked Jill Sible, professor of biological sciences and assistant provost for undergraduate education, to engage the university community in a discussion around finding new ways to embed and implement experiential learning opportunities.

--Our provost, deans, and the Directors of VAES and Virginia Cooperative Extension are working closely with industry partners and community leaders around the Commonwealth to expand the reach and impact of our network of Cooperative Extension offices and the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station sites in the spirit of Beyond Boundaries.

--Provost Thanassis Rikakis will continue to support cross-cutting academic strengths that will advance academic quality, best prepare students, and boost our reputation globally. As a land-grant university, we are in the unique position to approach academic preparation through the lens of meaningful and applied service based on academic foundations and principles of scholarly engagement.

--In support of the advisory group, I have asked the Office of the Senior Fellow for Resource Development to continue to provide research and analysis that advances these goals. We will also continue the Beyond Boundaries Presidential Lecture Series, which will invite thought leaders to inspire disruptive and transformational approaches to globalization and the

changing landscape of higher education. Our first two speakers, Facebook's Regina Dugan and University of Florida President Kent Fuchs, have already delivered stimulating messages to our community, and I look forward to the continuation of this series.

Beyond Boundaries is an exercise in imagining a vision for Virginia Tech a generation into the future. This vision sets a trajectory to position Virginia Tech as a global top-100 university. We know that existing ranking systems do not adequately capture the complexities of who we are, but our commitment to *Ut Prosim* and the land-grant mission extend our capacity beyond quantitative measures into collective values and action. I hope that each of you will use the Beyond Boundaries report as a starting point to inspire, energize, and transform the future of Virginia Tech. With your engagement, these initiatives will come together to advance diverse communities of learning equipped for a 21st century education. I strongly encourage the university community to continue to develop and share distinctive ideas that will transform the long-term direction of Virginia Tech.

Daily lane closures on Research Center Drive Nov. 16-30 and Perry Street closure on Dec. 2

Sections of the Huckleberry Trail are being relocated as part of the ongoing Southgate Interchange Project. As part of this relocation, there will be daily lane closures on Research Center Drive, between Innovation Drive and Southgate Drive, Nov. 16-30 between 7 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

Research Center Drive will remain open, however, drivers should expect delays in the area.

Both lanes of Perry Street, from Lot 1 to Stanger Street, will be temporarily closed on Friday, Dec. 2, from 5:30-7:45 p.m. for Blacksburg's annual holiday parade. Traffic will be suspended on Stanger Street once the parade begins.

Vehicles exiting parking lots will be allowed access to other exits to leave area. Emergency vehicles and personnel will also have access to the area in the event of emergency.

In the event of inclement weather, the parade will be rescheduled for Saturday, Dec. 3 at 1 p.m.

Hybrid Retirement Plan participants: Automatic voluntary contribution increases to take effect January

On Jan. 1, 2017, voluntary contributions to Hybrid 457 Deferred Compensation Plan accounts will automatically increase by 0.5 percent if Hybrid Retirement Plan participants are not already contributing the maximum four percent.

Employees are covered by the Hybrid Plan if they were hired on or after January 1, 2014, have never participated with a Virginia Retirement System (VRS) or Optional Retirement Plan (ORP) plan, or have cashed out their VRS or ORP account.

This increase, called auto-escalation, provides participants with a convenient way to save more for retirement. The more participants save in voluntary contributions, the more they receive in matching employer contributions. When a participant contributes four percent, Virginia Tech contributes 2.5 percent.

No further action is required unless participants want to opt out of auto-escalation or increase their contributions.

Employees can opt out of auto-escalation through Dec. 15. Voluntary contributions can be increased throughout the year on a quarterly basis. The next quarterly deadline is Dec. 15.

To opt out of auto-escalation or to increase voluntary contributions:
-- Log into Account Access at www.varetire.org/hybrid and select "Contribution"

-- Call Investor Services at 1-VRS-DC-PLAN1 (1-877-327-5261) and

select option 1

For more information, contact the HR Service Center at 540-231-9331 or HRServiceCenter@vt.edu.

University announcement regarding Fair Labor Standards Act

The following is a message to the Virginia Tech community from the Vice President of Administration sent on Nov. 28.

Last week, a federal district court judge for the Eastern District of Texas issued a nationwide preliminary injunction blocking the U.S. Department of Labor from enforcing the new Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) overtime rules for executive, administrative, and professional employees who earn less than \$913 per week.

To comply with the new rules set to go into effect on Dec. 1, Virginia Tech was planning to raise salaries for eligible (non-instructional) employees who had been making less than the \$913 per week and who continue to be in exempt level positions. However, in light of the preliminary injunction, the university will need additional time to consider last week's ruling and its overall impact.

Please be assured that Virginia Tech remains committed to providing competitive salaries and will continue to work in the best interests of our employees. Future updates will be provided through Virginia Tech News within the week.

Virginia Tech will close for winter break; employees must use approved leave

Virginia Tech employees are reminded that the university will be closed for winter break beginning Friday, Dec. 23, 2016 through Monday, Jan. 2, 2017. The university will reopen on Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2017. All employees who earn annual leave must use annual or other appropriate leave balances to cover the four winter closing days from Dec. 27-Dec. 30. These days are not holidays. Employees must use leave to cover these days.

Supervisors must approve any exceptions, but are strongly encouraged to be flexible and fair with employees and their individual work situations and personal circumstances in accordance with existing leave and alternative work policies. Salaried employees who do not work and have insufficient leave balances to cover the winter break will be placed in a leave-without-pay status in accordance with state and university leave policies.

Certain departments may remain open due to the nature of the work; in some cases, minimal or full staffing may be necessary. Each department head has the authority to designate the employees required to work during the winter break to support necessary university or departmental operations or functions. Normal holiday compensatory leave policies will apply when employees work on one of the officially designated state holidays. During the winter break, departments must make arrangements to retrieve, on a regular basis, communications (e.g., voicemail, email, etc.) from the public and provide a timely and appropriate response.

The resolution approved by the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors is available at www.bov.vt.edu/minutes/10-06-07minutes/attachment_r_06-07-10.pdf.

For more information, contact the leave team at hrlleave@vt.edu or 540-231-9331.

Virginia Tech News is published weekly during fall and spring semester and bimonthly during the summer sessions, by the Department of Human Resources and the Office of University Relations as a service to university employees who do not have computer access on campus. For more information, or to discuss submission of items call 540-231-7643.