

## From President Tim Sands: Cooperation and Hokie spirit helped us finish the year strong

To the university community,

As we approach the end of our spring semester, I have never been more proud to be a Hokie.

A year ago we wrapped up the spring 2020 semester while still catching our breath from a rapid and unprecedented transition to remote learning and working. We had a plan in place to protect our community, maintain operations, and safely return to in-person learning. Our success depended on you — our students, parents, faculty, employees, and alumni — and the support of key partners, including the Town of Blacksburg and the New River Valley Public Health Task Force.

The journey wasn't easy. Many lost family and friends to COVID-19. Student experiences were disrupted and traditions changed or cancelled. Racial and social inequities were inflamed. We missed opportunities to study abroad and host international students. Being unable to gather for collegiate sports and other events was a blow to our spirits and our local economy.

Yet once again we displayed the Virginia Tech spirit that sustains us through difficult times and inspires us to overcome our challenges with quiet determination. When I reflect on the past year, I feel great pride and appreciation for how our students stepped up to help our community.

Students like our COVID Crushers, who provided masks, hand sanitizer, and important information about testing, vaccines, and public health guidance; our student vaccine clinic volunteers who helped facilitate thousands of vaccinations; those who served through the medical reserve and our COVID Companions; and the many who quietly assisted us in various ways throughout the year.

I appreciate our faculty members who made efforts to transition back into classrooms and provide in-person learning experiences, researchers who continued their important work under COVID-19 guidelines, and thought leaders like Linsey Marr, whose expertise in airborne virus spread continues to be shared with the world through hundreds of interviews, thousands of quotes, and more than 40,000 Twitter followers.

And I can't say enough about the leadership of our administrators and support staff who delivered key resources including more than 100,000 COVID tests, thoughtfully managed budgets to minimize the financial impact of the pandemic, and kept our community informed as the situation evolved. Thanks to those who provided academic and administrative/operational support to our students, faculty, and staff, ensuring our community was supported, engaged, and had the best VT experience possible. I especially want to acknowledge those who accomplished this work while also serving as caregivers for their children, parents, and other family members.

Thanks to this team effort, COVID-19 cases at Virginia Tech remain low. We are planning a fully in-person fall semester, and a series of in-person commencement experiences (<https://vt.edu/commencement>) will begin Monday. Congratulations to the Class of 2020 and the Class of 2021. We hope you enjoy your well-deserved celebrations next week, and we wish you the very best ahead. We will always be proud of the strength you've shown and your embodiment of Virginia Tech's spirit.

Over the summer we will continue transitioning to more in-person experiences and learning. COVID cases in our region continue falling, and we are easing restrictions as vaccinations increase. Our ongoing student survey on Canvas indicates that over 38 percent of the student population and 38 percent of the employee population have confirmed that they have received at least one dose of a vaccine so far. Employees who haven't taken this brief survey yet, please do so: [https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cC1gwIRFnG171Sm?utm\\_source=cmpgn\\_news&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=vtUnirelNewsEmployeeStudentCMP\\_042721-vaccine-survey](https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cC1gwIRFnG171Sm?utm_source=cmpgn_news&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=vtUnirelNewsEmployeeStudentCMP_042721-vaccine-survey).

Vaccinations are the key and, as I said in my message last week (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2021/04/president-message-042821.html>), vaccine-based "herd immunity" will be a necessary part of full-capacity, in-person operations. Please take advantage of the widespread availability of vaccines over the spring and summer so we can come together in the fall. Vaccination is our best way to ensure we all can enjoy more freedom and the activities that connect us.

I can't wait to see our community fill the Drillfield and the rest of our beautiful campuses and shake Lane Stadium again as we jump to "Enter Sandman." Virginia Tech athletics is coming back strong after a challenging year, launching the \$400 million Reach for Excellence campaign with a vision to be championship contenders in all sports.

As we complete one of higher education's most challenging years, your hard work and dedication made it possible for us to fulfill our land-grant mission when the community, the commonwealth, and the nation needed us most. There is much to look forward to as we develop exciting new spaces for learning, research and engagement, including the new Innovation Campus, which just yesterday announced the largest corporate commitment in the history of the university.

Take pride in what you've accomplished, take care of yourselves, and enjoy the summer. I'm looking forward to being together in the fall as we kick off an exciting new semester and the beginning of our sesquicentennial celebration.

Be committed. Be well. Thank you, Hokies!

Tim Sands, President

## 2021 Staff Appreciation Day update

Since 1993, Virginia Tech has celebrated the hard work and dedication of more than 4,300 staff and wage employees by holding a Staff Appreciation Day. Historically the event offers a wide range of activities, lunch, music, and more that draws a large crowd of employees, vendors, and volunteers.

Unfortunately, to continue to protect our campus community during the COVID-19 pandemic and follow social distancing guidelines in place, we cannot host an in-person celebration.

While this year's event will not be held, we again want to thank our valued employees for their dedication to our university and the campus community.

Please direct any questions to the HR Service Center at [hrrservicecenter@vt.edu](mailto:hrrservicecenter@vt.edu) or 540-231-9331.

## Open enrollment for health insurance and flexible spending accounts is May 3 - 17

Open enrollment for state-provided health insurance and flexible spending accounts (FSA) ends May 17. Any changes made during open enrollment will be effective July 1, 2021. No action is required for employees who wish to continue the same insurance elections; however, FSA, including dependent care accounts, must be renewed each year.

The Virginia Department of Human Resources Management (DHRM) has mailed open enrollment information packets to employees' home addresses.

Employees are strongly encouraged to submit open enrollment changes through EmployeeDirect, the Virginia Department of Human Resources Management's (DHRM) electronic submission portal, and select Health Benefits Direct. Changes must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. on May 17, 2021.

Enrollment forms and supporting documents can be submitted to Human Resources using its secure e-drop box. Paper forms should only be used if online access is unavailable.

Human Resources is holding Zoom information sessions for employees to review this year's open enrollment changes. Zoom details and the full list of sessions can be found at <https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/health/open-enrollment/informational-meetings.html>. Registration is not required.

Visit <http://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/health/open-enrollment.html> or contact the HR Service Center at [hrrservicecenter@vt.edu](mailto:hrrservicecenter@vt.edu) or 540-231-9331.

## Hokie Health: Learn more about burnout and how to recover

According to a survey of 1,000 employees conducted pre- and post-COVID by Limeade Engage, 72 percent of employees are currently burned-out as compared to 42 percent prior to the pandemic.

Both the individual and organization are affected by burnout. Individuals may produce lower productivity and experience stress-related health issues while organizations may

experience absenteeism and turnover. The key to recovery is to care for one's self on a regular basis. Practices such as gratitude journaling, meditation, and regular exercise are behaviors that enhance self-care.

Hokie Wellness is offering a program on Burnout and Recovery on Tuesday, May 11, and Tuesday, May 18, from noon-1 p.m. Learn more about burnout and what steps you can take toward recovery. Registration is required for both sessions. Sign up by selecting the May 11 or May 18 session at <https://vtnews.vt.edu/notices/hokie-wellness-hokie-health-burnout.html>.

Hokie Wellness (<https://hokiewellness.vt.edu/>) serves Virginia Tech to foster a healthier community by providing prevention services, education, outreach, and resources. For questions or if you want to join the Hokie Wellness Google group to stay up to date with monthly updates, contact the team at [hokiewellness@vt.edu](mailto:hokiewellness@vt.edu).

## How to get a COVID-19 vaccine: First and second dose information; upcoming Lane Stadium clinics

Upcoming clinics at Lane Stadium will be open to all university and community members seeking first and second doses.

- May 6, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. (Moderna and Pfizer second doses available); schedule a first dose\*; second doses - walk-in only
- May 11, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (Moderna and Pfizer second doses available); schedule a first dose\*; second doses - walk-in only
- May 18, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. (Moderna and Pfizer second doses available); schedule a first dose\*; second doses - walk-in only
- \*Links to schedule the first dose is available at <https://vtnews.vt.edu/notices/UR-howtogetvaccine.html>

For information on upcoming clinics in the NRV, paperwork to complete, and how to schedule a first dose appointment at one of the clinics in the region, visit <https://vtnews.vt.edu/notices/UR-howtogetvaccine.html>. Second dose participants do not need an appointment.

Logistics for attending a vaccine clinic at Lane Stadium

- Enter at Gate 3 in the South End Zone.
- Park in the Stadium Lot. Enter the lot from Sterrett Drive.
- Arrive as close to your appointment time as possible.
- Bring: ID/Hokie Passport. First-dose participants MUST also bring their printed, completed, and signed forms: COVID-19 encounter form and Under 18 Consent form (if applicable). If using a fillable PDF, please be sure your full information is not cut off.

Additional resources to schedule and receive a COVID-19 vaccine, either for a first or second dose include:

- **VaccineFinder.org** gives results of vaccines available by location and information on how to sign up for a vaccine at a pharmacy and other COVID-19 partners.
- NRV clinics: All university members in the NRV region can sign up for ongoing clinics in the area. In most instances, first dose appointments can be scheduled online; second doses are available for walk-ins.

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