

[News](#) | [Giving](#) | [Libraries](#) | [Maps & Locations](#) | [A to Z Index](#) | [University Status](#) | [Hokie SPA](#) | [Canvas](#) | [My VT](#) | [We Remember](#)

□ [Virginia Tech / 2017 State of the University](#)

# Transcript: 2017 State of the University



As prepared for delivery.

Thank you Seyi and Brett. Good afternoon everyone!

I'm pleased to join Laura and our son, KC, in welcoming you to the Blacksburg campus and a new academic year. What an exciting day to be in Blacksburg! We have ESPN outside and the Jimmy Kimmel show on campus. Isn't it great to be a Hokie?

Thank you for spending time with us this afternoon in the Moss Arts Center. Every time I look up in this theatre, I am reminded of the beauty at the intersection of art, design, and engineering (not to mention our natural resources!).

I also want to welcome our remote audiences in Roanoke, the National Capital Region, and on the web. A special welcome to our Alumni Board of Directors, the College of Engineering Committee of 100, and the Alumni Advisory Council.

This afternoon I would like to take a few minutes to celebrate our successes over the past year and to share my perspectives on the opportunities and challenges ahead as we strive to become a leading Global University in the spirit of the engaged land-grant institution that we are today.

Before we get into all that, I want to welcome everyone who is here for the first time. Please welcome our new students, faculty and staff.

Members of our board of visitors are here - would you please stand as I call your name. C.T. Hill, Anna James, thanks again to Seyi and Brett, our undergraduate and graduate reps, for being here and for introducing me, and welcome to our faculty representative Dr. Hans Robinson, and our staff representative, Robert Sebek.

We have new leaders who have either joined us recently or will be joining us soon. In less than two weeks we'll be welcoming Richard Blythe - Dean of the College of Architecture & Urban Studies, who will be joining us from the RMIT University School of Architecture and Design in Melbourne, Australia. Today I'm pleased to welcome Julia Ross - Dean of the College of Engineering, Luisa Havens - Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, And Rosemary Blieszner - who is taking on the role of Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. I wish I could individually recognize everyone who has made our success possible. To each and every one of you, thank you for all you've done, and all you will continue to do to make Virginia Tech the best comprehensive land-grant research university in the world!

It is your devotion to this institution, your talents, and your compassion that have made Virginia Tech strong and resilient. This strength is evident in our Principles of Community, and it is what will get us through the challenging year ahead. And while I won't stop here to list the issues and controversies that characterize this time in our nation and at our institution, I will observe that we will come through stronger, and each challenge will represent an opportunity to listen, to educate, and to lead the way forward by example.

I want to take a moment to recognize some of the individuals whose leadership has "moved the needle" in several very important areas. Leaders such as Menah Pratt-Clarke, vice president for strategic affairs and vice provost for inclusion and diversity. Menah couldn't be here today, but I want to take a moment to recognize her work.

She has been instrumental in our recognition as a Diversity Champion by Insight Into Diversity for a second year in a row. With her guidance, we are welcoming 15 new underrepresented faculty to Virginia Tech this year, the most ever. She brought ExploreVT & the Black College Institute to Virginia Tech this year. And InclusiveVT's Project 2022, is off to a great start, setting ambitious milestones for our institution regarding race, gender, and economic diversity. We are committed, we have momentum, but we must not let up. Inclusion and diversity are core to our role as an engine for social and economic mobility, for attracting talent from the broadest pools possible, and for ensuring that all of our students have on-campus experiences that prepare them for the world they are about to enter. InclusiveVT is our institutional and individual commitment to Ut Prosim in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence.

Let me also call out Charlie Phlegar, Vice President for Advancement. Charlie joined us two years ago. He's an alumnus - a "double Hokie." This is our second year of record fundraising, with \$162 million in new gifts and commitments, more than twice what we raised just two years ago. We just announced a record 15 million dollar scholarship donation from the Clark Foundation for high-achieving underserved and underprivileged students. I'm proud that our leaders believe in our vision enough to support it personally. This year 100% of the members of our President's Council - Deans, VP's and Institute Directors - made financial contributions to the university. We have a very effective advancement structure, and many hardworking individuals inside all of our colleges who are making things happen. This is a **great start**. We still have a long way to go and much more work to do.

And while our advancement team is building relationships, it is the vision of what Virginia Tech could become that is driving the commitment that our friends and alumni are demonstrating. Thank you!

I especially want to thank our Provost, Thanassis Rikakis, for his tireless work in collaboration with our deans and institute directors to advance our academic enterprise in alignment with the Beyond Boundaries vision. Together with our faculty, they have launched five Destination Areas: Adaptive Brain & Behavior, Data & Decision Sciences, Global Systems Science, Integrated Security, and Intelligent Infrastructure for Human-Centered Communities

Our Destination Areas connect our strengths across broad themes so that we can become a DESTINATION for top talent and partners in the commonwealth, the nation and around the world. They build on the interdisciplinary research tradition of our successful institutes and centers, allowing for richer and ever more impactful opportunities. All are designed to build that dynamic cross-cutting layer that will define the Virginia Tech of the future. And each Destination Area traverses the disciplines, encompassing all three mission areas of the university, including teaching and learning at the graduate, professional and undergraduate levels. Together they form a network of strengths, allowing us to quickly respond to emerging complex problems.

To give you a sampling of new undergraduate courses: this fall, our faculty are offering: Under Intelligent Infrastructure and Human Centered Communities we have a classed called “The Future is Now, Reinventing Community in the 21<sup>ST</sup> Century”. Under Data Analytics and Decision Sciences we are offering “Intro to Data in the Social Context”

Also under D&D - we have a course called “Data in our Lives: Critical Thinking with Data” It’s courses like these that open a window to the world our students will lead in the future.

Our Destination Areas also require world-class shared facilities and resources, and our Alumni and Friends are stepping up. We’re about to begin construction on buildings that will focus on Intelligent Infrastructure and Construction thanks to the generosity of John Lawson, Russell and Brett Hitt, and other industry professionals who see our vision’s potential.

Speaking of Alumni and Friends, this has been a very good year for connecting and reconnecting. We were honored to have two outstanding technology leaders speak at spring commencement - engineering alumna Regina Dugan, the former head of DARPA who now leads Facebook's technology development, and Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg. We're also privileged to have one of the honorees from our spring 2016 commencement with us today. Irving Peddrew is an alumnus and great friend to the university. He was the first African-American student to attend Virginia Tech. Mr. Peddrew, welcome! Thank you for being here.

We need to expand our outreach to alumni and friends, especially our alumni. They know, better than anyone, how a Virginia Tech education can improve lives. We have some of the most loyal alumni in the country, but only 12% support the university financially. Although that is up from 9% two years ago, that's low compared to our peers. In our vision for the future, private support is vital. That's why we need to achieve 22% alumni giving by 2022 - What a great way that will be to celebrate our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

There are many reasons to be excited about Virginia Tech in 2017. Freshmen applications are on the rise. We have set records each of the last three years. This is because we are getting the word out. The outcomes for our graduates are outstanding, and we are offering degrees and student experiences that are tailored for this century. For example, we are leading Virginia in STEM-Health graduates, with 24% of the total for the state. This record interest has yielded a record entering class - bigger than we expected.

We are near the top of every ranking that focuses on value. For example, this past July, Money ranked Virginia Tech #23 in Best Colleges for Your Money of all public and private institutions in the US. This ranking was based on quality, affordability and alumni success.

We are also near the top when it comes to broader outcomes and the student experience. Earlier this month, Niche ranked Virginia Tech 5<sup>th</sup> out of 666 Public Universities in America and #1 among the public land-grant universities. We were #2 in campus food and #3 for our Blacksburg campus out of more than 1,300 universities. Princeton Review ranked Virginia Tech #1 in the category of "Students Love their School."

You don't get a number-one ranking in that category without a lot of hard work. Vice President for Student Affairs Patty Perillo and her DSA colleagues do an incredible job. Patty, thank you, and your team, for the work you do!

Virginia Tech is all about Ut Prosim, and we are pleased that in Washington Monthly's "Public Good" ranking of universities, we made the top 10 among public universities and the top 20 overall, our highest ranking ever by that publication.

And in the traditional rankings of US News & World Report, Virginia Tech made the top 25 publics again, tied for our highest ranking ever.

Finally, a number of our academic programs achieved top-10 recognition this year - and please bear with me, it's a **long** list!. Our Undergraduate Architecture program is ranked #4 in the US by Design Intelligence. Our Hospitality and Tourism Management program in the Pamplin College of business is ranked #8 in the world by the Academic Rankings of World Universities and #6 in the world by QS. Aerospace Engineering is #10 in the world in the Academic Rankings of World Universities. We have been ranked #1 in the US for the past three years by USA Today College in the category of Natural Resources and Conservation...and congratulations to Dean Winistorfer and CNRE for crossing the 25-year milestone! US News has ranked undergraduate programs in Biological/Agricultural Engineering, Civil Engineering and Industrial/Manufacturing Engineering in the top 10. US News has also ranked our graduate programs in Civil, Environmental and Industrial & Systems Engineering in the top 10. Our Management Information Technology online Masters program is #2 in the US. And our Evening MBA program in the National Capital Region is #7. I really appreciate Dean Robert Sumichrast and his Pamplin faculty for leading Virginia Tech to the top tier of these business rankings. Congratulations to our deans, department heads & chairs and faculty for distinguishing Virginia Tech nationally and globally.

By working across boundaries, we are continuing to, in the words of coach Buzz Williams, #getBETTER.

The Virginia Tech learning experience can lead you to unexpected places.

Ella Rak could have done many things after she graduated with degrees in Dairy Science and Animal & Poultry Science this past spring, including attending our Vet Med school. She chose a different path, taking her Hokie Spirit all the way to Cameroon - Before she left, I had a chance to talk to her, and I asked - "what led her to forego the Vet Med opportunity and dedicate two-and-a-half years to service?" <<Ella Rak Video>>

One of our Cadets, Gregory House, also hopes to use his knowledge to help people in disadvantaged nations. He's currently working with Dr. Marc Edwards -- leading a project to make sure tap water is safe in homes that were hit by hurricanes and flooding in Texas and Florida. And this past summer, Cadet Jacob Steblein spent a month in Poland working with their Air Force Academy and training with a multinational brigade. He's working toward a career in military intelligence.

General Fullhart, those are just two examples of the remarkable individuals who make up our Corps of Cadets and the unique experiences the Corps offers - thank you for your leadership, and thank you to the Corps for representing our heritage of honor and service every day.

And congratulations on the spectacular transformation of the Upper Quad, including the new location for our first student, Addison Caldwell!

I've been very proud of our student-athletes over the past three years - and not just because they're winners. Over the summer, 11 student-athletes traveled to Rwanda to work with school children there. There are many more examples of character and service I could talk about if we had the time. One of the reasons our student athletes excel, is that they have great leadership. We appreciate Whit Babcock for everything he's doing. And welcome to some new leaders in athletics; Coach John Szefc - Baseball program, Coach Tony Robie - Wrestling, And Coach Jill Lytle Wilson - Volleyball. We appreciate all our great coaches...and speaking of great coaches, Coach Fuente and his team have really been bringing out the lunch pail this season, haven't they?

Are we excited about playing Clemson tomorrow night? And welcome to ESPN GameDay, which is outside setting up on Alumni Mall behind Addison Caldwell for their live broadcast tomorrow.

In a nutshell, the lunch pail philosophy is what Envisioning Virginia Tech, Beyond Boundaries, is about - focusing on our strengths and working hard to continuously get better. Beyond Boundaries began in 2015 as an opportunity to envision Virginia Tech 30 years from today, as a top-100 global university and a leading engaged institution in the spirit of the land-grant university. We have defined that “North Star” and we are focusing now on defining a trajectory to that Virginia Tech of the future, taking our first steps toward that vision.

We have developed a Framework for the Future. First among the Beyond Boundaries themes is the VT-shaped student experience. Virginia Tech is already known for disciplinary depth, interdisciplinary thinking, and purpose-driven experiential learning. So let’s make sure every student has access to a VT-shaped experience. Every student should have the opportunity to learn in a multidisciplinary team with people whose lived experience and expertise are different than their own. Each student brings their disciplinary knowledge to the table, and everyone learns to communicate across differences. Employers want to recruit students who have these skills. I believe we do this well already, but in the Beyond Boundaries Virginia Tech, this cross of the “T” will be designed into the experience of EVERY student.

The “V” that supports the “T” represents purpose-driven experiential learning. We know that real-world stakes reinforce traditional learning. Having a clear objective, a deadline, and a client or community partner, transforms a passive learning experience into an intensely active one. Again, I think this is a strength of Virginia Tech: cooperative education, undergraduate research, our investment teams, athletics, the corps, and our many student competitions all provide these experiences.

But we need to embed these opportunities into each student’s experience. This means rethinking the transcript, the academic calendar and the campus of the future. And we will do all of this with the leverage of technology. If the student experience is to become VT-shaped, the university itself must be VT-shaped as well. The future Virginia Tech will balance disciplinary strength with transdisciplinary programs that embrace complex problems from the perspective of improving the human condition.



We will be inclusive, interconnected, and agile - able to quickly respond to global needs and opportunities. The world will be our campus, and our students, faculty and partners will collocate where the action is - in living laboratories across the commonwealth and anywhere in the world - maximizing our societal impact.

That's the Beyond Boundaries vision in a nutshell. It is ambitious, but now that we see it, we are moving towards it. This academic year, I have asked Menah Pratt-Clarke in her role as VP for Strategic Affairs to engage the university and our community in the development of a plan and a continuous planning process for Beyond Boundaries. We will establish goals, metrics and milestones. We will first identify what we think will not change in the next thirty years, and then we will innovate right up to the edge of that core.

Although this academic year will focus on planning, we already have much underway. We are growing our campus to achieve critical mass. We are smaller than the leading comprehensive land-grant universities, and that means many of our programs are too small to be strong in all three mission areas of discovery, learning and engagement. This growth will be strategic, and not uniform. One element of growth is already apparent, growing from about 25,000 undergraduates in 2015 to 30,000 in 2023.

This will not all happen in Blacksburg, we plan for some of that growth to take place in Roanoke and the National Capital Region. As is evident to everyone, we were extraordinarily successful at yielding first-time students for the class of 2021. We will have more moderate growth in future years to ensure that Virginia Tech maintains a small-campus feel with all of the advantages of scale. Our emerging Master Plan features several new residence halls, student centers, dining facilities, and of course, parking structures.

The faculty will grow in number as well. We have identified over 400 new faculty positions in our five Destination Areas and our four Strategic Growth Areas to be filled over the next eight years. This is in addition to an estimated 500 disciplinary hires in the Colleges.

This is the first year in our transition toward our Partnership for an Incentive-Based Budget, a new approach to budgeting designed to incentivize and reward the achievements and aspirations of academic units.

We are accelerating InclusiveVT. Our growth provides an opportunity to make a big move toward a more diverse and inclusive university community, a community that maximizes the individual's potential for personal growth and the collective opportunity for academic excellence and impact. We are making progress. This year, about 30% of our entering class is from underrepresented or underserved groups, including underrepresented minority, low income and first generation college students. This is up from 25% a few years ago and on our way to 40% by 2022. Our land-grant mission is to be an engine of upward mobility, and we plan to get back to those roots.

Part of the fuel for achieving this vision is philanthropy. We welcomed more than 130 Beyond Boundaries scholars to campus this fall. Thank you to those of you who contributed.

Our Beyond Boundaries vision will only be achieved with deep partnerships across sectors. This past year, we created a business engagement center known as LINK, under the direction of Brandy Salmon. LINK will lower barriers for comprehensive partnerships, including joint research and innovation, student internships, and philanthropy. This holistic "one-stop" approach is reflected in the partnership between the Office of Research and Innovation, led by Vice President Theresa Mayer, and in Advancement by Associate Vice President of Development Mike Moyer.

Our vision will require that we grow and expand the use of our campuses across Virginia. Over the summer it was exciting to watch the new gateway to our campus taking shape on Route 460. (it will also be exciting to see the Southgate traffic light go away...) And ducks won't be the only thing flying near the Duck Pond with the construction of one of the largest drone facility of its kind in the country. Next month we'll be breaking ground on an expansion in Roanoke, and the next phase of our Health Sciences and Technology campus. Speaking of partners, Carilion Clinic has been the best of partners for the past decade, and we look forward to the next phase of our relationship.

We've got a great group watching us today at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute. Are you folks excited about what's happening in Roanoke?

Mike Friedlander, the founding director of the research institute and Vice President for Health Sciences and Technology is doing an outstanding job - congratulations, Mike!

The research that is happening in Roanoke is important, not just because it elevates the university and our partnership with Carilion Clinic, but because it has the potential to change people's lives. Dr. Deb Kelly, a faculty member at VTC and in the Department of Biological Sciences, is one of those scientists. She's joining us from her lab in the Research Institute. Dr. Kelly, I recognize that piece of equipment behind you...I spent a decade of my scientific career driving the Model-T version of that machine. If I understand correctly, you and your team recently announced that you discovered the molecular structure of the BRCA1 mutation that suppresses the proteins that prevent breast cancer tumors from forming. Is there hope that this discovery will someday lead to a more effective treatment?

<<Dr. Kelly>>

Thanks Dr. Kelly, we'll let you get back to work. We're looking forward to many more exciting discoveries at VTCRI

Our VTC Health Sciences and Technology campus in the Roanoke Innovation Corridor will attract talent, resources and partners from around the world to Roanoke Virginia. Many of our Blacksburg programs - in fact, nearly every college - will have a presence there as well, from Veterinary Sciences to Human Nutrition to Biomedical Engineering and more. In July, our independent VTC SOM will become Virginia Tech's ninth college, allowing our partnership with Carilion Clinic to "graduate" to the next level.

We are also growing in the National Capital Region, our Urban Living Laboratory. We have a great opportunity to advance the Virginia Tech vision in the National Capital Region, and a talented team working to make this happen. Steve McKnight, our Vice President for the NCR is doing a great job.

Many of our partners are there, especially in our Destination Areas.

The NCR also offers experiential learning opportunities for our students exposure to policy makers, and ready access to global partners. Back in 2014, I talked about the concept of a “Binary Star” connecting the Roanoke and New River Valleys with the National Capital Region. To that end, we have just started operating a door-to-door bus service, and the expansion of passenger rail in our region next month will create another connection.

We also took an important step toward expanding our presence in the Tidewater region last month when we helped break ground at the Newport News Tech Center Research Park. The park is being developed by Virginia Tech alumnus John Lawson, and managed by our Corporate Research Center. It puts us in an important location - near Jefferson Labs and many of our potential partners.

Our expansion throughout the commonwealth is an important step towards the Beyond Boundaries Vision, but we must also expand as a Global University; bringing a true global perspective to the university experience, empowering our graduates to address the world’s greatest challenges, and becoming a leading destination for global talent and innovative ideas.

Virginia Tech has been a globally-engaged university for much of the last century, but becoming a leading **Global University** will require sustained and intentional actions and resources. Our Beyond Boundaries planning over the coming year will take our vision and turn it into action. Although we have much to consider, some of these actions are already apparent and underway.

Research is a critical mission of Virginia Tech and an important part of our vision to become a truly Global University. We will continue to enhance the impact of our research through supporting scholarship and by lowering the barriers to global partnerships that amplify or complement our strengths. We will recruit more talent from other cultures and nations. And we will make our education and research enterprise portable, so that our students, faculty and staff can work and learn from where the action is, anywhere in the world. All of this will take resources, but when we are successful, we will be bringing the best global talent to Virginia. And what better institution to take the lead than the one with Ut Prosim as a living motto!

Consider our history as a Land-Grant University and how Virginia Tech has served the Commonwealth over the years - through the Corps of Cadets; agricultural outreach in every county; breakthrough research in science, health, and engineering; and contributions to the arts and humanities.

Our vision honors the hard work of all who came before us, and it will be our legacy for the Commonwealth. It makes me proud to be a Hokie - what a great moment to be at Virginia Tech!

It's going to be exciting, but it will take all of us working together, so I'll leave you today with this final thought - Hokies, it's time to pick up the lunch pail!

Thank you again for being here and have a great year!