



President Tim Sands outlines plans for 2020 fall semester

To Virginia Tech students, faculty, and staff, and our neighbors across the commonwealth:

Amid a tumultuous spring in the U.S. and the world, I hope you, your family, and your friends are well and beginning to find the capacity to turn your attention to the future – a better, more equitable future.

Education is the key to achieving our aspirations, both as individuals and as a society. We at Virginia Tech are privileged to be in a position to enable that better future, and we are looking forward to returning to this most important mission in the fall semester.

I am pleased to announce Virginia Tech's plans for the fall semester. Hundreds of individuals and several working groups and task forces — at the university, in our communities, and at the state level — have contributed to the shaping of fall plans for all Virginia Tech locations. Although the plans we present here will continue to evolve over the summer with additional input and data, significant elements are firm, and it is now time for our students, faculty, and staff to shift from planning to preparation. We will hold a variety of town halls in the summer to continue to seek further input and to keep you apprised of developments.

Today we are sharing our plan for Blacksburg, where we will blend in-person and online teaching and learning in a manner that preserves valuable on-campus experiences and engagement while also reducing the potential for exposure to the coronavirus for those who are most vulnerable. Instruction on campus will start on Aug. 24 and the semester will conclude on Dec. 16, as originally scheduled. In order to mitigate the risks associated with an anticipated late-fall resurgence of this disease, we plan to pivot to online instruction and exams after Thanksgiving break.

Our holistic, principles-based approach (<https://vt.edu/ready/home.html#principles>) means that much of our planning for Blacksburg will pertain to all Virginia Tech locations. However, conditions in other regions of Virginia warrant distinct plans for each location. For example, the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine will phase in clinics and in-person instruction over the summer months. As these site-specific plans become available, they will be shared internally through list-servs, the Virginia Tech Daily Email, and online on our expanded COVID-19 site, newly named vt.edu/ready.

To our students, employees, and community members in the New River Valley, gratitude is the most appropriate word to describe my appreciation for your individual and collective commitment to serving our community during these challenging times. Your swift and persistent adherence to public health guidelines — from physical distancing, to voluntary self-isolation, to the wearing of face coverings — has limited the impact of COVID-19 in the Blacksburg area.

Our university researchers responded to the dire need for rapid testing (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/04/041320-FLSI-FBRI-COVID-19-tests.html>), enterprising students and employees used their skills (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/04/unirel-faceshields.html>) to address shortages of critical equipment (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/04/virginia-tech-engineer-and-carilion-physician-upgrade-breathing-.html>) and supplies, Virginia Cooperative Extension (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/05/ext-extension-goes-digital.html>) agents continued to serve by moving quickly online, and our campus and community hosted a federal personal protective equipment (PPE) (<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/may/headline-856494-en.html>) decontamination site. These are examples of how you stepped up when needed. The contributions of essential employees who remained on campus, the application of Virginia Tech's world-class expertise (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/03/unirel-coronavirus-expertpanel.html>) to help the public better understand this disease (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/05/eng-marr-testing-mask-materials.html>), and the care for each other that sustained us through these difficult months make us proud to be Hokies.

This strong community response provides an opportunity for a phased transition to an in-person fall semester, allowing research, student clinics, and athletic training to ramp up over the summer following appropriate public health protocols. Our faculty, teaching assistants, and instructional designers are actively planning for a fall semester that utilizes a combination of in-person and online teaching and learning that preserves, to the extent possible, the experiential learning that distinguishes Virginia Tech's "hands-on, minds-on" approach.

At the time of this announcement, the incidence of COVID-19 in the New River Valley has been largely suppressed and appears to be declining across the commonwealth, yet there are still hot spots in other regions of the U.S. and across the world. We

can anticipate further outbreaks and resurgences of the disease over the coming months. While we are hopeful for vaccines and effective treatments that reduce serious symptoms and mortality, we cannot count on those solutions in the near term. It is reasonable to assume that we will be living with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future, and during this time we must rely on each other. We will learn together how to live well and work effectively as we take the precautions necessary to mitigate the health risks for our community. We also deeply value our relationships with the local communities that host our programs and campuses. While we transition back to more traditional operations and an on-campus academic semester, the safety, security, and well-being of our community will remain the principal focus, and we will make changes in our plans and practices as conditions on campus and in our community evolve.

Our primary objective is to care for those who are most vulnerable from serious disease. As with other diseases and hazards that we live with every day, we won't be perfect, but we can attempt to minimize the risk so that the mission of Virginia Tech — preparing the next generation to lead, generating new knowledge and applying that knowledge in the communities we serve — can continue as it has for nearly 150 years. We will emerge stronger as a university and as a community.

Before I offer details of our plans, I would like to ask those new to Blacksburg, or returning to our community after being away, to be mindful of our Principles of Community (<https://vt.edu/principles-of-community.html>) and to take personal responsibility for the health and safety of those you know and those you have not yet met. For us to achieve our collective goals, we must remain vigilant, disciplined, and exceptionally considerate of others.

Life on campus and in town will be different. Adhering to public health imperatives will at times be frustrating, cumbersome, and exhausting, but our commitment to living *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) in every moment has never been more important. It will be the difference between a successful fall and a chaotic and possibly interrupted semester. If we do this right, we will manage to preserve the best of the residential campus experience for which Virginia Tech is known. Hokies can do this! You can do this!

With gratitude,

Tim Sands
President

Ready! Employee checklist

Virginia Tech is ready as we welcome faculty, staff, and wage employees back to work. To help you prepare - both before you return to work and each day before you come to work - we've assembled a checklist for you.

See the checklist: <https://vt.edu/ready/employee-checklist.html>

Download these safety apps

Hokie Ready App

- Virginia Tech's new public safety app (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/08/unirel-hokieryadyapp.html>) contains the Hokie Health survey and other emergency resources.
- Available for download on Apple or Android devices.
- University students and employees should complete the health survey every day before coming to work or class.
- Learn more about the app and survey at <https://emergency.vt.edu/programs/HokieReadyApp.html>.

COVIDWISE

- COVIDWISE is Virginia's new COVID-19 exposure notification mobile app (<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covidwise/>).
- Notifies users if they are exposed to an app user who tests positive for COVID-19.
- Read more about the app at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covidwise/frequently-asked-questions/>.

Social Security 101 sessions available in September

The Division of Human Resources is hosting a free workshop where employees will have the opportunity to learn more about Social Security. Guest speaker and Social Security representative Jacqueline Weisgarber, who has more than 14 years experience, will answer questions such as:

- When are you eligible to receive retirement benefits?
- How does early retirement affect your benefits?
- Do you qualify for disability, survivors, and spouse benefits?
- How do you get the most from your benefit?
- What is the future of Social Security?
- When should you file for Medicare?

Attendees will also learn how to use their "my Social Security" online account and other online services.

Two sessions will take place on Thursday, Sept. 17, at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Join via Zoom:

- <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/3374188929>
- Call-in: +1 929 436 2866
- Meeting ID: 337 418 8929

No registration is required for the sessions; however, attendees are encouraged to go to www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount to create a "my Social Security" account and print out their Social Security Statement before attending the session.

For questions, please contact the HR Service Center at 540-231-9331 or hrrservicecenter@vt.edu.