

**VIRGINIA TECH BOARD OF VISITORS RETREAT
MINUTES**

**Sunday, August 29, 2021
Hahn Horticulture Garden
200 Garden Lane
Blacksburg, Virginia**

Board Members Present*

Letitia Long (Rector)
Shelley Barlow
Carrie Chenery
Greta Harris
C. T. Hill
Sharon Martin
Melissa Nelson
L. Chris Petersen
Horacio Valeiras
Preston White

Absent

Ed Baine (Vice Rector)
Anna James
Mehul Sanghani
Jeff Veatch

*[*Note: For board members attending this retreat, SCHEV approved this retreat as fulfilling the requirement for additional training on board governance at least once every two years for board members at public institutions of higher education (§23.1-1304, Code of Virginia).]*

Constituent Representatives Present:

Paolo Fermin, Undergraduate Representative to the Board
Phil Miskovic, Graduate/Professional Representative to the Board
Serena Young, Staff Representative to the Board
Robert Weiss, Faculty Representative to the Board

Also present were: President Tim Sands, Catherine Amelink, Cyril Clarke, Al Cooper, Corey Earles, Kari Evans, Bryan Garey, Kay Heidbreder, Rachel Holloway, Chris Kiwus, Sharon Kurek, Ken Miller, Kim O'Rourke, Mark Owczarski, Dwayne Pinkney, Menah Pratt-Clarke, Donna Ratcliffe, Susan Short, Frank Shushok, and Tracy Vosburgh.

Rector Long convened the open meeting at 12:07 p.m. and made introductory comments, explaining that the retreat would be conducted in two parts. There was no public comment period. Rector Long thanked board members Ed Baine and Melissa Nelson for leading the planning committee for the retreat; regrettably, a recent injury prevented Mr. Baine from attending.

Part 1 began with a presentation by Dr. Dwayne Pinkney, Senior Vice President and Chief Business Officer, and Mr. Ken Miller, Vice President for Finance. Rector Long introduced the presentation, noting that this will be the first of a series of discussions intending to lead to a comprehensive strategy that will include all of the university's financial resources, including a multi-year tuition plan, to address the university's highest priorities and opportunities that arise. Dr. Pinkney explained that the presentation would not tie specific initiatives to tuition. Rather, it is intended to provide a clear framework for how decisions are made. Overall, the university's budget is \$1.9 billion from all sources combined. One component of revenue is out-of-state student tuition. The state has set in-state student enrollment in 2018 as the baseline below which in-state enrollment cannot drop. VT is permitted to grow out-of-state enrollment incrementally by 1 percent per year; out-of-state enrollment is approximately 30 percent currently. As opportunities present themselves, VT must be flexible and nimble in reconsidering/reordering priorities. The greatest use of funds is personnel costs, which consume about 80 percent of the total budget, leaving 20 percent for other expenses. Dr. Pinkney showed a slide including an illustrative, not exhaustive, list of high-priority initiatives for the next six years and another slide showing the projected pace of investment needed. Provost Clarke noted that affixing specific budget numbers to each item is very difficult because many are intertwined. For example, experiential learning may lead to bridge experiences, which may require locating elsewhere and some online learning, requiring software and IT support, etc. Ken Miller demonstrated a model showing budgetary impacts as the individual elements of revenue are varied. Provost Clarke noted that the university will explore the next phase of enrollment growth, how to increase capacity and ensure high-quality instruction. A question posed was whether VT could accommodate 500 additional students today. Provost Clarke responded that the university could support 300 additional students. Dr. Shushok noted that providing housing for more first-year students would reduce the number of upper-year students who could return to on-campus housing and would also put pressure on dining halls, counseling services, the bus system, etc. Speaking as a former resident advisor in a living-learning community, Paolo Fermin added that a reduction in the number of returning students would be detrimental to a living-learning community. Provost Clarke recalled that the goal had been to reach enrollment of 30,000 by 2023, but VT grew faster than anticipated and has already attained that goal. VT is obligated to grow computer science and computer engineering, which would mean reducing enrollment in other programs if there were not overall growth. Nevertheless, there are internal and external capacity considerations. The plan for the next admissions cycle is to grow enrollment to 30,300. President Sands noted the need to explore whether those 300 students need to be in Blacksburg. Questions were raised about the PIBB budgeting model, whether any programs have been eliminated, and how much of the budget is discretionary. The PIBB model has worked well in terms of directing funds to programs in need of them; yet, it is not nimble. The PIBB applies to academic colleges only. Dr. Pinkney added that the administrative areas went through a three percent reallocation process last year. Provost Clarke noted that SCHEV reviews all programs on a regular cycle and VT considers all programs annually to determine whether any should be discontinued. Of the \$800 million base, 80 percent is expended on personnel, but the remaining 20 percent is not entirely discretionary.

Part 2 addressed the Covid experience and began with a presentation by Dr. Rachel Holloway, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, and Dr. Frank Shushok, Vice President for Student Affairs, that covered the following topics from the perspective of challenges and opportunities encountered by students during the pandemic.

- Student health and wellbeing
- Effectiveness of online and hybrid instructional delivery
- Student advisement
- Academic standards and integrity
- Student access to learning and extracurricular life
- How the sense of community that sets Virginia Tech apart is nurtured and perpetuated

This main topic of the retreat focused on lessons learned from and initiatives accelerated by the pandemic that can be leveraged going forward.

In sum, the university learned that we can deliver services and certain experiences successfully in a virtual environment, but not develop relationships. Examples of some of the successes: In terms of student engagement, we can expand access, particularly in Northern Virginia and Roanoke. Over 1000 students happily met with a therapy dog virtually. Over 100 group fitness classes per week were offered virtually, and some of the participants would have been reluctant to attend in-person fitness classes. Orientation was entirely online, and all of the activities that typically occurred during orientation were shifted to Welcome Week, which had a tremendous turnout. Sophomore and transfer students were invited to Welcome Week this year, and that practice will be continued. Academic advising was delivered successfully remotely with the logistical hassles removed; advising will be offered through a hybrid model this year. In the career center, there was a great increase in the number of students participating in virtual information sessions with employers. There was also successful engagement of guest speakers, alumni, and other professionals virtually. Unfortunately, there was also an increase in undergraduate academic integrity violation reports, which is consistent with the national experience. This indicates that faculty remained diligent in reporting violations throughout the pandemic. However, it was learned that students are less likely to make poor choices, such as academic integrity violations, if they feel connected to a faculty member and engaged. If VT is seen as a caring community, the rest of the pieces tend to fall into place. The students are incredibly happy to be back on campus this fall. The university had a history of strong online courses before the pandemic. However, it required a tremendous amount of work to deliver courses fully online well. Some faculty were better prepared than others. Many reported that it would take them four times longer to prepare to deliver classes remotely. The number of fully online classes has increased two percent over the pre-pandemic number. A certain number of faculty need to continue online delivery due to health considerations. Paolo Fermin added the students' enthusiasm to be back on campus is palpable; it is not possible to find friends or form study groups through Zoom.

The presentations set the stage for further discussion and were followed by two break-out sessions during which the board members were divided into two groups to consider the questions below. Following each break-out session, the board reassembled for a plenary discussion of the topics.

Breakout Session 1 –

During session 1, President Sands, Provost Clarke, SVP Dwayne Pinkney, and VP Pratt-Clarke rotated between groups A and B.

Group A:

Horacio Valeiras – BOV Discussion Leader

Donna Ratcliffe – Resource/Scribe - Director of Career and Professional Development

Participants:

BOV: Tish Long
Sharon Martin
Preston White
Paolo Fermin
Robert Weiss

VT: Rachel Holloway
Chris Kiwus
Ken Miller
Sharon Kurek
Frank Shushok

1. From an employer perspective, how would you structure **internship and cooperative (co-op) education programs** to ensure that Virginia Tech graduates are set up for success in your organization?
 - a. How can these opportunities be provided without delaying time to graduation?
 - b. If they are compensated, how can students still earn course credit towards their majors?
 - c. Can they be structured so that the net financial outcome favors a reduction in educational debt at graduation?

Sharon Martin summarized the group's discussion. The topic is very timely as this issue is of great interest at the state level. Whereas 20 years ago, half of students worked during high school; today, only 20 percent of students worked during high school. Since 80 percent of students come to college with no work experience, internship and co-op opportunities are more important than ever. Employers consider work experience to be extremely valuable. However, there are several obstacles that can prevent students from participating in co-op and internship experiences. Apartment complexes typically do not permit subleasing. The absence from campus may extend a student's time to graduation if the required course sequence is interrupted. Those internships that are unpaid may not be accessible to students who would not have the means to pay their living expenses. Some ideas proposed include taking classes in the summer to stay on track for graduation, getting academic credit for the work experience, or being able to take online classes while students work. Also, employers need to open internships and co-op opportunities to a broader range of majors.

Group B:

Melissa Nelson – BOV Discussion Leader

Catherine Amelink – Resource/Scribe - Associate Vice Provost for Learning Systems
Innovation

Participants:

BOV: Shelley Barlow
Carrie Chenery
Greta Harris
C. T. Hill
Chris Petersen
Phil Miskovic
Serena Young

VT: Bryan Garey
Kay Heidbreder
Kim O'Rourke
Susan Short
Don Taylor

2. Should Virginia Tech place more emphasis on **lifelong learning** of postgraduates, including alumni? Thinking about your organization specifically, what opportunities are there for Virginia Tech to address the ongoing learning needs for your incumbent employee base?
 - a. What mode of instructional delivery (online, hybrid or in-person) or combination thereof is best suited to such employees?
 - b. Would there be sufficient benefit for employers to justify them paying for employees' tuition?
 - c. How important is it that the learning be certified by a university credential versus one provided by an organization not accredited by a Department of Education-recognized entity, and would a credential such as a badge or certificate be valued?

Melissa Nelson summarized the group's discussion. They considered the reasons why individuals would want to come to VT to pursue lifelong learning objectives: to re-tool and the VT brand. VT's goals in offering lifelong learning opportunities include revenue generation and growing the Hokie Nation. Engaging and educating alumni and the community are part of VT's land-grant mission to serve the community. Reasons people seek to re-tool include: executive leadership; personal interest, professional development, community and economic development, and preparation for mid-career change. VT's brand is based on the quality of faculty; loyalty, which includes non-alumni who want to be part of the Hokie Nation; reliability; a reputation for serving the underserved; and the positive attention brought by Amazon's decision to locate its second headquarters in Virginia. Questions to be answered are what programs would employers be willing to sponsor, and whether financial aid might be available.

Breakout Session 2

During session 2, President Sands VP Pratt-Clarke rotated between Groups C and D.

Group C:

Greta Harris – BOV Discussion Leader

Rachel Holloway – Resource/Scribe - Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Participants:

BOV: Carrie Chenery
Tish Long
Melissa Nelson
Chris Petersen
Paolo Fermin
Phil Miskovic

VT: Cyril Clarke
Catherine Amelink
Ken Miller
Susan Short
Frank Shushok
Don Taylor

3. During the pandemic, we greatly expanded our experience in online delivery, including synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid modes. Our faculty and students learned what can be done easily with acceptable effectiveness, and what would require significant investment to become equivalent to or superior to traditional in-person learning in terms of quality.
 - a. Based on your career experience and assuming that the educational experience of students often is diminished when fully online, what do you believe is the appropriate **mix of instructional modes** for Virginia Tech at the undergraduate and professional master level?
 - b. Assuming that there is a strong case for expansion of online learning, how do you think this could best be accomplished from an organizational perspective? For example, should a separate entity be created within or affiliated with the university that is devoted entirely to online instruction, or should existing units such as Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS) continue to serve as a resource in support of online learning, but in an expanded form? An example of the former is Purdue University Global (see <https://kaplan.com/individuals/earn-a-degree/>).
 - c. Should tuition for online learning be charged at a different rate than in-person learning?

Greta Harris summarized the group's discussion. It is useful to start with the end in mind. What is the goal? Is it flexibility in the learning experience? Is it to engage more citizens of Virginia in a learning relationship with Virginia Tech? Whether instruction is in person, online, or a hybrid, VT must be about excellence and service. An intentional investment of time, intellect, and resources is necessary to create the best quality. VT is at the beginning stage of exploring what is possible; this should be a priority.

Group D:

Chris Petersen – BOV Discussion Leader

Bryan Garey – Resource/Scribe - Vice President for Human Resources

Participants:

BOV: Shelley Barlow
C. T. Hill
Sharon Martin
Horacio Valeiras
Preston White
Robert Weiss
Serena Young

VT: Dwayne Pinkney
Kay Heidebreder
Chris Kiwus
Sharon Kurek
Kim O'Rourke
Donna Ratcliffe

4. Remote work, like remote teaching and learning, is more plausible at scale after the pandemic experience. Like all organizations, Virginia Tech is gearing up for a post-pandemic workforce with some mix of on-site, hybrid and remote roles for individuals and for units. What lessons have you learned (or are you learning) that we should consider as we plan and pilot the **future of work** at Virginia Tech? Bear in mind that a relatively small number of employees already work remotely full-time, from various locations within the US.
 - a. What kinds of job duties are better suited to remote work?
 - b. In anticipation of there being more employees engaged in remote work, how is this likely to change Virginia Tech's space planning in regard to its sufficiency, type and management?
 - c. How should we expect an increase in remote work to affect the market for university employees in regard to availability and personnel cost?

Bryan Garey summarized the group's discussion. They considered the suitability and impact of hybrid/remote work and the changing workforce. Meeting the requirements of the job should be first and foremost. What does VT need from the roles in the organization based on the function of a given unit? However, individual preferences also need to be considered. Remote/hybrid work is here to stay and is an important factor in recruitment and retention, so it must be addressed. This is complicated by the fact that managers and the workforce sometimes have different perspectives. Some work cannot be performed remotely; remote work is more suitable for process-driven roles. Regarding impact, it is also important to preserve the VT brand, which is characterized by service, innovation, and quality. It is difficult to maintain the culture in a remote work environment. Relationships are built through collaboration, mentorship, and loyalty. Erosion of the brand can have impacts on philanthropy and much more. Another consideration is the impact on space. If half of the workforce works remotely, how will the newly freed space be utilized? Many more organizations, including VT, are experimenting with hoteling. In a remote environment, technology becomes even more critical. Will more IT professionals be needed, or will there be a need for them to be trained differently? Security of data and equipment becomes more

important. Should employees be required to use the employer's equipment when performing work? There is also the matter of equity and perceptions of equity. At VT, some of those employees who have been required to be at the workplace every day while others have had the flexibility do not feel that they have been treated equitably. For many years, workers have been paid differential rates based on the cost of living. Should a remote worker be paid based on cost of living of the employer or the employee? Are job performance and productivity being measured appropriately? The first step in creating policies about remote/hybrid work must be to develop a list of values/principles in order to ensure fairness for all.

The retreat concluded with a plenary session led by President Sands and Rector Long. President Sands noted that disruption, such as that caused by the pandemic, brings opportunities and risks. Among the risks in this situation is the incorrect assumption that it is possible to go back to the way things were in 2019 before the pandemic. On the other hand, opportunities can be found in what we learned from our learners (i.e., students) during the pandemic. The administration will take what they heard today, begin taking some actionable steps, and continue talking with the board. The Rector reinforced earlier statements by President Sands that Virginia Tech will emerge stronger from the pandemic by learning from the experience and when possible accelerating initiatives that were planned for the future.

The retreat was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.