**Strategies for the Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Minority Faculty:
A Former Chair's Perspective**

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Preamble: *This report has been compiled for use by the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost. During the spring semester, I devoted time to working on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority faculty. What follows are my own impressions, observations, and suggestions; they do not necessarily reflect those of a particular office or department. I am grateful to Provost Mark McNamee, Vice Provost Jack Finney, and the staff in the Provost's Office for setting up meetings with department heads and faculty members. My thanks also to Vice President William Lewis and the staff in the Office for Diversity and Inclusion for the information they provided about university-wide diversity programming. There are many worthwhile diversity initiatives already underway at Virginia Tech, and it was helpful learning more about them so I could be mindful of both context and resources. I would also like to thank the department heads for welcoming me to their Lunch and Learn series, and the underrepresented minority faculty at the assistant and associate ranks who met with me one afternoon and spoke frankly about climate issues at Virginia Tech. The information they provided was invaluable. For the purposes of this report, I have focused on tenure-track instructional faculty at Virginia Tech. I am acutely aware of the narrowness of the scope of this report, and the fact that I focus mainly on underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities—though it should be emphasized that the successful recruitment and retention of a wide range of underrepresented minorities among faculty, staff,* and *students (veterans, those with disabilities, members of the LGBT community, etc.) is of equal importance. I am therefore hopeful that the templates and recommendations contained herein can usefully be applied to the recruitment and retention of members of other underrepresented groups, as well as to the recruitment and retention of majority and women faculty.*

Introduction: The Challenge

It would be safe to say that a sizeable increase in the numbers of underrepresented minority faculty (UMF) at Virginia Tech within the next few years is seen as unlikely. After all, we are struggling to retain the few we have. Salaries have never recovered from many rounds of state-initiated budget cuts. [i] In recent years we have lost some of the faculty and administrators who were key contributors to the diversity mission. [ii] At present, roughly 2.8% of faculty members are Black/African American and 3.5% are Hispanic. [iii] Numbers have been slipping for African American/Black instructional faculty, in particular. In 2006, for example, it was 3.4%. This is not to say that there aren't areas of diversity excellence at Virginia Tech. Some departments and programs have instituted effective recruitment and retention strategies, and efforts to improve the climate and increase faculty diversity have been made by academic colleges and by other entities across campus, including the Provost's Office, the Office for Diversity and Inclusion (formerly the Office for Equity and Inclusion, and, before that, the Office of Multicultural Affairs), AdvanceVT, and the Office of Equity and Access. Many department heads, however, still find that advancing UMF recruitment and retention is challenging, to say the least. Having served as chair of the English department for four years, I realize that Virginia Tech chairs and heads face a daunting task when it comes to diversifying the faculty. But I also realize that no one plays a more significant role in recruitment and retention than the department head/chair (hereafter referred to as "head" to avoid confusion). Department heads not only set the tone and priorities for their departments, they also have to implement a collaborative vision. Their interactions with faculty place them at the center of the hiring process. If a department head is uninformed, unenthusiastic, or ill-prepared to meet the

demands of recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, it's hard to make any real progress towards inclusiveness.

The most frequently cited obstacles to increasing diversity at Virginia Tech include the location of the institution in a rural setting, which does indeed make it harder to recruit underrepresented minorities; the lack of critical mass, which means that hires are likely to enter departments as the lone underrepresented minority; the relatively low salaries we're able to offer candidates; and, in many disciplines, the chronic lack of minorities in the candidate pool. If the diversity pool is almost empty, some would argue, isn't it foolhardy to dive in? In response, I would suggest that it's not particularly helpful to bemoan the depth of the pool. Our time is better spent pooling the resources we have, making a clear-eyed assessment of our options, and taking steady, incremental steps towards improving the situation. University reports like these tend to have a broad focus. Strategic plans, in particular, often list what needs be done but don't necessarily provide guidance about how to bring these things about. Operationalizing a vision, especially when it involves substantive change to the status quo, is a time-consuming, risky enterprise. An adaptive, holistic approach to hiring and retention is called for, and the creation of a dynamic, responsive diversity framework at the departmental level—recruitment and retention's ground floor—is a path to lasting change.

As an associate dean for diversity, and, later, as a department chair, I was able to work with my colleagues to recruit a number of minority faculty and senior women faculty. Looking back, however, I see there were many times when I was unable to do as good a job as I would have liked, mainly because there were so many other things competing for my attention. Heads juggle a multitude of competing interests, often with relatively little guidance and not nearly as many resources as they need.[iv] This report reflects my awareness of the challenges heads face, and offers constructive suggestions about how to make departments more inclusive and welcoming for *all* those we recruit, not just for members of minority groups.

The most recent campus enrollment profile shows that only 3.8% of students identify themselves as African American/Black; Hispanic students make up only 4.6% of the student population; Asian students make up 7.5%. 0.1% of students self-identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.1% self-identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.[v] The repercussions that accompany a lack of diversity among the instructional faculty are many: we are less likely to be able to recruit and retain minority students, less likely to retain the minority faculty we have, and less likely to be seen as a diverse enough campus to attract corporate recruiters.[vi] In spite of excellent programs like MAOP, [vii] and work by tireless diversity advocates like Dean Bevlee Watford in COE, it has been hard attracting and retaining minority students, partly because of the strong relationship between the number of minority faculty and our ability to attract and retain minority students. It's no surprise, for example, that minority graduate students applying to the MFA program in Creative Writing regularly cite faculty diversity as one of the main reasons why they applied to the university.

We often speak about the need to enhance diversity at Virginia Tech, yet it hasn't usually led to widespread improvement. Administrators and faculty have learned to speak *Diversityish*—a language that is enjoying tremendous popularity in higher education as, paradoxically, America's campuses are increasingly likely to include fewer African Americans and other underrepresented minorities. Words like "diversity" and phrases like "embracing difference" are sprinkled liberally on FARs and annual reports. The rubber hits the road, however, at the intersection of Rhetoric and Action. This is where Change resides—one reason why diversity is sometimes viewed as threatening. Genuine inclusiveness is usually accompanied by an interrogation of the prevailing culture. If we truly embrace diversity, it's a reciprocal interaction: we have to change ourselves and

our attitudes. It's not simply a question of tolerating others' differences; it's about being willing to reshape the culture in response to difference.

Virginia Tech has undertaken a number of climate surveys. AdvanceVT's Faculty Work/Life Surveys,[viii] and the COACHE climate surveys[ix] have shed light on where we stand. The 2007 report by the Task Force on Race and the Institution also included many useful recommendations.[x] But, in spite of these efforts, UMF recruitment and retention has not improved.

As someone who knows what it's like to be a department chair pulled in multiple directions, I understand how tempting it can be to push diversity to the back burner. One of the hardest things about being a department head is the sense that one is "going it alone." Close collaboration with responsive colleges and a supportive central administration can enable departments to achieve their goals. I've therefore included some practical approaches below—recruitment and retention templates that can be customized to fit the needs of departments at various stages in their diversity development. For the purposes of this report, I have made the assumption that all the department heads at Virginia Tech would diversify their faculty if they could. This isn't necessarily the case. In all likelihood, there are some heads determined to do no more than pay lip service to diversity. But I think we have tended to place too much focus on changing attitudes instead of focusing on how we do business. Change can easily be thwarted by intransigence, and we can lose valuable time trying to convince those who do not embrace the diversity mission that a campus lacking in diversity is unhealthy. It's often better just to forge ahead in hopes that the UMF you recruit will inspire nay-sayers to reconsider their positions (or, perhaps, to retire). We should avoid placing minority faculty in climates we know are chilly, however, and instead invite them to be part of supportive communities where their contributions will be valued.

The remainder of this report is divided into three sections:

1. **Section I: Background**—a brief history of faculty diversity at Virginia Tech, and an account of the methodology used to compile this report.
2. **Section II: Diversity Templates for Departments**—examples of various approaches departments can employ to diversify their faculty.
3. **Section III: General Recommendations**—a series of recommendations that can be speedily implemented to improve minority recruitment and retention and address climate issues.

Section I: Background

Virginia Tech faces a wide range of challenges when it comes to diversifying the faculty. Some of the challenges are national in scope: a dearth of minority candidates in certain disciplines, for example, and the fierce competition for minority hires. Some challenges are regional and relate to Virginia Tech's geographical location, fluctuating levels of state funding, and so on. Many of our other challenges, however, are cultural. These are related to campus climate and readiness. To some extent, these cultural challenges are unique to Virginia Tech. For that reason they are the ones we're likely to be able to tackle effectively.

During the past two decades, Virginia Tech has occasionally tried to enforce diversity using somewhat crude methodologies, some of which engendered resentment. Some of the early policies even wound up placing minorities at risk. There was, for example, a policy that provided bridge-funds to incentivize minority hiring. In some instances, however, there wasn't a genuine need for the minority candidate's expertise, or there was insufficient faith in the candidate's ability to obtain

tenure. One of the unintended effects of this program was the recruitment of minority faculty who had little chance of ever succeeding at Virginia Tech. Another college-instituted policy required that an ethnic minority serve on all major committees, which meant that the service burden on the few of us who were minority faculty was extreme. Avoiding these kinds of one-size-fits-all approaches is essential. The strategies we employ must be tailored to fit the needs of individual departments and disciplines. They must also take into account the needs of minority faculty at Virginia Tech.

In order to gauge where we are now in relation to the recruitment and retention of UMF, it wasn't enough to look at institutional history, past reports, and statistical data. There were a number of groups with whom it was important to meet.[xi] In January, I met with a group of underrepresented minority faculty from across the university to discuss their concerns and find out how the climate could be improved. Subsequently, I also met with department heads and shared with them some thoughts on how we could approach recruitment and diversity. In turn, they also shared with me some of the challenges they face. Not surprisingly, given what the surveys have told us, it became clear that some department heads are more effective than others when it comes to UMF recruitment and retention. In discussions with junior faculty it's also become clear that there is confusion about the recruitment and retention process. For example, when should UMF approach heads to let them know they have been invited to interview for a position, or have an offer in hand? Department heads were not always informed about the potential, say, for target-of-opportunity hires. It can be hard for both faculty and department heads to navigate their way through an unfamiliar and seemingly unresponsive system. This is unfortunate because sometimes there are solutions to problems if people know which offices and administrators to call.

When I met with minority faculty at the assistant and associate ranks, the words they used to describe the climate included the following: *cold, a challenge, disrespectful,* and *insular.* Many felt that proactive intervention could result in a lessening of attrition among minority faculty. Some were eager to participate more fully to "effect change" in the university and were hoping for opportunities to do so. Salary issues and a lack of diversity resources were also cited, as was the need for mentoring, the need for more "diversity champions" at all levels of the university, and the need to provide some relief for excessive service. We should remember, of course, that almost all assistant professors are understandably nervous about promotion and tenure, and frequently feel alienated by a process that can appear to be stacked against them. But the level of discontent among underrepresented minority assistant and associate professors at Virginia Tech seems more pronounced than is typical. Many had not been asked this simple question: "What is the one thing that could be done to significantly improve your experience at Virginia Tech?" Yet there are also departments where minority faculty feel valued and fulfilled. Some of us have stayed at Virginia Tech precisely because our departments have valued our contributions. But there is, unfortunately, a pervasive sense of alienation among a sizeable number of minority faculty. This is something we need to address. At the very least, when faculty—minority or majority—leave for other institutions, we want them to take a positive impression of the VT community with them, one that enhances the likelihood of successful recruitment of other faculty in the future.

Section II: Diversity Templates for Departments

Given the differences among the various disciplines, it's clear that a customizable approach to diversity recruitment and retention at the department level is necessary. It seems advisable to invite departments to set their own goals in collaboration with the university. The examples in the table take a number of factors into account, including the current climate in the department, hiring feasibility, and departmental needs. We should avoid reinventing the wheel; we can draw upon existing university resources, many of which can be helpful.

I've divided departments into three separate groups:

1. **A Diversity-Phase One department** has had very limited, if any, success in recruiting and/or retaining UMF. For these departments, the focus will likely be on fostering climate preparedness, instituting pipeline initiatives, and establishing diversity partnerships.

2. **A Diversity-Phase Two department** has also had limited success but has shown a demonstrated commitment to diversity, having made recent offers to minority candidates, though these may not have been successful due to uncompetitive salaries at VT. For this department, the focus is on making successful hires.

3. **A Diversity-Phase Three department** has had success in recruiting and retaining UMF and underrepresented minority grad students. This department therefore faces new challenges—e.g., salary compression, the need to make competitive retention offers, etc. Phase Three departments may also be able to serve as a resource for other departments.

A worthy university goal may be that a specified percentage of departments move up into the next phase of diversity development. At a department head diversity summit or at other meetings of department heads, it would be interesting to see how departments rate themselves and whether these ratings match those of their own faculty and colleges.

One of the reasons to recommend a phased approach is that it marries realistic diversity goals to assessment and thus empowers the department to chart its own course. It also makes clear to the colleges and central administration from the outset what kind of support departments are likely to need as they work their way along a phased trajectory.

Please note: If these categorizations are used as a punitive mechanism rather than as opportunities for collaborative support, they will engender resentment. I should also point out that some of these strategies are already being employed by departments. What is different about this approach is that it unites strategic plans to specific activities. My hope is that this three-tiered approach could also foster a greater awareness of the options available to departments and promote interdisciplinarity.

One of the most fruitful cross-disciplinary partnerships we enjoyed in English when I served as chair was the one the department had with Materials Science and Engineering. Brought about in large part by the late Alf Knobler's fondness for both departments, the collaboration culminated in a generous gifts to both departments from Mr. Knobler. I learned a great deal working with David Clark, and the initial collaboration between the departments led to others.

It should be noted that the potential exists for support from external agencies for diversity initiatives featuring cross-disciplinary engagement. Initiatives like the ones below may be appealing to foundations and to other agencies. (AdvanceVT's original funding in 2003 was through NSF, for example.)

Three Department Templates for Diversity Recruitment and Retention		
Dept Strengths & Challenges	**Goals**	**Strategies**
Example A: A Diversity-Phase One Dept. (no UMF; limited pool): A dept. with a very strong academic reputation but no UMF and a very small pool. In addition, no senior women faculty in the dept. Challenges 1. Finding UMF to recruit 2. Recruiting and retaining female associates and/or full professors 3. Creating a more welcoming climate	Goal 1: Hiring—Recruit a majority faculty member with a strong diversity-advocacy record; Recruit 3 minority ABD Fellows/ Diversity Scholars within three years; hire at least one to the rank of asst. prof. Goal 2: Establish connections with regional HBCU's; 2 HBCU partnerships within 2 years; establish short-term faculty exchanges [xii] Goal 3: Collaborate with other units to create an inclusive climate (ongoing)	1. Apply for funds to recruit UM scholars (racial/ethnic minorities, veterans, etc.); meet with AAEE to develop collaborative search committee strategies; identify a potential hire and submit a proposal to AdvanceVT's Visiting Scholars program; appoint the majority faculty hire to serve as the dept.'s diversity advocate. 2. Appoint a departmental diversity liaison[xiii] to recruit at minority professional conferences, to locate potential senior female profs and to work collaboratively on pipeline initiatives (e.g., visits to HBCU's with the Grad School). 3. Working with ODI, set up a series of hands-on faculty and administrator workshops on cross-cultural communication; dept. reps attend AdvanceVT Advancing Diversity workshop & report back.
Example B: A Diversity-Phase 2 Department (potential for recruiting UMF): A dept. with a strong record of locating UMF and making offers, none of which have been successful due to uncompetitive salaries. Challenges 1. Insufficient funds to make salaries competitive 2. No mentoring program 3. No diversity committee or rep.	Goal 1: Make competitive offers to UMF candidates; hire 2 in the next 3 years Goal 2: Establish a mentoring program Goal 3: Revise dept. governance to include a diversity committee and/or appoint a diversity advocate within the dept.	1. Apply to a centralized Diversity Recruitment Pool for a Salary Enhancement Award well in advance of UMF offers in hopes of making them competitive. 2. Invite the PO, ODI, and/or faculty from other depts. to assist in designing a mentoring program for all junior faculty; apply for funds from ODI to attend an out-of-state mentoring symposium. 3. Hold elections for a diversity committee and/or appoint a liaison. Their charge: to produce a detailed dept. diversity plan to be included in the annual report to the college.
Example C: A Diversity-Phase 3 Department (several UMF recruited and retained): A dept. with an established record of recruiting/retaining UMF and with access to diverse pools of faculty and grad student candidates Challenges: 1. Salary compression 2. Training for mentoring teams; service obligations for women and UMF 3. The loss of minority graduate students to universities with more competitive stipends	Goal 1: Address the issue of salary compression Goal 2: Increase retention by improving mentoring teams and offering rewards for exceptional service; assist other departments Goal 3: Continue to recruit a diverse faculty and attract/retain minority graduate students	1. Work with the dean of the college and PO to address salary compression issues. 2. Invite faculty to attend training sessions with mentoring experts; invite faculty mentors to apply for extra travel funds; reassess the effectiveness of mentoring teams by consulting with mentors and mentees; working through the college, collaborate with another dept. to set up a mentoring program 3. Work with AAEE on advertising; apply for an increase in TA stipends; offer summer stipends to TAs who work on diversity initiatives; work with HR's Dual Career Program on spousal/ partner placement.

Section III: General Recommendations

1. **Resources for Hiring and Retention—the Salary Issue**

Not surprisingly, when it comes to minority recruitment, one of the main concerns department heads have relates to salaries. Every year, a number of minority hires are lost not because departments have failed to locate worthy candidates, not because they have failed to make them feel welcome, and not because they have failed to make them offers. The offers are declined because Virginia Tech salaries are not competitive. Considering the effort it takes to search for faculty and make an offer, it is extremely discouraging when it becomes impossible to finalize the hire. Ironically, the colleges with the least competitive salaries are often the ones with the greatest chance of recruiting underrepresented minorities. Some departments in CLAHS, for example, have starting salaries so low that a competitive offer to a minority candidate could be more generous than the salaries of the senior associate and full professors in the department. For obvious reasons, this situation is an extremely difficult one to handle.

It's not unusual for minority candidates to receive offers that far exceed the offers they get from Virginia Tech. When department heads ask if extra funds can be provided to make the offer more competitive it has sometimes proven difficult for the university to offer fiscal support. This is understandable when the difference is so vast that finding funds to cover that difference would create stress elsewhere, but there have also been cases where the amount of money department heads need to make up the difference is relatively small. It's likely there are many reasons why such funds can be so hard to come by at Virginia Tech, but it flies in the face of the university's own expressed desire for greater diversity—nor is it a fiscally sound option given the investment the university has already made in the faculty members.

When college-level or university-level support has been offered in the past, it has sometimes been in the form of "bridge" funding—a solution that offers temporary relief while bridge funds last, after which departments are on their own. The whole concept of bridge funding is problematic, especially when combined with diversity mandates. It can encourage departments to think of minority faculty and minority graduate students as "fiscal problems" that need to be solved. At the end of the temporary funding period, departments are forced to cobble together budgets that contain too many variables and not enough stability. It is therefore important that minority faculty not be put in the unenviable position of jeopardizing the fiscal stability of their departments. Bridge funds, though they have an important role to play under certain circumstances (visiting professor salaries, for example), are not the best way to increase faculty diversity because they do not provide a long-term solution for departments strapped for funds.

There is some confusion among department heads about target-of-opportunity hires and whether or not funds are available to support these hires. This concern needs to be addressed. Ideally, for there to be buy-in by the faculty, the minority candidate should fulfill a specified need in the department, center, or program, which is why the minority hire made as a result of an open search is often the preferable route to take. We shouldn't forget that hires at the senior level can be very beneficial in promoting diversity and increasing a department's pool of mentors. For example, the senior women we recruited in English have made valuable contributions to the department and have served generously in key administrative roles. They have enriched the department in multiple ways and continue to do so.

It would be helpful to institute a system that rewards departments committed to diversity. Were the university to institute Diversity Recruitment Awards in the form of salary enhancements for

new hires, these could be used to make offers more competitive. Departments with a demonstrated commitment to inclusiveness would be able to apply for these awards. A department in the College of Science, for example, eager to increase the number of females at the rank of full professor, applies to the diversity recruitment pool as a way to make its offer to a woman at the rank of full professor more competitive.

The retention issue is arguably even more challenging when it comes to salaries. After years of decreasing state support, Virginia Tech's salaries have lagged behind many of its peers. The university's current goal is to reach the 60th percentile among benchmark institutions. This will necessitate a 4.1% pay raise for the next six years. [xiv] Relatively low salaries translate into significant challenges. When counter-offers are successful, heads worry about compression issues. Yet it's also true that unless Virginia Tech proactively goes after minority professors who are being wooed by other institutions, we wind up losing some of our strongest faculty members. Some minority faculty report that department administrators seem shocked to learn about the kinds of offers they are receiving. It's important, therefore, that administrators have a realistic notion of how competitive the market is. Working with the college and the Provost's Office, it's sometimes possible to make a counter-offer at an early stage in the negotiating process in order to dissuade a faculty member from leaving. As long as Virginia Tech's salaries are low, however, this problem is likely to persist.

Some faculty attrition is inevitable, of course, and even healthy. If a faculty member would be happier elsewhere, it's incumbent upon administrators to make sure that the transition is as smooth and supportive as possible. It's easy to forget that Virginia Tech's reputation is forged as much by those who leave us as by those who stay. Too often, the university has sent minority faculty away with a bitter taste in their mouths. Instead, we should aim to send out ambassadors whose words of praise encourage others to join us in the future.

Sometimes key players are kept out of the loop, unaware that there are resources to be tapped. Step-by-step instructions about how to handle counter-offers would be helpful, as would a university liaison whose primary role is to offer support to departments as they try to recruit and retain faculty. Searches are enormously time consuming. Department heads should be apprised of the fact that, under certain circumstances, resources can be tapped, if indeed this is the case. Getting into Virginia Tech's discretionary-fund vault can be like trying to get into the vaults of Gringotts, the wizard bank in *Harry Potter*. Department heads should not have to be skilled in wizardry in order to have access to funds.

A Special Note about Salaries for Department Heads:
Although the department head's role is one of the most demanding on campus, salaries don't necessarily reflect the level of responsibility a head assumes. Heads' salaries are sometimes made by converting a 9-month AY position to a 12-month CY position, with the addition of a modest stipend. The conversion-with-modest-stipend approach assumes that the service one will be doing as department head is equivalent to the work one did as a faculty member. This is both absurd and disingenuous. In departments where salaries are low, department heads are particularly vulnerable to unfair compensation. This is one of many reasons why it can be so difficult to find people willing to take on these positions. Recognizing the role heads take in the wellbeing of the university, it would seem wise to professionalize this process and pay heads what they deserve. Managing budgets and personnel, undergraduate and graduate programs, troubled students, curricular initiatives, and culture wars can take an enormous toll; and though some enjoy serving in this capacity, others only take it on because no one else in the department is willing to do so. Though the problem may be less pronounced in smaller departments, it's certainly something to examine in

larger ones. Were Virginia Tech to decide upon a fairer approach to compensation for heads and communicate openly about it, I think it would be a big step in the right direction. If we keep asking heads to do more at Virginia Tech (and we do—I'm guilty of doing it in this report) we can't keep paying them less.

2. Cross-Cultural Communication Training

Cross-cultural communication is one of the trickiest aspects of leadership, but it's often the one that is assumed to be the easiest to acquire—hence the relative lack of training for department heads and others in leadership positions at Virginia Tech. Some of those who believe they are the most gifted cross-cultural interlocutors are, in reality, the worst (though people are reluctant to tell them this because they're confident the disclosure won't be well received). It's important for administrators to know their strengths and weakness, to ask questions like "Am I good at communicating across race and gender?" "Which groups/individuals do I communicate with most and least effectively?" All of us have weaknesses; all of us need help to overcome them. For example, when a department head realizes that a faculty member prospects for tenure are not good, how should s/he respond? In the past, department heads at Virginia Tech and at some of the many other colleges and universities I've visited, have admitted they are less likely to offer a honest feedback to minority faculty than to majority faculty for fear of being accused of racism. The problem with this, of course, is that faculty members are kept in the dark while the tenure clock is ticking. When the precariousness of their position is revealed to junior faculty it can be devastating. Good cross-cultural communication, therefore, is an essential skill for department heads.

There are some excellent training opportunities offered through the Provost's Office, the Office for Diversity and Inclusion, and the colleges, including customizable training experiences for department heads through AdvanceVT. Yet because the department head is the single most important liaison between the faculty hire and the university, this training needs to be ongoing. The training sessions should be geared towards recruitment, retention, and climate issues; they should be run in a "safe-space" environment so that people know they can mis-speak without being demonized for doing so.

3. Mentoring Initiatives

If there was one common thread among the various groups and individuals with whom I spoke it was the need for a more coordinated, effective approach to mentoring. Because good mentoring is something from which all faculty can benefit—not just those from underrepresented groups—it may be one of the most widely beneficial initiatives to institute. Many departments have already adopted a proactive approach. (In English, we have three-person mentoring teams for assistant professors, and other departments have adopted effective mentoring strategies; CLAHS's College Diversity Committee has made efforts to ensure that mentoring is a priority in the college.) But though the rhetoric around mentoring is lively, the mentoring programs themselves are often uneven. According to some of the assistant and associate professors with whom I spoke, mentoring is non-existent in some departments. In others, mentors aren't necessarily supportive or appropriately matched with junior faculty. It's important to try to give junior faculty a choice about who will mentor them. Some associate professors also expressed a desire for mentors, especially now that reviews of associate professors are to be mandated. It would be helpful, therefore, to survey departments to find out how mentoring is being handled and what assistance departments may need in setting up effective programs. The most recent COACHE survey is helpful in this regard. The department survey should be tailored to fit the three different constituencies: the departmental administration, the junior faculty being mentored, and the mentors themselves. It may well be, for

example, that some mentors are unclear about how to approach mentoring; and other faculty, especially from underrepresented minorities, may be eager to have external mentors from other colleges and universities. Hopefully, this is something a well-designed survey could reveal.

Mentoring approaches can be customized to fit the needs and make-up of faculty in a department. Some junior faculty, for example, comfortable with where they are with regards to tenure and promotion, may wish to opt out of mentoring programs altogether; others may opt for mentors external to the department, assuming these can be found. It may not be possible to have mentoring teams for faculty if there are few senior faculty available to serve, in which case, group mentoring sessions could complement the work of individual faculty mentors. As an incentive, it may be helpful to institute a Faculty Mentoring Award, or some other kind of recognition to be given to departments, programs, or centers that establish innovative mentoring programs.

Conclusion:
In this report, I have focused primarily on departments and not on what else the central administration or the colleges can do to bring about greater faculty diversity. But a couple of things are worth mentioning when it comes to the university's role.

Without a greater minority presence in the upper echelons of the university administration it's unlikely we'll be able to tackle this challenge effectively. It's also clear that diversity taps into many different aspects of the university matrix: resources, salaries, culture(s) and climate, a vision for the university, and university priorities. Therefore, there is only so much departments can do on their own. Pooling our talents and resources and working collaboratively across units and disciplines is an essential component for success. The pivotal roles played by the President's Office and the Provost's Office, the academic colleges, and the Office for Diversity and Inclusion cannot be underestimated.

Many years ago, I wrote a report similar to this one for the Black Caucus entitled "A Race against Time." (I was wittier in those days.) We shared the report with President Paul Torgersen. Among the recommendations was that we hire a Vice President for Multicultural Affairs. At that time, there was no such position at Virginia Tech, which meant it was difficult to coordinate or advance diversity initiatives. A short while later, Dr. Ben Dixon was hired in that capacity, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs was established. Though modestly funded, the office has endured and, after a number of different iterations, evolved into the Office for Diversity and Inclusion headed by Vice President William Lewis and staffed by a dedicated team.[xv] As I described above, there are many pockets of diversity excellence at Virginia Tech: departments that have worked proactively to increase diversity for many years. Administrators like Dean Karen DePauw in the Graduate School, who has improved the climate for all graduate students in numerous ways. The members of the AdvanceVT team have also served as a key diversity advocates, and members of the Black Caucus and Hispanic Caucus have continued to advocate for diversity. Members of the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity have tackled important policy issues, and the 2013-2018 Diversity Strategic Plan outlines some admirable goals. There is cause for optimism.

Diversity is also a vital part of the curriculum. Virginia Tech has academic programs in a number of important fields that focus on gender, race, and ethnicity, including Women and Gender Studies, Africana Studies, American Indian Studies, and Judaic Studies. Foreign Languages—a significant component of diversity because immersive language study is one of the most effective ways to embrace other people's perspectives—has grown and thrived in recent years. Professor Jim Dubinsky is working on a proposal for a new Veterans Studies minor. The timing of this is good: the implementation of the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) is going to

necessitate the redesign and enhancement of search procedures to ensure that a good faith effort has been made to include veterans and those with disabilities in the candidate pool.

I have not been able to include some of the other issues about which we need to mindful, including unreasonable service burdens on minority faculty, the pros and cons of a diversity summit tailored to department heads, and so on. Nevertheless, I hope some of these suggestions spark further dialogue.

It is easy to become disheartened when we revisit the same issues repeatedly with regards to diversity at Virginia Tech. But it would be wrong to become discouraged when many people in the university's past and present worked hard to increase diversity under much harsher circumstances than these. We shouldn't be reluctant to look squarely at the issues, acknowledge where we're falling short, and work strategically, collaboratively, and holistically to improve the situation. Rather than using the term "strategic planning," I think that the term "strategic pro-action" may be more useful because a proactive engagement with this issue will bring about the kind of change planning alone cannot accomplish.

Drawing upon the many strengths we already have at Virginia Tech and tapping into new ones, we can work together to build a stronger, more inclusive institution for the future. Inclusiveness benefits all of us because it allows us to tap into the remarkable power of diversity and use it in a transformative way to benefit the entire community. There is still a long road ahead, but we have the ability to go much further if we decide to marry our capacity for success with our will to succeed.

When they met with me in January, the assistant and associate minority faculty who attended the meeting braved the cold and the threat of snow. They offered constructive suggestions to improve the climate while, outside the Inn, the snow began to fall. Perhaps it was fitting that the climate that day was so cold—a visual reminder of the chilly cultural climate of the campus. But perhaps the winter's chill also served to remind us that warmth is possible, too. We weren't outside; we were in a safe, warm meeting room, carefully set up for us by the Provost's staff—a place where we could speak honestly to each other about how to improve the climate for minorities at Virginia Tech. I hope the university's actions will demonstrate how much the voices of faculty are valued, and how excited we are that, in spite of the challenges we face, they have elected to be part of our Virginia Tech community.

<div align="right">

--Lucinda Roy, Alumni Distinguished Professor
May 20, 2014

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[i] The relatively low salaries and low graduate student stipends at Virginia Tech are one of the main challenges we face as we try to further diversify the community. For a breakdown of faculty salaries, see <http://www.vt.edu/about/factbook/faculty-staff-overview.html> Bear in mind, however, that salaries are much less competitive in some colleges than in others.

[ii] The university community is still feeling the loss of those who have died in recent years, including, of course, Zenobia Hikes, Ed McPherson, and Woody Farrar. We have also lost other strong voices for diversity when people have left Virginia Tech. These include Tonya Smith-Jackson, Jermaine Holmes, Kevin McDonald, and Barbara Pendergrass, to name but a few. When our numbers are so low to begin with, losing even one member of the diversity-advocacy community is a cause for concern.

[iii] Data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness at http://www.ir.vt.edu/work_we_do/demo_enroll/Faculty_and_Staff/faculty_staff.html. As the percentages vary slightly, ranging from 2.6% - 2.81% for African American/Black faculty at Virginia Tech, see also "Virginia Tech Peer

Institution Diversity and Inclusion Comparative Study."
<http://www.diversity.vt.edu/pub/documents/benchmark/benchmark-2013.pdf>

[iv] Training for department heads/heads includes the Lunch and Learn Series, coordinated by Vice Provost Jack Finney, and the Departmental Climate Compendium and Climate Consultations, available through AdvanceVT. See "Resources for Department Heads,"
<http://www.advance.vt.edu/resources_links/department_heads/resources_for_dept_heads.html>

[v] For the most recent campus profiles see <http://www.vt.edu/about/factbook/student-overview.html>

[vi] Some of Virginia Tech's most valued corporate allies, including the Michelin Corporation, have discontinued their recruiting efforts at Virginia Tech because our pool of students is insufficiently diverse. Many years ago, Dean Bevlee Watford warned that this kind of response would ensue if we were not able to recruit a more diverse student body. She has been proven right. Majority students also pay the price when a university cannot attract underrepresented minorities.

[vii] From MAOP's website: "The Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program (MAOP), founded in 1993, is an academic success community founded upon the principles of self- efficacy, mentoring, and peer support. Central to the goal of MAOP is the promotion of diversification within the student body of Virginia Tech. Through partnerships with various academic colleges and departments at Virginia Tech, other colleges and universities, governmental entities, and various organizations, MAOP participants are supported with academic guidance, emotional and social support, and financial support." http://www.maop.vt.edu/ This excellent, long-standing program, directed by Dr. Jody Thompson-Marshall, is one that merits continued support.

[viii] "African-American and Hispanic faculty are significantly less satisfied with their jobs at Virginia Tech (66.7% somewhat or very satisfied for African-American faculty; 52.6% for Hispanics; 79.1% for Caucasians; and 78.7% for Asians) and almost twice as likely to leave in the next two years as Caucasian or Asian faculty (70%for African-American and Hispanic faculty vs.35% for Caucasian and 37% for Asian faculty)—AdvanceVT Faculty/Life Survey, 2008. See <http://www.advance.vt.edu/documents/newsletters/advancevt_newsletter_aug2009.pdf>

[ix] See http://www.advance.vt.edu/measuring_progress/surveys/coache_surveys.html "In spring 2007, fall 2009, and fall 2012, Virginia Tech participated in the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey of faculty job satisfaction. The COACHE survey asks faculty to assess their experiences regarding promotion and tenure, the nature of their work, institutional policies and practices, and the general climate, culture, and level of collegiality on their campuses." The sections on "Interdisciplinary Work, Collaboration, and Mentoring" (22), the "Tenure and Promotion" section (26), and the section entitled "The Department" (32) are of particular interest in relation to this report.

[x] A copy of the final report from the Task Force on Race and the Institution is available at
<http://www.provost.vt.edu/archives/race_task_force/race_institution_task_force_final_report_2007.pdf>

[xi] Due to the fact that my teaching commitments prevented me from accepting the course release offered by the Provost's Office, the number of meetings I could schedule with groups and individuals was limited. Inevitably, I have failed to take into account some of the fine work that is being done across the campus. I hope, however, that some of the suggestions and information contained herein will still prove useful.

[xii] Short (week-long?) faculty exchanges with HBCU's could serve to strengthen pipeline partnerships. Faculty and programs could benefit from the exchange of ideas and learn from each other's students.

[xiii] Ideally, the department diversity liaison (DDL) should be someone with a proven track record of commitment to diversity. The DDL should also be a skillful cross-cultural communicator and should be recompensed for his or her service with, say, a course release or travel funds. If it's not possible to find a suitable person for this position, appointing someone who agrees to undergo training could also be effective.

[xiv] From the minutes of the University Advisory Council on Strategic Budgeting and Planning, December 5, 2013.
<http://www.governance.vt.edu/uacsbp/minutes_12-05-13.pdf>

[xv] One of the many innovative diversity initiatives being offered through the Office for Diversity and Inclusion is the Diversity Development Institute, directed by Michele Deramo, with Alicia Cohen, a program that offers great promise for the future.