

July 2015

To Each Member of the Virginia Tech Class of 2019:

On behalf of Virginia Tech's faculty, staff and students, I am pleased to welcome you to the global family of Hokies! As I cannot attend every one of the thirteen summer orientation sessions to welcome you in person, I would like to take this opportunity to address you in writing. This (and my video message at orientation) will have to suffice until I do have the pleasure of meeting you on the Drillfield, in a dining hall, at an event, or in a classroom.

By now, you will have received ample advice on how to make the most of your university experience. I do not intend to repeat all of that advice here. You would not be attending Virginia Tech if you were not academically prepared to succeed. You know something about hard work and its rewards (although you will find you can do more and achieve more than you may believe at the moment).

I would, however, like to mention a few elements of your future Virginia Tech experience that should be part of your plan.

First, I ask you to **practice respect**. Regardless of your life experience so far, you will meet and interact with people whose perspectives are very different than yours. You will be comforted by associating with individuals who share common experiences, and that is perfectly appropriate. But be deliberate in engaging those who do not share your history, your experiences, or your view of the world. Like recent graduate, Justin Graves (@hesonwheels), set a goal to make one new acquaintance each day – someone who you would not normally feel comfortable engaging. Ask yourself what you assume about that person, and then go on to discover where you were right and where you were wrong, always practicing respect.

Second, I ask you to **look out for yourself and others**. It is perfectly natural to want to push boundaries and explore limits once you are free of the daily supervision of parents, guardians and teachers. Peer pressure only amplifies those desires to take risks. In pursuit of self-understanding, before you arrive on campus for move-in day, write a contract with yourself. Think through what risks you are willing to take, and define your own boundaries. Stick to it. Perhaps you would be willing to share these boundaries with close friends so that they can remind you when you are approaching them. Do the same for your friends. When you are out with friends, follow the principles of "No Hokie Left Behind:" Go with Friends, Stay with Friends, Leave with Friends.

Invent the Future

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Third, I ask you to plan your time at Virginia Tech to include **experiential learning**. We know, from the 240,000 Hokies that have preceded you, that certain experiences in college are strongly associated with well-being and workplace engagement in later life. Commit to a substantive multi-semester experience as either an undergraduate researcher or an intern in an organization that will allow you to practice in your field(s) of study. Study in another part of the U.S. or abroad; develop your entrepreneurial skills by starting a company; engage deeply in a student organization. Be curious and engage a passion or interest – it will matter!

Finally, I ask you to **contemplate your personal interpretation of our motto, “*Ut Prosim – That I May Serve.*”** When that motto was adopted 119 years ago, Virginia Tech was a military land-grant institution. Taken literally and with context-appropriate interpretation of the Latin expression, the motto lifted up the willingness to sacrifice one’s safety and even one’s life by leading others into peril, in service of the greater good. When you glance at the pylons, walk on the Drillfield, or observe the modern Corps of Cadets Pass In Review, you will reflect back on Virginia Tech’s long and meaningful history in preparing the next generation to defend this country, promote democracy among its citizens, and build the economy.

Today, *Ut Prosim* represents that and much more. I like to think of today’s Virginia Tech as a global “Service to Humanity Academy.” You are here to develop your skills and harness your passions in preparation for a meaningful life of service to others. You may already share this or a similar view of the meaning of *Ut Prosim*, and perhaps that was the most compelling reason for you to attend Virginia Tech. More likely, you have many other reasons for being here, whether it is a family tradition, the strength of our academic programs, the proven value of a Virginia Tech degree, or your desire to study and live within a strong and supportive community (there’s the food, the mountains, and our ideal four seasons as well!).

Regardless of your perspective on *Ut Prosim* as you enter Virginia Tech, I assure you that during your time here, or perhaps later in life, the bigger picture will come into focus for you, and you will be prepared to make choices that will change the world, your country and your community.



Tim Sands
President

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