

Status Report from Beyond Boundaries
The Beyond Boundaries initiative seeks to advance "our status as an internationally recognized global land-grant institution, and strategically addressing challenges and opportunities of the changing landscape of higher education," as established by President Tim Sands in May, 2015.

Four subcommittees of the Beyond Boundaries initiative have been working since September to help draw a picture of Virginia Tech a generation into the future. Later this semester, the task forces will present concepts to the university community. This status report covers highlights of how this faculty-led group envisions ways future students will learn at Virginia Tech. Co-chaired by Jill Sible, assistant provost for undergraduate education, and Matt Wisnioski, associate professor science and technology in society, the subcommittee tasked with Preparing Students in the future met for the final time, Feb. 4.

Preparing students for the future

It was somewhat daunting envisioning our school three decades into the future, but of this we are certain - any university must be 'person centered' not only in curricular design, but the entire collegiate experience. Our very mission centers on educating people.

From that perspective, our committee embraced the concept of the T-shaped student whose deep disciplinary education is balanced by the broadening of those universal skills that employers are seeking: critical inquiry, problem solving, teamwork, and the like. But we believe Virginia Tech adds another dimension unique to our school incorporating elements of Ut Prosim and the land-grant mission, which we and others on campus have dubbed the V-T shaped student.

Fostering V-T shaped graduates demands purpose-driven learning. Students, like every one else, are motivated when their work has meaning and value. This applies to the 'work' of learning. The very mission of land-grants schools revolves around communities, large and small, and the needs of those communities. In the global land grant university of the future, those communities will be anywhere in the world and will be the hubs of purpose driven learning where students, faculty and community members work - and learn - in collaboration.

While deliberations have necessarily been evolving in subcommittees, several common themes have emerged. Everyone is talking about experiential learning. President Sands emphasized this in his inaugural speech last April. Students on our committee and students with whom we spoke are emphatic on this point - education in the future must contain significant components of experiential learning. We are not entirely sure what it will look like. And we are debating how we can scale it up. But we know what current forms look like -- paid internships, mentorship, service learning, undergraduate research, and more. Experiential learning ties together other aspects of the unique V-T shaped educational experience.

This leads to a related point. We believe that the collegiate experience will become more and more individualized with students having access to the learning that they need when they need it. Formal learning will be available in support of, rather than competing with, student participation in experiential learning.

Some have spoken about moving beyond specific disciplinary degrees. We are not there yet. This really is a 30-year question. We know that deep disciplinary learning and skill building are deep forces that will persist. Flexibility, individualized instruction...call it what you want. Fundamentally, we would like to see students enabled to design a course of study that is intentionally and meaningfully connected to issues facing them, our society, and indeed, societies around the globe.

President Sands challenged the university to see itself as a "global land-grant university." Every committee has addressed the meaning of global perspectives in different ways.

When we talk about "global perspective," we are really describing a way of knowing and a way of being in the world.

Cultivating global perspectives in our students means developing cultural competencies from language training to empathy and ethical reasoning. For example, we need to educate our graduates to not view themselves only as global "problem solvers" who parachute in to another part of the world, but rather as collaborators and partners.

The Beyond Boundaries steering committee will publish a preliminary report in late March. In the meantime, our subcommittee for Preparing Students strongly encourages comments from the university community. Feel free to comment [on the website](#) or [email committee members](#).

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