Virginia Tech—Inventing the Future

When Timothy Sands, then Provost at Purdue University, accepted the position as president of Virginia Tech, he acknowledged the effort of the out-going president, Charles Steger, and the Board of Visitors since the devastating events of six years earlier when a gunman killed 32 students and faculty members. He said that his main goal was “to maintain that momentum and build on it.”

One important way that is being done is by striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal. *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) is the essence of the Virginia Tech experience, the guiding principle of the community. The motto rests upon a foundation of trust, integrity, respect, and compassion:

“We cannot serve without honoring diversity. We cannot be a vibrant community without promoting caring and inclusiveness, respecting individuality, and valuing the unique contributions of each of our members.”

While the diversity of the entering undergraduate class was up by 26% since fall 2012, at a 2016 Board meeting it was announced that the institution would be committing to increasing the underrepresented percentage of its incoming first-year class from 12% to 25% by 2022.

But the reality was that conventional recruitment and financial aid strategies had probably reached their limit. And so Virginia Tech has made a serious investment in sophisticated analytics to understand student choices in accepting (or rejecting) offers of admission and aid. Another asset to grow has been in helping faculty and staff to understand why this issue is important. A set of workshops—VTunfinished—has extended the conversation so that change is owned campus wide.

There has also been an effort to share knowledge about how the extended process needs to work. A targeted pipeline program (*College Access Collaborative*) has been created that works directly with specific schools in ten different communities to make Virginia Tech a more visible option for middle and high school students. This effort is also offering teaching methods to support teachers in the schools and programming to help students be better prepared for college level work.

These initiatives—and other strategic and aligned efforts—are being assessed against a series of strategic goal metrics. Feedback—How will we know if we are successful?—is built into this robust virtuous cycle of change at Virginia Tech. Not only are the high level metrics in place, there is now in place detailed student success measures to compare retention, time to degree and attainment for diverse students versus majority students.

Momentum continues to build as Virginia Tech takes responsibility for creating its own future.