April 20, 2009

Provost McNamee,

On February 12, the members of the NCR faculty association met with Karen DePauw about discussions that had taken place between herself, Jim Bohland, and Dixon Hanna concerning space in the NCR and the concerns expressed in our letter to you dated October 20th of last year. In addition, Jim Bohland indicated in an email to faculty that the questions we raised, particularly about the inequities in how space is paid for in the region were being looked into by the same group. In the meeting here, Dean DePauw asked specifically that we, the NCR faculty, develop some principles to help guide the development of such a space policy.

What we understood from these communications is that the issues we've raised are complex, as we noted, and not limited to the NCR. We understand that as programs utilize space in the CRC in Blacksburg, for instance, similar issues have arisen. We were interested to learn that the university is considering the merits of policies that would require all programs to pay, at least partially, for research space, for example, whether on the main campus or not. In effect, we believe that our call for a review and development of equitable and transparent space policies may have been more timely than we had anticipated.

As to the request that we suggest some principles for a suitable space policy, we are somewhat taken aback. In our letter of October 20th on p. 4, we listed the "basic tenets" of what an equitable and transparent space policy would be. Quoting from that letter:

This is truly a complex, university-level problem, and for that reason, the NCR Faculty believe that it can only be resolved at the University level. Therefore, we are appealing to you for the establishment of a uniform and fair space policy for the region that is consistent with policies on the main campus in Blacksburg, and further, that recognizes the reality of the current and future conditions in the NCR. It is our view that the basic tenets of such a policy should be:

- Space planning in the region should be carried out through an inclusive and open process with appropriate participation by all stakeholders.

- Virginia Tech properties in the region, however acquired, should be subject to a consistent set of guidelines, consistently administered, with regard to allocating space to programs, departments, faculty, staff and students.
- Costs imposed for space allocated to faculty, staff, and students, including space in which students pursue their graduate or professional training, should be borne either centrally, or fairly and equitably across colleges and programs.

Nothing we've heard to date changes our impression that these are the starting principles from which to develop an equitable policy. We strongly feel that the best way forward is still an inclusive process, with representation from all parties involved or affected. The facts remain: all space costs money; the university occupies and pays for space through various financial instruments; there are multiple policies in place affecting how those financial obligations are met, and they vary from payments that are entirely borne centrally to payments entirely borne by the occupants of the space. In the NCR, the variation in the financial models is negatively affecting us at all levels, from the individual faculty member to the program level, to the regional level. The only solution we can see is one in which we behave as a single entity, ideally isolating the complexity of the financial issues behind a workable and equitable framework. That is basically how the University handles our salaries, our IT needs, our parking, etc. It should do the same for our basic needs for space.

Again, we would very much like to participate in the development of a strategy moving us toward this goal and following the principles stated above.

Sincerely, with the consensus of the NCR Faculty,

Angela J. Huebner, Ph.D.
President, NCR Faculty Association

cc: Dr. Karen DePauw
Dr. James Bohland
Mr. Dixon Hanna