July 25, 2012

Teresa A. Sullivan
President
University of Virginia
P.O. Box 400224
Charlottesville, VA 22904-4224

Dear President Sullivan,

We believe that the purpose of the University of Virginia is to change the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world for the better through new, relevant knowledge and graduates who provide inspiring, ethical, and informed leadership. UVA is nationally recognized for its distinctive integration of an exceptional residential undergraduate liberal arts education, outstanding research across a variety of disciplines, and an array of preeminent professional schools. Our faculty is among the best in the nation and dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, service, and patient care. Our students are especially noteworthy for a tradition of self-governance and their intense engagement in all aspects of University life.

On May 3, the President presented a draft of her academic vision to the leadership of the Board of Visitors. Our thoughts are informed by and build on that document. To sustain and advance our status as one of the best public institutions in the nation, as well as to navigate through a time of opportunity and change, the University needs: (1) to assess thoroughly the challenges associated with the current and projected state of higher education, (2) to identify opportunities and initiatives that will advance the mission of the University along multiple dimensions, and (3) to play a leadership role in the evolution of higher education, specifically with respect to public universities over the next decade. In doing so, we must define our current strengths and weaknesses, develop strategies that advance and differentiate UVA from our peers, and then execute these strategies aggressively, yet with a flexible and learning mindset, to move the University forward.

Fundamentally, we need to address the question, “What do we want the University to be in 10 years?” To answer this, strategic planning at the University of Virginia needs to occur at two levels.

First, a set of important macro-level issues must be thoughtfully raised and resolved through effective partnering between the academic leadership of the University, the Board, key University constituents, and the Commonwealth.
We begin by recognizing that UVA is part of a diverse portfolio of state-supported institutions of higher education within the Commonwealth, each of which makes a special contribution to the well-being of the Commonwealth. This macro analysis must then account for the differences between these schools and also reflect the current situation is not a level playing field with respect to our private school peers, but is, in fact, a system with cumulative disadvantage to a public institution such as UVA. The macro issues center on the relationship between the University, the Board of Visitors, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Major issues include the governance relationship between the Commonwealth and the University, the long-term funding model of the University, the governance role of the Board relative to academic leadership (including Board authority and responsibility in influencing and providing oversight regarding academic strategy, tuition, enrollment, and resource allocation), and the selection, composition, and tenure of Board members. The political nature of these issues means we cannot address them by ourselves, but that it must be a collective effort. The resolution of these issues, however, will determine the context and important constraints within which the academic community plans its long-term future. We suggest that the collaborative discussion at this level involve representatives of key stakeholders, including the Board, University and academic leaders, alumni, faculty and staff, and students.

The second level of strategic decision making must focus on: (1) defining a unique vision for UVA with respect to the best in residential undergraduate, graduate, and professional educational experiences in the next decade; (2) developing strategies and making the necessary choices to provide such experiences within projected available resources; (3) assessing and evaluating our claims of uniqueness with respect to students’ experiences and outcomes; and (4) structures and processes that foster continued creativity and excellence in service of the academic vision. In doing so, we must be willing to look beyond current academic and funding models, and to analyze the opportunities and the risks associated with various models and resource requirements.

Developing this vision and its related strategies require, in part, addressing the following points:

- **Identify current core areas critical to the intellectual strength and reputation of the University.** This process involves an assessment of the strength and contributions of these core areas, thoughtful decisions regarding additional resource commitments, and careful identification of activities that should be reduced or eliminated to invest in core areas critical to the University’s future. This assessment also involves developing the requisite structures and processes within and across units that enable this level of analysis and planning.

- **Identify opportunities for innovation that provide comparative advantage, essentially defining distinctive peaks of excellence to acquire within and across disciplines.** This creative process should emphasize unique intellectual and program leadership, coupled with the efficient investment of resources – existing and new – to realize a compelling vision. These opportunities should distinguish the institution such that the whole is more than simply the sum of its parts.
• Setting the right time frame – long enough to enable the creation of excellence through sustained investment, but short enough so that there is accountability. Clear evidence of success in academic initiatives should be expected within three to five years.

To develop such a vision and strategies that are consistent with the purpose of the University of Virginia, we intend to focus on five key areas as part of strategic planning:

**Faculty:** The University’s identity is driven by the quality of our faculty, and so we must be able to attract and retain faculty of the highest caliber, creating an environment to assure their strongest contributions across the teaching, research, and service dimensions. This essential commitment requires that we offer competitive salaries, as well as the overall support to enable our faculty to excel in teaching and research. Recruitment and retention should be based on the unique vision and strategies developed by the academic leadership, and it should be coordinated across our schools in order to build communities of excellence that can surpass outcomes typically associated with individual units or department. The responsibility for this effort should fall primarily on the Provost and the deans.

**Education:** We must continue to innovate with respect to the curricular and co-curricular experiences of our students. Central to this goal are efforts to expand and enhance the opportunities which challenge their intellects, develop their critical thinking skills, and provide them with a base of knowledge and learning methodologies that they can rely upon throughout their professional and personal lives. Meeting these challenges must involve structural and pedagogical innovations; we must work across schools and departments and appropriately integrate technology and other best learning practices throughout our curriculum. We need to think creatively about an educational model that will build on foundational disciplinary majors with increased interdisciplinary and group learning opportunities and service experiences. Once again, the responsibility for this planning should be centered on the academic leadership and faculty.

**Global Prominence and Impact.** Although UVA is nationally recognized, our reputation and impact around the world tends to be associated with specific schools, programs, or faculty. Given the rapid globalization of the higher education industry, particularly with respect to faculty and student recruitment and research visibility, UVA must act now to establish itself as a major global university along a variety of dimensions. To do so, UVA must articulate a clear global strategy to identify and facilitate educational and research opportunities, to establish international educational, governmental, research, and corporate partnerships, to focus resources on the recruitment, retention, and support of international faculty and students, and to integrate a range of study abroad experiences within the overall academic program. This emphasis should be driven by the Vice Provost for Global Affairs working closely with the deans and other relevant units.
Research. Knowledge creation and translation into practice is an essential hallmark of a great university. UVa must identify areas of research excellence and create an environment in which the faculty and their research associates can flourish. Through these activities, we enhance the intellectual life of faculty and students and provide research opportunities for undergraduate students that differentiate our educational offerings from liberal arts colleges. Research-based Ph.D. programs are one important aspect of this commitment as they educate the future intellectual leaders of society and develop new knowledge. Although we may be unable to invest in all research and Ph.D. programs because of resource constraints or size limitations, a collaborative effort involving the Provost, the Vice President for Research, and the deans must develop an institutional strategy that identifies and allocates resources to research and Ph.D. education, one that takes advantage of our strengths and leverages our differential advantages across our schools.

Financial sustainability. The preceding four areas will have major implications for the resources of the University. Forward planning must enable the academic leaders and faculty to deploy resources in ways that ensure the safety and soundness of the University for future generations. Resource decisions should be informed by a new financial model developed in consultation with the faculty and academic leadership and that promotes accountability, transparency, incentives to innovate, and flexibility.

Beyond this overall two-level framework for thinking about strategy at the University level, we also are committed to moving forward with a determined sense of urgency. We believe that small, committed planning groups can offer models and concepts that will become best practices for moving the institution forward. These groups must have clear charges and deadlines for their deliverables. Previous experiences teach us that planning efforts that involve large groups over substantial periods of time are cumbersome and yield plans that offer little in the way of new thinking and difficult decisions. They frustrate rather than inspire.

We recommend that the University convenes, as soon as practical, a relatively small, yet representative group of Board members, University leaders, deans, faculty, staff, students, and functional experts (e.g., legal and financial advisors) to develop a set of strategic recommendations regarding the macro-level issues. These recommendations should not be bounded by current practice and constraints; rather, they should be driven by a realistic assessment of the structures and models necessary to promote excellence and innovation at UVa over the coming decade. These initial recommendations can then be reviewed and commented on through a broader process involving more relevant parties.

Similarly and concurrently, the academic leadership should focus immediately on the key areas described above. Under the leadership of the Provost's Office, we should organize small, representative groups to address these strategic topics. Not only can we make progress on these issues, but the evolving structures for academic initiatives may offer process models for tackling more complex issues. Once again, this process should recognize and invest in core areas, build new and unique programs, and position the University and the schools for sustained excellence and innovation.
The University of Virginia is committed to being a leader and a model for public higher education in creatively addressing these issues. As the academic leaders of the University, we are eager to move forward and to demonstrate that our collective will to achieve preeminence is the real hallmark of this institution. We look forward to working with the University leadership, faculty, students, staff, alumni, and donors on realizing this vision.

Respectfully,

John D. Simon  
Executive Vice President and Provost

Kim Tanzer  
Kim Tanzer, Dean, Architecture

Meredith Woo, Dean, Arts & Sciences

Harry Harding, Dean, Batten School

Billy Cannaday, Dean, Continuing & Professional Studies

Robert Planta, Dean, Curry School of Education

James Aylor, Dean, Engineering

Robert Bruner, Dean, Darden School

Paul Mahoney, Dean, Law School
Carl Zeithaml, Dean, McIntire School of Commerce

Steven T. DeKosky, Dean, School of Medicine

Dorrie Fontaine, Dean, School of Nursing

Karin Wittenborg, University Librarian