

# outbursts

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spotlight on community engagement

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## Virginia Tech wins prestigious designation

*The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching celebrates the university's engagement work*

By Andrea Brunais

**R**enewing recognition first won in 2006, Virginia Tech has achieved community engagement classification from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

In a rigorous application process, the foundation required the university to prove that over the past several years Virginia Tech has practiced community engagement that is "deeper, more pervasive, better integrated, and sustained."

Then-President Charles W. Steger cited several examples of Virginia Tech's engagement work in an opinion piece he co-authored for The Richmond Times-Dispatch in 2012, included in the Carnegie application:

"Because of our scientists and extension specialists, food is safer and its supply is more secure, water is cleaner, grain is better able to withstand disease, and Virginia's farmers have better access



Hannah Perlman, left, a junior in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and Kristina Lundquist, a junior in the College of Engineering, pull weeds in a landscaping project at an elementary school in Christiansburg. The project included moving garden beds to the playground for children to work on and clearing a space by a creek to hold science classes. The project was sponsored by VT Engage.

to markets. Computers are faster and more energy efficient. Football players are better protected from head injuries. CHARLI, Virginia Tech's first untethered, autonomous, full-sized walking humanoid robot, takes mechanical engineering to new heights with each step."

Virginia Tech is one of 361 institutions holding the classification. The foundation defines the term "engagement" as employing partnerships with businesses and communities to solve mutually agreed-upon problems, not only contributing to the public good but also enriching scholarship and creating students who are imbued with a sense of civic responsibility.

"Positively transforming lives and communities – that's what university engagement is all about," said Guru

Ghosh, vice president for Outreach and International Affairs. "In our application, we showcased our bold spirit and noted our campus climate of innovation and service, open boundaries of study and research, and an entrepreneurial approach. Those assertions are now validated."

Examples of community engagement cited in the application include the Pilot Street Project/Coalition for Refugee Resettlement, in which students travel to Roanoke to tutor refugees' children and help their parents with citizenship preparation and other issues. (The program involved the Roanoke Housing Authority and the Catholic Church's Refugee and Immigration Services.)

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Student Sanah Ali returns chairs to the neighborhood school after a break during a Dominican Republic service immersion trip over spring break 2014.

## Designation *continued*

Other projects include:

- The Office of International Research, Education, and Development leads projects that raise the standard of living in developing countries, partnering with more than 80 universities and institutions worldwide and managing a research portfolio totaling \$100 million.
- Virginia Cooperative Extension supports more than 100 local offices as well as half a dozen 4-H centers and 11 centers statewide devoted to agricultural research.
- Get on the Bus, a program launched in 2012, entices faculty, staff, and students to volunteer through an easily accessible experience in which up to 30 people ride together to a destination such as a food bank for a day of service. VT Engage added Get on the Bus to its dozens of service projects that enable students to not only volunteer but also reflect on the experience.
- This past spring, Virginia Tech's research laboratory in India opened, and in its 6,000-square-foot lab dedicated to energy research, solar panels and small windmills are being refined to help improve life for 400 million Indians not connected to the grid. The research is also expected to help create low-cost, renewable energy worldwide.

Earlier this year, Provost Mark G. McNamee said of Virginia Tech's emphasis on civic engagement: "Our students fully embrace the spirit of Ut Prosim (That I May Serve), and they continue to seek new ways to have a lasting impact on local, regional, and global communities. Whenever I talk with students about their various projects, I am moved by their passion, generosity, and sustained commitment. We will continue to encourage all of our students to take an active role in service activities while they are here and throughout their lifetimes."

"Ut Prosim is our core value, and the exemplary way we breathe life into that value is through our engagement work," Ghosh said. "Everyone at Virginia Tech – students, faculty, staff, our research teams – all have a hand in demonstrating this core value."



Rangaswamy "Muni" Muniappan, right, helps countries worldwide create healthier crops. His work is part of the USAID-funded Innovation Lab at Virginia Tech. Here he speaks with reporters in India.

## Then and now

Since Virginia Tech's last Carnegie classification in 2006, the university has established the Center for Student Engagement and Community Partnerships (2008) as well as:



- launched the Engagement Academy for University Leaders (2008)
- established the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute (2010)
- opened the Virginia Tech Research Center - Arlington (2011)

Also, in the past decade, Virginia Tech's expenditures for public service grew from \$59 million to \$113.6 million (as reported to the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System).

www.outreach.vt.edu

The university recognizes and celebrates excellence in community engagement through major awards funded by the Virginia Tech Alumni Association. These include the Alumni Awards for Excellence in Extension, Alumni Awards for Excellence in University Outreach, Alumni Awards for Excellence in International Outreach, and the Alumni Award for Excellence in Team Outreach. The awards recognize outstanding achievements that contribute to Virginia Tech's engagement with local, statewide, and global communities. In addition, each of the eight colleges annually presents an award to faculty for outstanding achievement in outreach and engagement work.

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