



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

April 2, 2009

Mr. John R. Lawson, II
President and CEO
W.M. Jordan Company, Inc.
11010 Jefferson Avenue
P.O. Box 1337
Newport News, VA 23601

Re: Virginia Tech

Dear Mr. Lawson:

Thank you very much for your call yesterday. I am delighted to know that you and your fellow board members have agreed to undertake a comprehensive review of Virginia Tech's tenure and diversity policies.

As you know, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences' proposed tenure guidelines are just one part of a web of policies that raise First Amendment and academic freedom concerns, necessitating a systematic review by the Board of Visitors. Some will no doubt argue that this is beyond the board's purview, but as you indicated to me on the telephone, the board does indeed have plenary authority to advance Virginia Tech's mission and to safeguard the institution's academic and financial health. You deserve great credit for acting on this responsibility, and if ACTA can assist you with it in any way, please do not hesitate to call upon us.

In 1991, Benno Schmidt—then the president of Yale and now, like you, the chairman of a public university's board—observed that in too many ways, universities seemed to think that “the purpose of education is to induce correct opinion rather than to search for wisdom and liberate the mind.” This is exactly what is at issue with these policies. Virginia Tech should not, in its policies or anywhere else, prescribe what faculty members are to believe. The board's review must ensure that to the extent Virginia Tech pursues diversity—a most worthy concern—it does so by proscribing discriminatory behavior, not regulating private conscience and personal belief.

As you go about this necessary and proper review, I urge you to ensure that it is thorough, open, and transparent. In particular, I hope you will release the results to the public—as Missouri State University did in 2007 with an external review it commissioned of its troubled School of Social Work. This is the best way to assure parents, taxpayers, and faculty members that Virginia Tech respects academic freedom and professional standards.

Warm best wishes and renewed thanks.

Cordially,

Anne D. Neal
President

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