



Dean of Admission Greg Roberts

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Carrying on the Legacy

Greg Roberts discusses his new role as admission dean

Shortly after the death of long-time dean of admission John A. Blackburn on Jan. 20, Greg W. Roberts was appointed his successor. Roberts joined the admission office as an associate dean in August 2003 and was named senior associate dean in May 2008.

Early this summer, Roberts took time to answer a number of questions.

You worked closely with Jack Blackburn for more than five years. What did he teach you?

That's a tough question. Jack taught me so much. He really was an amazing man. He was my mentor and a dear, dear friend. I wouldn't be where I am today without his guidance and support.

I have a picture on my desk taken in the spring. It's a picture of Jack and our staff on Beta Bridge in front of a special note we painted for him. The bridge read "Dean Blackburn: For all you do, this bridge is for you." Although he was very sick and extremely tired as he endured painful treatment, he stands with his shoulders back, head up, smiling, proud. His jacket is buttoned and there's not a hair out of place.

That is the way I remember Jack. He was dignified and poised and graceful even under the most trying and difficult circumstances. This is not something you teach, but it is something you never forget. I hope one day I can be as courageous and steadfast. Jack provided an example for me and

our staff. He worked hard and was committed to this university and its students. He lived a life grounded in Jeffersonian core values—integrity, honor, strong character. He simply did what he thought was right. If I can be half the dean and man Jack was, I will consider myself a success.

Diversity and access were hallmarks of Jack Blackburn's legacy. What will be your approach to these same issues?

My goal is to build on Jack's legacy. I hope to work closely with current minority students, alumni and faculty as well as national access groups to identify and encourage talented underrepresented students to apply to U.Va.

I would like to work with the Alumni Association to expand the Jefferson Book Award Program to recognize well-rounded students at predominantly minority high schools, which will help generate interest in applying to U.Va. This would strengthen our relationships with counselors and students in these areas. I plan to work closely with the Office of Student Financial Services so we can continue to spread the word about AccessUVa [www.virginia.edu/financialaid/access.php].

We also need to utilize technology to reach students who cannot afford to visit the University. Our outreach office, headed by Valerie Gregory, has coordinated travel arrangements to Grounds for many such prospective students and our collaboration with the University's College Guide Program has been highly successful as well.

As you might expect, competition for talented minority and low-income students is intense. Unfortunately, we have a limited budget and a relatively small staff. We need the support of our dedicated alumni to help us reach out to students in their towns and communities. I hope we can continue to build the Virginia Alumni Admissions Network [alumni.virginia.edu/admission/vaan] and arrange for more interviews for these students in pilot cities. I also hope to continue to strengthen our relationship with U.Va. clubs around the world, whose members do so much work on our behalf.

Some have questioned whether universities in Virginia have a high enough ratio of in-state students, and pressure is mounting to decrease out-of-state enrollment. For the past decade, Virginia

residents have made up 68 to 69 percent of undergraduate enrollment at U. Va.

What are your thoughts on this?

We're happy with the current blend of the student body. We are a public institution with a commitment to the residents of Virginia. Virginians are the heart of this school and we are fortunate to enroll some of the finest this state has to offer, from every corner of the Commonwealth.

We also enroll students from nearly every state in the country, and we have a dynamic and interesting international population. I know this is a hot and sometimes contentious issue, particularly as we see an increase in competition for admission at the best schools in the country and have a struggling economy. Our goal each year is to enroll talented, smart, interesting and diverse students from around the state and the world. This diversity enriches the lives of all students who enroll at U.Va. and adds to their experience on Grounds, in and outside of the classroom.

I hope that we continue to seek balance in our classes and that we can maintain the subjectivity of our application review without quotas or targets set by the legislature.

What are your thoughts on legacy admission? What is the current practice and will it continue?

We are fortunate to have the most dedicated, loyal and passionate alumni in the country. The spirit of this place speaks for itself. It's a defining characteristic of this great institution. Each year we see outstanding children of alumni apply for admission. While legacy admission has come under more intense scrutiny at colleges and universities around the country in recent years, we plan to maintain our current model, in which out-of-state legacy applicants are treated as if they are Virginians. The offer rate for Virginians to the University was 44 percent this year, the non-Virginian offer rate was 24 percent. There is a significant advantage to being a Virginian in our review. This fall 14 percent of the enrolling students are children of alumni. Academically, more than 90 percent of the legacy students are graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school classes.

Do you plan any changes to the Office of Admission's practices or approach in the next several years?

We have gone through a number of significant changes in our operation over the course of the past few years. We eliminated Early Decision two years ago, moved to an

Admission Snapshot



The final entering class that the late Jack Blackburn, former dean of admission, helped shape looks to be the most diverse and best qualified in the history of the University.

"[Jack] is always on our minds," says Blackburn's successor, Greg Roberts. "We wanted to bring in a class that reflects his legacy."

A statistical snapshot of the Class of 2013 follows:

- The applicant pool increased by more than 3,000, to 21,839. The University made offers to 6,775 students (31 percent).
- Forty-nine percent, or 3,308 students, accepted their admission offers.
- Academically, 88.5 percent ranked in the top 10 percent of their high school classes. The median SAT score on the critical reading and math

portions rose to 1350, and the middle 50 percent of the entering class scored between 1250 and 1430.

- Sixty-seven percent of entering first-year students are Virginians (transfer students increase the in-state total to 69 percent).
- An estimated 205 students have qualified for full need-based, all-grant packages under the University's AccessUVa financial aid program, up from 170 last year.
- More incoming students identified themselves as coming from minority populations (students were allowed to choose more than one ethnic origin). There are 443 Asian Pacific Americans (up from 374 last year), 303 African Americans (up from 280), 203 Hispanics (up from 125), 212 foreign nationals (up from 189) and 27 Native Americans (up from seven).
- In the Princeton Review's 2010 edition of *The Best 371 Colleges*, U.Va. scored 99 on a scale of 60 to 99 for its selectivity in admissions, 98 for academic rating and 91 for financial aid.

online review of the application last year, and we began accepting the Common Application in 2008. We established guaranteed admission agreements in the College and in the Engineering School over the past few years, which guarantee admission to those who have earned an associate's degree from a Virginia community college and have met a series of requirements. We are always looking ahead and we try to anticipate trends and changes in the field. Aside from requiring a teacher recommendation this year along with the guidance counselor recommendation, we have no plans to make significant alterations to our process for 2009-10—and for that I'm thankful.

What are the admission challenges and opportunities that are particular to U.Va.?

Over the past decade, college admission has evolved into a high-pressure, intensely scrutinized and very public business. We face global competition for students, a struggling economy, anxious families and the demand for instant access to information in an era of digital communication. Debates about the use of standardized testing, legacy admission policies, the impact of rankings, and general equity and fairness

in the selection process are taking place in admission offices throughout the country.

As our office considers these issues and develops plans to confront them, we remain focused on one enduring challenge: Building an academically strong and diverse class. For public institutions like U.Va., this goal is complicated by the fact that we face issues that are often unique compared with those of our private peers. For example, we strive to blend a global perspective and commitment to geographic diversity with an obligation to enroll the best and brightest Virginians.

As dean of admission at U.Va., my response to all of these important issues and challenges will be grounded in Jeffersonian philosophy. At a time when the pressures of admission have resulted in some competitors pursuing enrollment management practices that emphasize the end over the means, we will continue to anchor our policies in the ideals of honor, integrity and character. We will blend academic and business models of admission that recognize and respect the changes that have taken place in the field, but we also will hold firmly to our core values. Of course, we will continue to emphasize personal service, creativity and accountability, already hallmarks of the admission office.