



May 3, 2016

Members of the Virginia Tech Community:

Last night the [National Review](#) reported that Virginia Tech had disinvited a speaker to our BB&T Distinguished Lecture series. I am compelled to share some details on how we invite speakers through the BB&T series and help everyone understand the current circumstance.

Each semester the Department of Finance invites one BB&T speaker to campus and this past year we invited Charles Murray. The invitation to Dr. Murray created some dynamic conversations throughout the community. While Dr. Murray was controversial and many on campus requested us to rescind the invitation, the president and I agreed the invitation should stand. And it did.

This year the committee reviewed recommendations and invited [Robert Baro](#) to campus. He has accepted and will be the BB&T speaker for 2016-2017. To clarify what has been reported, no invitation was ever extended to Jason Riley. A faculty member did reach out to Mr. Riley to inquire of his interest in speaking at Virginia Tech. When Mr. Riley was not selected by the committee the same faculty member emailed Mr. Riley with his personal explanation of why he had not been selected. This faculty member does not represent the committee's voice and this faculty member did not extend an invitation nor rescind an invitation.

I am planning to meet with all involved to ensure that the process we have in place is appropriate and that we are inclusive and diverse in our selections of speakers and thought leaders we bring to campus. I am reminded of the [Principles of Community](#) in which *"We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect. We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity."*

As the president said in his [letter](#) in March, *"This will not be the last time that a student group, a faculty member or the administration invites a speaker whose views will be regarded by some in our community as repugnant, offensive or even fraudulent. The dichotomies of free speech vs. censorship and civil discourse vs. hostile discourse intersect but are not equivalent. While we cannot prevent others from finding their place on each of these axes, let us set an example for free speech AND civil discourse."*

I am deeply sorry to see this characterization of Virginia Tech in the national media and across social media.

Sincerely,

Robert T. Sumichrast, Dean