

March 16, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:


The University of Virginia is excited to participate in the *#wifresh* initiative, spearheaded by the University Innovation Fellows (Fellows) as a means to expand the participation of incoming first-year students into STEM disciplines. The program will help young students see problems as opportunities to be approached with fresh eyes and an entrepreneurial mindset. As part of the initiative, Fellows will work with orientation week organizers to hold design thinking, creativity, and innovation workshops that connect first years to peer communities of Makers and Innovators in STEM, reaching an estimated total of 3500 first year students.

The initiative was developed in response to findings published in the report “Engage to Excel: Producing One Million Additional College Graduates with Degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.”¹ The report, published by the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, cites the importance of the student experience that is connected to a community of STEM professionals, in meaningful relationships with both peers and instructors, as a key factor in reducing departures from STEM fields.


Orientation week organizers will work with University Innovation Fellows to implement short, fun and engaging experiential learning opportunities that expose all of our incoming first-year class to the University of Virginia’s community of innovators, with the goal of significantly reducing STEM attrition

We believe students can have a powerful impact in driving student engagement in STEM and are excited to work the University Innovation Fellows (a program of the National Center for Engineering Pathways to Innovation or Epicenter) to enhance STEM attraction and retention to ultimately meet U.S. workforce needs and strengthen our national competitiveness.


Respectfully yours,




Teresa A. Sullivan
President




Ben Matthews
University Innovation Fellow




Anthony Sung
Katie Kan
University Innovation Fellows



James H. Aylor, Dean
Luis T. Rader Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering



David Chen
Center Program Director at the University of Virginia



W. Bernard Carlson
Chair, Department of Engineering and Society
Joseph L. Vaughan Professor of Humanities
Professor of History

¹ https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast-engage-to-excel-final_feb.pdf