ENVISIONING VIRGINIA TECH

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

IDEA BANK: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

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VirginiaTech®

Launched in September 2015, the Beyond Boundaries idea bank was created by the Office of the Senior Fellow for Resource Development to engage the Virginia Tech community with the Beyond Boundaries Initiative. The purpose of the idea bank was to gather ideas from the university community that would advance the initiative's two goals: advancing as a global land-grant university and addressing the changing landscape of higher education. Respondents were given the option to respond to six prompts that correlated with these themes.
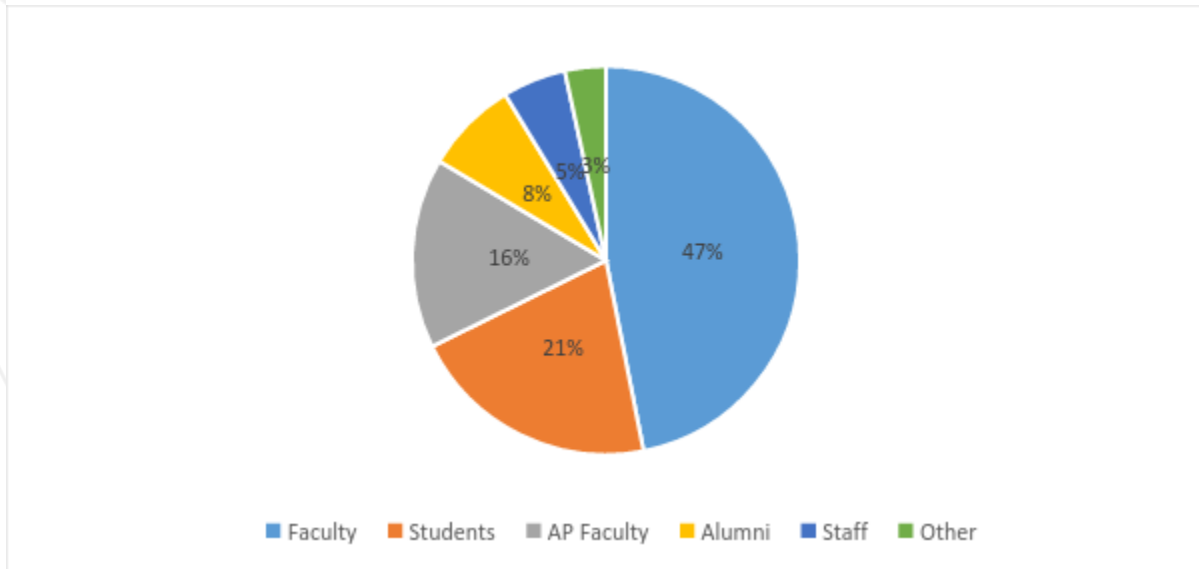
Table 1: Idea Bank Questions and Related Themes

Question Number	Question	Theme
1	What barriers can Virginia Tech address to increase access?	Affordability and accessibility
2	You have been tasked with designing a live/work/study environment that will be built in 2047. Describe this environment. What needs to be included? What will no longer be necessary?	Campus of the future
3	You are mentoring members of the class of 2047. What skills would you encourage these students to develop in preparation for the world in which they will live and work?	Preparing students
4	How will the practice of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) change between now and 2047?	*Ut Prosim*
5	If you could make one hire on behalf of the university, who would it be and why?	Talent
6	Did we miss anything? Please share your ideas for Virginia Tech in advance of its 175th anniversary in 2047.	Other ideas

Respondents were asked to self-identify when entering the Beyond Boundaries website as faculty, alumni, AP faculty, student, staff, or other. Faculty was defined as instructional and research faculty, whereas AP faculty consisted of administrative and professional faculty. Participants were allowed to respond to all or any of the prompts, and could return to questions repeatedly if necessary. For the purpose of data collection, each individual response to a single question is counted as a data point. Information does not reflect how many questions each respondent answered, nor does the data show whether the same question was answered multiple times by a single participant.

The idea bank was removed from the website for comment and the last results were collected March 1, 2016. 322 responses were gathered, with almost half (47 percent) coming from faculty members. As shown in Table 1, students accounted for 21 percent of the respondents. AP faculty, alumni, and staff accounted for 16 percent, 8 percent and 5 percent, respectively. Three percent of the respondents self-identified as other.

Figure 1: Idea Bank Respondents by Self-Identified Category

The responses by question were more evenly distributed with 24 percent of the responses answering the question, "You are mentoring members of the class of 2047. What skills would you encourage these students to develop in preparation for the world in which they will live and work?" The second most answered question, "What barriers can Virginia Tech address to increase access?" had 22 percent of the responses. "You have been tasked with designing a live/work/study environment that will be built in 2047. Describe this environment. What needs to be included? What will no longer be necessary?" had 16 percent of the responses, followed by, "If you could make one hire on behalf of the university, who would it be and why?" with 14 percent. The least number of responses, 13 percent and 11 percent, respectively, answered the questions, "Did we miss anything? Please share your ideas for Virginia Tech in advance of its 175th anniversary in 2047" and "How will the practice of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve) change between now and 2047?" Figure 2 illustrates the number of responses for each question.

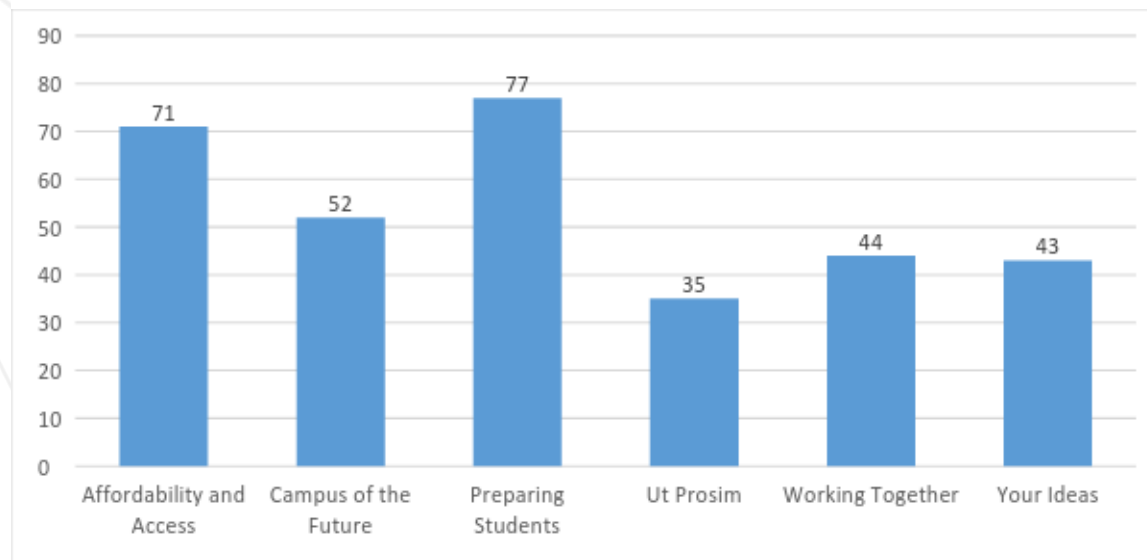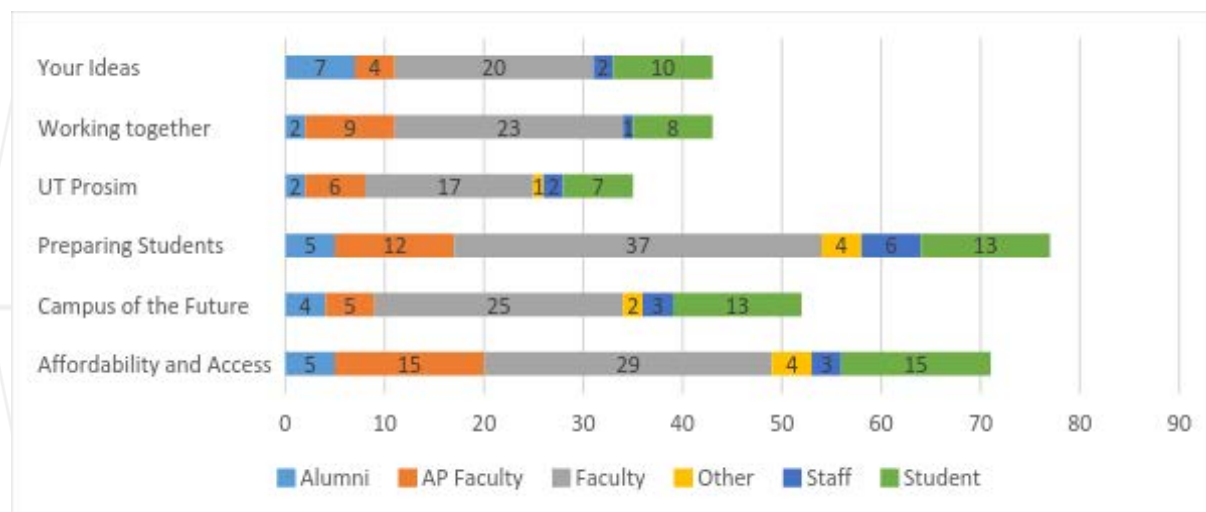Figure 2: Idea Bank Results for Questions by Number of Responses

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of questions as answered by each of the self-identified categories of respondents. Faculty and staff were most likely to answer the question about preparing students, while the majority of students and AP faculty wrote responses to the affordability and accessibility theme. Alumni spoke most to the "other ideas" question.

Figure 3: Response by Question and Respondent Self-Identified Category[1]

The idea bank questions, although targeted by theme, were intentionally left open in order to encourage creative answers. The intent of the questions was to inform the thematic area groups, and as such, they related to the thematic areas of the Beyond Boundaries project. Responses were published on the Beyond Boundaries website and given to the thematic area working groups and Steering Committee (see Beyond Boundaries Toolkit).

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[1] Raw numbers

So far, this paper has introduced the process and participation of the idea bank. In the next section, we draw out common themes that were expressed through the idea bank by the university community. The method through which this was done was content analysis. Individual responses were grouped and coded to determine common themes. The unit of analysis varied due to the differences in the data; researchers looked at sentences, phrases, and words to best interpret the respondent's meaning. To ensure reliability, multiple researchers examined the responses, ensuring inter-coder reliability. The remainder of this paper examines the common themes that were extrapolated from the data received in the idea bank.

Common Theme 1: The VT-Shaped Student

The idea of the VT-Shaped Student has emerged as a way of describing the "necessary combination of expert depth and collaborative breadth" of the Virginia Tech student, as well as their "unparalleled capacity for purpose-driven engagement in the communities that they serve".[2] Idea bank comments reflected this ideal in comments that discussed the need for students to not only master disciplinary pursuits, but also to obtain critical skills that will be needed in the job market such as technological competence, creativity and flexibility. Many respondents commented on the need for Virginia Tech to foster an environment of lifelong learning, enabling students "the ability to quickly acquire new knowledge and new skills" for the constantly changing world.[3] Critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills, and the ability to work within a team were also frequent responses.

In addition to seeing a need for students in 2047 to possess certain skills, idea bank respondents also saw a need for graduates to possess certain characteristics that would serve them not only in the job market, but also in life. These included compassion and empathy for others, "ethical and moral decision making,"[4] and the ability to maintain a work/life balance. One student suggested that students need to learn how "to follow [their] excitement"[5] to be successful in the future and that Virginia Tech can help encourage this by not putting students "on track" too early in their academic careers.

Skills of the future were also expressed by those who responded to the question, "If you could make one hire on behalf of the university, who would it be and why?" Responses included "a Vice President for Human Connection" who would oversee "contemplation, ethics, empathy, connectedness, and genuine community" within the university curriculum.[6] Another faculty member suggested that Virginia Tech should hire a leader to incorporate the humanities to help develop its comprehensive mission. In addition, individuals were suggested who would offer students the ability to grow their innovation skills[7], learn languages such as Mandarin[8], and increase the diversity of both the student body and the workforce on campus[9].

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[2] Preparing Students for the World in Which They Will Live and Work Committee Summary, February 12, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.beyondboundaries.vt.edu/assets/preparing-students_021216.pdf

[3] Idea Bank response from faculty to Preparing Students question

[4] Idea Bank response from faculty to Preparing Students question

[5] Idea bank response from student to Preparing Students question

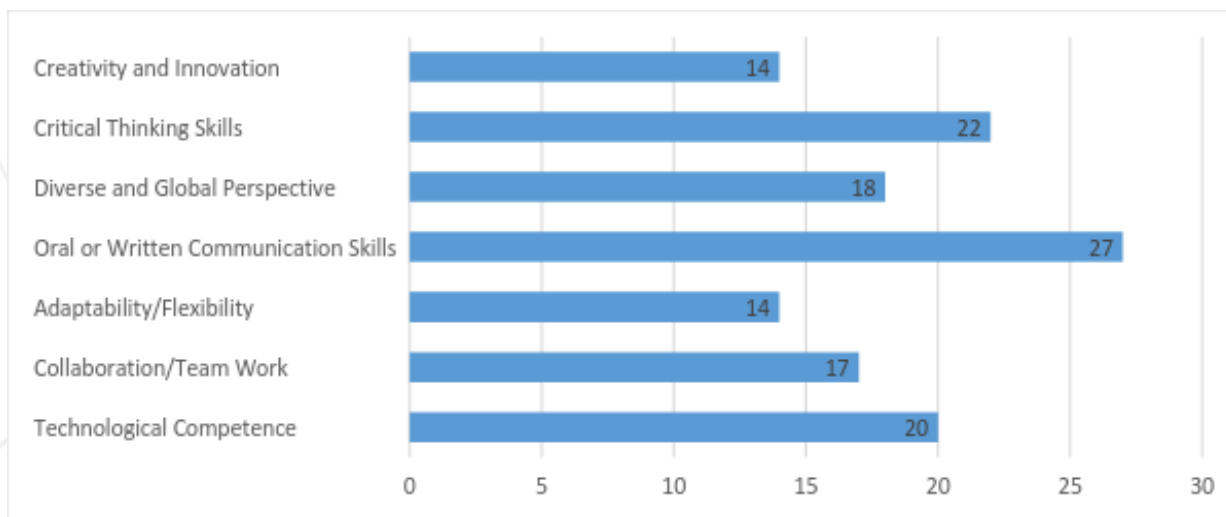[6] Idea bank response from faculty to Talent question

[7] Idea bank response from alumni to Talent question

[8] Idea bank response from faculty to Talent question

[9] Idea bank response from faculty to Talent question

Figure 4 shows common themes in regards to the skills students will need in the future. Most frequently discussed was the need for students to be able to communicate with others, both written and verbally. Critical thinking skills and competency in technology were also seen as important among respondents.

Figure 4: Thematic Responses to Skills Students Will Need in the Future[10]

The ideas of service and *Ut Prosim* were also widely discussed in the idea bank, in response to the Preparing Students, Talent, and *Ut Prosim* questions. Respondents seemed to value the need for service, both within the Virginia Tech community and globally. As one AP faculty member stated, "I believe that *Ut Prosim* is a critical cultural component of Virginia Tech. Encouraging students (and faculty/staff) within the agency around this principle may be one of the strongest things that we can do to stay grounded in making real contributions to the community around Virginia Tech and beyond."[11] Participants expressed the potential of using service to not only benefit mankind, but also to provide students an opportunity to "apply their learning, on campus and off"[12] and allow them to "design their course of study/degrees around these [real world service] projects."[13]

Common Theme 2: Collisions of Ideas and Spaces

Members of the Virginia Tech community expressed that the future university would look similar to the way it does today, with a few exceptions. One common theme was the need for greater collaboration within the university through a collision of ideas and relationships. This was expressed in various ways such as the creation of infrastructure, the desire for greater interaction between faculty and students, and the need for a more globally located, technological campus.
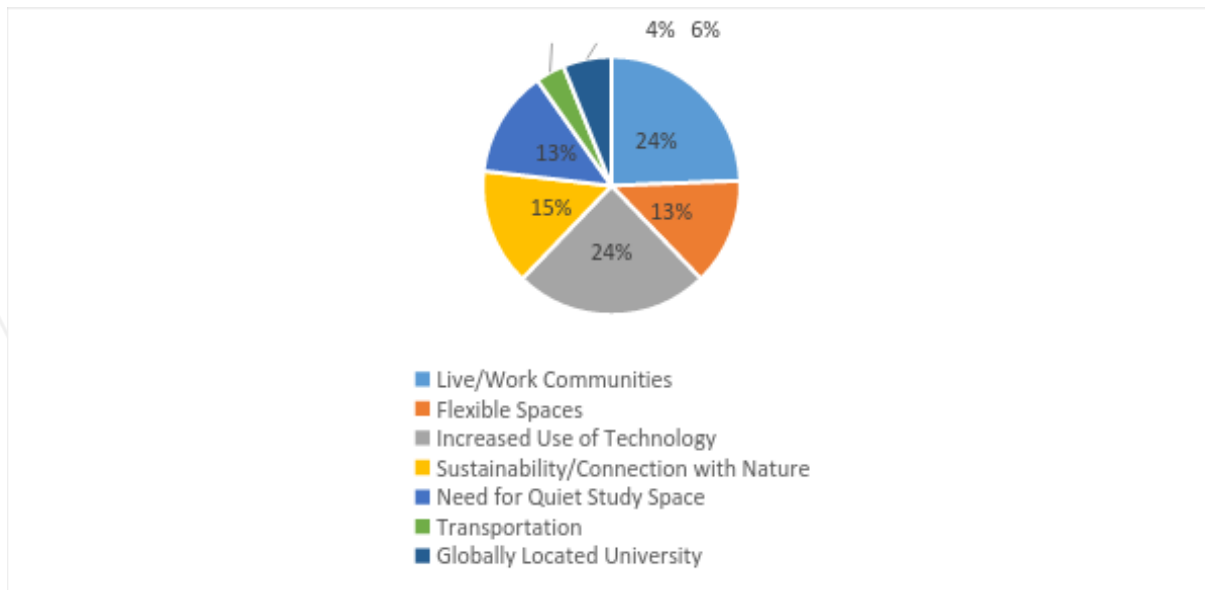
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[10] Raw numbers

[11] Idea Bank response from AP faculty to *Ut Prosim* question

[12] Idea Bank response from faculty to *Ut Prosim* question

[13] Idea Bank response from faculty to *Ut Prosim* question

Figure 5: Thematic Responses to How the Virginia Tech Campus Should Look in the Future

The first commonality among many of the participants was the creation of live/work/study/research environments. One alumni envisioned "a dynamic learning lab/lounge/information portal/technology hub, of sorts, that provides a great opportunity for students, faculty and staff to interact with each other."[14] Others described "communal meals and regular meetings focused around study topics related to course work"[15] and "living arrangements that encourage working and studying as teams."[16] The main justification given for the suggestion of these living and learning communities focused creating relationships and collaborations between students and faculty, allowing for a more immersive and interactive university experience.

Participants also focused on the need for flexible spaces that maximized the use of technology as a way to enhance learning and research. One student suggested the need for a "campus-wide Wi-Fi connection, including all outdoor areas, [which] will allow students to complete assignments and…achieve absolute solitude while studying for exams."[17] Another student noted that in the future "space needs to be flexible and adaptable. Large rooms should be able to be divided into smaller rooms, and electronics should be able to move around the room to be configured with desk space for the purpose of a meeting or lecture."[18] The need for quiet study spaces was also frequently mentioned by staff, faculty, and students.

When envisioning Virginia Tech in the future, ideas emerged concerning sustainability and environmental awareness. Several participants talked about the need to decrease electricity and coal consumption and discussed the possibility of using more sustainable sources of power,

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[14] Idea Bank response from alumni to Campus of the Future question

[15] Idea Bank response from faculty to Campus of the Future question

[16] Idea Bank response from alumni to Campus of the Future question

[17] Idea Bank response from student to Campus of the Future question

[18] Idea Bank response from student to Campus of the Future question

such as wind and solar. Others talked about the need to protect the natural habitat around the university for both aesthetic and environmental reasons.

Common Theme 3: Accessibility

Two common themes arose with respondents who discussed the need for Virginia Tech to be more affordable and accessible. The first dealt with the rising cost of higher education. "Tuition is a massive hurdle for many students, including out-of-state" students who worry that increased debt and job insecurity after graduation becomes "very real, debilitating and terrifying".[19] Members of the Virginia Tech community believed that this can be addressed by the university through increased scholarships, alumni contributions and more opportunities for meaningful student employment on campus.

In addition, online classes and partnerships with community colleges were suggested as ways to reduce cost and decrease students' time at Virginia Tech. One AP faculty member stated that Virginia Tech should concentrate on "online/distance learning that is more mobile-friendly and free from the constraints of the rest of campus. Create a pathway for a different kind of student online, a student of the world. Of course, our students here on campus should also be students of the world, but the Internet affords a different way of engagement that should be explored."[20]

Finally, ideas about the increasing costs of building and auxiliary services emerged. "Cost drivers in non-academic areas, such as housing, dining, recreational sports, athletics, and comprehensive fees" can create, according to one respondent, additional financial burdens for students and their families.[21] Concern was also expressed about the increased number of buildings being constructed, and the costs associated with this growing infrastructure.

In addition to focusing on the increasing costs of higher education in the future, a second theme emerged addressing the accessibility of Virginia Tech to traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations. This issue of access was characterized by members of the community who felt that Virginia Tech should focus more on the recruitment of first generation students, minorities, and students who are "financially challenged to go to a university."[22] One faculty member stated that to increase access, it would be critical that Virginia Tech "work with the K-12 system to ensure that students graduate with the skills they need, prepared to do college work."[23] Another respondent suggested that "while finances are certainly a concern, many first generation students and members of underserved populations do not know how to navigate the college application and financing process" and this is an area that should be addressed through "vigorous outreach."[24] Figure 6 presents common themes dealing with issues of affordability and access for the future of Virginia Tech.

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[19] Idea Bank response from student to Affordability and Access question

[20] Idea Bank response from AP faculty to Affordability and Access question
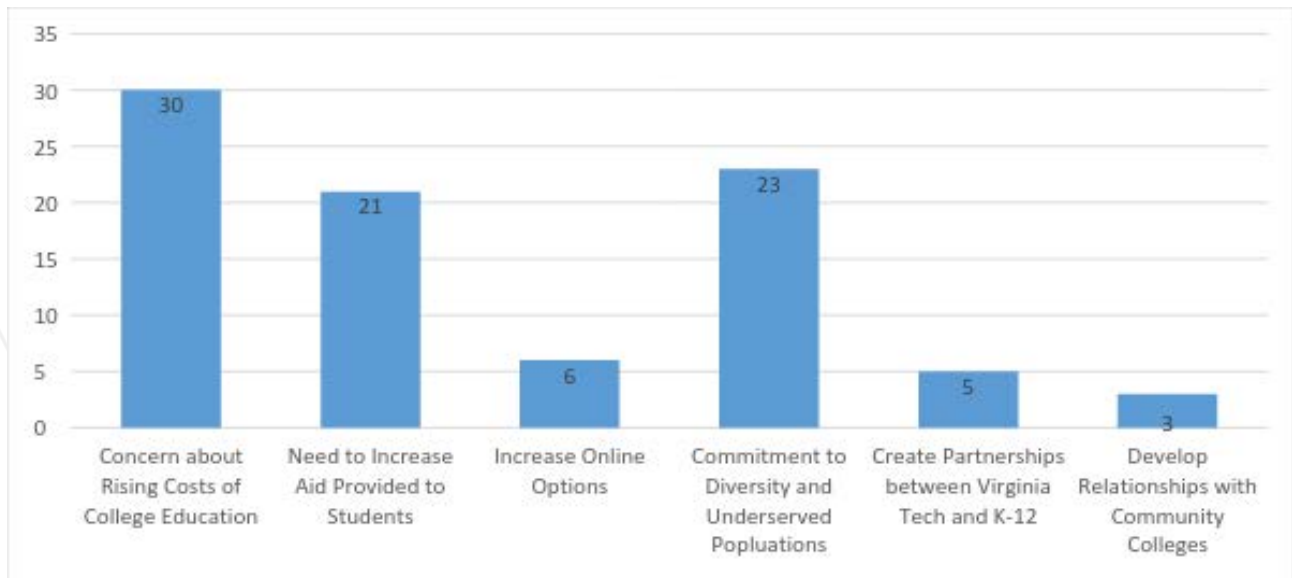
[21] Idea Bank response from AP faculty to Affordability and Access question

[22] Idea Bank response from AP faculty member to Affordability and Accessibility question

[23] Idea Bank response from faculty member to Affordability and Accessibility question

[24] Idea bank response from AP faculty member to Affordability and Accessibility question

Figure 6: Responses to how Virginia Tech can Address Affordability and Access to Higher Education

Conclusion

      The purpose of the Beyond Boundaries idea bank was to gather input from the Virginia Tech community as a way of informing the visioning process. Using these ideas and common themes, the thematic area groups were better informed about the needs of the university and the desires of its members. Many of the idea bank thoughts served as impetus for discussion throughout the Beyond Boundaries project. Specifically, working groups included in their discussion the need for well-rounded, or VT-shaped students, the need to ensure access and affordability for students from diverse backgrounds, and the creation of spaces that would encourage collaborative and purposeful learning in the future.