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Remarks at the VCCS New Horizons Conference (2014)

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Remarks at the VCCS New Horizons Conference (2014)

These remarks were delivered at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center in Roanoke, VA on April 10, 2014.

In the year 2012, seven out of every ten Americans who earned a bachelor's degree acquired student loan debt along the way. The average amount each borrower owed was \$29,400. That's just shy of the sticker price you'll find on a brand new BMW X-1 Sports Utility Vehicle.

Collectively, Americans owe more money for student loans than they owe to credit cards. The numbers are slightly better in Virginia – but they're nothing to brag about. Six out of ten Virginians who earned bachelor's degrees in 2012 amassed student loan debt. That ranks Virginia #23 in the nation.

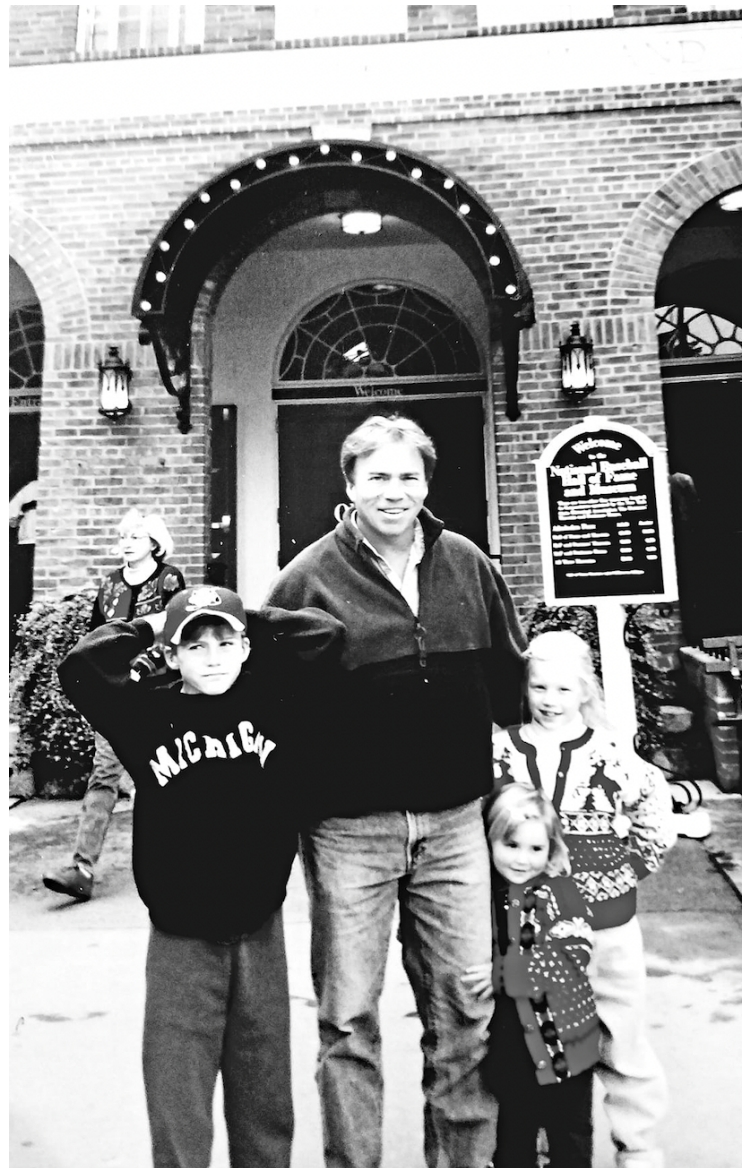
Their average debt load came to just under \$25,000 – that's the same amount of bonus money the US Olympic Committee gave to an athlete who earned a gold medal at the Sochi games.

Affordability efforts

There are a number of things that we do within our community colleges to help families navigate the costs of a college pursuit:

- Our mandatory tuition and fees are about one-third of the comparable costs at a public university.
- We have dozens of guaranteed transfer agreements and now a state-supported transfer grant that's looking better all the time.
- Through processes like strategic planning, reengineering and benchmarking, we put our operations under bright lights and microscopes to minimize inefficiencies.

But there's another way to help our students and families save a lot of money. We're just at the beginning of that and everyone in the room tonight can help in the effort. We're finding creative ways to reduce textbook costs. And by doing that we are fighting back against



one of the biggest punch-in-the-gut rip-offs in higher education. I know, because I lived the experience of expensive textbooks and I bet you did too.

Chancellor's OER grants

I am supporting this effort from my office through the creation of OER Adoption Grants. These are incentives for faculty members to produce courses using Open Educational Resources; courses that can then be shared with their peer instructors across the system.

The first round produced twelve, faculty-developed courses in which all required materials are free and openly licensed. With a modest investment of \$36,000, the savings to the 520 students enrolled in the Fall 2013 pilot was at least \$52,000.

The pilot courses for Spring 2014 are underway and will more than likely produce comparable if not greater savings. Additional savings to students will continue to accrue with each passing semester.

In addition to those grants, there were several other OER projects launched by colleges.

- Tidewater Community College developed the Z Degree, the first-in-the-nation degree that has no textbook costs.
- With a \$20,000 Chancellor's Innovation Fund grant, Northern Virginia Community College created a General Education certificate that also has no textbook costs for students.
- Virginia Highlands, New River, and Lord Fairfax community colleges are currently in the process of developing OER projects with their CIF grants.

Through these various initiatives, the VCCS has developed free and open course materials for 30 courses, most of them high enrollment courses. Another 18 open courses are currently in development.

In case you don't know, I just announced a second round of the Chancellor's OER Adoption grants to continue our momentum and scale the adoption of the OER materials that have been developed. Our OER work is earning national recognition. In fact, it's helping to attract the 11th Annual OpenEd Conference will be held to Arlington in November 2014.

We live in a time and cultural where buzzwords are often abused to the point they become meaningless. "Innovation" is one of those words. But efforts like OER is where innovation becomes meaningful; that's where it benefits a lot of people; that's where it becomes real.

So, congratulations to those we are recognizing tonight. And thank you to all the faculty members here tonight who can bring so much purpose and passion to efforts like this.