James L. Hilton, an Academic Known for Collaborative and Entrepreneurial Approach to Technology, to Lead Information Technology at University of Virginia

December 9, 2005 -- University of Virginia President John T. Casteen III today announced the appointment of James L. Hilton as vice president and chief information officer.

Hilton, associate provost for Academic, Information, and Instructional Technology Affairs and a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, is a national expert on information technology policy and an advocate for strong collaboration between academic and technology cultures in a university environment. He also currently serves as interim director of Michigan’s University Library.

He began his career on the faculty at Michigan, and it was while teaching the school’s largest class – an introductory psychology course to 1,200 students – that he began to question how technology might play a role in personalizing the undergraduate academic experience. Those questions led him away from teaching five years ago to new directions in information technology. He believes that technology has the potential to revolutionize classroom teaching in higher education.

"James Hilton is a tenured professor who understands the academic enterprise, he understands the challenges and opportunities facing higher education," Casteen said. "He is a visionary leader who brings with him a record of accomplishments in both the classroom and in the informational technology arena. We are fortunate to have him join our community – and to be part of envisioning our future."

Hilton, 46, was drawn to the University because of what he calls "the breathtaking trajectory of U.Va. . . . I believe that higher education, especially public higher education, will undergo radical changes during the next decade. Only a handful of schools are poised to meet that challenge, and among these the University of Virginia is uniquely positioned to lead the great publics through that transformation."

He predicts that undergraduate education will look more like graduate education, and that collaboration will infuse the teaching environment.

"I believe the University of Virginia has the potential to best 'get' the use of technology in the service of providing a great residentially based education," Hilton said. "We will reduce the barriers between research and teaching to better enable the faculty's teaching and research mission. And while things will look different, faculty will continue to drive the agenda; technology will serve to facilitate and enhance the directions the faculty set."

University Librarian Karin Wittenborg and J. Milton Adams, vice provost for academic programs, co-chairs of the nine-member search committee that unanimously recommended Hilton’s candidacy, agreed that he has the experience in a wide range of IT issues in higher education that are needed to move the University forward. "We saw strong leadership and people skills," Adams said. "I think we were most impressed with his ideas and his depth of understanding of how IT works in an academic setting -- and how it can result in new and deeper learning."

Wittenborg added: "He understands the importance of our work in the digital humanities and our needs in high performance computing. At the same time he's looking at the horizon for opportunities and challenges headed our way."
Hilton is returning to territory close to his family roots. His father, also a long-time academic, served as chairman of the English department at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., where Hilton grew up.

Throughout his own teaching career, Hilton has been the recipient of numerous teaching awards, including Michigan’s highest teaching honor – the Arthur F. Thurnau professorship – from 1997 to 2000.

Hilton also is a prodigious writer with a long list of chapters, multi-media publications, journal articles and commentary pieces to his credit. Many of his works reflect his academic research on personality and social psychology, although in more recent years, the topics range from intellectual property and policy issues to multimedia myths and digital management systems.

As vice president and CIO, Hilton will have overall responsibility for planning and coordination of academic and administrative information technology, voice communications and network operations on a University-wide basis, including institutional policy oversight of Medical Center IT operations. He will report to Leonard W. Sandridge, the University’s executive vice president and chief operating officer, and will serve on the President’s Cabinet. He also will be considered for an appointment as a tenured professor in the Department of Psychology.

"I am looking forward to the leadership James will bring to the University, and I am committed to assisting him in his goal to provide support for faculty, students and staff," Sandridge said. "I am encouraged by the fact that collaborative initiatives and an entrepreneurial spirit will be part of the University’s strategy under his leadership."

Hilton has three degrees in psychology. He received his B.A. from the University of Texas in 1981, his M.A. from Princeton University in 1983, followed two years later by his Ph.D.

Hilton and his family, including wife Molly and children Michael, 17, and Meghan, 14, will join the University community July 1, 2006.