

Undergraduate Student Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

August 26, 2019

Presented by Madelynn Todd, Undergraduate Student Represent

Good afternoon Rector Valeiras, President Sands, members of the Board of Visitors, and distinguished guests. I am honored and extremely excited to be serving as the undergraduate representative to the Board of Visitors for the 2019 – 2020 academic year. I will do my very best to make sure that the views of the undergraduate constituency are conveyed to the Board and assist in addressing topics of concern in any way possible. As this is the beginning of my term, I would like to share some important updates.

Hokies are home! It is apparent when you walk across the campus how excited the students are to begin the new school year here in Blacksburg. This time of year, there is no better place to be than at Virginia Tech. Smiles and laughter abound across campus. This year, we welcome about 7,600 freshmen into the Hokie Family. You can feel the anticipation and perhaps a bit of anxiety, of our freshmen, but many members of Hokie Nation have stepped up to support them. Hokie Helpers have been fantastic, and I have heard nothing but praise from parents and students alike. Even President Sands, Provost Clarke and Chief Foust were not too busy to lend a hand and make everyone feel welcome!

And it appears that Hokies are not the only ones to recognize how incredible our university is. Students have proudly shared the results of a recent Niche Survey across multiple social media platforms. Even unbiased analysts agree that Virginia Tech is a top-notch institution. According to the 2019 Niche Survey, Virginia Tech is in the top 10 public schools in the United States with additional top 10 rankings in student life, food, and the campus. In addition, many programs such as architecture, agricultural sciences, and engineering are among the top in country.

I have taken the lead in working with the Jewish Student Union since the end of last semester and through the summer to address their request for more Kosher food offerings at Virginia Tech. While they acknowledge that the University is committed to diversity and inclusion,

members have expressed a difficulty in locating Kosher food options. In April of this year, members reached out to the Director of Dining Services, Ted Faulkner, in an effort to address this issue, and it ended on a positive note according to the JSU. The possibility of offering pre-packaged Kosher food has been proposed.

In addition, I have also been communicating with the Jewish Student Union on a second issue in regards to religious accommodations and absence policies. The union has been working on a draft resolution over the summer too. I am working with the VP of Student Affairs and others to determine where in process this resolution is and what next steps are needed. I very much appreciate the assistance of Dr. Patty Perillo and others in this matter.

Further, students are looking forward to the new mental health initiatives that have been implemented ahead of the upcoming school year. These include the addition of four new counselor positions at Cook Counseling Center, the engagement of various student groups, and the possibility of embedding counselors within each college. With the increasing pressures faced by many of today's college students, having the resources in place to assist is absolutely critical.

With all the new programs and service improvements in the works, the upcoming school year promises to be one of the best yet. However, some issues still concern many of the undergraduate students.

Obviously, the over-enrollment here at Virginia Tech has been the trending topic even prior to the end of the last semester. Despite initial criticism, most students seem to be handling it better than expected. Although the idea of living at the Inn or HIE may not have been the ideal choice for some, on move-in day, many students expressed excitement at the spaciousness of the rooms and accessibility to a private bath. The added food trucks and extended dining hours may help to keep lines shorter.

And finally, the negative editorial posted by a parent who attended orientation does not appear to concern most undergraduates. Although this might not be the case with parents, nearly all students seem to support the use of gender pronouns as means to further increase inclusion and diversity. I would like to commend the University Communications Team's response to this

matter which was clear, concise, and timely. There was overwhelming support from the undergraduate constituency for the University's position on the issue. The concern in the editorial that conservative students were "educational refugees" was not shared by the College Republicans at Virginia Tech as evidenced in their statement.

Personally, I am very excited to learn about new safety measures that have been implemented over the summer. The addition of a 3-way stop sign on Washington St. should help reduce vehicle-pedestrian accidents. The flashing light in front of the Student Services Building is being tested for effectiveness and seems to be working well according to Dr. Sherwood Wilson, Vice President for Operations.

Finally, as I grow into my new role as undergraduate rep to the Board of Visitors, I have a few action items that I will be working on over the next month. The main issue I want to focus on is how to improve communication with the undergraduate community. I would like to work with BOV social media accounts and the Communications Team in order to find unique and relevant ways to connect with my constituency. I also look forward to viewing the results of the student climate survey conducted in February of this year. I will continue working to improve safety and accessibility across campus. I hope to work with Dr. Christopher Kiwus and the Facilities Department personnel to conduct a safety walk on campus in the upcoming month.

In conclusion, I look forward to serving as the voice of the undergraduate students at Virginia Tech. Please let me know if there is any way I can be of assistance. Thank you for your time and Go Hokies!

Graduate Student Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
August 26, 2019

Ryan King - Graduate Representative to the Board of Visitors

Good afternoon. I want to start by thanking the members of the Board, the graduate school, and the graduate student population for entrusting me to be the graduate student representative to the Board of Visitors for the 19-20 academic year.

Very briefly, I will introduce myself. I am a first generation college student born and raised in Gastonia, North Carolina. I completed my undergraduate education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before beginning my PhD in Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health at Virginia Tech in 2016. My research focus is investigating minimally invasive therapies to improve survival following cardiac arrest, for which I won a fellowship, this spring, from the National Institutes of Health to fund my research for the next two years. Prior to assuming my role on the Board, I served as the executive chair of the Roanoke Graduate Student Association and the TBMH department delegate to the Graduate Student Assembly. Today marks the first day of my 21st year of class.

Like my predecessor, Zo, I worry that the qualifying words “graduate” or “undergraduate” often get lost when referring to Virginia Tech students. As such, the two student populations become synonymous with one another. While there are certainly overlapping aspects of being a student at either level, there are also quite substantial differences, which Zo so well highlighted in the video series he presented at the last Board meeting. Graduate students are more likely to be older, have spouses, dependents, and elder care responsibilities, and far more likely to not be in Blacksburg. I encourage members of the Board to spend time exploring the “graduate education by the numbers” section of the VT grad school website (<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/about/numbers.html>).

Today, I will speak on two points: 1) Over 30% of the graduate student population **is not** in Blacksburg, and 2) there is a lack of quality, affordable, accessible childcare for graduate students - we fall well behind many of our SCHEV approved peer institutions in this regard (cite Cornell and UC Berkley).

Over the weekend we have had an opportunity to envision the future of the “greater Washington DC metro” area, and you have heard me time and time again advocate for expansion of student services in the area. Something that I believe may have been lost in the conversation is the tense - I was not speaking in future tense, but rather in the present, when indicating a need for student service expansion on extended campuses of Virginia Tech. We must ensure ALL students at Virginia Tech have equitable access to student services and I believe everyone in this room is in agreement (the president just addressed having a VT experience regardless of campus is a priority). From my understanding, a large contribution to the lack of student service availability is directly related to the difference in fee structure for graduate students based on which campus they are pursuing their degree (please note I am not advocating to raise graduate student fees) - I will not attempt to provide a solution, but I would like to encourage everyone to keep thinking about what an equitable model may look like. For any member of the Board, or university

leadership, curious to see what a day is like for a graduate student on a non-Blacksburg I invite you to join me in Roanoke anytime - or, if preferred, I will put you in touch with an NCR student.

Understanding that there is a working group currently operating to assess child care I think it is also timely to stress that graduate students cannot be forgotten in the solution. In the 2018 “additional services for graduate student survey” conducted by the Graduate school 10% of respondents indicated they could use direct assistance in accessing and affording child care. I want to highlight a few services that are already in place at the graduate school.

Since 2003 (**we were the first in the nation with this grant!**), the graduate school has offered a work-life grant program that assist in financially supporting students away on maternity/paternity leave (for up to 6 weeks) during pregnancy and after childbirth. Starting in January 2015, Little Hokies Hangout began programming for children aged 2-5 years; however, Little Hokie Hangouts does not alone have the capacity to meet the graduate student needs and is offered exclusively in Blacksburg - leaving the NCR, Roanoke, Richmond, and Hampton Roads campuses without equitable assistance. Several of our SCHEV approved peer institutions (particularly UC Berkeley and Cornell University) do a better job in supporting their graduate student parents. As many of you no doubt know, graduate enrollment numbers across the nation are on a steady decline; in order to continue competitively recruiting graduate students to Virginia Tech it is imperative that, at a minimum, we keep up with our peer institutions, but this is an area where Virginia Tech has a real possibility to be innovative and become a leader among peers.

Lastly, many graduate students at Virginia Tech who are not on an assistantship are part-time wage employees; as such, I want to state that graduate students support the staff’s efforts to increase the student and non-student wage employee salary paid amount to \$12/hour.

In the coming year, I look forward to continuing to meet graduate students across all of Virginia Tech’s campuses and research locations.

Bullet point summary (and additional points)

- Over 30% of the graduate student population is not in Blacksburg.
- Currently, the benefits/services available to graduate students are not viewed as equitable across campuses by the graduate students. This has created an envious view between campuses.
- We are far behind our SCHEV approved peers in regards to supporting graduate students with dependent (both child care and elder care).
 - “Right now, there is no child care assistance in the NCR. My entire stipend plus some goes into part-time child care. I had to do my own research to try and stay within a price range, luckily I found a somewhat decent center, but childcare is extremely high in this region and any little bit would help.” - Maryann Romero, MBA candidate at NCR.
- Graduate school enrollment numbers are declining nationally - in order to stay competitive in recruiting efforts it is essential that VT at least match benefits offered by our peer institutions, but there is a real opportunity for us to become a leader among peers.

Faculty Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
August, 2019

John Ferris, President—VT Faculty Senate

Good morning Rector Valeiras, President Sands, members of the Board, Provost Clarke, and all others gathered here today.

To get where I am going – where I hope we are going -- we need to look back.

Last fall I spoke about time, money, and people. I said we were well beyond the point when even small tasks can be added to the faculty workload without negative effects; that the faculty bucket is full; that each new drop pushed an old one over the edge; that every additional form to fill out or committee to serve on pulls faculty away research and teaching; that if research expenditures decrease or teaching evaluations are less favorable, it should come as no surprise.

I noted that total undergraduate enrollment had increased by about 13% in the previous 4 years while the number of faculty had only increased at half that rate.

I also said it is people who make Virginia Tech great; that students love Virginia Tech because of their interactions within our community; Advancement depends on continued attachment of students to Virginia Tech; and that faculty, who are called to serve the core missions of the university -- teaching and learning, research and discovery, and outreach and engagement – are central to the personal experience that students so highly value.

I also talked about financial buckets, as I will again by contrasting the Fall 2018 projection for faculty salaries is around the 33rd percentile, and slightly decreasing, to the long-stated goal of bringing us up to the 60th. I have heard that money in these financial buckets must be spent on items for which the buckets are intended, and while I understand that, the time has come to ask, *How are the buckets filled in the first place*, and more generally, *What can we do to improve faculty morale?*

In the past year, just as we were thrilled to hear that nearly a billion dollars would be devoted to an expansion of our inclusive state-wide campus, we also learned that two out of the three lowest responses on the employee survey had to do excessive workload and work-life imbalance, and now we face a significant undergraduate over-enrollment. Rather than a drop in the bucket, this splash comes at a time when the faculty engine has been running above the red-line for far too long.

Forgive the mixed metaphor: I am an engineer, not a writer. I reach for these images in an attempt to convey the faculty mood and out of concern that faculty frustration is turning into faculty disengagement. While there seems to be broad and long-standing recognition that the faculty workload is increasing and that our

pay is below where it should be, faculty wonder when Virginia Tech will take concrete steps to alleviate these problems. Consider salaries: I can't recall a year when either the BOV minutes or a presentation by the president or provost in Faculty Senate did *not* include a statement about the disparity between our goals for and actual faculty pay, as well a commitment to do something about it, yet the disparity remains. I believe this awareness-without-action, in this area and others, has built up a level of frustration that undermines the trust faculty need to have in our collective willingness to engage all of our problems, including those faced by faculty. When *any* issue is repeatedly acknowledged but not addressed to a degree that shows measurable progress toward a solution, it becomes illogical to trust that a solution will be found, and in this case, that faculty and the administration are truly partners in a shared endeavor.

The issues I have raised must be addressed by actions, not words.

Our focus over the summer was on preparing to house, feed, and teach the unprecedented number of students arriving on our campus as we meet. These actions were necessary and urgent and proper but we are now at a critical juncture in our development when I believe that faculty engagement is key.

It is time to address faculty workload, work-life balance, and pay.

Specifically, I'm asking the Board of Visitors to support

1. Efficient use of faculty time.

Faculty should only work on things that only faculty can do. Streamline training and meetings. Staff up and train staff to handle all non-faculty-required items so faculty can serve our core mission.

2. Respect for faculty life outside of Virginia Tech.

Create time when faculty are free from Virginia Tech obligations. Specifically, from 5pm on Friday to 8am on Monday - No contact, No meetings, No work required by our university during these hours (recognizing very few notable exceptions, such as existing professional degree programs). This is somewhat philosophical, but action by the Board of Visitors supporting this philosophy would drive a change in culture at college and department levels.

(Thanks to Board for moving to a later start time on Sunday, or Monday starts, for BOV meetings.)

3. Compensation of faculty workload and commitment with commensurate pay.

A billion dollars is being spent primarily on buildings and infrastructure, but faculty are still not paid at the 60th percentile. I'm not suggesting one big step, but with inflation at 2.9%, 2%-3% cost of living allowances do not move the needle. I've learned of a plan to increase faculty salaries 4.6% over the next six years (and that some tweaking is possible), but I am asking Virginia Tech to commit to 6% raises, at least 3% over inflation, every year until faculty are paid at the 60th percentile.

What makes Virginia Tech great is our people and it's time to walk the walk before faculty walk away from our great community.

Thank you

Staff Senate Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Directors
August 23-26, 2019
Presented by Tamarah Smith, Staff Senate President

Good afternoon Rector Valeiras, Board of Visitors members, President Sands, Administrators and distinguished guests.

I am honored to be a part of the constituent group to advocate for our amazing staff.

As this is my first meeting as the staff representative to the Board, here is a little about me.

I was born in California but raised in West Virginia. I learned at an early age that you had to work hard for what you want. Being raised in a tight knit farming community, we knew everyone and were taught the value of communities rallying together for all situations.

From an early age, I have had a passion for leading, and a desire to help communities grow. With my 30 years of Virginia Tech Service, a certification in advanced organizational management and some college course that I have taken here, I have a passion for this university and for service. I have seen so much change over the years and support the change that is occurring.

One change I am advocating for staff this year is to expand their knowledge of change occurring at the university and take an active part in learning the “buzz” words and how they apply to our work. The “5 Minute Buzz Word” provides opportunity for a staff volunteer to share their understanding of the initiative, what it means to them, and how it impacts their work. Specific examples include Ut Prosim, shared governance, and Tech Talent Pipeline. My hope is that if staff better understand the terms faculty and administrators are using, they will feel more included and appreciated for what they bring to the table.

Another staff initiative is to offer different activities or events where we can work together in serving not only our university but our communities as well. This past month I shared the need for volunteers working as a Hokie Helper for move in. At this time, I do not have a number of those who are participating, but I am excited to start this initiative. These events will not only benefit the community but help staff to feel the sense of community that we all need.

At our past staff senate meeting we were joined by Reese Ramos, our new Director of the Ombuds Office, who very delightfully engaged the staff in what his office has to offer. The staff were very encouraged by this new resource and look forward to working with him.

As you have been hearing, affordable/quality child care continues to be an issue in this community. Staff Senate has an ad hoc committee on this issue and will continue to share this need with the university. The past staff senate president, Robert Sebek, is also a stakeholder on the University Childcare Committee convened earlier this spring by Dr. Pinkney.

Finally, compensation is being reviewed on student wage, and non-student wage positions. This past year we made great strides with increasing the minimum salaried paid amount to \$12.00 an hour. When this increase was first brought forth, there was ongoing concern that non-student wage and student wage positions may be doing the same type of work and if this is the case, shouldn't those positions be reviewed and considered for a change to the minimum wage. A separate committee has been formed to address these concerns. This committee is being chaired by Paula Stuard, Compensation Director in Human Resources and I am fortunate to have a seat on it.

I am a resource for this university advocating for staff, working beside our faculty, undergraduate and graduate student constituent leaders. I welcome encouragement and input on how we can work together to make our university stronger.