

## **Constituency Report**

**Gabe Cohen**

**Graduate Student Representative to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors**

**April 3, 2017**

Good afternoon Rector Chapman, President Sands, members of the board, administration, and distinguished guests. Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity to update you on the things that I have been working on, as well as current events on campus and how they relate to undergraduate student life.

At the beginning of the year I spoke of wanting to find new ways for the BOV reps, student groups, and the university, to communicate with students. This idea took many forms over the course of the year and after assessing all of our options, Canvas seemed like the best medium through which to broadcast information. For those who are unaware, Canvas is the online academic portal for students where quizzes are taken, assignments are submitted, and notes are posted by professors. Daily use means that this platform represents an opportunity for very high student engagement. Branching into this space is relatively new for the university and it is important to make sure that landing pages on Canvas are not overrun with unwanted content. I want to thank the department for Technology Enhanced Learning and Online Services for working with myself and the DSA Communications department for getting this initiative to its final stages. Select student leaders and groups will now get the opportunity to post one message every two weeks and this is a huge step forward. The next steps in this process involve creating a set of guidelines for what criteria the messages need to fulfil in order to be posted, and making sure that the Division of Student Affairs is set up to moderate posts from organizations and manage the process.

Sexual assault and bias-related incidents have been large topics of conversation on campus in the past few months. Students have received countless emails informing them of sexual assaults involving students both on and off campus and are concerned about what the university is doing to combat this. The 28th annual 'Take Back The Night' rally was held this is past week in the GLC to a packed auditorium of students standing up for gender-based violence. Just a few weeks ago, an act of hatred occurred at the Chabad house at Virginia Tech. The Chabad house is a place for Jewish students to congregate. Leaflets with a hateful message were strewn about the property. The response from the University was strong and a rally was held two days later with hundreds in attendance to show support for the Jewish community. Andrew Peck, the President of the Jewish Student Union, wants to thank Virginia Tech for such a strong showing of support, as well as to President Sands, Police Chief Kevin Foust, and many others that delivered strong messages. This however needs to be an ever present reminder that these are not isolated or one-off incidents and our international students are facing frequent issues both on and off campus. Bias-related incidents at VT are increasing, there are many student groups that do not feel safe, and there is a great deal of work that needs to be done. I urge you to make sure that organizations such as the VTPD and the Intercultural Engagement Center continue to receive the resources they

need to combat these issues. On top of this the board should receive regular reports from student affairs about the state of sexual assaults on campus at each meeting.

SGA has been hard at work over the past 6 months to improve the student experience. Thanks to their efforts, Smoke Free VT legislation has moved through the governance system and was recently passed by University Council. SGA has been working on a Green RFP for a bike share program and is starting to collaborate with the Town of Blacksburg to make this idea a reality. In an effort to further integrate the reusable green “ozzy” containers in dining halls, Student Government is working to allocate \$16,000 so that every incoming student receives one next fall. In addition, the April 16th Community picnic will be taking place on Saturday, April 15th.

The Virginia Tech Master Planning process has made great strides in the last few months and Sasaki recently came to campus to meet with various stakeholders and present new ideas. Students have been very involved in this process thanks to the work of Jason Soileau, Mike Dunn, and many others. Sasaki has been receptive to any student concerns they can accommodate and the students that have seen the new ideas wish they could attend Virginia Tech when all of these new concepts are implemented.

Yesterday the selection committee had the opportunity to interview 3 outstanding undergraduate students that hope to become to the next Board of Visitor Representative. I'd like to thank my selection committee for all of the work they have put in this semester to assess our very strong applicant pool. Each candidate has already been very successful in his or her own right at Virginia Tech and the thing they all have in common is a commitment to serve and make a difference in this community. Morgan Sykes, the previous undergraduate representative, created formal training materials to aid in the transition of this position. I am happy to say that Tara and I have been working to expand upon these to include any lessons learned and mistakes made in an order to create a more efficient transition period.

Thank you all for your time and attention and please feel free to reach out with and questions or concerns about student life on campus.

Constituency Report  
Tara D. Reel  
Graduate Student Representative to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors  
April 3, 2017

Good afternoon Rector Chapman, President Sands, distinguished members of the board, administration, and guests.

Much has happened since we last met in November, which makes this report a challenge to write. Our last meeting ended on November 7th, and our national election followed. I heard from several international students in our community over the past several months. They expressed sentiments of uncertainty at what may lie ahead for them. Within our graduate community, Dean Karen DePauw has continued to work on creating welcoming, affirmative environments to everyone, and has held several information sessions regarding the executive order that created a travel ban this year.

I want to share with the Board that one of the greatest experiences I have had at Virginia Tech has been the friends I have made from all over the world. I have learned about different religions, cultures, and languages. I have gained a deeper understanding of the world and people who I may not have met otherwise. In return, I've taught them what it was like to grow up in rural America and be a part of Appalachia. We often have a great deal in common. I know this is a shared experience with many students.

I feel great sadness to tell you that there has been a rise in bias-related incidents on our campus. Most recently, an incident impacted our Jewish community. However, as President Sands noted at a support rally, no matter what anyone does to drive us apart, it only seems to bring us together. I want to express appreciation to President Sands for his efforts in reaching out to our community. He has created presidential initiatives that included calling on Dr. Todd Schenk, the creator of National Frenemies Day, which created discussions to promote civility at Virginia Tech and further strengthen our community.

In the past several months, work has continued to provide a community where our graduate students can thrive. Dean DePauw has taken on academic bullying through a task force and has even been invited to speak with the Faculty Senate. The graduate school conducted a climate survey to assess the climate of inclusion among graduate students and inform efforts to turn the Principles of Community into practice. Almost 20% of the graduate student body participated in the survey including all of our campuses and there was representation from every college. Results of the survey called for a demand for increased training for faculty who advise graduate students and

continued efforts toward diversity and inclusion for all. The President spoke recently in a magazine article that it is time to turn Virginia Tech's commitment to diversity into action. The Graduate School will do its part by using this survey to analyze the data to determine action plans for improvement.

I would also like to add a few notes of appreciation to the Board. First, thank you for inviting us to the table every meeting and to your Board retreat. Second, I want to show appreciation for the proposed graduate assistant compensation plan for 2017-18 that implements a 2.0 percent increase. We are appreciative that this increase will offset costs with the graduate student health insurance. Last, but not least, I along with the Graduate Student Assembly would like to thank Rector Chapman for attending the recent Research Symposium during Graduate Education Week. The students enjoyed engaging him in conversation about their research and it meant a lot to the students to have him there. We appreciate the Rector learning more about our graduate community.

In closing, I share with you a message of hope I received. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Virgil Wood, a ten-year working associate of Martin Luther King, Jr. this past weekend. Dr. Wood was here for two well-attended conferences - the Uplifting Black Men Conference and the Ridenour Faculty Fellowship Conference & High Table. Dr. Wood may have first discovered Virginia Tech due to work of one of your outstanding faculty, Dr. Ralph Hall. Dr. Wood shared some sentiments with me before departing. He told me that being on our campus was one of the best experiences he has had. He said our Hokies give him high hopes for the future.

Ut Prosim,  
Tara D. Reel

**Staff Senate Constituency Report**  
**Virginia Tech Board of Visitors**  
**April 2, 2017**  
**Presented by Alex Parrish, Staff Senate President**

Good afternoon Rector Chapman, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, administrators and distinguished guests: It is an honor to sit at the governance table with all of you once again.

Since we last spoke, several staff initiatives have begun. It has been my focus since taking this post to help support staff associations around campus, and we have been nurturing the development of leadership from underrepresented groups of staff.

Bringing more people to the table sheds light on issues about which we were not previously aware. Several staff made us aware of issues with employee parking during university events, a matter about which we are in the process of gathering further information. Also, retired staff made us aware that a survey of insurance benefits during retirement may be necessary. This comes at a good time, as the state of Virginia is in the process of conducting a closer examination of benefits to state employees.

Senate offered assistance in helping the Office of Internal Audit conduct a survey concerning the reception of policy changes with staff on campus. This action is ongoing, after great support from the leadership of most of the campus Staff Associations to blanket a larger collection of personnel.

There is a lot of excitement about the development of an Ombuds office by Ellen Plummer, or at least there was once we understood what that word meant. Having sat in several of the development meetings, I can affirm my personal belief that this is a fantastic asset to offer the university community. I believe it is a strong complement to the services already offered by Human Resources, and staff will find great benefit from the provisions of this office.

Staff Senate also adopted a resolution in response to the apprehension by some of our international colleagues about travel restrictions imposed at the federal level. This measure, which states emphatically our belief that inclusion and diversity are dependent on recognizing the inherent value of all people, was drafted after we observed a similar initiative by Faculty Senate.

The Staff Senate Executive Committee is participating in “The Big Event,” putting our efforts into the pool with colleagues and students. I haven’t yet received word about the project we will be engaged in, but I’m sure I’ll have something great to report at the next meeting. The website says that the event filled to capacity with more than 1200 project requests. Statistics like that make me proud to be a member of the Hokie nation.

It is an exciting time to be a part of this campus. I consider it a rare privilege, finding myself somewhat serendipitously in a place where I have the opportunity to take part in its unfolding. I have seen university leaders stand up against hate, swap their suits for t-shirts to help with move-in, and sit down with people from many different walks of life to solve problems. I have worked beside students, faculty and staff from our community who volunteer many hours of their own time because they see the potential for something great here, and we know that we can make it happen together.

Thank you for inviting me to the table.

Respectfully submitted,

Alex Parrish  
President, Staff Senate

**Faculty Constituency Report**  
**Virginia Tech Board of Visitors April 2-3, 2017**  
**Monty Abbas, President-VT Faculty Senate**

Good afternoon Rector Chapman, President Sands, members of the Board, and all esteemed guests. I am honored to represent the Virginia Tech Faculty in delivering my third report to the BOV today, with updates on issues and activities we have been working on.

Faculty members are still concerned about salaries and compensation, especially those who have been at Virginia Tech during the time of salary freezes and are facing salary compression or inversion issues. I call for this issue to receive priority as Virginia Tech starts to acquire new sources of funding. We are also still very interested in having a faculty club that can foster a collaborative and collegial environment as we move into a transdisciplinary framework, with the Destination Areas; many great ideas can be born and fostered in a faculty club.

The Faculty Senate has worked diligently on addressing challenges our faculty faces. We issued a strong statement and a resolution in support of our principles of community and in solidarity with our immigrant and permanent resident faculty and students this past February. We were engaged in challenges related to the electronic faculty activity reports, and have provided the administration with a list of items to be addressed. We formed a taskforce to monitor and participate in the development of the new budget model, highlighting both issues and potential remedies from the perspective of the faculty. We plan to remain engaged with the Destination Areas dialogue and progress. We also formed a tenure and promotion task force to increase the efficiency and clarity of the P&T process.

Increasing faculty and university success is highly dependent on the quality of our students, success in research, education, and service, and access to opportunities. These factors are all intertwined and interdependent. On students, we look forward to interact with the Advancement office as we reach out to high-quality students. On faculty success, we worked with the Provost office and conducted a forum on research and scholarship, bringing high-profile faculty panelists to share their “ingredients for success,” and we are planning two more forums on “research and scholarship” and “education and outreach.”

Now, access to opportunities deserves more attention. One side of the coin is related to having a better communication, information, and business engagement model. Virginia Tech is making concrete improvements on these levels, and we continue to be engaged with these efforts. The other side of the coin is inclusion. We should be very careful not to build highways for success without adequate on-ramps for any faculty member having the impetus to participate. This is extremely important, and especially as we strive to attract faculty and students from underrepresented groups. I think we all agree that incentivization alone is not enough to address this issue. It behooves us to account for this Value, not only in our vision, but also in our standard operating procedures in the very near future.

Thank you all for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today. I look forward to sharing our ongoing progress and new endeavors with the Board in the future.

Sincerely,

Monty Abbas