

Camellia Pastore
Undergraduate Representative

June 2021 Constituent Report

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to be a judge for a debate that was the final assignment for a group of VT students. There were three prompts, related to the feasibility, vitality, and desirability of online learning. Each team of students did an amazing job at making the case for or against each point and illustrated points of view that span the spectrum of the student body's opinions.

We proved that it is possible to take Virginia Tech education online, but there are undeniable barriers that make that experience different for different students. Wi-Fi and stable internet are a big part of that -- my roommate and I used to joke that if we had class at the same time, neither of us would be able to listen since Zoom would freeze and crash. When we gain the ability to learn from anywhere, what do we lose? The small moments before and after class when relationships are formed with the professor or other students. The pressure of being surrounded by peers as motivation to pay attention and avoid distractions. When we lose the ability to sit in a room and learn together, what do we gain? Greater access to education for those whose physical or situational circumstances make it difficult to be in a classroom setting. The potential for more efficient use of time, such as eating during class or looking after a child.

To me, the question of if online learning is a sustainable model is one with an obvious answer. In the wake of major corporations hiring employees without a degree combined with mounting student debt, many students are looking to alternatives. Our strong enrollment numbers show that Virginia Tech continues to appeal to students, and we do not want that to change even as higher education may look different in the future. Recent rollouts of online degrees and certification programs from Tech show that we are preparing for this.

At freshman orientation, students are told "welcome to VT -- this is home." Once the pandemic started and learning went virtual, many of us were left wondering what exactly home was supposed to be. But we found it, for the most part, in people and shared memories rather than physical locations. I had friends I didn't meet in person until the last week of school, and buildings that used to be an everyday hangout spot that I still haven't returned to. The desire to see friends and experience the traditional "college experience" may clash with the flexibility of asynchronous courses and self-paced learning.

Taking all of these points together, customization is the name of the game post-pandemic. Our curriculums can benefit from both online and in-person learning, using a hybrid model based on what enhances each course and enables students to have agency in their learning. We can do more than just replicate offline courses online; we can utilize what we have learned from faculty experiences with virtual teaching to take the best of each environment. Further, some students may still seek a traditional four-year path while others have no desire for anything more than a crash course in one subject that will give them a leg up in a desired industry. In the future, one

Virginia Tech student's path to degree could be completely distinct from that of their friends, tailor-made to fit their specific needs and goals.

So, what exactly have we done this year? I say "we" because one of the things I am most proud of is the way that students have worked together to make our collective voice stronger. As I began the role of undergraduate representative, I learned a lot from other student leaders and organizations who had been doing this sort of work already. The beginning of the school year was a lonely time for a lot of students, so I was heartened by the way we all naturally took to collaborating and reinforcing each other's work. Reflecting back on all the group chats and Google documents we made in preparation for meetings, I count myself lucky for getting to spend time with so many inspiring students.

This year, student leaders have voiced opinions about in-person classes, dining options, access to mental health care, and educating others about systemic inequality. People have opened up and shared personal stories about making friends, dating, and parties in an attempt to give administrators an inside look at the trials of being an undergraduate. I say all this to share that it can weigh heavily knowing that you are the one voice being heard, and I want my fellow students to get the credit they deserve for investing so much into accurately reflecting many perspectives.

One large undertaking many students have been involved in is the development of the new Undergraduate Student Senate, or USS. USS is a redesign of undergraduate student government combined with the Commission on Student Affairs. It's a fantastic model that allows students to be representatives on behalf of their academic college, organization, or just students in general. After so much time spent debating the merits of different models and fine-tuning this final one, the student creators have a vision for a student government where all students understand the flow from idea to policy and who makes decisions at each level and feel empowered to play a role in that process if they choose to.

As undergraduates, we are typically here for four years, and many of us go that whole time without understanding the inner workings of the university or what progress is being made. That is why it was so important for me to make harnessing social media a key part of how I communicated with students. As the school year was about to begin, students felt like new information and big changes were constantly being announced, so our social media page broke down key documents into relevant information and always directed students to Virginia Tech websites to gather more information or seek other resources. We documented each Board meeting and released fun videos taking students along with Sabrina and me. We also posted quotes from our speeches as well as major policy updates or discussions from each meeting. Finally, we did several student or organization spotlights, where we could showcase what the VT experience was like through the lenses of our peers.

It is, in colloquial terms, rather weird to be both a student representative, sitting in on meetings where decisions that decide the university's future occur, and a normal student, freaking out about grades and wondering if ten minutes is too short of a time to send a double text. As we

continue to hear our friends (and Twitter) complain that no one at the school listens, it can feel disheartening as we wonder if our insights will have any sort of impact. I have heard from past Board representatives that you begin to feel the effect of your term a few years after it ends, and knowing how much the Board members and administrators care, I hope the feedback given this year will continue to be helpful as you all make decisions after I am gone.

It wouldn't be the end of my last speech if I didn't give one final thank you to the Board members for giving me the honor of holding this position. It has been such a rare and special experience to look behind the curtain of my own school and be a part of making something great even better. I have a lot of love for this school, its students, and the culture of kindness that we all work to create. I know I'll carry the lessons I've learned this year with me for a long time, and I hope you all don't forget me too quickly as you start next year with Paolo, the outstanding next representative. Thank you.

It has been a pleasure serving this year, during a year like none other. With any luck we can leave this year behind and take with us the lessons and innovative methods we have embraced. I am thankful for all the wonderful initiatives I have seen the board pursue and accomplish this year on behalf of student welfare. Some of which include generous donations on personal accord; including graduate student employees in the state mandated 5% pay raises; freezing tuition at the onset of the pandemic; and simply living out the spirit of Ut Prosim by serving on the board and listening to students. Allow me to emphasize that: listening to students.

My most vivid memories of my service to the board were when you all, would pull me aside and ask me about student perspective. I remember every board member who did this and I have so much respect for you for doing so. When you would grill me with questions and thoughtfully consider what I had to say, I felt heard. That is the best thing you can do to show you are really considering the students and as representatives, it makes us feel effective in our roles.

I hope you will continue to make efforts to engage with representatives like this. I also challenge you to go above and beyond the call of duty and make yourselves more available to students. As a student representative, I was eager to organize focus groups with Horacio and Greta to meet other graduate students. My understanding is that the future representative, Phil is keen on continuing to organize focus groups and I strongly encourage board members who want to gather more student perspective to reach out to Phil, as I know he is eager to serve and would be a great resource for this.

That said, as with all my other reports, I have three recommendations. These recommendations are almost entirely in your wheelhouse as the Board of Visitors. These are recommendations on how to improve access and effectiveness of you all, the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors.

I have three hopes that the Board and Kim O'Rourke will consider these moving forward.

1. Livestream the Board of Visitor Meetings

This would make governance more accessible to the public and allow our community members across extended campuses to participate and stay informed of Virginia Tech governance. University of Virginia and George Mason University Boards have shown that this can be done successfully. My understanding is that the critique of making these public is that if the livestream goes down, that the state requires all board work to halt until the livestream is back up. Set up two livestream sessions at separate links from different angles of the room, that way if one fails, we have another going while we repair the first. Other institutions across Virginia even allow people to dial in to meetings. We could even save the recordings and post them on the website. This past year has proven, that making our meetings virtual can be done. As a new alumna, I would be so eager to view future board meetings and stay in touch with my community. This is a chance for Virginia Tech to innovate!

2. Allow for public comment at the Board and Committee meetings

We often boast shared governance at Virginia Tech and I think the best display of shared governance is when everyone has a right to speak. Camellia and I carry the responsibility to represent the student body and even more value could be ascertained if we opened board and committee meetings for public comment. As a model for us to pursue this, I think we could build off the practice of George Mason University (<https://bov.gmu.edu/meeting-minutes/>). George Mason allows written and verbal comment at meetings and operates on a registration model to ensure that public comment does not become

overwhelming. As a SCHEV peer, they have proven it can be done and I see no reason why we cannot do the same.

3. Allow representatives at annual SCHEV training

As you all know, board members are required to attend a [SCHEV orientation session](#) within your first two years on the Board. I was speaking with Board Member Melissa Nelson who suggested that representatives to the board attend the annual SCHEV training. I think this is an excellent way to ensure that representatives are adequately prepared for their role. I would have been immensely thankful for that type of opportunity to prepare me for my duties. Additionally, this would allow representatives the opportunity to build synergy and rapport with Board Members at large. I encourage Virginia Tech to explore this possibility, so that we can ensure representatives are serving at our full potential.

Coming in my place will be Phil Miskovic, who I am confident will bring some excellent ideas and perspective on behalf of graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech. Board Members, I urge you take the future student representatives and communicate with them. Bridge the gap in perspective with collaboration, whether that means asking them questions in between committee sessions or dropping them an email when you are wondering what students are thinking. Allow them to be a wealth of knowledge as you are navigating policy.

With that, thank you all for allowing me the opportunity to serve Virginia Tech. I cannot emphasize enough how much of an honor and a privilege it has been. Although I have been critical at times, I have always been and always will be the optimist. Thank you for listening. I must extend my gratitude to Dean DePauw, Frank Shushok, Monika Gibson, Phil Miskovic, Hannah Kuneyl, Kari Evans, Kim O'Rourke, Maruf Hoque, Horacio Valeiras, Ellen Plummer, and all the board members. These individuals have been instrumental in helping me represent graduate and professional students to the board.

Thank you.

Staff Senate Final Constituency Report

June 7 & 8, 2021

Presented by Tamarah Smith, Staff Senate President

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

I am grateful to be here today to present on behalf of our staff. My two-year commitment to Staff Senate and to the Board of Visitors as the staff constituent soon comes to an end. That does not mean my work in shared governance will end nor I will stop advocating for staff. I will just continue advocating in different ways. I am so grateful for the opportunities that this leadership role has afforded me and the professional growth that has come with this service. Thank you to each of you on the Board as you have listened and acted upon topics that I have brought to your attention and all the while demonstrating care and concern for staff at Virginia Tech. Thank you, Drs. Sands, Clarke, Pinkney, Wilkes, Plummer, Havens Gerardo, Herndon (my boss), Mr. Garey, Dr. Kaufman, Camellia Pastore and Sabrina Sturgeon for your encouragement and mentoring along the way. Thank you to the staff senate for trusting me to lead and advocate for you. Virginia Tech really has the best staff ever. Thank you to my tribe of friends that have been on this journey with me that I am so grateful for.

Some highlights of the past couple of years are worth sharing. When it became apparent, in light of COVID 19, that we would have to eliminate or diminish some of our wage positions Staff Senate raised concerns with Human Resources, and we were able to participate in seeing that jobs were secured, and employees did not lose pay for spring semester 2020. This took strategic organizing to rearrange work schedules, budgets and even some job duties to ensure staff were protected. These efforts are commendable and much appreciated. Virginia Tech's commitment to staff was evident in these and other efforts to address concerns during a very anxious time. Teleworking was implemented in Spring 2020 and being able to work from home eased some staff tension with job insecurity and anxiety of being around others during a pandemic. However, while working from home was a blessing for some, unfortunately not everyone was able to benefit from teleworking. Our university stayed on top of the curve and offered webinars for Zoom fatigue, work life balance, and stress from working during covid, and shared mental health resources.

Communication across the university was a concern compounded by the pandemic and the unease that so many of us have felt. We are thankful that the communication has gotten stronger and better. Going through a pandemic has been tough, but it's also been a learning experience of how we can do things differently and, in many cases, better. The pandemic raised new dimensions of the urgent needs for affordable, quality daycare all employees. I for one am thankful my son is grown and I did not have to juggle a full time job, while teaching school age children, and taking care of elder family members at the same time like so many of our faculty, staff and students have had to manage.

Being a part of a research university allows all of us to be a part of the amazing work that Dr. Finkielstein and her staff do with Covid research/testing and the work Dr. Marr and her team continues to do with air quality. Staff Senate had Dr. Friedlander present on the amazing things he and his team are doing with research. The staff left this meeting feeling a sense of pride at working at a university that is on the forefront of so many great initiatives.

Staff are thankful for the opportunities to learn and be a part of what our university does. With the social injustices we have heard about and witnessed, it's encouraging to know that Virginia Tech is actively addressing our need to have difficult conversations and that work is being done to be a part of the solution for injustices, and not the problem. Our principles of community and being a part of what the University has done and is doing on injustices is encouraging. Virginia Tech is a leader in so many areas and it's my hope that we lead in these efforts as well.

An on-going issue for staff employees are salaries. For our staff positions, I encourage Virginia Tech to work on comparable staff salaries so that we retain the high-quality staff that we have.

And finally, I want to introduce you to the new staff senate president who starts July 1. Her name is Serena Young and she works in our University Ombuds office. I am confident that she will be a fantastic staff constituent bringing past experience, fresh ideas and an amazing energy to the role

Thank you all again for this amazing opportunity.

Tamarah

“Elevating Faculty Potential”

Presented by Eric Kaufman, Faculty Representative to Virginia Tech’s Board of Visitors

In March, the Board took several actions related to faculty that are worth highlighting and celebrating.¹ First, I thank you for recognizing Linsey Marr and Carla Finkelstein with the *Ut Prosim* Scholar Award. It is important to recognize and support the exceptional work of faculty like Linsey and Carla, because their work inspires other faculty and students at Virginia Tech. The Board also conferred new Distinguished Professor² appointments and approved faculty members for endowed professorships³ or fellowships. You may be aware that the University held a Faculty/Staff awards program in April,⁴ with many of those recognitions sponsored by the Virginia Tech Alumni Association. A goal for the university might be to have all awards come with an allocation of funds. Among faculty recognition areas that may be overlooked are the appointments to the Academies of Faculty Service and Leadership.⁵ In the current structure, there are no financial advantages bestowed on members of the Academies of Faculty Service and Leadership, yet Virginia Tech relies heavily upon such individuals to fulfill shared governance roles and responsibilities. Personally, I regret that I have not nominated a wider array of individuals for the Academies of Faculty Service and Leadership, because I believe we have many more faculty embracing the *Ut Prosim* spirit of the academies than have been recognized.

You may wonder why faculty must be involved in Virginia Tech’s shared governance system, rather than simply relying upon the work of quality administrators. To start, it is important to recognize that universities operate differently from businesses. In fact, the Principles of Accreditation from SACSCOC⁶ require Virginia Tech policy decisions be based “on the authority of faculty in academic and governance matters” (p. 23). Accordingly, faculty members play critical roles with the 28 commissions, committees, and councils that compose Virginia Tech’s governance system.⁷ As participants and decision-makers in shared governance, faculty members are critical partners in reviewing the university’s curriculum, developing and maintaining appropriate policies related to academic matters or faculty employment, and helping to establish the university’s mission-related priorities. The Faculty Senate’s annual report for 2020-21 (Appendix A) acknowledges faculty review of 34 resolutions that advanced through the University’s governance process. Beyond participating in the formal governance process, faculty play a critical role in problem solving and maintaining a positive organizational culture. As a point of reference, Jack Finney, our Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs, said the following about Bob Hicok, who was this year’s inductee to the Academy of Faculty Service: Bob “has the ability to steer conversations toward important topics and toward outcomes that work for faculty and the university.”

¹ <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2021/03/bov-march2021-overview.html>

² <https://faculty.vt.edu/faculty-recognition/distinguished-professors.html>

³ <https://faculty.vt.edu/faculty-recognition/endowed-chairs.html>

⁴ <https://vtx.vt.edu/awards/facstaff2021-1.html>

⁵ <https://faculty.vt.edu/faculty-recognition/academies-faculty-service-leadership.html>

⁶ <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/2018PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>

⁷ <https://governance.vt.edu/ccc.html>

In my August report to the board,⁸ I highlighted the work of Linsey Marr as “the epitome of Virginia Tech’s land-grant mission,” and it was highly appropriate for the Board to recognize her work. While Linsey represents the epitome of our land grant mission, her stardom is the result of several strong relationships. Linsey is by no means a lone star faculty member, as a recent *Wired* magazine article⁹ points out. When Linsey found herself at an impasse with the World Health Organization, she turned to Tom Ewing, a faculty member in another college at Virginia Tech, who in turn enlisted the support of Katie Randall, an exceptional graduate student in a department separate from Tom’s academic home. Such relationships are at the heart of our work at Virginia Tech. And, those investments in meaningful work advance the University’s reputation, including recent recognition in the *Times Higher Education* Impact Rankings,¹⁰ which assesses universities against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. With continued support from the Board of Visitors, I am confident faculty will continue to make progress in addressing global challenges. Thank you for your work to elevate faculty potential by helping to ensure a collaborative and positive work environment.

In conclusion, I thank you for a very productive year. I have enjoyed serving the faculty and the University as a member of the Board of Visitors. I appreciate the board’s attention to faculty concerns and hope the board will continue to find ways to acknowledge the contributions of all faculty members, including those who make investments internal to the University as well as those whose impact is internationally visible.

⁸

https://www.facultysenate.vt.edu/content/dam/facultysenate_vt.edu/bov-constituency-reports/Kaufman%20BOV%20Report%20-%20August%202020.pdf

⁹ <https://www.wired.com/story/the-teeny-tiny-scientific-screwup-that-helped-covid-kill/>

¹⁰ <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2021/05/unirel-rankings.html>

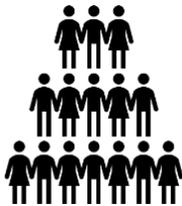
2020-21 Annual Report*

Senate Roster & Representation



Membership included 92 Faculty Senators, representing 71 academic units, across 9 colleges (plus the University Libraries).

Meeting Attendance



Convened 15 meetings of the full senate, with an average attendance of 76 individuals (62 senators and 14 guests).

In total, 176 different individuals participated in Faculty Senate meetings (including senators and guests).

Prominent Guests for Q&A Sessions



- Tim Sands, University President
- Cyril Clarke, Provost & Executive Vice President
- Horacio Valeiras, Rector for Board of Visitors
- Noell Bissell, New River Health District Director

Notable Presentations



- Academic Bullying Considerations (Bryan Hanson)
- Climate Action Commitment (CUS Resolution 2020-21A)
- Faculty Open Access Policy (Ginny Pannabecker)
- Modifications to Policy 13015 (COR Resolution 2020-21B)
- Undergraduate Honor System (Kara Latopolski)

Other Significant Discussion Topics



- Adaptations to Promotion and Tenure (P&T) in Response to Pandemic
- Standardized Test Requirements for Admissions
- Expectations for Instruction During the Pandemic
- Experiential Learning and Bridge Experiences
- Revisions to Shared Governance
- Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) Reporting

* As outlined in the Faculty Senate Bylaws (VII.A.1.b), this report has been prepared for distribution to the senate, faculty, administration, and Board of Visitors. More detailed information is included in meeting minutes, available on the Faculty Senate website: <https://www.facultysenate.vt.edu/>

Ideas/Topics Highlighted for Future Attention



- Assessment of Instruction (Including SPOT & Peer Review)
- Faculty Senate Policy Oversight
- Google Workspace for Education
- Services for Students with Disabilities
- Software Licensing and Procurement
- Undergraduate Admissions' Use of Standardized Test Scores

Surveys & Reports



Facilitated a university-wide faculty/staff survey on Fall 2020 planning that yielded more than 3,000 responses.

Co-sponsored a town hall on COACHE Survey of Faculty Job Satisfaction, highlighting faculty insights on how to improve the workplace.

Structural Improvements Through Constitution & Bylaw Amendments



- Affiliation of college faculty associations (and representatives)
- Expansion and balancing of senate membership
- Oversight of Faculty Senate committees
- Transition of secretary/treasurer role to operations officer

University Governance Resolutions Considered



The Faculty Senate Cabinet considered 34 resolutions that were advancing through university governance. Of those, 8 resolutions were advanced to the full senate for comment, including resolutions from the Commissions on Faculty Affairs, Research, and University Support.

Public Statement



In solidarity with Virginia Tech's Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) community, the Faculty Senate formally adopted a statement condemning the acts of violence committed against members of the APIDA community.

Recognitions



After serving in Faculty Senate officer roles for four consecutive years, Bob Hicok and John Ferris have earned membership in the Academy of Faculty Service and the Academy of Faculty Leadership (respectively).