

Good morning, everyone! It gives me tremendous joy to be here with you all today! I'd want to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to serve in this role. I am eager to get started and collaborate closely with every one of you during my term. My name is Jamal Ross, and I will be the Undergraduate Representative to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Board of Visitors in 2022-23! I am a fourth-year student studying Political Science with a legal studies option as well as Philosophy, Politics, and Economics. Amelia Court House, Virginia is my hometown. Throughout my time at Virginia Tech, I have found delight and enthusiasm in a variety of leadership roles both on and off campus, such as a resident assistant, orientation leader, and undergraduate researcher in the Political Science and Applied Economics departments. During my term, I intend to portray the undergraduate student population in a way that not only paints an image of the undergraduate student body, but also tells a story about the undergraduate student body and provides a variety of views. As I talk to you today, I am not just Jamal Ross, but also the link between the board and the over 30,000 undergraduate students that attend Virginia Tech. I want to give insight into undergraduate students' everyday activities and experiences, so I'm taking notes, asking questions, and leading talks to observe what students are experiencing, hearing, and desiring during their time at Virginia Tech.

Everything appears to move at the speed of light around this time of year. Students are returning to Blacksburg, settling into their resident halls or off-campus homes, and preparing for the forthcoming academic school year. The Great Migration, as I call it, began last week. Move-in week is one of the busiest times of the Virginia Tech Academic Year. During this period, I witnessed our university's motto "Ut Prosim" in action. Our whole undergraduate body of returning available students and other university volunteers worked diligently to assist and greet their new fellow Hokies. I can't go any farther without praising Virginia Tech! We are a genuine

powerhouse, as seen by the high number of incoming students, record admissions, and one of the most diverse classes in Virginia Tech history. This demonstrates that we are doing well and will continue to improve and change as the years pass.

Let us now go deeper into our student body and analyze the various aspects that make up Virginia Tech. We need to concentrate on the decisions we make, how we execute them, and how they affect our students. Then consider what is appropriate for our students and what they require to succeed, while also aligning with university policies that allow for the university's success and progress. Today, I'd want to focus on four major topics: safety, accessibility, affordability, and food insecurity. Going out and putting myself in their shoes, being in their locations, and asking them questions is a terrific way to understand the student body and interact with this many students. So I committed to attending events, engaging in various volunteer projects, and working directly with students throughout the summer and into our current month of August. And I begin with a simple question: "How are you, Hokie?" This one sentence unleashes a torrent of knowledge, allowing me to consider several areas to focus on as the academic school year progresses. Students' primary worry was their health and safety. What we must remember is that Covid-19 has touched the majority of our undergraduate students in some way, which has influenced their manner of learning and development through their academics and has changed the dynamic on campus as we move forward. Some students are nonetheless concerned about the future of the university's lectures and programs. Students praise the university's announcement on Covid-19-related regulations, and I want to express my gratitude for giving many ways to keep our Hokies healthy! Another aspect of campus safety is the university's environment and climate. Students have praised the initiatives and hard work of the Sexual Violence Culture and Climate Working Group. Thank you for establishing this, Dr.

Timothy Sands, and I look forward to working with you as this group achieves significant accomplishments for the institution.

Another major concern of the undergraduate student body is accessibility. This includes those with impairments attempting to get from one side of campus to the other. An individual who has a mobility limitation has very few alternatives for getting from the east to the west side of campus without crossing paths into an obstruction or going significantly off the beaten route, making it impossible to walk freely across campus. This is related to the concept of accessibility in terms of how the cost(s) affect our students. The institution places a high value on attrition, whether for diversification or enrollment, but once students arrive, retention is a concern due to Virginia Tech's affordability. This is important to keep in mind when we make judgments about how we can best help students during their transition and matriculation at Virginia Tech. Other significant and current concerns on campus include sustainability and food poverty. A "Hungry Hokie" is not something we desire. Students responded that the growing cost of meals has affected them and has caused them to make changes in order to see what they can buy and use to feed themselves. We should collaborate to make food more secure on campus for our students and start a dialogue about trash on our campus and how we can reduce waste generation. I'd want to continue our chat with you in greater depth and seek any advice for next steps.

As I finish, I intend to offer you with raw facts and statistics from our students over my term. So, during the year, I will be accumulating various data points to construct a more complete image of the undergraduate student population, which will be named "The Representative Ross Report." This will feature quotations and agenda items gleaned from personal talks and meetings with students and campus partners throughout my tenure in this position. I'd want to thank the board for all of your hard work, and we appreciate you all very

much! I'm thrilled to be able to collaborate with you this year, and I wish you well, live long, and prosper, and as always, Let's Go Hokies!

Report from the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Visitors
Anna Buhle

Hello, Rector Long, Vice Rector Baine, members of the Board, President Sands, and other guests.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce myself. I am a fourth-year medical student and the first medical student representative to the Board of Visitors. This is the second time I have been fortunate to be a student at Virginia Tech as I completed my undergraduate degree here as well in Biochemistry and Microbiology. This May, I am excited to graduate and begin my residency in obstetrics and gynecology.

During my first few months as the graduate student representative, two topics in particular have emerged that I would like to focus on today - graduate student stipends and graduate student housing.

First, graduate students at Virginia Tech are not being paid a living wage. Almost three quarters of students on assistantships are barely making the minimum to afford fundamentals such as food and housing as well as the expenses of being a graduate student.¹ Additionally, this data does not include out of pocket medical expenses, additional educational expenses, or childcare costs which can be considerable especially in the generally older graduate student population.¹ As one might predict, there is great variability between the cost of living in Blacksburg compared to Roanoke and Washington D.C.; with the cost of living being nearly \$1,000 per month more in D.C. than in Blacksburg but the average stipend in D. C. being less than the other two campuses.¹

This is particularly troubling when considering that the graduate students that Virginia Tech enrolls are highly educated and often with many years of work experience. As follows, many students here made the choice to further their education at Virginia Tech ahead of or instead of pursuing lucrative positions in industry. When they chose Virginia Tech, most assumed that they would be well cared for, and that the university would support them in meeting their basic needs to live while they pursue their education. While the data presented in the Graduate Student Assembly Cost of Living Report (discussed above) is discouraging, it did give the university valuable insight into the financial stress graduate students face and led to the creation of a task force to address this serious problem. Currently, the

Graduate Stipend Task Force twice a month and at each meeting members come prepared and passionate to find a solution.

Second, safe, stable, and affordable housing continues to be a pressing problem for graduate students across all our campuses. Several students in the D.C area have reached out to me directly, concerned about the cost of housing, and near complete lack of affordable housing. Their stress is palpable. Students in Blacksburg have similar concerns.² Housing is in high demand. Since 2013, there has been less than a 2% apartment vacancy rate in Blacksburg.³ With such demand and with inflation, rents have skyrocketed. Between 2019 and 2020 there was a 9% increase in rent.³ Many graduate students have begun searching for affordable housing outside of Blacksburg which increases their commute time, and for many, raises concerns about reliable transportation to campus. The rising cost of living, coupled with low wages, is leading to housing and food insecurity, and significant psychological and physical stress placed on our students.

Virginia Tech gives a lot to its graduate students, from education to mentorship and student support, the university provides incredible opportunities for us to advance our education and build a strong career. And graduate and professional students, in return, contribute significantly to the university. We develop new ideas, publish research, present at conferences, bring in grants, and teach classes all of which expand the reputation and prestige of our university. The issues I just described leave graduate students vulnerable. The significant associated stress puts them at high risk for health issues and is a detriment to the education they are trying to obtain. To address this problem is a daunting task. However, this is also an incredible opportunity for the university to become a national leader in graduate student support. Prospective graduate students will certainly take notice of the action taken here. And by mitigating the financial stress felt nearly universally by graduate students, Virginia Tech will be able attract candidates from diverse backgrounds and of the highest caliber.

Thank you.

References:

1. 2021 Graduate Student Assembly Cost of Living Report:
<https://gpss.vt.edu/advocacy/2020-2021-advocacy/2021-cost-of-living-survey-results.html>

2. http://www.collegiatetimes.com/news/students-scramble-for-affordable-housing-as-rent-prices-in-blacksburg-increase/article_66263996-198d-11ec-8de2-9baf57b7c204.html
3. HUD PD&R Housing Market Profiles – Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Radford, Virginia:
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/USHMC/reg/BlacksburgVA-HMP-May20.pdf>

Staff Senate Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
August 21 - 23, 2022 Presented by Serena Young, Staff Senate President

Rector Long, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, administrators, and guests: Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about Virginia Tech's staff.

This is an exciting time of year as employees and campus are ramping up for our Fall Semester. Summer has seemed to fly by but I'm sure most would agree we are looking forward to those cooler temperatures and Hokies Football of course.

I am happy to announce at the beginning of the Summer Semester, our Staff Senate unanimously approved the new Constitution and Bylaws. These will now move forward to University Council and then I will bring them to the Board for full approval in the coming months. We are also creating procedures for new staff associations, as well as developing standard operating procedures for the executive roles within our senate. This will help with retaining history and streamlining information for new and incoming people.

At our last Board of Visitors meeting, I talked about the concerns with the new Commonwealth Telework Policy, as you are all aware, all telework agreements submitted were approved and for that Staff are grateful. We are thankful to Bryan Garey and his wonderful team of individuals for all their hard work and efforts in helping to make this possible.

This fall three major projects/announcements are going to be made. I am not at liberty to discuss those yet because an overall message will be going out to employees sometime this fall semester. What I can tell you is, they are a direct answer to several major concerns and issues directly affecting staff and faculty here at Tech. If all goes well, some of the long-standing issues staff and faculty have faced will see great improvement. Human Resources is also rolling out the new Performance Planning System which will hopefully address the long-time concern for Staff and Supervisors/Leadership evaluations. These projects are a direct result from creativity and teamwork, persistence, and hard work. We are thankful to all individuals who have made them possible!

The McComas Leadership Seminar planning is well under way, and I believe as we promised last year, this year's seminar will be the best one yet. We have a phenomenal speaker already lined up with lots of other surprises in store as well. I am looking forward to this Fall semester and serving with you for another year and can't wait to see what more we can accomplish.

On behalf of Staff Senate, I would like to thank you for listening today. I appreciate your attention today and I thank you for the opportunity to share Staff thoughts. I look forward to sharing our ongoing progress and collaborating with you all to make this year the best one yet!

Sincerely,
Serena D. Young

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report
August 23, 2022
Presented by Holli Gardner Drewry, A/P Faculty Senate President

Good afternoon, Rector Long, board members, President Sands, Provost Clarke, administrators, and guests. I am honored to be here to represent more than 2,000 administrative and professional faculty members.

Last week we held our first A/P Faculty Senate meeting for this academic year. At the meeting we completed the installation of new senators and alternates and began work on setting the agenda for our second year. So far we are planning to work on the following:

We will continue to receive monthly updates from HR on the Job Architecture Project. We want to be active participants in the rollout of findings and stand ready to serve as requested.

The Commission of Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs or CAPFA reports to the A/P Faculty Senate in the new Virginia Tech governance structure. CAPFA is currently preparing suggested updates to the A/P faculty section, Chapter 7, of the faculty handbook, with particular attention to the Grievance and the Allegations of Unprofessional or Unethical Conduct processes.

Having lived and worked with our constitution and bylaws for the past year, our standing committees and a working group have identified a few minor updates to the constituent definitions and election procedures. CAPFA is reviewing these suggested changes and will submit edits to the A/P Faculty senate for discussion and approval. Changes will also include any needed updates to align the documents with the new governance structure.

We received an overview of the work planned for the Academic Freedom/Freedom of Expression Task Force from our representative to the group, Janice Austin. Janice will continue to give us updates throughout the fall semester and the senate is prepared to offer feedback as requested.

The senate will continue its outreach to A/P faculty working outside of the New River Valley to learn more about their work situation challenges and possible opportunities for improvement.

Of particular importance to senators is to continue coalition-building efforts within the A/P faculty rank as well as with the other areas of shared governance and across the university community. To that end, I am excited to share that the A/P faculty senators unanimously supported the selection of a philanthropic project to be launched this academic year. In the coming months senators will explore the available Virginia Tech funds and will select a fund to champion. Some initial suggestions included the Marketplace, Student Emergency Fund, childcare resources support, a fund to help part-time employees, and support for graduate students. The senate will work with Advancement to identify opportunities and launch the appeal. With more than 2,000 A/P faculty members at Virginia Tech, the senate is hopeful that we can raise significant funds to support our selected cause with the goal of continuing this work in future years and to leave a lasting legacy to the university community.

As you can tell, the A/P faculty continue to embrace the opportunity to be active in university governance. I welcome your feedback and look forward to sharing additional updates on the work of the A/P Faculty Senate.

Faculty Constituency Report

Robert Weiss (President, Faculty Senate)

21 August 2022

As we begin a new academic year the faculty are optimistic about the upcoming year and are thrilled to have students back on campus ready to learn. With that excitement and optimism also comes some concerns that I want to share with you from our faculty.

Given that COVID-19 will be part of our lives for the foreseeable future, Virginia Tech has plans in place to address another outbreak should one occur. Knowing there is a real possibility that faculty and students will be impacted by COVID going forward or other infectious disease, it is pivotal that we not lose sight of the ongoing impacts from the last few years that are still resulting in both physical and mental challenges that are both seen and unseen. The changes to how we live and work have taken a toll that we are only beginning to assess. Though vaccines, masking, and other measures help us battle the virus, the ongoing care and consideration that we need to extend to each other requires a different kind of attention and effort. While some have come through this period unscathed, others continue to battle medical, economic, familial, and psychological challenges directly attributable to the virus. As we return to “business as usual,” I ask you each to remember that for some unknown number of us, “business as usual” is impossible. As part of the Hokie Nation, we must continue to work together to address our collective and individual needs in what will remain a challenging environment. Though there are financial and practical limits to what Virginia Tech can accommodate, it is critical that we try to do everything possible for community members who need our help and understanding. As we return to a more normal campus experience it is going to be essential that we begin to develop plans for how we navigate this changing landscape. What can we do to be prepared if students or faculty need to attend classes virtually due to illness? Do we have the capacity to continue to offer the VT experience to our students if faculty are unable to teach or do we need to consider online/recorded options being a possibility in situations when faculty are unable to teach? Is there a need for all classes to be able to be offered in a hybrid mode for students to be able to attend virtually or watch a recorded lecture if they are feeling unwell and need to be away from class for a few weeks? Given these possibilities, what infrastructure and IT support need to be in place to make this possible? While we do not have answers to all of these questions, we are hoping that this can be the beginning of a discussion about how we better plan for operational challenges in the future.

We have spent some time together during the retreat discussing freedom of expression. I wanted to touch on two distinctions between academic freedom and first amendment freedom of speech in academic and non-academic settings. As free as we each are to express our views on the Los Angeles Lakers, climate change, yogurt versus ice cream or any other topic, the academic disciplinary boundaries of a given subject place natural and necessary limits on what will or should be discussed in a particular classroom. For example, while a student’s views on the separation of church and state may be appropriate in a class on politics or American history, they do not appear to align as well with discussions in a physics or geology classroom. In academia, the context of speech must be considered when evaluating freedom of expression.

Additionally, the content of speech must be evaluated in an academic setting in a manner and at a level that would be atypical for everyday speech. We expect faculty to convey their disciplinary knowledge and expertise and evaluate students based on the student's ability to understand and acquire this knowledge and expertise. Though it is critical for faculty and students to coexist in an environment of give and take, of debate and doubt, there is always a body of knowledge that must be accepted as the standard against which students will be evaluated. If a student believes that the tectonic theory of continental formation is wrong or that Shakespeare didn't write Hamlet, they are and should be free to make their case. In the end, we expect faculty to uphold the disciplinary standards that they have acquired over years of study and practice and challenge students to grow and learn in an environment of mutual respect and to engage in civil discussions both within and outside of the classroom. At a bar or picnic, in Boston or Dallas, in anger or at peace, people are free to say and believe whatever they want. However, the right to express these thoughts freely and applied without limitations within a classroom setting, would make it impossible for faculty to keep students on topic to achieve course learning objectives or to hold students to disciplinary standards, the idea of instruction would fall apart. Virginia Tech and its faculty must maintain the highest standards of instruction in which we are able to educate and broaden the world view of the next generation while holding the disciplinary standards.

The future of higher education is changing, and Virginia Tech must remain committed to our students and faculty to ensure that we balance freedom of speak with Academic Freedom and the need to provide a collegial and challenging learning environment.