

MINUTES

March 26, 2020

The Board of Visitors of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University met in open session on Thursday, March 26, 2020, at 2:00 p.m. to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university. On this date, the Commonwealth of Virginia was operating under a state of emergency as declared by Governor Northam due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was an entirely electronic meeting as permitted by the *Code of Virginia*, as amended. Refer to §2.2-3708.2, subsections A.1.b.; A.2; and C.1,2,3. <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/2.2-3708.2/>. A quorum was present on the videoconference.

Present

Mr. Horacio Valeiras (Rector)
Mr. Edward Baine*
Ms. Shelley Butler Barlow
Ms. Greta Harris
Mr. C. T. Hill
Ms. Letitia Long
Ms. Sharon Brickhouse Martin
Dr. Melissa B. Nelson
Mr. L. Chris Petersen
Mr. Mehul Sanghani
Mr. Dennis Treacy
Mr. Jeff Veatch
Mr. Preston White
*(*joined the meeting at approximately 3:00 p.m.)*

Absent

Ms. Anna James

Constituent Representatives:

Ms. Madelynn Todd, Undergraduate Student Representative to the Board
Mr. Ryan King, Graduate Student Representative to the Board
Ms. Tamarah Smith, Staff Representative to the Board
Dr. John Ferris, Faculty Representative to the Board

Also present on the Zoom videoconference were the following: President Timothy Sands, Ms. Kim O'Rourke (Secretary to the Board), Mr. Whit Babcock, Dr. Noelle Bissell (Virginia Department of Health), Dr. Cyril Clarke, Mr. Al Cooper, Mr. Corey Earles, Mr. Bryan Garey, Dr. Guru Ghosh, Ms. Kay Heidbreder, Dr. Rachel Holloway, Ms. Elizabeth Hooper, Dr. Chris Kiwus, Ms. Sharon Kurek, Dr. Scott Midkiff, Mr. Ken Miller, Mr. Michael Mulhare, Mr. Charlie Phlegar, Dr. Dwayne Pinkney, Dr. Menah Pratt-Clarke, Dr. Frank Shushok, Dr. Ken Smith, Dr. G. Don Taylor, Ms. Tracy Vosburgh, Mr. Chris Yianilos.

In addition, 177 members of the university community and public viewed a live stream of the videoconference on YouTube Live.

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Rector Valeiras called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. On behalf of the board, he thanked President Sands, the administration, faculty, staff, students, and their families for their efforts and extended condolences to those directly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. He acknowledged that this is uncharted territory in our lifetimes: The pandemic has caused significant dislocation, upending plans and lives, and caused a lot of pain and anxiety in the Hokie Nation and beyond. He commended the Hokie Nation for pulling together, finding solutions, and moving forward.

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President Sands began the series of six presentations with an overview of planning efforts and chronology of decisions made by the university this spring. He described the timing and process used by the university to make several historic decisions, including decisions to extend spring break and move courses online, and to postpone, move online, or cancel university events, including the 3.2-mile Run in Remembrance and commencement. They were difficult decisions but the right decisions in that they put the health and well-being of the students, faculty, staff, and community members first.

Mr. Mike Mulhare, assistant vice president for emergency management, and Dr. Noelle Bissell, director of the New River Health District of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), described how the university, VDH, and local health providers have worked together to provide the most current and accurate public health information. Consistent messaging among these partners is essential. Individual responsibility and the actions each person can take to protect the broader public is the focus of public messaging.

Dr. Cyril Clarke, executive vice president and provost, provided an update on the huge effort to move courses online, along with the status of the university's spring study abroad program and the university's research enterprise. He praised the more than 2,400 faculty members teaching this semester for a remarkable pivot to online instruction. They transitioned more than 4,500 course sections to an online format in only two weeks. He also acknowledged the tremendous effort of the Technology-Enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS) team for the support they provided both students and faculty as courses were moved online. He also noted that 232 students who started the spring semester on study-abroad programs have returned home, while seven are currently in transit and 18 have requested to shelter in their locations.

Dr. Dwayne Pinkney, senior vice president and chief business officer, spoke about the current status of the university's operations and workforce. He emphasized that Virginia Tech is operational, and that the university is scaling the operations that are necessary to meet the needs of current activities. He also discussed how the university is preparing for possible future operations issues. He cited Presidential Policy Memorandum 309 that was recently issued to lay out the process the university would follow if necessary to further reduce on-site staff in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

Dr. Frank Shushok, interim vice president for student affairs, provided an update on student services. As of March 23, 957 students remained in university housing, down from more than 10,000 at the start of the academic year. Also, 4,612 off-campus students terminated their dining plan and transferred their remaining dining dollars, flex dollars, or commuter cash to the fall 2020 semester. He added that while most campus life facilities have closed, Schiffert Health Center remains fully operational to meet the health needs of the remaining students, and Housing and Residence Life is also working to secure single rooms for all remaining on-campus students. He announced that another \$800 rebate was being offered to on-campus students as an incentive for them to leave campus and move back home for the remainder of the semester.

Tracy Vosburgh, senior associate vice president for university relations, provided an update on communications efforts to provide information to all members of the Virginia Tech community during this rapidly changing crisis. The university's [COVID-19 website](#) has been the primary repository for university information on all topics and issues affected by the pandemic. Additionally, the university has employed the Daily Email for faculty and staff, the three-times-per-week email to students, and university social media channels to raise community awareness and provide critical leadership messages and information. The university social media accounts have seen an 85 percent increase in impressions, mainly due to coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rector Valeiras then called upon each of the constituent representatives and board members to ask questions and offer comments. The students shared some of the concerns of their constituents, in particular the worry of some of the graduate students about how they will be able to support themselves over the summer. President Sands responded with a request that such input continue to be shared with the administration, which is now beginning to focus on planning for the summer and fall. Ms. Smith expressed appreciation to the administration for listening to the concerns of the staff and working to provide answers. Dr. Ferris provided assurance that the faculty would continue to serve faithfully as stewards of the academic mission. All board members were supportive of the faculty, students, staff, and administration and impressed by what the faculty were able to accomplish in two weeks. They were appreciative of the comprehensive and ongoing communications from the administration. They were saddened that students, particularly seniors, would miss all the usual festive spring events. They expressed thanks to the students and their families. President Sands responded that the university community will continue practicing the university's motto of *Ut Prosim*.

Rector Valeiras stated that due to the pandemic and Governor's order prohibiting gatherings of more than 10 people, the regular Board of Visitors meeting planned for March 29-30, 2020, is canceled. If legislation is passed during the General Assembly's reconvene session on April 22 that will allow boards of visitors to meet entirely electronically (without requiring a quorum to be physically present in one location) to conduct regular business, then a board meeting will be scheduled in late April to consider pressing matters including, but not limited to, tuition and fees for 2020-21.

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The meeting was adjourned at 3:24 p.m.

Horacio Valeiras, Rector

Kim O'Rourke, Secretary