

**Board of Visitors Constituency Report**  
**William Storey, Undergraduate Representative**  
**April 8th-9th, 2024**

Good afternoon Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, guests, and friends. It is an honor to once again be here with you at this table. I am thrilled to update you all on some of the hustle and bustle that has occurred within undergraduate student life over the course of the semester thus far.

Let me begin first with a wholehearted and sincere thank you to the Board and to the upper administration for this year's annual cycle of tuition and fees adjustments. As a proud Pell Grant student, the cost of attendance for this university is by no means distant from hundreds of other students' daily thoughts, mine included. However, even with inflation over the past year, I was pleased to see the efforts put forth by the university to alleviate unnecessary pressure on students' cost of attendance for the upcoming academic year, and encourage the university to continue this trend. The steadfast devotion towards making the university more accessible for students has not gone unnoticed and I want to extend my immense gratitude and appreciation to all those involved in this effort.

The "Hokie Highlight" handed to you all today is an incredibly active and passionate student named Delia Alcorn. During her time as an undergraduate here she has been heavily involved in changing the stigma and rhetoric surrounding sexual violence on campus. Some of her work includes working with Schiffert to acquire SANE nurses at Virginia Tech so that people will have local resources available and she has even helped curate legislation on a statewide level to make these nurses available at every college and university across the commonwealth.

For many Virginia Tech students, the imminent end of the spring semester tends to signal a prosperous horizon of opportunities either through the achievements of graduation or through the prospects of a summer internship. However, not all students look to a positive future; the Israeli-Hamas war has been an ongoing point of stress and anxiety for many students over the past six months. Though the conflict is 6,000 miles away, there are students on our campus who are feeling the effects of the war right here in Blacksburg. Many of these students have described a feeling of loneliness and invisibility at an institutional level or that they have withdrawn from their daily routines out of fear of harassment. To describe the issue as complex would be an understatement. I believe it to be axiomatic that we continue to strive for a safe and

healthy environment for all students both on and off campus, so that they may have a place where they can curate positive change, together.

As some of you may remember from my first report last semester, one of my foundational goals is to help spread the awareness of food insecurity that many students struggle with both on and off campus. The Market at Virginia Tech has been one of those foundations for many students experiencing food insecurity. It is a place where students can come and get a week's worth of food at no cost thanks to the incredible support of the Sanghani family's founding donation. I was able to connect with Isebel Lagen, the director of The Market, and further solidified the importance and need for a resource center such as this. Thanks to her help, I have partnered with The Market and USS to start a food drive on campus. Bins for collections have been implemented in dorms and offices, as well as one in the president's office. All donations will go directly to the center and aid in feeding and supporting students in need. I look forward to updating you in June with the full overview and results of the food drive.

Furthermore, I would once again like to thank the administration and the board for your unwavering support over this past year and look forward to continuing with the positive trend that has been established. On behalf of all undergraduate students here at Virginia Tech, thank you.

## Graduate and Professional Student Constituency Report

### Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

April 8 - 9, 2023

Presented by Emily Tirrell, Graduate and Professional Student Representative

Rector Baine, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, administrators, guests, and friends. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you all about the graduate and professional students today.

It has been an exciting and eventful time for students as we get closer to wrapping up the semester, with various students preparing for examinations and graduation. I am pleased to report that this year the students at the Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School achieved a **99% match rate** into categorical residency positions. For those who are unaware, this is an incredibly stressful and intensive process that fourth year medical students go through to transition to the residency portion of their training and medical careers. This is an enormous accomplishment and demonstrates the quality of work that our Virginia Tech Carilion students and staff are putting into their roles. It has been an honor to work with such dedicated students throughout my term, and I know that our soon-to-be graduates will continue to represent the principles and values we hold dear both during their final months at Virginia Tech and beyond.

As a reminder, two main topics impact graduate and professional student attraction and retention that I am focusing on throughout my term: student financial wellness and overall student engagement and wellbeing.

As we heard during the public hearing on tuition and fees a few weeks ago, financial wellbeing continues to be a pivotal aspect of graduate and professional student wellbeing during their time at Virginia Tech. I was, and continue to be, moved by the personal stories shared by students. I have worked closely with students and administrators to find multiple avenues of support for students, and am continually working to address and mitigate the financial strain of the cost of education. I am pleased to share with the board that I have been working closely with the Dean of the Graduate School, the Financial Office, and Provost Clarke to address the financial strain that our doctoral students are facing when paying for tuition. A current model in place to support students is the "Graduate Candidacy Status Tuition Reduction", which **reduces tuition by 10%** once a doctoral student hits specific programmatic milestones. As determined through the shared governance system, this reduction will eventually **increase to 66%**. We have been assessing

this current model, and collaborating to find ways to increase this reduction incrementally and to make the process more “user friendly” for both students and administrators. These discussions are still ongoing, but I am optimistic that this will have a positive impact on students who are without financial assistance from their research labs and are paying their way through graduate school.

Student engagement with campus resources is another contributing factor for student attraction and retention. As a reminder, graduate school data shows that approximately 41% of graduate and professional students want to connect with campus resources surrounding mental health initiatives. In our last board meeting, I addressed this and promised to partner with the Graduate Life Center, Hokie Wellness, Cook Counseling, and many other campus organizations to host a Graduate and Professional Student Resource Fair. I am very pleased to report that this event was a huge success!! With 21 campus partners in attendance, we had over 100 students attend this event and learn more about the resources that Virginia Tech has to offer. I am incredibly proud of this event and outcome, and want to give a huge thank you to all the campus partners who attended and for the support I received from the Graduate School while hosting this event. This event was so successful, I am currently partnering with DC Area Campus administrators and students to host a similar event in the future. While this event did not reach our students at the Roanoke Campus or our Agriculture Resource Extension Centers, I am committed to expanding and broadening student services, and ask that the board be committed as well.

Throughout these experiences, it is apparent that student wellness and student engagement correlate directly with one another, overlapping in many students' experiences. Just as it has been discussed when framing the benefits of the Virginia Tech Advantage, students who are struggling due to financial hardships cannot benefit from the experiences and support that Virginia Tech has to offer in the same way a financially privileged student can. Similarly, students who are struggling from global unrest experience challenges that other students may not face. As our graduate and professional students are navigating the hardships associated with higher education, it is apparent that graduate student wellbeing feeds into engagement with campus partners, and vice versa. I ask that the board consider student financial wellness and student wellbeing and engagement when discussing future university initiatives, and to continue to consider the impact that graduate and professional students have on the Virginia Tech enterprise as a whole.

**Overall, I am continuing to work with student leaders, the graduate school, the medical and veterinary schools, and campus partners to provide support to our graduate and professional students, to increase retention and to attract talent to the university. On behalf of the graduate and professional students, thank you for listening today. I appreciate your attention and I thank you again for this opportunity to share. I look forward to continuing to share my ongoing progress in this role and collaborating with you all in serving Virginia Tech! Go Hokies!**

## Staff Senate Constituency Report

### Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

April 8, 2024 Presented by LaTawnya Burleson, Staff Senate President

Rector Baine, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clark, administrators, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about staff and non-student wage at Virginia Tech.

Since my last update, Staff Senate has been very busy! We're happy to report that the resolution for the statement of support for staff participation in shared governance and professional development opportunities was finalized and approved by Dr. Sands. This is a great achievement for the university.

Rector Baine attended our February Staff Senate meeting, sharing his personal and professional background and listening! He offered responses to tough questions and followed up with administration to get more answers or to flag issues. Feedback has been extremely positive from this meeting, staff felt genuinely heard and seen.

The annual James D. McComas Staff Leadership Seminar was held on Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup> on the Blacksburg campus where we welcomed close to 300 staff and non-student wage employees. It was a great opportunity to connect with our colleagues and provide meaningful programming while also recognizing the two McComas Leadership Award winners, Jenna Booth with Adult Day Care and Patricia Williams with the School of Animal Sciences. The Division of Human Resources supports this event each year and we appreciate their ongoing commitment to the future of the seminar.

Staff Senate has also made significant progress with a wide variety of initiatives, including outreach to the constituency, providing feedback on the staff leave change proposal by voicing concern over the proposed changes further impacting the perceived inequity between faculty and staff/non-student wage employee groups, and introducing a new resolution to address compensation issues. Staff Senate has continued to collect information from our constituency so that we can act on and/or communicate with administration in an organized fashion. Our focus has been on getting out of our offices and meeting people where they are by sharing our Staff Senate Roadshow presentation, which is mainly a listening session where all questions and comments are heard. These Roadshows give us valuable opportunities to connect with those who may have a difficult time participating in Staff Senate meetings.

A major part of our outreach initiative was designing a comprehensive survey to gauge work-life balance, job quality, and benefits, and to provide an opportunity for additional comments. Our hard-working Staff Senate team developed this survey to identify ways to advocate for our

constituents and to bring attention to concerns and issues that may be overlooked. The survey launched on February 15 and closed on March 1 with an impressive 21 percent response rate and receiving responses from all colleges and schools. We are actively reviewing responses at this time, and we will be working to make results known in the coming weeks.

Some themes have emerged during our outreach work - the most common being the perception that staff are treated differently than AP and T&R faculty. The most recent examples of this overarching theme were the changes to the leave policy that were rapidly proposed and implemented in January of this year. The university stated that these changes "...create an equitable experience for all faculty and staff," but the truth of the matter is that the changes to the leave policy impacted faculty and staff differently, with faculty earning four additional days of leave to be used during the holiday break, whereas staff did not gain any days but instead staff-only holidays were moved to the holiday break period. Staff-only holidays included George Washington Day, Indigenous Peoples' Day, Election Day, and Veterans Day, and they were one of few remaining staff-only benefits which provided staff with an opportunity to take a day off of work to participate in events and recognize these important holidays or bank the day to be used at their discretion.

In addition to the holiday changes as part of the leave changes implemented in January, leave accruals were adjusted. While new staff are now accruing at a higher rate (certainly something to celebrate), I would not be performing my role as staff representative to the BOV if I did not diligently attempt to make sure all voices are heard, staff with twenty years or more of service are not being rewarded in the same way they were previously. To quote some of our staff colleagues who have reached out to us, this gives many people the impression that the university does not value staff with higher years of service, and it feels like the university is telling our colleagues to move on already and retire.

These thoughts have been shared with administration, but we would like the Board to hear this from us as well. We welcome any discussions with Board Members and administration about this or any other topic.

We are pleased to hear that administration has been researching the staff supplement issue that has been highlighted in each of my previous reports, and we welcome any proposed solutions to address this issue, along with the ongoing compensation issues facing non-student wage and staff employees. We are hopeful that we can work with administration to come up with a solution to these important issues, but our Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs has also introduced a resolution to establish a task force to investigate the supplement amount and threshold, along with compensation for non-student wage and staff employees which we will pursue if it is needed.

While we will continue to address and collaborate with administration on issues that have been brought forth today, I wanted to highlight some positives. Staff Senate often hears positive comments on some employee benefits that need to be called out. The benefit most frequently

applauded by our constituents is flexible work arrangements/hybrid and remote work options. Staff overwhelmingly and continuously mention how this benefit has led to better work-life balance and they hope this is here to stay and even expanded on in the future. Hokie Wellness events and courses, TimelyCare virtual health service, and the employee discount program (PerkSpot) are also frequently praised by our constituents. We are appreciative of the university for identifying and providing access to these benefits. Staff Senate will continue to do our part to share information on available benefits to maximize non-student wage and staff usage.

In closing, I wanted to thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the staff senate, non-student wage and staff community. I look forward to our on-going collaboration.

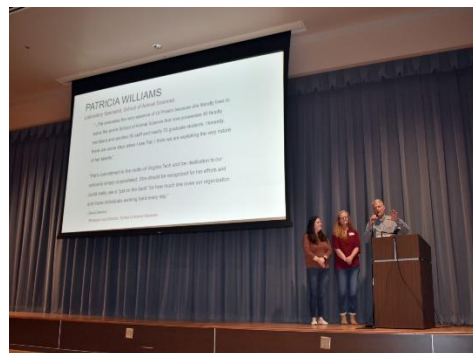
Sincerely,

LaTawnya Burleson

President, Staff Senate

[University holiday updates for faculty and staff | Virginia Tech News | Virginia Tech \(vt.edu\)](#)

Photos from the James D. McComas Staff Leadership Seminar







## **Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report**

April 8-9, 2024

Presented by Janice Austin, A/P Faculty Senate President

Good afternoon, Rector Baine, board members, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Executive Vice President Sebring, administrators, and guests. It is a pleasure to be with you all for the April board meeting.

During Giving Day 2024 in February, our [Beyond Boundaries Scholarship philanthropic project](#) received many donations as we work to reach our goal of \$3,000 by the end of June. We continue to encourage all AP Faculty members to contribute as they are able to this important opportunity to support a Virginia Tech undergraduate student.

Our A/P Faculty Professional Development Leave working group had finalized their recommendation and the Commission on Administrative and Professional Affairs (CAPFA) is in discussion on a resolution for the recommendation. The newly formed Professional Development Committee within the AP Faculty Senate has planned and held our first event, a Tour & Talk, where a group of 40 AP faculty members were able to tour the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, learn more about the important work of our colleagues at FBRI and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, as well as network among the event participants. We are excited to be able to offer similar Tour & Talk events in the upcoming months.

Our Elections and Nominations Committee has been active this spring. A subgroup of the committee reviewed nominations for the [Administrative and Professional Faculty Award](#) and we look forward to the award winners being recognized at the annual faculty and staff awards reception. Additionally, the committee has completed our senator elections for the 2024-25 academic year. We were pleased to receive numerous nominations for open senator seats and had approximately one third of all AP Faculty members vote in the election. This response to our elections is encouraging as it illustrates continued growth in engagement from our employee group with the AP Faculty Senate as well as in shared governance. Our officer elections will be held this month and I look forward to sharing the selection of our leadership team with you at our next meeting.

Thank you for the opportunity to update you today and I look forward to sharing additional information on the work of the A/P Faculty Senate at the June meeting.

## **Constituent Report by Faculty Representative Joseph Merola to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, April 8, 2024.**

Rector Baine, Vice Rector Calhoun, and all member of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors,

I am pleased to share a few words with you as the Faculty Representative to this Board.

It is hard for me to believe that ten years ago, I sat in this same position, and I went back to see what I said then. Here is a snippet:

“Faculty senate has been intensely discussing the issue of faculty voice. Mr. President (Sands), in the article in today’s Roanoke Times, you are quoted ‘I can throw out ideas, but I have to bring along the faculty. The faculty can throw out ideas, and staff, and they need to bring me and the board along,’ he said. ‘It’s a two-way street.’ The two-way street is exactly what we ask for and we truly need. While we have a great tradition of shared governance at Virginia Tech, it can be greatly improved by the addition of a forum for more frank (emphasis here) discussions on programs. Right now many of those discussions are compartmentalized and often they get far down the road at which time no one wants to be seen as obstructive.”

We have come a long way in those 10 years and have a shared governance system that has made tremendous strides in having faculty (and other constituents) find their voices. In recent weeks, I have reflected on the message I wished to convey, and foremost, I feel fortunate for my 37-year career and my current role as President of the Faculty Senate, speaking for Virginia Tech’s faculty. This role has enabled me to listen to and learn from members of our community and our counterparts across the Commonwealth and the nation.

Our commitment to shared governance, evident in the robust system implemented last year, encompasses various senates and commissions, ensuring diverse participation and democratic policy formation. This governance structure has gained national attention for its inclusivity and efficiency. Additionally, this year's revisions to our shared governance system will further enhance the resolution process, reinforcing our mission as an inclusive community dedicated to improving the quality of life and the human condition within the Commonwealth and throughout the world, inspired by our land-grant identity and guided by our motto, *Ut Prosim*. However, a change in a shared governance system is an iterative, ongoing process, and the faculty have accordingly made observations about what has and has not worked in the system over the past year and a half.

Recent campus discussions and activities have prompted dialogue and reflection on enhancing our shared governance's efficiency and effectiveness. For instance, the Faculty Senate is currently deliberating over "Position Statements." Last month, a proposed statement about the situation in the Gaza Strip was presented to the Faculty Senate for its consideration. It has given us an opportunity to study and refine our

processes on position statements related to matters on international events, war, crises, and other matters that affect our faculty members' well-being and mental health, both directly and indirectly. While resolutions must fall within a body's governance purview, the appropriateness of various statements and their crafting remains an area for improvement. This situation emphasizes the importance of attentive listening, constructive dialogue, and welcoming diverse perspectives.

This semester, the Global Distinction initiative has sparked faculty concerns, particularly regarding campus equity and consistency with our land-grant values. While the Global Distinction Initiative has shifted to articulate more of these values, more needs to be done to incentivize, reward, encourage, and/or assess our land-grant values, such as valuing locally relevant research, community-based research, arts and humanities scholarship, and other scholarship not indexed in the major databases utilized by external evaluators, such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE WUR). For example, performances, films, and Extension publications have no fit within the current metrics included in Global Distinction, yet they are an invaluable part of our university's scholarly and creative activities. Without clearly outlined incentives, rewards, and/or indicators for *all* of our land-grant values, faculty will continue to view the Global Distinction Initiative with skepticism if not cynicism. These concerns suggest a potential identity crisis, challenging us to balance global aspirations with our commitments to inclusivity and service. I believe our shared governance system, emphasizing diverse participation in university mission goals and values, can address these challenges to some extent; however, more importantly, it is crucial that all voices are heard who are affected by Global Distinction, which includes administrators, faculty members, staff members, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

I thank the Board for its willingness to listen to constituent representatives, both during formal presentations and through informal interactions. I am grateful for the board members' openness and look forward to our June meeting, where I will review this year's faculty issues and introduce next year's Faculty Representative.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph S. Merola  
Faculty Representative to the VT BOV