

Thomas Feely

Board of Visitors Undergraduate Representative Constituent Report

20 August 2025

Good day, President Sands, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board of Visitors, and members of the Hokie community gathered with us today. My name is Thomas Feely, and I am honored to represent the undergraduate students of this extraordinary institution.

This role is the capstone of my Hokie experience. I believe that my roles as Regimental Commander of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets and officer in charge of the Eagle Scout Association, Communications Officer, New Station Project Manager, and Member at Large of the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad, ambassador and Associated Schools of Construction competitor for the Myers-Lawson School of Construction, Student Leader (Resident Advisor) for Residence and Well Being, University Building Official intern, and Defense Civilian Training Corps scholar have led me to where I am today prepared to lead and trusted to serve. I look forward to providing a broad perspective coupled with the input of the undergraduate body.

Many of my peers have enhanced this community, the Commonwealth, our country, and abroad over the past few months through internships, competitions, mission trips, military training, and study abroad programs, among other experiences.

Following up on foci from my predecessor, Miss Orellana, and matters from previous meetings, I intend to provide updates on the following topics throughout my term:

1. Residential Facilities

- a. We need to remain conscious of how maintenance nests into the masterplan. When planning new facilities, we should be explicit about how we consider the lifecycle of the core and shell, as well as budget for the lifecycle of systems. It is encouraging to have a plan to move forward and create swing space to take our more senior facilities offline, properly rehabilitate or replace them, and provide future classes of Hokies with a more modern experience on par with other on-campus and off-campus accommodations.

2. Dining Costs

- a. Dining Services heard concerns from and worked with students relating to the current dining plan structure. After engaging with a consultant and

student focus groups, their work has been reviewed by University leadership and will be presented for consideration by the Board at a future meeting.

3. Transition from Undergraduate Studies to Post-Graduation
  - a. Career development
    - i. Campus internEXP is an internal program to get students connected to on-campus work, enhancing experiential learning and developing employability skills to help our graduates compete for and secure careers to bridge the transition.
    - ii. I intend to investigate how we can leverage the Virginia Tech Innovation Network, strengthening experiences and opportunities for the Blacksburg campus students.
4. Topics of Discussion from Constituents
  - a. Employee Appreciation Day annually excludes student wage workers.
  - b. In the current climate, it is imperative to maintain our identity as a land grant institution and senior military college of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - c. Research conducted at Virginia Tech continues to receive national recognition and contributes to our Global Distinction.
  - d. The Undergraduate Student Senate and Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs have developed a course for students, approved by Parking Services, to enhance education regarding parking policies. In exchange for successfully completing this course, Parking Services has agreed to adjust certain first-time infractions.
  - e. The class of 2029 is set to have students from 47 states and 77 countries, with 606 international students. Each undergraduate brings a unique background that contributes to our Global Distinction.

This introductory report is strictly informative with no proposed courses of action.

While I have spent much of my time developing within the Corps of Cadets, the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad, and the Myers-Lawson School of Construction, I am eager to advocate for my undergraduate peers at large to help inform decisions made at this table and assist my peers in digesting the outcomes of these meetings.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to working with you throughout the next year.

In the spirit of Ut Prosim,

Thomas Feely

## **Graduate & Professional Student Constituent Report**

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors Meeting, August 18-20, 2025

*Katherine Drinkwater Gregg, Graduate & Professional Student Representative*

Rector Rocovich, Members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you as the representative for the nearly 8,000 graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech. I am incredibly excited to spend the next academic year listening to, learning from, and advocating for my fellow students.

To give you a little background on my journey to VT, I grew up in Reno, Nevada as a curious kid who loved learning. Eager to explore a different part of the country, I attended Duke University for my undergraduate degree where I studied Mechanical Engineering. What excited me most about engineering school was the challenge of working on interdisciplinary teams to solve complex, sociotechnical problems. I wondered how universities could better prepare engineers like me to design solutions to ever-changing, real-world problems. When I learned there were graduate programs in Engineering Education that studied these same questions, I knew this was the path for me. I am now a third-year PhD candidate in the department of Engineering Education and an MS student in Mechanical Engineering. I chose Virginia Tech for graduate school for three reasons: 1) a top-ranked Engineering Education program housed within a distinguished College of Engineering, 2) a strong sense of community and school pride, and 3) many opportunities to gain experience with teaching, research, and service. The fact that my younger brother was an undergraduate student who could show me around Blacksburg didn't hurt either. I can confidently say that I would make the same choice again.

I share these details about myself to contextualize my perspective as a graduate student. My experiences in other educational environments help me identify differences and opportunities here at VT. But, of course, my perspective is only one of thousands of graduate students that come from every corner of the world and study disciplines across all realms of knowledge. When I meet graduate and professional students, I am continuously astounded at the breadth of their accomplishments, interests, and goals. We come to Virginia Tech to gain knowledge, skills, and relationships that will further our careers, but graduate and professional students give back to the Hokie community in innumerable ways. I would like to highlight some of those impacts for you today.

Graduate and undergraduate students are often discussed as separate, but graduate and professional students have a profound impact on the development of undergraduates. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) provide one-on-one instruction, experiential laboratory learning, and detailed feedback on assignments. Notably, 162 graduate Hokies served as Instructors of Record in Fall 2024<sup>1</sup>, meaning they are responsible for independently teaching courses on top of their

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Dr. Aimee Surprenant, Dean of the Graduate School

own coursework and research. For example, my friend, Marin Fisher, a fourth-year PhD candidate, is currently preparing to teach two sections of ENGE1215: Foundations of Engineering. She will be the first engineering instructor that students encounter at VT and has the responsibility of mentoring 144 students as they discover what it means to be an engineer. Other VT graduate students are using their skills across the commonwealth through the VT Teaching Fellows program. This partnership with Northern Virginia Community Colleges allows advanced graduate students to teach community college courses in their discipline. Teaching Fellows represent the best of Virginia Tech to community college students who may hope to transfer to a 4-year institution while bolstering their teaching resumes and increasing access to higher education across Virginia. Beyond these formal programs, graduate and professional students constantly engage in informal mentoring of undergraduates. Whether as supervisors of undergraduate research, consultants in the writing center, or residential well-being student leaders, graduate students are active in all aspects of the undergraduate student experience. It is essential that we ensure graduate students have the time, energy, and financial ability to engage in this impactful mentoring.

Despite the myriad backgrounds of graduate and professional students, we all saw something in Virginia Tech that made us think, ‘this is home.’ We care for this campus and community like it is our home by making it welcoming to all, upholding our Principles of Community, and striving to leave it better than when we came. Graduate students do this work voluntarily through student organizations, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS), and individual projects. The Graduate Honor System, which upholds academic integrity in an increasingly challenging environment, is run almost entirely by graduate students. This system educates our academic community about how to write with integrity in addition to addressing cases of misconduct. Graduate student involvement extends to university wide initiatives; students were active in the 2020 revisions to the Climate Action Commitment and were instrumental in the food security study that led to the creation of the Market of Virginia Tech. At the department level, graduate student associations (GSAs) plan community building events, support professional development, and participate in community outreach. My predecessors, Emily and William, started the biannual Graduate Resource Fair to help graduate students locate resources across campus. I am excited to continue this tradition with more than 25 organizations attending this Fall’s Resource Fair on September 11th. It is impossible to quantify the number of hours that graduate and professional students contribute to making Virginia Tech a better place for all, but I’m certain that the spirited, tight-knit community that led me to choose VT is sustained by the work of graduate students.

No one gets through post-secondary education alone. For many graduate and professional students, partners and family are a key element of their support system. Hokie families are also benefit to the Virginia Tech community. It is estimated that about 30% of graduate students bring

partners and about 15% bring children<sup>2</sup> with them to Blacksburg, Roanoke, or Northern Virginia, and these areas get to benefit from the excellence of the whole family. This may take the form of skilled labor, economic engagement, or simply more Hokie fans at athletic events. My husband, Connor, works as an engineer for a manufacturing startup in Christiansburg. His job made it possible for us to concurrently pursue our career goals and support a small business in the NRV. The families of graduate students add value to Virginia Tech and the commonwealth. However, for families to be able to thrive here, they need access to necessities like housing and daycare, which can be difficult to find and afford in Blacksburg.

You may have noticed that I have not mentioned many important contributions from graduate students, such as knowledge creation, research publications, representing Virginia Tech at conferences, and exemplifying *Ut Prosim* as VT alumni. These are certainly notable ways that graduate and professional students add value, but my hope was to highlight some unexpected ways that we may be making a difference. This is, in fact, my goal for my term as a BOV representative: to elevate the successes and challenges of graduate and professional students that may be flying under the radar.

This objective extends beyond my quarterly constituent reports to the Board. Groups of graduate students are often unaware of issues affecting other graduate students or other constituent groups at the university. Furthermore, most students I talk to do not know what the Board of Visitors is or how the decisions made here affect their VT experience. I hope to improve the experience of graduate and professional students by helping them understand a little more about university governance and the people that move this institution forward. To accomplish this goal, I need your help. Over the next year, I want to learn what you think graduate students should know about this board, about the agenda items discussed, and about you. I am particularly interested in exploring experiential learning experiences, graduate student resilience and mental health, and community building across programs and disciplines. With your feedback, I will strive to create avenues of advocacy for graduate and professional students that will continue long after this year.

Thank you and go Hokies!

---

<sup>2</sup> Source: Monika Gibson, Chief of Staff for the Graduate School

## Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

August 18-20<sup>th</sup> 2025

Presented by Amber Hagan, Staff Senate President

Good afternoon, Rector Rocovich, members of the board, President Sands, Provost Clarke, administration, and guests.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our staff and non-student wage at Virginia Tech. I'd like to provide you with some context on the employees the Staff Senate represents before I speak on our goals for the year.

Currently Virginia Tech employs 3510 staff members and 1792 non-student wage employees. Our constituents hold a wide variety of positions throughout the university. It not only includes operational and administrative positions like mine, but a whole host of unique roles. From the individuals who ensure our students have clear pathways to walk to class to the anesthesia technicians at the Veterinary Medicine School, the staff and non-student wage designation covers positions in all senior management areas of the university.

These 5302 positions run the gamut from stone masons to academic advisors. We are the folks who keep the lights on, the bills paid, and the calendars organized. We support our students by providing a clean, safe and welcoming place to live and many delicious places to eat. We keep our community safe with law enforcement, emergency management and security personnel. We support our instructional, administrative, and research faculty with lab technicians and program coordinators.

This year the Staff Senate is continuing to focus on compensation issues. The Staff Compensation Taskforce will soon be bringing forth recommendations and we hope this will help to bring additional clarity and transparency to the staff compensation process. While merit raises are appreciated by us all, it's difficult, when necessary expenses like parking and insurance continue to rise along with cost of living in the area.

The Staff Senate will also continue our work researching Bereavement leave for Staff. We have begun with benchmarking our peer institutions and are interested to see what recommendations come from our research.

Another focus for the senate this year will be senate recruitment and retention. The Staff Senate will be utilizing its newly created Staff Engagement and Access Committee to recruit and retain representative to the Senate. This will bring more voices to the table to ensure that we are representing our constituents in the best way possible. This committee will also identify ways for the Staff to participate in service projects, in the spirit of *Ut Prosim*.

In closing, on behalf of the Staff Senate Executive Committee, Staff Senate, and all staff at Virginia Tech, I'd like to thank you all for your time today. I wish you all the best for the Academic year and I look forward to seeing what we're able to accomplish and celebrate together this upcoming year.

Go Hokies!

Amber Hagan

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report  
August 18, 19, 20, 2025  
Presented by Dr. Marlena McGlothlin Lester, A/P Faculty Senate President

Good afternoon, Rector Rocovich, board members, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Executive Vice President Sebring, administrators, and guests.

It is my pleasure to present my first report as Administrative and Professional Faculty Senate President and Representative to the Board of Visitors, representing our over 2,600 administrative and professional faculty colleagues comprising approximately 29% of Virginia Tech's employees.

While not serving in this role, I serve as the Director of Advising for the College of Engineering coordinating services for over 10,000 undergraduate students. I have spent my 20-year career advocating for students and faculty, and while this is a shift in constituents, it is an honor to serve and advocate for A/P faculty, ensuring that that voice of our employment classification is championed.

A/P faculty fill critical roles that touch every part of university operations, from senior administrators who perform work directly related to management of the institution, colleges, or administrative departments, to professional and managerial positions in finance, public relations, human resources, and information technology. This includes librarians, counselors, extension agents, coaches, physicians, academic and student affairs professionals, development officers, and professionals in outreach and continuing education. These roles make up seven constituent areas: Extension, Research, Academic Support, Student Affairs, Athletics, General Professional, and General Administrative.

Since assuming leadership in July 2025, our A/P Faculty Senate has focused on strengthening professional development opportunities and expanding our community impact. I am grateful to outgoing President Janice Austin for her exceptional leadership and seamless transition of responsibilities.

The A/P Faculty Senate meets monthly and represents constituent groups at all levels. We aim to give the entire community a represented voice in shaping our university. I am happy to report that during our July Senate meeting, chairs and co-chairs were selected for our standing committees: Communications, Policies and Issues, Elections and Nominations, and Professional Development. I conducted the official installation and administered the oath of office for new senators and alternates.

Our Professional Development Committee will continue the popular Tour & Talk series, planning to host the Corps of Cadets as the next event. This event will help foster cross-departmental collaboration and professional networking.



We will continue collaborating with fellow senates on shared priorities while advocating for the professional interests and development of our constituency.

Later this week, I'll be facilitating an A/P Faculty breakout session as part of New Faculty Welcome. This program is run through Virginia Tech's Faculty Affairs Office and focuses on creating a welcoming onboarding experience. Our goal is to engage new employees right from day one and help them feel connected to the university community from the start.

I would also like to take this opportunity to invite all A/P faculty in the room or listening to the stream to get more involve with the senate, reach out to me to learn more and encourage your fellow colleagues to get involved.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve and represent our A/P Faculty colleagues. I look forward to sharing continued progress at the November board meeting.

## **Faculty Constituency Report to the Board of Visitors**

Justin A. Lemkul  
Faculty Senate President  
August 20, 2025

*Rector Rocovich, Vice Rector Davis, Members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, and Chief Operating Officer Sebring:*

It is a distinct honor and privilege for me to address you today as the faculty representative to the Board. I became a Hokie over 20 years ago as an undergraduate student after being introduced to Virginia Tech when my sister enrolled here in 1999. Despite my best efforts as a stubborn younger brother to not follow in her footsteps, the allure of Virginia Tech was too strong. I quickly realized why the motto of our Alumni Association is “Virginia Tech for life.” I stayed to finish my Ph.D., and I now proudly hang two degrees from Virginia Tech on the walls of my home office, which are (of course) painted orange and maroon.

As I have experienced, the path that one takes in life is often unexpected. I never expected to have the privilege to return to Virginia Tech as a member of the faculty, and when I joined the Faculty Senate five years ago, I never expected to be sitting here. But each step of the way seemed like the right one. Today, I would like to speak with you about the path forward for all of us, the hopes we have, the challenges we collectively face.

The start of any academic year is the first step on a new path for all of us, as each year is different. We are welcoming new students, newly hired faculty and staff, and new members to this Board. Today is a starting point for a year that will undoubtedly challenge and inspire us, and it is only through collective action that we will rise to meet those challenges and continue the outstanding work that goes on at Virginia Tech.

The future prosperity of Virginia Tech is directly linked to the strength of its system of shared governance. We enjoy a robust system that allows for collective voice from all members of the university community that brings forward important issues and revisions to policies. It is a system that invites and welcomes all viewpoints and allows everyone to have their voice heard. Our system is evolving and improving and has shown remarkable achievements in just a few years. I served for two years as the chair of the Commission on Faculty Affairs, and I am grateful to the Board for ratifying each of the resolutions originating in that Commission. Perhaps you are pleased to see me here rather than continuing to chair the Commission given the rather large number of them.

Faculty are faced with unprecedented uncertainty, and they are understandably worried. They worry for the viability of research funding, the ability to truly be a global destination for talent and to recruit students from abroad to conduct research, and to teach students from all backgrounds as a core component of our land grant mission. Their path is uncertain. Proposed cuts to federal funding and the recent politicization of grantmaking threaten our ability to continue engaging in innovative scholarship, as do the delays imposed by disorder and bureaucratic gridlock at federal agencies. Delays and disruptions in visa processes impact the futures of our students and colleagues alike. We conduct our work against the backdrop of mistrust and misunderstanding about what it is that we do. Collectively, we must continue to demonstrate that Virginia Tech as an institution remains committed to its land grant mission and will remain a robust environment for faculty and students. We all have our roles in doing so. The faculty recognize their commitment to our mission, to deliver benefits of their scholarship to the Commonwealth of Virginia, the United

States, and the world more broadly. We further recognize that there is a partnership that exists between faculty governance and this Board, as together we chart the course for the future of Virginia Tech, its priorities, and its operating environment. It is only through reinforcing our mission and our identity as a comprehensive university that we will attain the global distinction we seek; we ask the Board to protect and promote free inquiry across all academic disciplines. Knowledge is the most durable economic engine, and one never knows when the ideas generated in academia will be a catalyst for entrepreneurship and societal benefit. Moreover, it is important to think beyond financial motivations; our society is enriched by the arts, the human experience is better understood by the humanities and history; and our shared values are more richly communicated through an appreciation of languages. Our different academic disciplines work in concert to further our shared aspirations, and our students benefit from this holistic approach to learning.

Virginia Tech has long been known for its innovation and the foundation it provides for faculty, staff, and students to have bright futures. It is that reputation that attracted me here as an undergraduate student two decades ago and one that called me back for my professional career. Over that time, Virginia Tech has never wavered in its path, one that began with Addison Caldwell walking over a mountain, wound its way across farm fields, marched through machining shops, and strode confidently into the digital world of artificial intelligence. Over the course of more than 150 years, the circumstances around us have changed. The context in which we teach and engage in our scholarly work is dramatically different. We must rise to meet these challenges, and the faculty look to the Board to be steadfast in its commitment to the prosperity of this institution. We must resist efforts that threaten our mission, particularly from external entities that do not understand our purpose and core values. We must reaffirm what makes us stand out, the ethos of our land grant mission, our Principles of Community, and to free expression and inquiry that empowers us to be a premiere institution of higher education and a force for societal good, which is what truly makes us globally distinct.

The path forward is uncertain, the world is tumultuous, but together we can work in concert to strengthen and expand what makes the Hokie Nation great. I look forward to working with you and my fellow representatives to the Board to achieve this common purpose in the coming year.

Ut Prosim, and Go Hokies.