

Board of Visitors Constituency Report  
Leslie Orellana, Undergraduate Representative  
August 26<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup>, 2024

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Good afternoon, Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, and guests. First, I want to thank you all for this opportunity to share my own experiences but also to speak to you all regarding a wide variety of student prospectives. Your continuous efforts to make Virginia Tech a place where students can excel is very appreciated by every single student.

I am excited and grateful to be able to collaborate with you all to continue this mission together as the undergraduate student representative this year. To introduce myself, my name is Leslie Orellana, and I am going into my fifth year at Virginia Tech. I recently received a bachelor's degree in real estate last year and will be continuing aiming to receive another bachelor's degree in building construction this year. My dual degrees and time here have given me the opportunity to challenge myself not only academically but also within my own personal growth, especially in leadership. I joined Hokie Ambassadors my first year to find a group of passionate students and share our excitement of Virginia Tech with others. Serving as president of Hokie Ambassadors allowed me to recognize the difficult decisions students must make each day to pursue their education. One instance of this was when I was approached by a prospective student after a campus tour and she shared that she, like myself, was a first-generation college student. She was lit up with excitement as the tour ended but her excitement was clouded with the difficult question of if Virginia Tech was worth the financial stress it would bring. It was an impossible question that no one prepares for. I told her of course and shared my experience of working jobs during the semester, the financial aid process, and her options for financing— but this is a difficult choice every student must make for themselves. Her story and many others inspired me to continue the work to make Virginia Tech accessible and affordable for all students.

This year I hope to not just magnify my own experiences and prospectives but to also shed light on the issues that are prevalent in the student body and share their successes. The issues that will be in my focus will be accessibility to experiential learning experiences, affordability, the rising cost of living, and food insecurity. While these topics are broad, diving deeper will demonstrate the immense positive impact we can implement to help students.

In my role as the undergraduate representative, I have met with all the deans of the colleges to collaborate on different issues and brainstorm ideas. An issue I brought up with every dean was

the idea of experiential learning. While experiential learning looks different for every student and can mean conducting research in a lab, an internship, volunteering at Virginia Tech's farms or clinics, or even getting involved in a student organization's leadership – every single person spoke to the importance of this experience. The issue lies in the accessibility of it. Not only are students striving to find the perfect opportunity to advance the skills taught in the classroom but also are tasked to finding and funding temporary housing, transportation, groceries, necessities, and even some students saving of their earnings for tuition or other semester expenses. This makes the experiential learning experience difficult to consider for students which may hinder some students from pursuing it, despite the colleges emphasis on the benefits to their students. I hope to use this year to work with various campus resources, organizations, and colleges to ensure every student has the opportunity to obtain these experiences despite their socioeconomic status or other constraints.

This year, we have also witnessed the cost-of-living rise as groceries, daily necessities, and interest rates continue to increase as a result of the national rise of inflation. While I, as well as all the students, appreciate the Board of Visitor's continuous efforts to keep tuition increases conservative at only 2.9% for this school year, the financial burden of attendance continues to grow. Off-campus housing in Blacksburg can easily be at minimum \$700 and upward of \$1500, with luxury apartments being the newest and most popular ones to be marketed. I hope that the Board of Visitors can explore additional solutions to housing for students that are beyond the first year guaranteed on-campus housing. We are also witnessing an increase in the cost of groceries and items that may leave a student struggling to find affordable options for daily necessities. Food accessibility has previously been tackled by my predecessors, but I hope to continue this mission as no student should have to worry about their accessibility to food or other essentials.

Overall, I am excited for this school year to work with a variety of students, administration, resources, and organizations to understand the student body and their needs. Virginia Tech is the place where so many people find their friends, dream careers, and the support to always call this place home and I am excited to continue that for generations to come. I thank you all for your continued support and for all you do for the advancement of Virginia Tech and Go Hokies!

**Graduate & Professional Student Constituency Report**  
**Virginia Tech Board of Visitors**  
**August 26 – 28, 2024**

**Presented by William Poland, Graduate & Professional Student Representative**

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

I am so excited to be delivering my first report as the Graduate and Professional Student Representative to the Board. A bit about me: I am a second year master's student studying electrical engineering and working as a graduate research assistant at the Virginia Tech National Security Institute. I am a lifelong Hokie as I grew up in Blacksburg and received my undergraduate degree in electrical engineering from Virginia Tech as well. Having much love and passion for Virginia Tech, I am eager to step into this role and advocate for our students.

The graduate and professional students are an integral part of the university, particularly in supporting our faculty's research efforts, which help distinguish Virginia Tech as an excellent university. By cultivating a desirable student experience, we can attract talented students that will enable the university's research goals and advance our work as a land-grant university. However, the graduate and professional student population is very diverse and there is rarely a one-size-fits-all answer to support all our students. This means that we must be deliberate and thoughtful in looking at our student population and understanding how to best support them.

In my role this year, I look forward to engaging with students and administrators across the university to work to improve the student experience for our graduate and professional student population. Some aspects of the student experience that are of interest to me include: graduate student well-being, access to and awareness of resources, international student experience, and supporting students across our multiple campuses. I have already begun to work with others on some of these issues, which I will now detail.

Following conversations from the previous board meeting in June on the complexity of the pay table for graduate student stipends, I was asked to join a working group on simplifying the graduate student stipend pay steps. Alongside administrators from the graduate school and finance department, I have already had two meetings with this working group, and I am very encouraged by the ideas and progress we have made. Currently, the group is finalizing a set of simplifications to the stipend pay table and will be reaching out to relevant stakeholders across university departments that manage graduate student contracts to receive feedback on the proposed changes.

I have also received an invitation to and am very excited to be a part of the steering committee for the Local Visioning Initiative. This group is composed of members from the university, as well as officials from the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, Montgomery County, and other New River Valley Stakeholders. The goal of this initiative is to explore further partnerships between Virginia Tech and the surrounding region and develop a shared vision for prosperity in our local community. As both a representative to the Board of Visitors and as a Blacksburg native, this is an effort that I am extremely interested in and look forward to supporting.

This past week, I also spoke at the Graduate School Orientation and introduced myself to new graduate and professional students who are beginning their time at Virginia Tech. This opportunity allowed me to increase the new students' awareness of what the Board of Visitors is and how I can support and advocate for them.

The orientation also gave me a chance to promote an event that I have been working very hard to plan, which is the Graduate Student Fall Resource Fair. This is an event that my predecessor began last spring which I wanted to continue in the fall as an opportunity to expose new, incoming students to all the resources and services that Virginia Tech has to offer. This event will take place on September 12<sup>th</sup> outside on the Graduate Life Center Lawn and is in collaboration with the Graduate School and the Graduate and Professional Student Senate. The resources represented at the fair will be diverse, ranging from student well-being to transportation services to professional development and more. I'm very pleased to say that there are over 30 groups planning to attend this event, which is an increase compared to the previous event in the spring, meaning that we will be giving more visibility to additional resources.

In the coming months, I look forward to continuing this work, as well as beginning to meet with other student groups such as the Order of the Gavel and the entire Graduate and Professional Student Senate to hear what is on the minds of our graduate and professional students. I am also planning to connect with the Deans of the Graduate School, Medical School, and Veterinary School, as well as representatives for our other campus so that I may gain a broader understanding of how to best serve our graduate and professional students for the coming year.

Overall, I am very excited for the work to come this year and I pledge to do my best to collaborate with you all in support of our students. On behalf of the graduate and professional students, thank you for listening today.

## Staff Senate Constituency Report

### Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

August 26-28, 2024 Presented by LaTawnya Burleson, Staff Senate President

Rector Baine, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Office, Amy Sebring, administrators, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about staff and non-student wage at Virginia Tech.

I am honored to serve as the Staff Representative to the Board for my second-year term and I welcome all new Board members and representatives and wish you all a successful year.

I want to provide you with some of the goals for Staff Senate for this academic year and give some context of the Virginia Tech employees that we represent. Currently Virginia Tech employees 4717 staff and non-student wage employees. Our roles vary from advisors, administrative, fiscal and lab support, grounds, dining services and housekeeping in support of students, faculty and administration at Virginia Tech. Our constituents have shared hardships faced by the high cost of living in this and other campus locations and compensation is not keeping pace with inflation. Merit raises while appreciated do not seem significant when parking and insurance fees also increase.

Compensation issues will be a main focus this year. While some issues with lower pay band staff are currently being addressed in a coordinated effort between the university and Staff Senate, a deeper dive into the compensation process involving transparency around market value and data sources is an ongoing effort.

I want to thank Amy Sebring and Bryan Garey who have shown great willingness to be more communicative and transparent in regard to this issue and are facilitating important conversations with leaders in the Division of Human Resources.

Parking, everyone's favorite topic! Currently the payroll deduction process for purchasing parking passes only occurs once a year. This creates a hardship for new employees who are hired at a time when this is not an option and have to pay up front. Staff Senate suggests investigating this to make it become a year-round option for employees. We will also work with administration on other parking and transportation issues that are negatively impacting non-student wage and staff.

Staff Senate will roll out our Governance School Cohort this fall. Programming will run for a full academic year, and include efficacy strategies and paths for staff advocacy, along with how to share opportunities for participating in governance with fellow staff and non-student wage members. Also, in the spirit of UT Prosim we are engaging with community leaders to identify ways to participate in service projects.

As I close today, I want to thank you for listening and again wish you the best for the upcoming Academic Year. I look forward to updating you on our progress and celebrating our successes in the upcoming year. Go Hokies!

LaTawnya Burleson

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

August 26-28, 2024

Presented by Janice Austin, A/P Faculty Senate President

Good morning, 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 August board retreat and meeting. I am looking forward to representing the administrative and professional faculty at Virginia Tech again this year.

Since the board meeting in June, the A/P Faculty Senate has installed new officers and senators for this academic year. We received a presentation at our July meeting from Lynsay Belshe, Carrie Cox, and Nick Quint from Auxiliary and Business Services regarding the transportation changes for the Blacksburg campus including the new transit center and Blacksburg Transit route changes on campus as well as sustainable transportation options. We continue to receive regular updates from the Job Architecture Project in Human Resources and look forward to the implementation of the new structure this fall.

The AP Faculty employee group is comprised of over 2,400 individuals doing a great diversity of work in support of the university's strategic initiatives. In June, I shared about members in Academic Support, one of our seven constituent areas. Today I would like to highlight some of the work done by AP faculty members in Extension. The Commonwealth of Virginia maintains a combined Extension system where Virginia Tech works collaboratively with Virginia State University, the 1890 Land-Grant institution. While all Extension Agents and most Extension Specialists are employees of Virginia Tech, Virginia State employs Extension Specialists and has a research farm. AP faculty members in Extension at Virginia Tech work on campus, at the six 4-H Educational Centers, the eleven Agricultural Research and Extension Centers (ARECs), the five district offices, and in extension offices in each county and most independent cities within the Commonwealth. Virginia is the only state that has the independent city structure like we do, therefore Virginia's Extension system is the only one that has truly city-based offices. When looking at the system as a whole with the other land-grant institutions, the Cooperative Extension System is the largest non-formal education system in the world. As an integral part of that system, 4-H is the largest youth development program in the nation and the only one that forms its educational mission from a research base. The work of AP faculty in Extension directly supports Virginia Tech's tripartite land-grant mission of education, research, and engagement. These A/P faculty work with 4-H youth development and support the annual 4-H Congress held in June here on the Blacksburg campus. Others work with farmers, gardeners, families, and in communities across the

commonwealth sharing information and resources, strengthening relationships and partnerships, as well as providing trainings and certifications. I will continue share more about our other constituent areas during our future meetings this coming year.

This year the A/P Faculty senate will continue our work to provide professional networking opportunities to AP faculty, collaborate with other Senates on shared concerns, as well as reviewing our constituent group representation and formation. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today and I look forward to updating you on the work of the A/P Faculty Senate at the November meeting.

## Faculty Constituency Report

Rachel Miles, President, Faculty Senate

August 28, 2024

Over the past nine years, I have served as an academic librarian, professional, and faculty member at two universities. During my career as a junior faculty member and now as an associate professor, I have dedicated my livelihood to service. Libraries and librarians can only thrive through service to others, and that is only possible through intentional engagement, outreach, communication, and community building. None of these are possible without effort, strategy, and planning; in other words, they do not transpire on their own. As the newly elected Faculty Senate President at Virginia Tech, I believe my passion and dedication towards service will and can be utilized in purposeful and guiding ways during the upcoming academic year.

The faculty at Virginia Tech are energized and ready to begin the new academic year, and I am always impressed with their fervor and commitment to their students, research, and service to the university. There are challenges that we will face in the upcoming academic year, and faculty members' enthusiasm can be directed in innovative ways to face these challenges. Engaging with the faculty and students will be critical as we move forward during the academic year as challenges unfold. For example, I expect that the student anti-war protests will likely continue, and I believe engagement between and with the different groups will be crucial to ensuring peaceful freedom of expression activities on campus. Faculty members can act as mediators, but they must be invited to the table to act as mediators and communicators between different groups. Therefore, I must stress the importance of *engagement* with faculty, which, again, takes effort, strategy, and work to achieve. Service to the university goes both ways; faculty serve the university just as other actors do, such as students, administrators, and staff. In many ways, we serve one another to create a cohesive, functioning campus community in which we can rely upon one another. As we move into the new academic year, it is imperative that we strengthen these engagement opportunities with one another. There will be times when our communication channels break down or when we disappoint one another, but we can learn from our mistakes and move forward again.

One of the major initiatives at Virginia Tech is the Global Distinction Initiative, of which I serve on its Steering Committee. This is an ambitious initiative meant to bring international recognition of scholarship to Virginia Tech and attract top talent. However, we have seen a lack of buy-in and adoption of the initiative from faculty members at large. Many are asking: what is in it for me? Why should I care? Again, I cannot stress enough the power and importance of *communication* and *engagement* with the faculty. There are benefits of this initiative to the faculty members, but as of now, that has not (yet) been communicated to them. We need more opportunities for feedback, engagement, and strategic communications around the initiative. In addition, the initiative likely needs to be strengthened to be more inclusive of faculty members from backgrounds in the arts, humanities, and trans-, inter-, and multidisciplinary backgrounds. For example, the Destinations 2.0 Initiative is one incentive for transdisciplinary research, and it brings together disciplines to solve real-world problems in innovative ways. The grants associated with this initiative are impressive and commendable but there are still concerns from the faculty with incentivizing trans-, inter-, and multidisciplinary research across the university in broader contexts. Current short-term



incentives and metrics tend to project and incentivize productivity (e.g., through publications) and impact (e.g., through citations) through short-term windows, usually two to three years. TDR/IDR typically takes longer (more like 5-10 years rather than 3-5 years), but when it is successful, it is *much* more impactful and even considered “breakthrough” research. Faculty members believe that long-term strategies and goals should be adjusted to incentivize and include TDR/IDR or those interested in TDR/IDR in our goals and metrics. Traditional citation metrics typically incentivize short-term impact and specialized research, rather than TDR/IDR. These short-term goals *can* and *should* still be pursued; specialized research is still critical to the growth of research and scholarship. Long-term goals should *also* be pursued simultaneously. I implore you to also read and digest the university-adopted [Statement on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics](#), which was approved by the President and University Council last May. It does not explicitly tell us to move away from our goals, such as to be a Top 100 Times Higher Education (THE)-Ranked University, but it says, “Yes, you can do this, *and* also include other metrics and scholarship in the process, especially and specifically for assessment of the individual.” A “yes, and” approach helps to bring inclusivity to ambitious university goals and drive intentional engagement with faculty who may *feel* excluded. In other words, we believe the university should pursue these goals, such as Global Distinction (GD), and that the metrics of GD act as mere proxies for scholarly impact. What faculty want to know is that their research, scholarship, and creative activities are still valued, incentivized, and encouraged by the university, regardless of the metrics used as proxies to measure and benchmark impact and success, especially at an *individual* level, such as during annual evaluations and in the promotion and tenure process. Large, bibliometric analytics can and *should* still be applied for benchmarking and macro-level assessment purposes, but we ask that the individual faculty member be protected from any potential inadvertent harm. In other words, when we are designing metrics-based assessments, we should ask ourselves: what are the unintended consequences? Who does this discriminate against (potentially)? And how can the metrics be gamed? For more in-depth reading, please refer to the [SCOPE Model for Research Evaluation](#).

The world of Higher Education (HE) is rapidly shifting and evolving. Service is often overlooked or perceived as “lesser than” compared to its counterparts, scholarship and teaching. However, without service to one another, the others do not thrive as much. Service is as much about trust in one another and in the institution as it is about functionality and ambitious goals. Sometimes our goals are too lofty, and sometimes we are too grounded in probabilities, but finding a middle ground is critical. The expectations of service in HE have evolved; traditionally, service activities are committee work or administrative duties, but now we see contemporary expectations shifting towards a more integrated approach that includes supporting the institutional goals in a broader context. How can faculty help support the institutional goals, especially through service, one of the most undervalued aspects of their work? I hope you will reflect on this question and others that I’ve posed throughout this report, and I hope we can work more closely together over this academic year, regardless of the challenges we face. I’m optimistic about the upcoming year, and I hope all of you are as well. In the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, I hope that this report will inspire you to engage with the faculty, such as those of us who have decided to serve in university governance. We are dedicated to service just as you are, and I believe that we can find common ground, commonalities, alignment in goals, and collaboration opportunities. I look forward to working with you in the coming academic year.