

**Board of Visitors Constituency Report**  
**William Storey, Undergraduate Representative**  
**August 28th-29th, 2023**

Good afternoon Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, guests, and friends. I am grateful for this opportunity to be sitting here with you all today and for the board entrusting me with this position. I look forward to collaborating with the board in its mission to exemplify *Ut Prosim* for the betterment of all current and future hokies here at Virginia Tech.

My time here as a student has been unique when comparing my experiences with those of students before and after me. My freshman year was all online due to the pandemic and whilst some of my peers may resent their time learning over zoom, I do not, because it is during this time that I got to see what truly makes Virginia Tech great, the people. While living in West AJ, I became good friends with the custodian on my floor, Ivan, and with dining hall staff like Kareem, both of whom I still talk with today. Drawing from these interactions, I decided that I wanted to play a role, like Kareem and Ivan, in making this university exceptional. Thereafter, I quickly became involved in student leadership with organizations such as the Student Life Council, the class of 2024 Leadership Team, and SVCC Cultural Transformation subcommittee where I garnered rich experiences and relationships that have allowed me to become the student leader I am today. Of course, none of this would have been possible had I not had down to earth people like Ivan and Kareem to show me what it truly means to exemplify *Ut Prosim*.

As the 2023-2024 Undergraduate Representative, I will address a wide array of issues relating to student life. Including but not limited to: food insecurity, accessibility, affordability, sexual violence, mental health, and diversity. In addition, I will work towards improving the quality of student life by working collaboratively with deans, directors, and fellow student leaders. Currently, one of my top priorities is to work with the SSD center. As the student population has steadily increased over the past few years, the

center has outgrown its current space in Lavery hall. It has gotten to the point where many of my professors would rather have me take my exam in an adjacent classroom, lab, or office, than deal with the headache of finding a time that fits with the SSD's schedules. Because of this, I want to work towards expanding the opportunities and resources available to the SSD office so that they will continue to aid students' academic success. Similarly, I want to help make this campus as accessible as possible. As someone with a younger brother who has cerebral palsy, I have seen first hand how important it is to have an ADA accessible campus. Furthermore, having grown up working in local food banks, I have become open-minded to just how relevant food insecurity is in many people's lives, especially younger and vulnerable college students. I want to make sure that every student is able to obtain a healthy meal on campus, no matter their dietary restriction or socioeconomic class.

The issue of housing costs is not a spasmodic topic here at Virginia Tech. In the post pandemic era we are seeing off campus housing prices reach unprecedented levels. The average cost of rent for a student living off campus is now upwards of \$800. When combined with other costs of living such as utilities, food, and gas, the cost per month easily exceeds upwards of \$1000 per month. I and many of my peers, have found it difficult to find affordable housing here in the Blacksburg area, as anything affordable that is not an old trailer full of mold priced at anything less than \$700 a month gets quickly gobbled up. Much of this has been accelerated by the Town of Blacksburg's decision in last year's comprehensive plan to limit where student housing can be built in the future, a significant portion of this area being where student housing is already pre-existing. Unsurprisingly, cheaper student housing is now being bought up by mega leasing companies and being replaced with "luxury" apartments, with the average price per bed at \$1100. As Virginia Tech grows and expands towards its university master plan, I want to implore the university to seek out more cooperative options and initiatives with the town of Blacksburg for student housing, as the rift between the two only seems to widen each year rather than come together. I bring this issue up not because I hate economic development, or hate the town of Blacksburg, but because I love this town

and university and want it to be better. Furthermore, this issue is not something that only a few students are facing, but a significant portion of the student body, even the students on the board with you today.

Similar causes for anxiety and uncertainty amongst many students, especially those of underrepresented and underserved minority groups have arisen in the wake of the Supreme Court decision to overrule Affirmative Action for the college admissions process. I believe it to be axiomatic that we continue to strive for greater diversity and richness amongst the student body despite the potential setbacks from Affirmative Action being overruled. I know that the university is already doing incredible work with programs like InclusiveVT, but I emphasize that we need not let this decision by the Supreme Court keep us from making a campus that is welcoming and accepting of all students.

To conclude, I once again want to express my sincere gratitude for this incredible opportunity to work with you all on making this university better not only for current students, but all future Hokies. It is because of this board that Virginia Tech is more than just a research institution, it is a place where people from all nationalities, religions, and socioeconomic classes can truly feel at home. On behalf of all undergraduate students here at Virginia Tech, thank you!

## Graduate and Professional Student Constituency Report

### Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

August 27 - 29, 2023

Presented by Emily Tirrell, Graduate and 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.

Thank you for the incredible opportunity to serve in this role. I am eager to get started and to collaborate closely with you throughout my term. My name is Emily Tirrell, and I am the Graduate and Professional Student Representative for the 2023-2024 year! I am a second year Ph.D. student in the Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health program and conduct research in the Robotics and Sensorimotor Control Lab in the Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics Department. I have been fortunate to be a student at Virginia Tech twice, and completed my undergraduate degrees in Biological Science and in Clinical Neuroscience. During my first few months as the Graduate and Professional Student Representative, I have connected with student leaders throughout the Virginia Tech community and connected with the deans of the graduate school, the medical and veterinary schools, and the different state - wide campus associate deans and representatives.

During my term I will give a voice to the graduate and professional student perspective, and impact how the board and university might improve our experiences here at Virginia Tech. First, I would like to share the complexities behind what a graduate and professional student really is. Our location for this board meeting provides an excellent opportunity for me to stress the importance of our graduate and professional students, the direct impact that we have, and the value we bring to our community and to the Virginia Tech brand. The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) and Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) combine in one of three thematic institutes associated with Virginia Tech, the others are the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) and the Virginia Tech National Security Institute (VTNSI). The Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) and Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) alone house approximately 2% of graduate and professional students (approximately 145 students) and in FY22, brought in approximately 48% of Virginia Tech's research enterprise grants and contracts (approximately 173 million dollars according to the FY22 Financial Report). These research institutes not only provide space for faculty and students to develop

formative research questions and answers, but space for Virginia Tech to grow into the surrounding commonwealth environment. I want to emphasize the importance of the institutes for Virginia Tech's strategic plan to achieve excellence as a comprehensive global land - grant university, and to specifically draw attention to the important role that graduate and professional students have in achieving that commitment.

So what is a graduate and professional student? We are first and foremost individuals and students of the university. We are also an extraordinary tool, resource, and contributor that the university has to promote its strategic plans and grow its research enterprise success. Our thematic institutes, departments, and research labs would not function or be productive without the work of graduate and professional students. In terms of rankings, when compared to our peer Land Grant Institutions, Virginia Tech ranked 16/112 overall in Fall of 2022, and recently gained recognition with a CASE 50 membership, acknowledging our value, quality, and fundraising excellence. These are both prodigious achievements, however, in Fall of 2022, Virginia Tech placed in the 251-300 range for the global ranking based on research excellence on a global scale. I segway into this comparison for one main reason: With the commitment to achieving excellence as a comprehensive global land - grant university, it is imperative that we attract and retain highly skilled graduate and professional students to increase our research enterprise success. Graduate and professional students will push Virginia Tech into achieving these goals and continue to raise our ranking. Two main topics impact graduate and professional student attraction and retention and I would like to focus on these throughout my term: student financial wellness and overall student engagement and wellbeing.

I am pleased to report that there have been great strides at the various campuses to improve student financial wellness. The DC Area Campus is installing a new metro pass initiative, partnering with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, to introduce the U-Pass to our graduate students. This pass allows full-time students unlimited Metrobus and Metrorail access to travel for about \$1 per student per day. This helps alleviate pressures to live close to campus, and encourages students to live in more affordable areas while still having direct access to campus. The Roanoke Area Campus has initiated a new "StarCard" reward program for students to get discounts at local restaurants and local establishments to offset some of the cost of living expenses. The Town of Blacksburg has provided free public transportation with the Blacksburg Transit Bus System. However, students are still struggling financially. To combat this and provide some financial relief, I am working with the Dean of the Graduate School and the Dean of

Students to find additional sources of funding, using the student emergency fund, to help provide additional support to our students. I ask that the board continue to discuss the financial wellbeing of graduate and professional students, and support these initiatives.

There have also been great strides at the various campuses to improve engagement with campus resources and overall student wellbeing. "TimelyCare", a virtual health and well-being platform available to all Virginia Tech students, has been utilized at all of our campuses. "TimelyCare" offers flexibility for students to be seen at off-hours and reduces barriers to accessing mental health care. With 4.69% of our graduate and professional students (approximately 333 students) utilizing this resource, "TimelyCare" has been an incredible success. However, students still report a great disconnect between campus resource availability and need, and previous campus polling shows that upwards of 21% of graduate and professional students (approximately 1,491 students) need additional access to campus resources. I am working with the Vice President of Student Affairs, Cook Counseling, and Hokie Wellness to promote campus resources to all students and to increase resource availability to combat accessibility difficulties that our students are facing. I ask that the board continue to discuss the engagement and overall wellbeing of graduate and professional students, and support these initiatives.

Overall, I am working 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. I ask that the board consider student financial wellness and student wellbeing and engagement when discussing future university initiatives, and to consider the impact that graduate and professional students have on the Virginia Tech enterprise as a whole.

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 sharing my ongoing progress in this role and collaborating with you all to make this an amazing year serving Virginia Tech! Go Hokies!

## Staff Senate Constituency Report

### Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

August 27 – 29, 2023 Presented by LaTawnya Burleson, Staff Senate President

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

It is one of the best times of the year for Hokies everywhere with the start of the fall semester and the season opener of Virginia Tech football just a week away. It is a time of excitement, hope and new beginnings; for Staff Senate it comes with a renewed commitment to be strong advocates for all staff at Virginia Tech.

The senate met with President Sands this past June in a hybrid format for the first time since 2019. We had a very productive meeting which shed light on many issues we face and brought forth a suggestion from Dr. Sands that he meets more than once a year with the Staff Senate and we, in turn, send a quarterly report to him on our activities. Staff Senate appreciates Dr. Sands continued interest in and support of staff activities.

One goal for this year's Senate is to increase the participation of staff in governance and professional development opportunities. Many staff have shared they do not have the support of their immediate supervisor to attend governance meetings and participate in professional development opportunities. The Staff Senate Executive Team is planning a road show to visit colleges and departments either in person, virtually or hybrid as a way of increasing communication with all staff and ensuring awareness of the many opportunities offered. The President's Office and the Department Human Resources are partnering with us in this effort by sharing messaging with Administration. This messaging will also be highlighted on the staff senate website to increase visibility and to reach all staff members.

A second goal is to thoroughly study leave discrepancies and compensation issues that staff face, with increasing the \$500 per year supplement and increasing the threshold a priority. This will be done by working closely with our Human Resources colleagues, who have been receptive and collaborative with us as we dig in on this work.

Thirdly, we will focus on education; it is the reason we are all here. The Staff Senate will welcome members from strategic affairs who reached out to us to discuss the Beyond Boundaries Vision and we appreciate that they are including us in this important work. Dr. Sands spoke to staff about the Virginia Tech Advantage Initiative which should have such an important impact on the commonwealth. Staff Senate would also like to see investment and thought given to increasing the faculty/staff dependent scholarship fund so that it might be more impactful to the dependents of Virginia Tech employees.

In closing on behalf of the Staff Senate Executive Committee, Staff Senate and all staff at Virginia Tech, I thank you again for this opportunity to not only speak to you today, but for our inclusion in Governance at Virginia Tech. I look forward to collaborating with you, sharing successes and providing ongoing support to this wonderful university.

Respectfully submitted,

LaTawnya L. Burleson

President, Staff Senate



Good afternoon, Rector Baine, President Sands, all the members of the VT BOV, VT administrators and all guests. It is a distinct honor to be able to represent the Virginia Tech Faculty on this board and to speak in this open session. I was honored to have been in this same position 10 years ago and, I can say that the Virginia Tech landscape is very different today than it was then and it is all for the better. The physical landscape is strikingly different – the addition of many new buildings but the academic landscape is just as altered new programs and new directions.

Based on our conversations yesterday at the Board Retreat, I decided to spend my time giving a chemistry lesson to the group, especially Mr. Chris Petersen who shared a poor experience with chemistry as an undergraduate and I just couldn't let that stand.

From the faculty perspective, shared governance in the university is stronger than ever and the role of faculty senate has moved to a more central position in university governance and has a key role in initiating, developing and approving key university policies. The entirety of the ensures governance system is a robust interaction between administrators, faculty, staff, and students, both graduate and undergraduate. By having input from all of those constituents, the university that its structure, the academic curricula and a myriad of policies are, to borrow from a recruiting ad, "all that they can be. "

Shared governance is critical to the health of the university and, to a large degree, is responsible for VT being in a better place than many universities around the country including several peer institutions.

There are some 2600 faculty at Virginia Tech and, on any given issue, there could be as many as 2600 opinions. Here are some of the issues that FS will grapple with this year:

1. Improving communication between Faculty Senate and administration. We had some glitches in that regard concerning the rollout of various IT policies that confused and caused concern among faculty. Earlier consultation with faculty senate and other bodies would have allayed much of the concern by allowing for more education of what the policies meant or did not mean. AND to tweak those policies for the benefit of those universities I am pleased to say that many administrators, including Amy Sebring, have reached out to me with their willingness to have regular meetings accomplish just that.
2. How can Faculty senate best represent and serve VT faculty? As VT expands, how should those new faculty be brought into the fold of the faculty senate? VT Carilion Med school, Innovation campus, etc.

3. Artificial intelligence – our discussions about this subject at the retreat yesterday were both fun and stimulating. The importance of the liberal arts in what we often refer to as a digital or technical future clearly came across the the importance of a university educating the full human was a very strong message, one that I believe that faculty embrace. On a narrower front, faculty need to understand the AI tools and how students can use them and how then can use them as teaching tools.

Someone yesterday asked how many admissions essays are written by AI. As an exercise, I went to ChatGPT, one of those AI tools. I posed the following task: “Subject: Faculty Representative Constituent Report”. I will share that report for the record, but let me now give you a few snippets to show you the power of the tool. (ChatGPT generated document is added to the end. I mentioned the bullet points in that report and showed how they coincided with the actual concerns of faculty.)

I again want to thank the board for the wonderful discussions we had at the retreat yesterday and your continued willingness to listen to the various constituent groups. I am the tip of the Faculty Senate iceberg. Other officers, administrative and staff support all of the senators. All of the concerns brought up by other constituents are also faculty concerns – a university is a holistic organism and faculty cannot do their best if the students, staff and AP staff are not healthy.

Thank you again for paying attention to the input from the faculty and I look forward to updating the board on the activities of the faculty.

Addendum 1: Constituent report generated by ChatGPT

Subject: Faculty Representative Constituent Report to Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

Dear Members of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors,

I hope this message finds you well. As the faculty representative, I am honored to provide you with a comprehensive report on behalf of the faculty constituents at Virginia Tech. This report aims to highlight key concerns, achievements, and suggestions that have been voiced by our faculty members.

### **Faculty Concerns:**

1. **Workload and Burnout:** A recurring concern among faculty members is the increasing workload, which has led to burnout in some cases. Many faculty members are managing a delicate balance between teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities. There's a call for more support mechanisms, such as hiring additional teaching assistants, streamlining administrative processes, and exploring flexible work arrangements.
2. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Faculty members are committed to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. However, there's a consensus that more can be done to foster an environment where all voices are heard and valued. Efforts such as providing implicit bias training, diversifying curriculum, and creating safe spaces for open dialogue have been suggested.
3. **Faculty Development:** Continuous professional development is crucial for maintaining the excellence of our institution. Faculty members are interested in more opportunities for workshops, training sessions, and networking events that facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and pedagogical innovation.

### **Faculty Achievements:**

1. **Research Excellence:** Virginia Tech's faculty members continue to make significant contributions to their respective fields. This year, several research projects have gained national and international recognition. The dedication of our faculty to advancing knowledge and addressing real-world challenges is commendable.
2. **Student Mentorship:** Faculty members take pride in their role as mentors. Many have gone above and beyond to provide guidance and support to students, both academically and personally. The positive impact of these relationships on student success cannot be understated.

**Suggestions for Consideration:**

1. **Transparent Communication:** Improved communication between the administration and faculty can enhance collaboration and understanding. Regular town hall meetings, where faculty can engage directly with the leadership, could be instituted to address concerns and share updates.
2. **Resources for Well-being:** Considering the challenges posed by the recent global events, allocating resources for faculty well-being, including mental health support and wellness programs, is highly recommended.
3. **Recognition of Service:** Recognizing faculty members' service to the university, beyond research and teaching, can boost morale and motivation. Acknowledging contributions to committees, outreach programs, and community engagement can foster a sense of appreciation.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to serve as the faculty representative and convey the thoughts and aspirations of my colleagues. I am confident that by working together, we can continue to elevate Virginia Tech's reputation as a premier institution of higher learning.

Thank you for your attention, and I remain at your disposal for any further discussions or clarifications.

Sincerely,

[Your Name] Faculty Representative Virginia Tech

Addendum 2: Rector Baine asked if I used ChatGPT to generate the board response. Here is what it produced:

[Virginia Tech Logo]

Office of the President Virginia Tech Blacksburg, VA 24061

[Date: Insert Date]

Dear [Faculty Representative's Name],

On behalf of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, we want to express our sincere gratitude for your comprehensive and thoughtful constituency report

presented during our recent meeting. Your insights and perspectives have provided invaluable information that aids us in better understanding the needs and concerns of our esteemed faculty members.

Your dedication to representing the faculty's interests and fostering open dialogue within our university community is commendable. Your report touched on various aspects that are crucial to maintaining and enhancing Virginia Tech's reputation as a center of academic excellence and innovation.

We appreciate the time and effort you invested in gathering and presenting data, addressing a range of topics including faculty development, research opportunities, curriculum improvements, and campus facilities. Your report has already sparked productive discussions among the Board members, highlighting areas where collaborative efforts can be undertaken to drive positive change.

Rest assured that your report will be carefully reviewed and considered as we move forward. We believe that an inclusive approach, involving faculty representatives like yourself, is essential in shaping the strategic direction of our institution.

We would like to extend an invitation to you to attend our next Board meeting to engage in further discussions based on your report. Your presence and active participation will provide additional context and insights that will be beneficial as we deliberate on various decisions and initiatives.

Once again, thank you for your dedicated service and your commitment to advancing Virginia Tech's mission. We are eager to work together with you to create a brighter future for our university and its community.

Sincerely,

[President's Signature]

[President's Name] President, Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

Cc: [University President's Name] [Other Relevant Board Members' Names]  
[Faculty Senate Chair's Name]