

Board of Visitors Constituency Report
William Storey, Undergraduate Representative
June 10th-11th, 2024

Good afternoon Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, guests, and friends. It is an honor and privilege to once again be seated with you all here today. The end of the spring semester was rich in student activities and I am delighted to update you all on these matters.

The unfortunate inevitability of food insecurity in a high cost of living town such as Blacksburg is an element of life that can not be understated. As mentioned in previous reports, food insecurity is a growing credence within our community in the town and in student life, and one that will require significant time and resources to sequester. With this in mind, the food drive that was initiated shortly before the start of the April board meeting aimed to tackle some of these attributes. I am incredibly pleased and proud to report that the food drive was a tremendous success through the month-long campaign. All in all, we collected 300+ lbs of non perishable food items that will go towards feeding dozens of Hokies over the course of this Summer and coming fall semesters. It is with my most sincere gratitude that I would like to thank everyone who donated towards the effort, with a special shout out to the President's suite, as their bin was almost overflowing. However, even with the food drives accomplishments, I can not downplay the reality that this donation was just one piece of a much larger puzzle of combating food insecurity for both on and off campus students and that tangible university action is still necessary to bring down this barrier for students.

Similar concerns for the sustainability and feasibility of campus dining has been a continual topic among undergraduate students over the course of this year as well. The long wait times due to grubhub orders, lack of workers, and more limited options from legacy supply chain issues has been plaguing on campus dining since the start of the pandemic. Finding ways to get students back into the dining halls and eating in the dining halls, prioritizing in person orders rather than grub hub orders, and curating a culture where students feel proud to work for dining will be critical to bringing Virginia Tech back to the number one spot in university dining.

At the end of the semester, we continued to see passionate and thorough demonstrations by students concerning the conflicts going on in the middle east. Many state that they feel that their voices have not been heard or fully understood, or that they are concerned for their safety and overall well being both on and off campus. The necessity for Tech to curate an environment of safety, mutual understanding, and constructive dialogue is vital if we are to be a university where everyone can feel welcomed.

The Hokie-Highlight for this board report will be a little different from the rest. The person we will be discussing today is Leslie Orellana whom most of you know will be the next Undergraduate Representative to the Board starting July 1st. Leslie is word for word, pound for pound, one of the most honest and sincere people I have ever had the privilege of getting to know and work with. When you look up the term "leader" in the dictionary, there is a picture of Leslie right next to the definition, because she embodies everything a leader is and stands for. The President of Hokie Ambassadors, a former President of the Real Estate club, and a proud first generation student, you will rarely find a harder working, more down to earth and humble student. I am thrilled that I will be passing the torch to her here soon, and I know you all will love getting to know her, just as I have in the past few months.

The 2023-2024 fiscal year has truly been one for the history books and for fireside conversation for decades to come. We have championed tough topics and engaged in rigorous but necessary discussions around all things student life. From housing prices off campus, to the affordability of the university for all students, to looking at campus through the lens of a wheelchair bound student, to bridging the gap of food insecurity, and campus safety to combat sexual violence. All the while still finding time to jump to enter sandman at a football game and throw snowballs on the Drillfield. We have come a long way and we should be proud of what we have achieved this year, however, the job is not yet finished and there is much more work to be done. I look forward to the continued effort of this board towards these aforementioned topics and believe it to be axiomatic that Virginia Tech never ceases in its mission to exemplify everything that Ut Prosim is and stands for, no matter the circumstances.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Board for blessing me with the distinct honor and privilege to be the Undergraduate Representative to the Board of Visitors. The opportunity to be sitting with you all is not one that I take lightly, and I will forever be grateful for being able to grow, learn, and laugh right alongside you all. I am a better person, student, and leader today because of this board. Finally, I would like to thank you all for your steadfast devotion to undergraduate students here at Virginia Tech, it is because of this board that students from all walks of life can call Virginia Tech Home.

Graduate and Professional Student Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

June 10 - 11, 2024

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 is bittersweet as I give my final constituency report, as it feels like just yesterday when I was attending my very first board meeting - what a wonderful year it has been! In this report I want to highlight what an incredible opportunity this position has been for me, what an honor it has been to serve Virginia Tech, and share what we have been able to accomplish this year.

Firstly, I would like to thank all of the faculty and leadership at the university who welcomed me into this role, and collaborated with me and other graduate and professional students this year. **Dean Surprenant, Dean Givens, Dean Learman, Dean Hoopes, Lauren Surface, Ellen Plummer, Dr. Francis Keene, Dr. James Bridgeforth**, and everyone else I am failing to mention, thank you for all of your support and guidance this year. To the board, it has been an absolute pleasure getting to know each of you, and see the incredible amount of time, dedication, and passion that you bring to each of these meetings. Not only do you make Virginia Tech a global destination for innovation and education, but a strong community and a home. Thank you for everything you do here, and the difficult decisions I know you make.

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

Much has happened this year in relation to student financial wellbeing, specifically surrounding the university's commitment to increasing graduate student stipends. According to data collected by the Graduate School earlier in my term, **19.8% of graduate students received a 5% stipend increase, 38.4% received between 5.1% - 10% increase, and 35.6% of graduate students received more than a 10% increase in stipend amount this year.** Similarly, work has been done on the "Graduate Candidacy Status Tuition Reduction," with great collaboration between the Graduate School and the Finance Office to reduce tuition costs for those who have met Candidacy status. The financial wellness of graduate

students has been an ongoing challenge, and I appreciate the care and dedication that has gone toward supporting our graduate students financially.

Student engagement with campus resources is another contributing factor for student attraction and retention that I focused on this year. As a reminder, graduate school data showed that approximately 41% of graduate and professional students want to connect with campus resources surrounding mental health initiatives. I have collaborated with multiple campus resources, and have seen much work go into supporting our students. In our last board meeting, I mentioned the great success of the Graduate and Professional Student Resource Fair. With 21 campus partners in attendance, we had over 100 students attend and learn more about the resources that Virginia Tech has to offer - It was a huge success!! Rumor even has it that Graduate School will continue to host this event in the future, and I don't think that it's a bad legacy to have from my term.

Finally, thank you for this incredible opportunity to serve our institution. I cannot put into words how impactful this experience has been for me, or what an honor and a privilege it has been to work alongside you all. This fall marks my seventh year here at Virginia Tech, and taking a peek behind the curtain of what makes this institution tick has been incredibly rewarding and inspiring. As my term comes to an end, I am excited to know that the Graduate and Professional Student Representative position will be taken over by a driven and compassionate young man. A second year masters student in Electrical Engineering, William Poland is incredibly talented and accomplished in the academic field, studying the scattering of electromagnetic waves over rough surfaces. A Blacksburg native, William has a deep connection to and a rich history with Virginia Tech. He is passionate about graduate and professional student experiences, collaborative with administrators and student leaders across campus, and will be an excellent addition to the Board of Visitors family. Both William and Leslie will do incredible work next year serving this institution, and will represent their respective constituents well.

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. It has been an honor to share my ongoing progress in this role and collaborating with you all in serving Virginia Tech! For a final time - Go Hokies!

Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

June 10-11, 2024 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 and non-student wage at Virginia Tech.

Since my last report Staff Senate welcomed Provost Clarke and Reece Ramos, University Ombuds at our monthly meetings. Both offered engaging sessions and we thank them for their time with us. Next week we welcome President Sands to chat with staff as a close-out to the academic year.

I wanted to provide a wrap up to this year and progress on goals and issues that have been provided in previous reports. I could not go any further discussing our work without giving my most sincere thanks to the Staff Senate Executive Team, each member works tirelessly and shows great compassion in the efforts of advocacy for staff. Without them the accomplishments of this past year and this report would not be possible.

My reports this year have stressed the importance of looking at the supplement program that eligible staff can receive yearly. Currently salaried staff who make 35,500 per year or less are eligible for a taxable 500 dollar stipend each January. Staff Senate has voiced concerns over the need to reevaluate the threshold and/or amount received to help offset inflation and cost of living. I am happy to share that Amy Sebring and Bryan Garey hosted a meeting with the Staff Senate Executive Team to discuss future options and while these discussions are in the early stages it is encouraging to have this level of engagement with Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer and the Vice President of Human Resources and for that I would like to thank Amy Sebring and Bryan Garey for letting us be heard in efforts to improve the well-being of staff. We look forward to working closely together this summer to select the best path forward.

Through our road shows and other listening sessions with staff, we identified several problems that staff members struggle with when it comes to continuous advocacy through governance.

1. Lack of awareness: Some employees reported that they were previously unaware that staff could be represented through governance at VT. Non-student wage employees in particular were unaware that they could have a voice through Staff Senate.
2. Complexity: Staff from across the university have communicated that they've found it challenging to navigate the ins and outs of advocacy through governance. They expressed uncertainty as to the rules and how they could employ the governance channels that currently exist for the benefit of staff. There's a learning curve to understanding how governance functions, both at the level of Staff Senate and more broadly throughout the university.
3. Efficacy: Even when staff and non-student wage members participate in governance, they don't always see how it can be helpful for chronic communication and fairness issues that they report experiencing and observing at work. They want to be able to see the impact governance can make on these issues.

Staff have reported fairness and communication issues to our Exec Team in multiple venues, but there was a concentration of these types of concerns expressed as a result of our “Making It Work for Everyone” speaker series held by our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Committee over the past academic year. As a result, the DEIB Committee, chaired by Tasia Persson spearheaded the planning of the Staff Senate Governance School to better equip staff for advocacy. The idea is to go beyond advocating for staff as an Exec Team in favor of training and empowering individual staff members to step up, lead, influence, and advocate for themselves and their fellow staff members.

We just held the kick-off meeting for our test cohort, which is composed of members of our DEIB Committee and Staff Senate Exec Team. The program will continue throughout the summer and include training modules that involve other offices on campus, including the Office of the Vice President for Policy and Governance. Some of these training modules include: Governance 101 tutorials discussion group, Mock resolution-building, Higher Ed 101, How elections & nominations work, a Panel presentation on how governance works for other senates on campus, and a Panel presentation with representatives of Staff Associations from across the university.

The next stage of the program will be to hold a full academic year Governance School for our first official cohort of staff members in the program. We will put out a call this summer for these participants. In order to accommodate a full academic year of training, the programming will be expanded to include efficacy strategies and paths for staff advocacy, along with how to share opportunities for participating in governance with fellow staff members. We are proud that this initiative has been visioned through staff senate and see it’s possibilities a learning opportunities for the broader Virginia Tech community.

As I close today, I wanted to thank the board members for their hard work and dedication to this university. After attending many board committee meetings, it is readily apparent that you are engaged and driven to ensure the long-standing success of Virginia Tech. I look forward to working with you again in the upcoming year.

Go Hokies!

LaTawnya Burleson

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report

June 10-11, 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 June board meeting.

Our 2024-25 officer elections were held in April and I'm pleased to share the officers will be Dr. Marlena McGlothlin Lester, Vice President; Enrique Noyola, Secretary/Treasurer; and I will serve a second term as President.

President Sands joined our May senate meeting to discuss a variety of topics including our system of shared governance, free speech at Virginia Tech, discussions President Sands has had with various student groups, and the AP Faculty employee group and Job Architecture project. We greatly appreciate President Sands taking the time to join us for discussion and look forward to continued interactions in the coming academic year.

The AP Faculty employee group is comprised of over 2500 individuals doing a great diversity of work in support of the university's strategic initiatives. In the AP Faculty Senate, we've clustered ourselves into seven constituent areas: Extension, Research, Academic Support, Student Affairs, Athletics, General Professional, and General Administrative. Today I would like to highlight some of the varied work done by AP Faculty members in Academic Support. These AP Faculty members are advisors and other professionals working to support our colleges. Many AP Faculty members in academic support work within the colleges in roles such as advising undergraduate students on their curriculum selections or leading graduate programs with recruitment and academic progress as well as administrative functions in the colleges such as finance and program operations. Other academic support AP Faculty work in units outside of, yet support, the colleges and the university's academic mission. These AP faculty members work in areas such as the Undergraduate Research Office supporting research opportunities for students, Technology-Enhanced learning and online strategies (TLOS) supporting teaching and learning efforts across the university, Analytics & Institutional Effectiveness using data and information to provide insights used for decision making and continuous improvement efforts, and managing finance and operations for university centers such as the Center for Coal Energy Research. I will share more about our other constituent areas during our future meetings this coming year.

Thank you for the opportunity to update you today and I look forward to updating you on the work of the A/P Faculty Senate at the August meeting.

Constituent Report by Faculty Representative Joseph Merola to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, June 10, 2024.

Rector Baine, Vice Rector Calhoun, and all member of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke and all honored guests,

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

Having served in this role 10 years ago, I would like to share my thoughts on Shared Governance 10 years ago and now. We have come a long way with the support of the president the provost and this board. Without going into detail, I must say that my experience this past year compared with ten years ago has been markedly different to the better. I have been active with state-wide faculty senate officials as well as the national council of faculty senates. In all those interactions, when I share information on Virginia Tech's system, I am invariably asked to give more details to help them in making changes to their systems. I was invited to give a presentation last week at the annual meeting of the National Council of Faculty Senates in which I shared the particulars of VT's Shared Governance. I was elected VP of the National Council with a view toward further sharing the expertise I have gained at Virginia Tech. Also, with the help of Anne Kroemer Hoffmann from Advancement, I published an article in THE on Faculty Senates that has garnered a LOT of attention.

The past year, Faculty Senate proceedings have gone smoothly except for an important issue that can be summed up as its role in enacting policies vs making "statements". FS Constitution makes it clear that the only resolutions that can be enacted are those that deal with university policies under the purview of the Senate. This past year, a group proposed a statement that they wanted Senate to endorse. This group did not accept the FS position that this statement did not deal with policy and so it is not in our purview. There was some lack of clarity in our by-laws and so senate allowed the statement to be considered. After lengthy debates, the resolution was defeated by a large margin. Ultimately, it became clear that the senate did not believe that it should play a role in endorsing political statements.

However, that raised the issue that faculty need a mechanism to have honest, open, and collegial discussions on issues that go beyond governance policies. Formulating such a mechanism is a high priority for the coming year.

When I asked faculty what issues I should bring forward in this report, many of the issues are tied to what is being discussed under the Global Distinction initiative. They are concerned that the emphasis on many high-level issues will not greatly benefit the bulk of the faculty. To begin with, the issue of the metrics troubles faculty, especially those faculty whose activities do not fit neatly into the metrics needed for THE rankings. One faculty member articulated it this way: "How can we, in a metric-driven world,

evaluate activities that do not show up in equations designed to evaluate programs and activities.” This past year, FS crafted a resolution concerning the Responsible Use of Research Metrics – a resolution passed by University Council and adopted by President Sands. We trust that all units on campus tasked with evaluating faculty take the recommendation in this resolution seriously to ensure faculty are fairly and responsibly evaluated.

It would appear to most faculty believe that strategic initiatives do not pay attention to the faculty in general. Allow me to quote another: “One thing I would mention from a faculty perspective is the pressures of enrollment growth on pedagogy and research. With more students comes more service to students and other supporting activities and less time to devote to innovation, research, and improvement. Further, our classes are bursting at the seams and at impossible times for rooms needed to hold higher capacity classes, and those classes are full of students with new accommodations that are the responsibility of faculty to meet. The job of all kinds of faculty (P/T, research, etc.) has grown exponentially and most of it in ways that do not enable more attention to the strategic vision of VT.”

VT Faculty have completed another outstanding academic year. Just listing highlights of accomplishments and awards would require my report to last several hours and no one wants that. Let me just say that our faculty are awesome!

With this meeting, my term as FS president and BOV rep comes to an end. In all honesty, I will miss our interactions, but I am also very pleased to say that the slate of officers for next year is an outstanding one. Rachel Miles will be President, Evan Lavender Smith will be Vice President, Justin Lemkul will be Operations Officer (Chair of CFA – amazing productivity this past year) and Alex Kinnaman as Parliamentarian.

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 I know you will work well with next year’s officers.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph S. Merola
Faculty Representative to the VT BOV