

COMMENTS MADE AT THE MARCH 5, 2025, PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION

Honorable Members of the Board of Visitors,

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Ronnie Mondal, and I serve as the President of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate. I am here to voice the urgent concerns of Virginia Tech's graduate students regarding student fees and tuition.

Graduate students conduct research, teach courses, and support the university's mission of innovation and excellence. Yet, we continue to struggle financially. Our stipends remain below a living wage, and increasing tuition and fees will only worsen this crisis.

Our comprehensive fees have already increased. Most of our assistantships do not cover these fees—we must pay them out of pocket from our already stretched stipends. A further increase would amount to an effective **pay cut**, making graduate education more inaccessible.

This comes at a time of immense financial uncertainty. Inflation continues to rise, with costs for housing, healthcare, groceries, and childcare outpacing our stipends. Many of us have families and dependents to take care of. A fee increase will push many to take on additional jobs or even debt.

Coupled with shifts in research funding priorities, visa policies, and economic conditions, many students, especially international students, are unsure about their financial stability and future career prospects. A financial burden will make Virginia Tech a less attractive option for top talent and directly impact our reputation and ability to remain a leading research institution.

I urge you to consider alternative funding sources rather than placing the burden on graduate students who are already struggling to make ends meet. We ask that you **freeze student fees and tuition**, at least for this coming year, to prevent further hardship. Instead of increasing financial strain, let's work together to create long-term solutions that support students and strengthen Virginia Tech's research and educational mission.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Good afternoon, everyone,

My name is Alexander Efird, and I am here representing the 31,035 undergraduate students here on campus as President of the Undergraduate Student Senate, our undergraduate student body government.

You have most likely heard, and will continue to hear from, many students on their own perspectives, but I wanted to provide you all some quick thoughts on what I've gathered from speaking with many of my fellow students.

First, I want to commend the Board for their efforts in past years to limit tuition and fee increases for students. While we've seen peer institutions in the Commonwealth and beyond heavily increase the financial burden that students face year-after-year, we've been fortunate here at Virginia Tech to see little to no increases in the cost of our educations.

In conversations I have with my fellow students, tuition and fees are always front-of-mind. As you would expect, the vast majority of students support keeping the current tuition and fees levels for the next academic year. One of the major concerns I hear from students every day is the financial burden they face because of tuition and fee costs. When students have to face these challenges, it can affect their social lives and their ability to join some of the over 800 clubs that we have here on campus. In some instances, students are so stressed that they cannot devote the attention needed to their schoolwork, leading to missed assignments and poor grades.

However, many of us understand that with the rising costs of living and operations expenses we all face, small increases may be inevitable. Yet, when the cost of education becomes less affordable, we all suffer. Students who are not privileged or who don't come from affluent backgrounds may be more inclined to reduce their involvement here on campus or may even take a step back from college entirely. That can deprive our Virginia Tech community from some incredible knowledge and perspectives that make us stronger as a whole.

That is why I also emphasize the financial aid programs that are at the disposal of students. These programs give students who lack the resources to achieve a full college education with the opportunity to do so. I've spoken with numerous students here on campus who have taken advantage of these programs, and they are all doing incredible things in their respective fields and will go on to represent the Virginia Tech name with pride and distinction. Continuing to expand these programs, including the Virginia Tech Advantage, will only enhance the quality of our community here at Virginia Tech and will provide students with the resources they need to be successful and accomplish great things.

Thank you all so much for your time.