

Board of Visitors Constituency Report
Leslie Orellana, Undergraduate Representative

November 18th -19th, 2024

Good afternoon, Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, and guests. Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to you all once regarding undergraduate students.

Since we last met, students have had an exciting start to their semester! With the addition of renovated War Memorial Gym, the Undergraduate Science Laboratory Building, Hitt Hall, Perry Place, and a revamp of campus transportation with the soon-to-be new transit center – campus and student life looks very different than when I first started here. These changes demonstrate Virginia Tech’s lasting commitment and the board’s contribution to student wellbeing and academics for both current and future Hokies. With that said, there is always progress to be made to keep Virginia Tech a place where students can find their sense of belonging, thrive in this environment, and obtain the diploma and skills they need for their careers, all while truly calling this place “home”.

Over the last 3 months, I have worked to gather student feedback and perspectives by interacting with a variety of student organizations. My goal is to fully comprehend the complexities of student experiences and concerns and work with different organizations, resources, and administrators to address these concerns. The two main areas I have focused on, based on student feedback, are access to finding local or on-campus employment, experiential learning opportunities, and food security. I am excited to share my research thus far as well as some of the amazing progress we have made and will continue to work on for the remainder of my term.

A pressing concern I have heard from students is regarding on-campus dining and food insecurity. First, it is important to recognize and appreciate the work Dining Services have taken on to address issues related to meal plan structures by taking feedback and working with a consulting group. However, a significant concern that persists is the affordability of on-campus dining. While the university has made amazing progress towards providing a variety of high-quality and nutritious meal options, the prices remain disproportionately high. While students and I recognize that the cost of groceries nationally has increased significantly, the prices of items within dining facilities are sold at a premium compared to a local grocery or convenience store.

To illustrate this, I conducted an experiment to see if there were differences in the prices of items sold in dining facilities compared to a convenience and grocery store. When creating my college grocery list, I chose a single serving of instant ramen, a bottle of soda, a box of cereal, a bag of chips, and a box of pop tarts – all of the college student staples. It is important to note that these are quick, casual food items sold that a student may reach for when trying to make their dining dollars or budget last throughout the semester. I also chose to analyze items that are not pre-made meals or made-to-order by dining services to have a fair comparison of items.

When I visited a dining hall, these 5 items together cost me \$30.30. On the other hand, the convenience store sold the identical items for a total of \$19.45, and the grocery store total came out to \$12.65. To break this down further, the same groceries are 139.5% more expensive in a dining hall than a grocery store and 55.7% more expensive than a convenience store. This price disparity may cause financial strain for students who are already struggling to find nutritious and budget-friendly dining options on campus. As we continue to improve campus dining options, I encourage the exploration of additional solutions to ensure students are not forced to pay high premiums for basic food items as we strive to combat food insecurity and maintain the nutritional and financial well-being of students.

Secondly, students have expressed the difficulties of finding quality experiential learning opportunities off and on-campus. Virginia Tech's commitment to experiential learning opportunities does not go unnoticed. With resources and programs in place like the Bridge Experience programs, Career and Professional Development services, undergraduate research, and community engagement, there are a wide variety of opportunities that students can pursue during their time here. It is important to recognize that minority and underrepresented students are disproportionately disadvantaged in obtaining these opportunities. As a first-generation student myself, I have struggled to keep up with my peers in finding the right resources and methods to obtain a quality experiential learning opportunity. However, I have also seen immense benefits to having those experiences such as workplace readiness and confidence. My internships also solidified my passion for my career and is the reason I am pursuing a dual degree, where I gained the confidence to push my own boundaries and aim for success.

On-campus employment has been a topic of concern that many students have voiced. This type of employment offers opportunities to gain the skills that are beneficial and essential to experiential learning opportunities, while providing convenience and flexibility of being right on-campus. Many students have expressed the difficulties with the non-standardization of employment procedures across campus. This issue begins with the hiring process and is throughout the on-boarding, training and time of employment of the student.

Currently there is no policy, procedure, or best practice in place for on-campus employment recruiting. A 2023 study conducted by the Virginia Tech Career and Professional Development found that out of 15 peer and aspirational institutions, 10 have a centralized on-campus employment office. In contrast, Virginia Tech does not; resulting in departments and colleges to independently determine how, or whether, they market their job opportunities campus wide. When positions are not publicly posted using a centralized job platform, like Handshake, it creates an inequitable situation by limiting access to opportunities for students who may not be aware of these positions. Additionally, when departments are solely responsible for the onboarding and training, students have reported challenges in receiving consistent information, support, and preparation to succeed in their roles. This approach can leave some students feeling excluded or disadvantaged, hindering the goal of providing equal experiential learning opportunities to all students.

To address these issues, I am excited to work with Career and Professional Development to explore and develop additional support and assistance to provide equitable resources to all students. In addition, I am also looking forward to continuing our collaborative work in reassessing career fairs on campus to truly understand student and employers' needs and concerns. My mission is to truly make Virginia Tech a place where students can thrive academically and feel supported and ready for the first step in their career upon graduation. I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such an amazing and dedicated group within Career and Professional Development and am excited to share progress and additional updates soon.

Overall, I am confident that with the ongoing collaboration and feedback, we can continue to make strides towards creating a more accessible, equitable, and supportive campus environment for all students. Thank you for your time, commitment, and incredible support of students and the advancement of Virginia Tech. As we close out this year, I am excited to provide additional updates in the Spring semester! Thank you, and Go Hokies!

Graduate & Professional Student Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
November 18 – 19, 2024

Presented by William Poland, Graduate & Professional Student Representative

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

Firstly, I'd like to start by providing an update on the graduate student resource fair that I hosted on September 12th. In total, we had 32 university services represented at the fair, which was attended by over 100 students. The feedback received from both the students and the groups attending was very positive. I think this event was a great success and I am looking forward to hosting another resource fair at the start of the spring semester.

Staying on the topic of resources, another initiative that I have begun working on is updating the 'vt.edu/resources' website, which is an online list of links to resources for Virginia Tech students. For context, this website receives over 7000 monthly views in peak months. While we certainly have students visiting this webpage, it has not been kept up to date and so is not reflective of all the services currently available to students. I have been working to get this website updated and improved so that it can be more useful to students.

Moving on to governance related updates, the working group that I was participating in for simplifying graduate student stipends steps has completed its work and developed a set of recommendations. This working group aimed to simplify the administrative backend of the pay table for graduate student stipends. The group recommended simplifications for this table, which will be presented to the board at a future meeting.

I'd like to also mention a resolution that the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) has been working on. GPSS is proposing the creation of a working group that will look at ways to more effectively address issues such with academic bullying, retaliation, and conflicts of interest. These are some issues that impact our graduate students, but do not necessarily have a unified policy or process for being handled. While I have not personally worked on this resolution, I am glad GPSS is collaborating with students, faculty, and staff to move it forward.

Next, I'd like to share some insights into my constituent populations. I have spent the past couple of months reaching out to different segments of our graduate and professional students. I have had meetings with Deans and Vice Presidents representing our medical students, veterinary students, and graduate students across our DC, Roanoke, and of course Blacksburg campuses. Likewise, I have connected with student representatives for each of these groups. From my meetings, there were a couple of recurring themes that I would like to bring up.

Firstly, for Blacksburg graduate students, one concern I've heard is the lack of housing options near Blacksburg for graduate students that have families. A large portion of our graduate student population is non-traditional students, who may be returning to school after years in other careers. Around 15% of graduate students at VT may have a spouse and/or children. While Virginia Tech has planned to expand on-campus housing in the university master plan with the future student life village, this does not include any accommodations for students with families. In comparison, some of our peer institutions like UVA and Purdue provide family-friendly housing options on-campus in an apartment-style offering. This is something that Virginia Tech should consider adding to remain an attractive university for applicants with families.

Secondly, focusing on graduate students not in Blacksburg, one theme I noticed was a sense of separation and weaker connection to the university. Physical distance, intensive workloads, and lack of a broader community outside of individual programs seemed to be a few contributing factors to this. This is not to say that these students feel isolated, but that they may have a stronger connection to their individual graduate programs, while the sense of "being a Hokie" is secondary. I believe we must continue working hard to instill "Hokie spirit" in all of our students, as that is what makes the culture of Virginia Tech so special.

Thirdly, I'd like to bring attention back to resource accessibility and awareness. Especially when I spoke with people from the Roanoke and DC campuses, resource accessibility was a big topic that I kept hearing about. While Virginia Tech has been making good efforts to improve the resources available to students (such as Hokie OneStop in northern VA and services from Blacksburg visiting Roanoke), students and administrators both stress that more support is needed. For example, current graduate students in Roanoke may have to commute to Blacksburg to pick up their student ID, and students in northern VA may have to commute hours to get to a student ID pickup site. Often, online and digital resources are the easiest way to reach these students, but they are not always accommodating – for example, websites telling students to visit a building in Blacksburg to resolve an issue, instead of having options to accommodate non-local students. My point is that as we continue to expand and put emphasis on our northern VA campus, we must be conscious that these students will require tailored solutions to support them that will be different from Blacksburg.

In closing, I encourage the Board members, to keep the issues of: (1) Awareness and access to student resources and services, (2) Family housing options for non-traditional graduate students, and (3) community-building for non-Blacksburg students, in mind. Our graduate and professional students represent an integral part of our university that enables teaching, research, and furthers our goal of global distinction. To attract and retain top graduate and professional student talent, we must continue to support this population.

Thank you.

Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

November 18-19, 2024 Presented by LaTawnya Burlison, Staff Senate President

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

It is hard to believe that it is November all ready and the Fall Semester is almost over. Blacksburg's autumn colors did not disappoint, and I hope that each of you had an opportunity to appreciate the beauty of our region.

In my previous reports I have closed with expressions of looking forward to celebrating our successes with you and today I would like to do just that.

In my August report I requested that Parking Services implement a year round prorated payroll deduction option for employees at Virginia Tech, I appreciate the interest and support the Board showed and almost immediately Lynsay Belshe, Vice President of Auxiliary and Business Services asked for more details on what Staff Senate was requesting and I am pleased to report that within a week I was contacted by Carrie Cox, the Senior Director of Auxiliary Services and Pam Tate, Parking Services Director to create a dialogue and a process towards implantation which I have been told will begin in January for new full time employees.

In October a base pay increase was implemented for close to 700 staff in our lower pay bands, which addressed cost of living and inflation issues. Again, the Administration has been actively engaged in the betterment of the university employees and I especially want to thank Amy Sebring and Bryan Garey who brought this forward and worked closely with Staff Senate on the implementation and communication plan. I have placed a link to the VT News story regarding this effort at the end of my report for your awareness. Also occurring in October University Council approved the Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs Resolution to create a task force to review compensation for staff and non-student wage employees. The task force is currently being formed under the purview of the President's Office and I look forward to reporting on its progress in future reports.

Staff Senate's Governance School is in full swing and the feedback on our programming has been extremely positive. In the spirit of UT Prosim we are engaging with the Corps of Cadets Pantry to combat food insecurities and in support of the Appalachian Caucus and as a proud Appalachian myself, staff senate is collecting toys to support Southwest Virginia Families in need and those directly impacted by Hurricane Helene.

As I close today, I wanted to thank the Staff Senate Executive Committee who works tirelessly on advocating for staff and non-student wage at Virginia Tech and to thank you for listening and for all that you do for Virginia Tech. We are fortunate to be a part of this special place.

Go Hokies!

LaTawnya Burleson

[Base pay increase to be provided for some staff employees | Virginia Tech News | Virginia Tech](#)

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report

November 18-19, 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 November board meeting.

Since the board retreat and meeting in August, the A/P Faculty Senate has onboarded our new Senators and have benefitted from informational presentations on Hokie Wellness, childcare initiatives at VT, governance resources created by the staff in the Office of the Vice President for Policy and Governance Office, and will hear about the employee survey results at our senate meeting later this week. In October, our Professional Development committee coordinated our second Tour and Talk where we toured the University Library here on campus to learn about the wide array of services provided by the Library as well as had the opportunity to network with other AP faculty colleagues. Dr. Jonathan Bradley provided a comprehensive tour of the library resources available to faculty and students including special collections; study and collaboration spaces; the 3D scanning, project design, prototyping, and media recording studios; the technology lending desk; reference support; and yes, books! If you haven't had the opportunity to visit the University Library recently, I encourage you to do so. I think you will find the space to be inviting, filled with students studying and learning, and will be impressed with all the resources provided by our modern academic library.

We have selected our philanthropic project this year, supporting The Market of Virginia Tech. As you may know, the Market provides food assistance to our undergraduate and graduate students with food security needs by providing programs that offer healthy food resources. We look forward to working among the AP Faculty this year to raise awareness of and funds to support the vital work done by the Market.

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. Today I would like to highlight some of the work done by AP faculty members in two of our constituent areas, Research and Athletics. The work of AP faculty in Research directly supports Virginia Tech's tripartite land-grant mission of education, research, and engagement. AP faculty in Research have responsibilities such as managing laboratories, overseeing research compliance, and serving as grants contract officers. Others serve in our institutes, including the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute and the Fralin Life Sciences Institute, directing projects, overseeing operations, and managing human resources functions. The

work of AP Faculty in Athletics supports our student athlete's performance in the classroom and in their sport. AP faculty members in Student-Athlete Academic Support Services support students through advising, mentoring, tutoring, and study facilities. Other AP faculty in Athletics serve as associate athletic directors and coaches, oversee operations and athletic facility management, and ensure compliance with university and NCAA policies. Their work collectively ensures our student-athletes are successful in their education and are provided a high-quality student-athlete experience. I will continue share more about our other constituent areas during our future meetings this coming year.

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 March meeting.

Faculty Senate President's Constituent Report to the Board of Visitors

Rachel Miles

Faculty Senate President

November 19, 2024

Rector Baine, Vice Rector Calhoun, Members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, and Executive Vice President Sebring:

On behalf of the faculty, I'd like to share an update on key priorities essential to Virginia Tech's academic mission: educating students, creating new knowledge, and serving the Commonwealth. As in any high-performing organization, attracting and retaining top talent is critical to achieving these goals. Our progress depends on successfully recruiting, hiring, and promoting world-class faculty who will shape the future of the university.

A top-tier faculty enriches the university in many ways. It enhances the student experience, fuels innovation, and strengthens our standing as a global research leader and economic engine for the Commonwealth. But the competition for talented scholars is intense. To remain a magnet for world-class faculty, we must continue to invest in resources and programs that make Virginia Tech their destination of choice. This includes competitive salaries, benefits, and robust support for research, teaching, and service—key pillars of the faculty experience.

Attracting and retaining the best talent also depends on creating an environment that fosters collaboration, academic freedom, and innovation. It's not enough to hire the best—we must cultivate a thriving scholarly community. This means encouraging interdisciplinary research, supporting faculty autonomy, and building a strong sense of academic collaboration. **This is particularly important as we advance the Global Distinction Initiative, which seeks to enhance Virginia Tech's global reputation and scholarly impact.** Moreover, while we already have a robust [Statement on Freedom of Expression and Inquiry](#), it is essential that we actively demonstrate our continued commitment to these principles in all aspects of our academic and institutional life.

As the Global Distinction Initiative unfolds, it is crucial that we continue to respect and protect academic freedom. Academic freedom is the foundation of scholarly excellence. It allows faculty to engage in bold inquiry and critical debate without fear of retaliation or interference. This freedom is vital to challenging conventional wisdom, testing new ideas, and addressing complex—and sometimes controversial—issues. When faculty are free to question, critique, and innovate, they drive discovery and progress. **For Virginia Tech to be recognized globally as a leader in research and education, we must ensure that our faculty have the space and support to conduct transformative work.**

We recognize that there are some faculty who may struggle to understand the full scope and implications of the Global Distinction Initiative. As it continues to take shape, **it is critical that we communicate its goals and benefits clearly and thoughtfully to all members of our academic community.** This initiative is not just about raising the university's profile but also about enhancing the scholarly impact of our research and creating an environment where faculty can thrive. As we attract and retain top talent through competitive resources and support, we must also create a culture where academic freedom is protected and innovation is encouraged.

Academic freedom isn't just a privilege; it's a responsibility we all share as we strive for global distinction. It is essential to ensure that Virginia Tech can meet the world's biggest challenges with integrity and intellectual rigor. **By aligning the goals of the Global Distinction Initiative with our commitment to academic freedom, we can not only attract world-class faculty but also foster the kind of scholarly environment that drives innovation, research excellence, and societal impact.**

Our commitment to inclusive excellence is just as important. Inclusivity drives excellence in everything we do. An inclusive environment enables everyone to bring their full range of talents, ideas, and unique perspectives to their work. This environment fosters creativity, innovation, and collaboration, empowering everyone to contribute at their highest level. Inclusivity means better solutions to complex research problems, more dynamic teaching environments, and stronger service to our communities. It's not just about who is at the table, but how everyone at the table can contribute fully. Inclusivity is key to excellence in every part of our mission and helps us reach our ambitious goals.

In closing, I want to thank President Sands, Provost Clarke, and Executive Vice President Sebring for their strong partnership with the Faculty Senate in supporting our faculty. On behalf of the Senate, we also deeply appreciate the Board's continued support of our faculty and students. Building and maintaining a world-class faculty starts with your leadership and the thoughtful policies you shape. Your decisions help create the conditions that allow us to recruit, retain, and empower the best talent. We look forward to continuing our work together to achieve Virginia Tech's vision for the future.

Thank you.