

Board of Visitors Constituency Report
William Storey, Undergraduate Representative
November 5th-6th, 2023

Good afternoon Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, guests, and friends. I am ecstatic to once again have the opportunity to be sitting here with you all today. The past few months have been full of incredible developments within student life, and it is my pleasure to bring you all the necessary insights, news, and perspectives to understand what is currently going on within the undergraduate student body.

I would like to start off by thanking the board for their approval of the special Board of Visitors meeting agenda on October 4th. The rebate given back to students is tiny but mighty and is a step in the right direction for Virginia Tech and its goal of becoming a more affordable and accessible university. When telling my peers about the rebate, smiles were shown unanimously on all their faces to the delight of the great news.

One of my main points of interest during my time here as undergraduate representative to the board is focusing on accessibility around campus. Having grown up with a younger brother with cerebral palsy I have been able to witness just how difficult many everyday places can be to navigate in his shoes. Similarly, I have been fortunate to have many friends here at Tech who have major physical disabilities that face numerous challenges daily during their commute in and around campus who are able to provide their insights and perspectives on what it is like to travel around with a disability. One of these people is my friend Sharan Patnaik, she is an undergraduate student here at Tech who is wheelchair bound and needs assistance getting to and from campus every single day. I have provided some personal testimony from Sharan about her life, her story, and what her experience has been like at Tech thus far for you all to read and save for reference when discussing accessibility on campus during future engagements.

It can be said that having the ability to place oneself into the shoes of another person is critical when looking to enhance one's own thoughts, opinions, and perspectives about a given topic, especially when desiring to facilitate positive change. As a result, a few weeks ago I did what anyone would naturally do in my situation when trying to gain a better grasp of what it might be like as a student with a physical disability on campus, I drove to West Virginia and bought the cheapest wheelchair Facebook marketplace had to offer. I realized that if I wanted to make Virginia Tech more accessible, I would need to place myself in the seat of a student who is wheelchair

bound, maybe not able to have an assistant, or able to afford a nice new wheelchair and figure out what it is like from their point of view. With this scenario in mind, I rode around the entirety of campus, and a few other niche spots, and timed how long it took me to get around and compared it to my regular walking times. Through my experiment, I found that students in a wheelchair can take about 2.5x as long to get around campus when compared to walking students. Additionally, I can now say with confidence that getting around campus in a wheelchair is an astonishing feat. From all the construction on campus, to road crossings, to uneven sidewalks, there are a myriad of challenges someone will have to face on their daily commute that most people would simply never notice. Now, I want you all to take this information and ask yourself the question: What does it mean to have an accessible campus? Is it simply to have the pure possibility of getting around, or should we be focusing on having an *inclusive* campus that makes sure every person is able to have access to the same opportunities. It should be noted, this is not just an argument to be made for students with disabilities, or faculty and staff with disabilities, but for every single person here at Virginia Tech. Furthermore, if you are able to improve the capabilities for students in arguably some of the worst scenarios possible, then you automatically improve life for every single current and future Hokie here at Virginia Tech.

To conclude, I want to thank you all for listening and taking the time to consider what I have brought before today. It is because of this board that Virginia Tech is moving in the right direction when it comes to having an inclusive campus that is welcoming of all students, no matter what challenges they may face. On behalf of all undergraduate students here at Virginia Tech, thank you!

Will Storey
BOV Report
11/5-6/23

Times in Minutes

(counterclockwise)

Around Campus WC: 95

Around Campus Walking: 38

Orange Arrow: 13

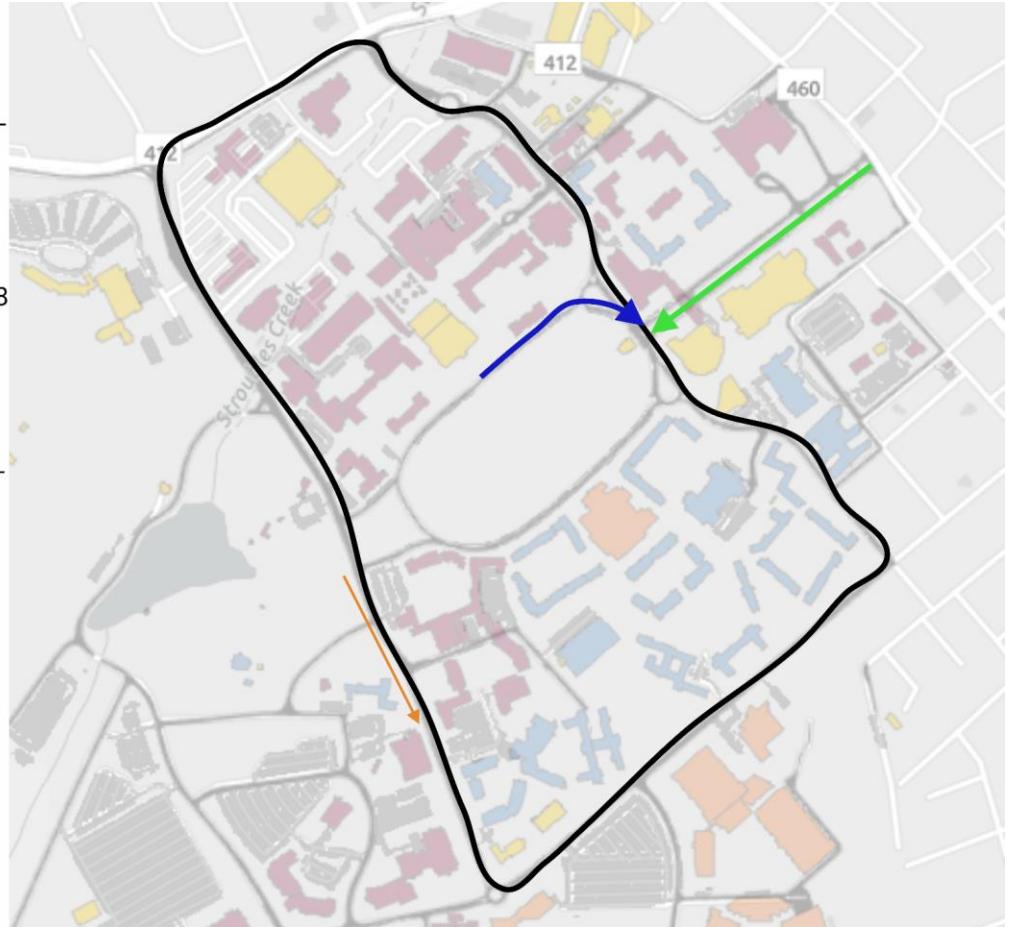
Green Arrow: 6

Blue Arrow: 11

Will Storey Accessibility
Coefficient: $95/38 = 2.5$

Findings: it takes about
2.5x as long for a WC
student to get around
campus when compared to
walking students

WC = Wheel Chair



Graduate and Professional Student Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

November 5 - 6, 2023

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 has been an exciting time for incoming students as the semester is in full swing, kicking off with the Graduate Orientation, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) Welcome Back BBQ, Homecoming, and the exciting Virginia Tech Football games. I am pleased to report that the graduate school has enrolled **2,226 students** into their most recent cohort, a considerable increase from enrollment last year. The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine has enrolled **51 students** into their most recent cohort, and the Virginia - Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine has enrolled **126 students** into their most recent cohort. In other exciting news, the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) at Virginia Tech Carilion was graciously gifted **50 million by the Red Gates Foundation**, to expand health science related research being conducted at Virginia Tech. These numbers show that Virginia Tech is a research institution that students are attracted to and is growing in its research enterprise success. With that being said, much work is still needed to reach our strategic plan to achieve excellence as a comprehensive global land - grant university, and to specifically attract and retain graduate and professional talent to the university.

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

Much has happened since our August board meeting in relation to student financial wellbeing, specifically surrounding the university's commitment to increasing graduate student stipends by 5%. According to recent data collected by the Graduate School, **19.8% of graduate students received a 5% stipend increase, 38.4% received between 5.1% - 10% stipend increase, and 35.6% of graduate students received more than a 10% increase in stipend amount. Only 6.3% of graduate students did not receive the 5% stipend increase**, and these individuals had various explanations for why. With the General Assembly adjustment for an additional 2%, I am pleased the board voted to increase the stipend step level and the stipend floor. Even with this stipend increase, graduate students are still struggling

financially and some have begun to seek other avenues of support outside of the institution, like working multiple jobs or joining the Graduate Labor Union. I want to emphasize the importance of existing governance structures that the university employs, but also touch on the fact that some graduate students are not feeling supported or heard by these structures. To combat this, I am continuing to work with the Dean of the Graduate School and the Graduate and Professional Student Senate to support graduate and professional students, to provide an avenue for conversations, and to promote existing campus resources and support structures.

Student engagement with campus resources is another contributing factor for student attraction and retention. In a recent survey sent out by the graduate school approximately 41% of graduate and professional students wanted to connect with campus resources surrounding mental health initiatives. Additionally, as brought forward during our special October board meeting, student resources surrounding mental health initiatives are an important part of a student's experience at Virginia Tech. After hearing the discussion surrounding campus resources and student mental health, I reached out to the Director of Cook Counseling to discuss the support they provide to students and the strategies they implement to do so. During this conversation, I found out that Cook Counseling is the largest counseling center of all the public institutions in the commonwealth, and has partnered with Hokie Wellness and Residential Wellbeing to provide robust care and support to all students. I am relieved to report that the most recent wait times for an initial appointment is only 1-2 days, and the length between initial and follow-up care is within a week. From my conversation it was clear to me that the individuals at Cook Counseling are working incredibly hard to provide support to all students at our institution.

With that being said, there is a great complexity in serving thousands of students, each with a wide variety of needs. For graduate and professional students, their needs become more complex: the graduate and professional student population includes returning professionals, individuals with dependents, those with chronic illnesses, and they are distributed at a variety of locations. Although daunting, to increase student exposure to and engagement with campus resources, I am partnering with the Graduate Life Center, Hokie Wellness, Cook Counseling, and many other campus organizations to host a Graduate and Professional Student Resource Fair in the Spring Semester. This event will bring campus resources directly to students, increasing exposure and awareness of the immense support that Virginia Tech offers. While this resource fair will reach Blacksburg

residing graduate and professional students, it will not directly reach the students at our Roanoke Campus, DC Campus, or at our Agriculture Research and Extension Centers. In collaboration with students and administrators at these various locations, I am committed to expanding and broadening student services, and ask that the board be committed as well.

Overall, I am continuing to work 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 continue to consider student financial wellness and student wellbeing and engagement when discussing future university initiatives, and to continue 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 continuing to share my ongoing progress in this role and collaborating with you all in serving Virginia Tech! Go Hokies!

Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

November 5-6, 2023 Presented by LaTawnya Burlison, Staff Senate President

Rector Baine, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clark, administrators, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about staff at Virginia Tech. At 4,454 strong we are by far the largest group of university employees, and we work in varied and diverse roles.

It seems like only a few weeks ago since we were together in Roanoke, and I presented Staff Senate's goals for this year to you. Today I would like to update you on our progress and bring some issues to your attention.

Our first goal was to increase participation for staff in governance and professional development opportunities. I am happy to report that our Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs has drafted a resolution to build on President Sands' "statement of support for participation in Governance and Professional Development," which I have included to this report for reference. This resolution proposes to add a statement of the university's support of staff participation in shared governance and professional as boilerplate language to all job postings. This statement of support to current and future employees reinforces our motto of "Ut Prosim", That I May Serve.

In addition to the proposed resolution, we have more than doubled attendance at our full senate meetings with active and engaged participation and welcomed many Virginia Tech Administrators to present at our meetings this Fall. The Staff Senate Executive Team has begun our "Road Show" initiative, as we have named it, to actively meet with staff in various areas of our many campuses who may not had the opportunity to attend meetings or were unaware of the existence of Staff Senate at Virginia Tech. While we have just begun our "Road Shows," we have already received excellent input, including areas of improvement and notes of praise for the university; these positives include the university's implementation of TimelyCare and the support of flexible work arrangements.

Our second goal was the focus on leave and compensation discrepancies facing staff. The Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs met with members of the leave and policy team with the Division of Human Resources to review current policies for clarification and we are currently collecting data to reinforce the need to increase the supplement payment and threshold that is paid annually to employees that make 35,500 or less. This taxable supplement was implemented in January of 2020 to offset expenses such as parking and childcare costs. With the increased cost of living, it is time to consider raising the supplement payment and threshold.

Thirdly, education remains a focus. The Staff Senate welcomed Dean Julia Ross from Strategic Affairs to discuss the Beyond Boundaries Vision and to glean input from staff on the future strategic vision. A common theme among the staff was the need for investment in educational and professional development opportunities, career pathing, and care. As the largest group of employees at Virginia Tech, **4,454 is the number as a reminder**, we are the backbone of the university. As such, an investment in the cultivation of staff's talent and education would be a benefit to the university.

In closing, I would like to share some areas of that will also be a focus of Staff Senate as we move forward. The inclusion and wellbeing of our non-student wage employees, the strong need for more access and affordability to dependent care, and to improve and increase our messaging as advocates for all staff at Virginia Tech. On behalf of the Staff Senate Executive Committee, Staff Senate, and all staff at Virginia Tech. I thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to collaborating with you, sharing successes, and providing ongoing support to this wonderful university as we work together to address the issues facing staff and celebrate and build on the positives.

Respectfully submitted,

LaTawnya L. Burleson

President, Staff Senate

A statement from President Tim Sands on staff participation in governance

Dear colleagues,

Navigating Virginia Tech's opportunities and challenges over the past few years has given me great appreciation for our robust system of shared governance and the collaboration and inclusiveness that comes from having staff working alongside students and faculty.

Participation in governance brings value to our staff members and the university, providing important representation and perspective, along with opportunities for unique and impactful professional development that can cultivate future leaders. While ensuring individual primary job responsibilities are completed, it is important that we endorse and support staff participating in our shared governance system. Staff members who have an interest in serving on committees and commissions should be encouraged to participate. The Division of Human Resources is available to help supervisors through conversations centered on balancing job responsibilities with university service. It has been our long-standing practice that employees serving the institution through committee participation are not required to use leave.

Maintaining our momentum and achieving our goals for the future will be challenging and complex, requiring all the tools and resources we have worked to develop. Active engagement in our system of shared governance, by all our constituency groups, is essential for the university to thrive.

I look forward to meeting with chairs and learning more about each commission's plans for the year. We have much to do and some exciting work ahead of us. Thank you for everything you do to support Virginia Tech and represent the perspectives of staff, students, and faculty.

Sincerely,

Tim Sands,
President

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report

November 5-6, 2023

Presented by Janice Austin, A/P Faculty Senate President

Good afternoon, Rector Baine, board members, President Sands, Provost Clarke, administrators, and guests. It is a pleasure to be with you all for the November board meeting.

Since the last Board meeting in August, the A/P Faculty Senate has onboarded our new Senators and selected to continue the Beyond Boundaries Scholarship for our philanthropic project this year. Our 2022-23 Beyond Boundaries Scholarship has been awarded to an undergraduate student and we are looking forward to hearing from the recipient during a future meeting. We are delighted to be able to support a student in their educational journey here at VT!

Dr. Julie Ross, Beyond Boundaries co-chair, joined our September meeting to discuss the vision and receive feedback from the senators on this important initiative. I thank Dr. Ross for joining us and providing the opportunity for the A/P Faculty Senate to engage in this work. Additionally, the Job Architecture project team in Human Resources continues to share updates with the A/P Faculty Senate and we received a demonstration on the job architecture web application during our October meeting.

Our A/P Faculty Professional Development Leave working group is finalizing their recommendation and will be working with the Commission on Administrative and Professional Affairs (CAPFA) in the coming months in consideration of a resolution for to the recommendation. The A/P Faculty Senate has also discussed thoughts on the new system of shared governance and will provide summative feedback to the Office of the Vice President for Policy and Governance by December.

Thank you for the opportunity to update you today and I look forward to sharing additional information on the work of the A/P Faculty Senate at our next meeting.

Joseph S. Merola
Faculty Constituency Report to VT Board of Visitors

Rector Baine, board members, President Sands, VT administrators, my fellow representatives, and honored guests,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the faculty at Virginia Tech.

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Seriously, I am grateful that I only need to make this report four times a year. Relaying the views of the faculty at Virginia Tech is a daunting task. To even think that the faculty can be represented as a monolithic group with the same concerns is quite a stretch. With over 2500 faculty, spread out over nine colleges including a medical school and a veterinary school participating in over 280 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Then consider the geographic locations throughout the commonwealth and beyond, there is quite a diversity of duties, activities, needs and opinions. And, we have many different classifications of faculty: Tenured and tenure-track, lecturers, collegiate professors, research professors and all the ranks that go along with those. I bring this up only to underscore the low probability of finding a true “consensus” within such a varied group.

All of that makes the beliefs that UNITE us all the stronger and all the more significant. All faculty have an abiding passion for academic freedom and a system of shared governance in which decisions are made, and policies are crafted for the benefit of all constituents of the university with input from all constituents of the university. Only with full transparency in all directions are the resources available from which the best paths forward will be found. We have made great strides in the last two years in establishing a new shared governance system at Virginia Tech that is an incredible step forward in achieving that transparency. The establishment of a Senate for each of the important constituencies encompassing students, both undergraduate and graduate, staff, and professionals. The Faculty Senate now holds a central spot in faculty governance, playing a key role in policy making. For the first time this fall, a faculty member chaired the University Council, Virginia Tech’s highest policy making body.

However, we have more progress to make to make our system the best it can be and a model for other universities. While the faculty have a strong commitment and embody the spirit of ut prosim, we are also being called on to serve the university in ways that stretch us so thin that, frankly, they are facing burn out and one of the areas that suffers is, well, shared governance. Some departments are not accurately represented in faculty Senate because the faculty are stretched very thin and cannot add another service activity to their agenda. The same holds true for our calls for faculty representation on essential commissions and committees. In terms of transparency, there are areas now where a LOT of work is being done on what must be called “damage control” in explaining the establishment and implementation of policies when much

LESS work would have been done on consulting governance in the beginning before formulation and implementation.

Think about what we ask of our faculty – Research and Scholarly activity, teaching, and service. In the category of service, we are expected to conduct committee work for the department, for the college and the university. That is just inside our institution's walls. We are also expected to conduct activities in service of our professions – in societies, on government panels and in a host of other ways. Oh, and for most, all of that service counts for about 10% of our evaluations in P&T and salary reviews.

Now, consider our strategic plan and the metrics that will propel us into the Global 100 – ALL GOOD GOALS. This is not a criticism of those goals. But note that service, especially internal service does not DIRECTLY impact those metrics. The key word is DIRECTLY – our internal health is critical for the attainment of ALL of these strategic goals, and we often assume that all is well on the home front. And for the most part, it may be, be we are not always meeting our potential because the things that make for a healthy internal culture are often taken for granted and are not addressed directly. And I submit that a vital shared governance system and a healthy faculty body, both physically and mentally, are two particularly crucial factors that must be addressed directly. We cannot keep assuming that we can keep asking more of our faculty.

Now, I am going to skip over THE most prominent issue that faculty share – parking. Dean Kevin Pitt shared with me that he heard a definition of university being thousands of entrepreneurs all sharing a common complaint about parking. But, enough of that.

While compensation is not the most important motivation and driver for the majority of faculty, it cannot be ignored, especially in an area where the cost of housing and cost of living have seen dramatic increases. We heard today about the progress made in average faculty salaries. This progress cannot be denied and is laudable. But the current percentile is not where we want to be and not where we need to be. AND that is an average that does not tell the story of a number of populations within that envelope of all faculty. As we continue to attract and reward the national academy members and other distinguished prize winners. Sometimes those who work “in the trenches” – the instructors, the tenured and tenure-track faculty focusing on giving our students the best educational experience that they can give – are often the victims of salary compression. I wish I had a solution to present today – only the suggestion that this is an area that must be examined and one for which a solution must be forthcoming. We are making great strides in the mechanics and organization of shared governance and the support of this board has been critical – we need to instill an appreciation and a reward system appropriate to keeping it a healthy system.

Please do not take the above as a critical constituency report. But any good faculty report cannot simply be a cheerleading piece – and there is so much to cheer – I doubt that I would not be in my 37th year here if that were not the case. For me, the message that I want to deliver

today is that Virginia Tech is outstanding, but we can be even more. And I have presented the areas which, if addressed, will help us be that more. Thank you for listening.

Joseph S. Merola

President of Virginia Tech Faculty Senate.

Faculty Representative to the VT Board of Visitors

Respectfully Submitted, November 5, 202