Undergraduate Constituency Report to the Board of Visitors

Thomas Feely

November 18, 2025

Good morning, Rector Rocovich, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board, President Sands, EVP & Provost Clarke, EVPCOO Sebring, and members of the Hokie community gathered with us today.

I am honored to be with you once again on behalf of my peers.

When we last convened, I committed to both representing the thoughts and feelings of my constituents and also helping them to digest the executive-level decisions made at this institution.

I am pleased to report that we have had constructive dialogue and have enhanced understanding. It is essential, as you are aware, to recognize that acceptance does not necessarily imply agreement.

Through this experience, I have gained a deeper understanding of significant opportunities to influence Virginia Tech, both for those currently on campus and for those to come.

Shared understanding, the value of community spaces, and preparation for post-undergraduate studies have been the main themes of my engagements.

Transparency with decision-making.

There is stronger trust from the students in the institution when decision makers are honest about the rationale and basis for decisions. For example, when President Sands acted outside the scope of shared governance under exigent circumstances, there was understanding due to the surrounding supporting documentation and transparency. Students felt a lack of trust when other programs were discontinued, and the references to the external forces were neither distributed nor verbally cited. Once I requested information and shared it with my peers, they then understood why decisions had been made once the facts were presented.

On-Campus Housing

On the topic of our campus community, our residents are grateful for the renewed focus on providing a modern living experience on par with the best of what our facilities have to offer and comparable to peer institutions. Important to couple with this acknowledgement is the need to find an appropriate balance between the pace of renovations and new construction to keep the cost of attendance manageable. It is no secret that right now, institutions must justify the value of the collegiate experience to ensure that there is a financial return on investment, and opportunity for civil discourse and personal development for young people in America, who are debating where to go and what to do after high school. To put it another way, we cannot price ourselves out of the market as the affordable and accessible land-grant that we pride ourselves on being.

Within these residential spaces, it is imperative to have adequate space for collaboration and community building.

In an effort to represent the student voice more accurately, I established an advisory committee for this position, comprised of students from across the University whose paths I ordinarily wouldn't cross. This has allowed me to draw lessons from experiences unlike my own and ask questions I would not have otherwise considered regarding the student experience. We can discuss how the Board defines "student success", but in the context of our group of successful students, I sought to peel back the layers of their success to see if there were defining moments, opportunities, or experiences.

A common theme emerged across the table, as students attributed their success to the connections they made during their first year at Virginia Tech. For many, it was an experience with an upperclassman sharing their journey and providing mentorship in a residence hall. Helping with course selection, homework, and offering advice on which social and professional clubs to consider were key pieces of information that students learned early in their Hokie experience in these spaces.

Part of the value of a Hokie is the down-to-earth, hardworking, "How can I help?" attitude. These attributes and the embodiment of the Pylons are developed through living with and looking up to mentors who live by these values.

The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets has, of course, been here since our beginning and is considered the premier Living-Learning Program (LLP) at Virginia Tech. It is the reason why thousands of Hokies, including myself, come to Tech. The director of Living-Learning Programs shared with me that they have worked to understand what makes the Corps so effective and provide parallel aspects in the other LLPs. Speaking as someone who has both been a cadet and currently lives in a civilian LLP, I see the value in these programs and the efforts the staff make to develop engaging programs that foster community. I can tell you that if it were not for the Corps, I would not have come to Virginia Tech. This program has transformed me into the person I am today, and I almost certainly would not be standing before you without these experiences. As we speak, students with parallel experiences are developing across campus, and it is our responsibility to ensure that first-year networks are supported. This way, when students move off campus or return to on-campus housing, they can carry these relationships forward and continue to benefit from and provide mentorship to others.

Bridging the Gap between undergraduate studies and what comes next is an ongoing area of discovery for my team.

We have learned about the Virginia Talent + Opportunity Partnership (V-TOP), a program that connects Virginia businesses offering work-based learning opportunities with students seeking them, in partnership with higher education institutions. This program provides resources to help businesses start internships, learn internship best practices, recruit for and fill their positions, with some employers qualifying for wage matching to further support students.

Additionally, the Ut Prosim Internship Support Fund supports students in unpaid and underpaid internships that benefit the Commonwealth. These funds contribute to housing, relocation, transportation, and other expenses during their experience.

One of the main points for the Investment to Win was the impact that Hokie Sports has on the community vitality. This comes at a cost of over $1,000 per student per year by 2029. A great way for the community to buy into this partnership is to consider part-time student interns. This benefits students' experience and development while strengthening ties with Virginia Tech and the community.

A great relationship within Virginia Tech is the Homefield Farm, a partnership between CALS and Student Affairs. The twelve-acre, student-driven farm is the only certified organic operation owned by a university in Virginia. It provides about 45,000 pounds of fresh produce to dining centers and Homefield's farm stands on campus. These educational experiences, coupled with the tangible benefits to the campus, are prompting us to explore other opportunities for similar partnerships.

The Campus Internship Experience program I mentioned in the last meeting developed 93 on-campus internship opportunities for students for this academic year, all of which are paying.

Internships can be challenging to secure for first- and second-year students who lack relevant skills or experience. Fortunately, we have phenomenal spaces, like the Build Lab, which allows anyone who has completed the safety training to use this fully equipped wood shop. Or the maker spaces in the library, which can bring ideas to life through art, additive manufacturing, laser cutting, and many other resources. Most recently, the Discovery Lab opened in the Undergraduate Science Lab Building, which I encourage you to visit. It has cutting-edge equipment and wet labs that even impressed the research faculty with whom I was touring. All students have to bring is curiosity, and the student lab staff will help advise them on their journey, giving them experience that will help them take the next step.

Dining Plans

Following up on a topic from our last meeting, student focus groups, and I have had the opportunity to collaborate with Dining regarding the future of student plans. They provided me with a preview of the new plans they plan to pilot and present to the BOV in the spring, and if approved, to implement in the Fall of 2026. This will provide a dining plan that enhances food security for our first-year students. Growth plan

When considering undergraduate enrollment at our Blacksburg campus, it is essential to remember who we are and what makes us unique. It was reassuring yesterday to know that we can look forward to exploring sustainable models in the future that do not compromise student experiences or potentially lead us to outgrow our identity.

Information Technology

There are two touch points that the University has with each student each day, regardless of campus or course modality. They are our learning management system, Canvas, and our Microsoft accounts, which include our emails and accompanying software suite. The Microsoft storage that students are allotted is inadequate for an R1 institution with such a heavy STEM focus. I recognize that the Microsoft contract was on the agenda for the previous meeting, and if I had known more, I would have tried to influence this restriction before it came to you for approval. Unfortunately, the Division of IT has informed me that we cannot increase the 10 GB storage limit for students. Nor can students pay for our own expansion. Instead, we have to shuffle data between our personal and school accounts. Therefore, we are going through the shared governance structure of the University to ensure that this issue is addressed for the next contract. Additionally, my team is looking into collecting data to better define the scope of the population impacted.

Thank you, Mr. Pearson, Secretary McCarthy, Rector Rocovich, President Sands, Ms. Heidbreder, and all those who played a role in helping Coach Franklin become a Hokie. We appreciate the support of the Hokie community as we invest to win. We look forward to the athletic department being a good steward of student fees and philanthropic support as we embark on this next chapter of Hokie Sports.

Please let me know if you have any questions at this moment, or if you would like to discuss them at or before our next meeting.

It is my greatest honor to stand before you on behalf of the 31,536 undergraduates of Virginia Tech. Thank you once again for this opportunity.

Thank you, and go Hokies!

Thomas Feely

Graduate & Professional Student Representative Constituent Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors Meeting, November 17-18, 2025

Katherine Drinkwater Gregg

Rector Rocovich, Members of the Board, President Sands, Provost Clarke, EVP Sebring, Faculty, Staff, Students, and Guests,

It is my pleasure to speak to you today in Academic Building One during my first visit to Virginia Tech's Institute for Advanced Computing. Over the last two days, I have thoroughly enjoyed exploring this campus, speaking with students and administrators, and learning about this important node in our Innovation Network.

As I reviewed my activities over the last three months and our agenda for this Board meeting, a theme which stuck out to me was student belonging and connection. In my PhD program, I have read many scholarly works that emphasize the profound impact of sense of belonging on student success [1], [2]. I doubt, however, that you need me to list journal articles to understand the impact of belonging on students across all demographics. A student who feels accepted, included, and supported in their learning environment is more likely to learn, contribute, and succeed in that environment. I believe Virginia Tech currently works diligently to help students foster their sense of belonging, from orientation programs to thousands of events hosted every year to our strong institutional culture. However, student loneliness, isolation, and disengagement are issues that still affect a majority of students on college campuses [3]. Furthermore, many of the agenda items we've discussed during this meeting could have a significant impact on the belonging of graduate students at Virginia Tech. Thus, I will spend the remainder of my report focusing on a few of those topics.

Connecting All Virginia Tech Campuses and Students

Hosting this meeting in Northern Virginia provides the perfect opportunity to discuss the student experience for those beyond the Blacksburg Campus. About 30% of graduate and professional students do not study in Blacksburg, with online students as the largest population (~1,260). While growth in the greater D.C. area has brought attention to students outside our main campus, the experiences of our students across Virginia vary widely. As I meet with student leaders across Virginia Tech, I wonder what it means to be a Hokie. What are the common experiences, values, or knowledge that we want all students to have before they graduate? How can our different physical locations develop unique identities while maintaining common elements of the Virginia Tech experience? You might say, for example, that every VT student should live out Ut Prosim through service or leadership outside of class. In Blacksburg, every graduate student organization in Blacksburg can request more than $10,000 per year for operating and event costs to serve their fellow students. The GSA in Northern Virginia, however, has access to only $2000 of funding from the Graduate School to serve nearly 800 students. While these differences are due to varying student fee structures on different campuses, the

ultimate impact is a very different student experience. Students in Roanoke pay the same fees as Blacksburg students because they are within 50 miles, but these students often lack the navigational resources to access valuable services and engaging events.

For me, simple experiences like wearing my favorite Virginia Tech sweatshirt or walking by the Pylons on the way to my office make me feel like a Hokie. We need to work to ensure that similar quintessential experiences are available at every VT campus for every student.

Ensuring All Students Have a Place that Feels Like Home

Virginia Tech is a large community with lots to offer. The breadth of spaces, resources, people, and services available to graduate and professional students is astounding. In the last month alone, I have had my resume reviewed by Career and Professional Development, learned about the importance of rich relationships at a Student Affairs event, taken advantage of health resources at Shiffert, and found free snacks in as many places as possible. I learned more about the dedication and tireless work of 28 campus offices through the Graduate Student Resource Fair in September. It was incredible to watch dozens of grad students navigate the fair, finding academic, wellness, and community resources. One student was ecstatic about finding a table that was giving out VT branded tape measures because the tape measure would help him learn to think about dimensions in inches and feet. A seemingly insignificant piece of swag made this student feel more comfortable and confident in their community.

I believe that this somewhat silly example from the resource fair exemplifies the purpose of our student support infrastructure. We provide different spaces, events, and opportunities to create many smaller communities within the Virginia Tech community. The tape measure was not an interesting giveaway for all students—I already have a few at home. But for that student, it was perhaps the most valuable thing he took away from the resource fair. His needs were seen and met. His participation and inclusion in the graduate community at Virginia Tech matters. Now, I am not saying that we should give every student a tape measure when they arrive on campus. I am saying that it is paramount that every student can find their own sense of belonging and mattering. For some, it may be their favorite table to study in the Learning Loft at Academic Building One. For another student it may be attending Tea at Two in the ADIPA+ center every week or playing games in the common areas of their Living Learning Program. For me, it's attending Friday morning coffee and pastries in my department. Every student does not only deserve a place where they feel safe, supported, and important, they need it to succeed.

As we discuss enrollment strategy, strategic priorities, and the future of Virginia Tech, maintaining the quality and robustness of our student support is imperative. The infrastructure that supports student life is far bigger than housing, particularly for graduate and professional students. I hope that we can grow in a manner that maintains and bolsters the student experience without straining our capacities.

Caring for Every Hokie from Day 1 to Graduation and Beyond

With the end of the semester and Fall Commencement approaching, I will conclude by celebrating the 525 graduate students who completed their degree over the Summer, and the 921 who are finishing this semester [4]. These students have put hundreds of hours into courses, projects, theses, dissertations, teaching, and more. The road to graduation can be bumpy, and strong belonging and connection is a key predictor of persistence. In the 2025 Graduate Climate Survey, 30% of respondents indicated that they had considered leaving their program in the last year. A GPSS working group and the Graduate School are currently analyzing the survey data to understand this number, but it is clear to me that we have some work to do to support students completing graduate degrees. I believe the common experiences and holistic support I have already spoken about are directly connected to this goal. Furthermore, the importance of belonging continues as students become Hokie alumni. Students who have a strong sense of belonging while on campus are more likely to be involved in their alma mater as alumni, both philanthropically and voluntarily [5].

The bottom line is that fostering belonging for everyone on our campus starts on Day 1 and continues long after they graduate and move on. This is a difficult task, but I think that Virginia Tech is already doing a remarkable job. We must ensure that we continue to move the needle forward rather than slipping backward. I look forward to working on this with you for the remainder of the semester and in the new year. Thank you!

Works Cited

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[2] T. L. Strayhorn, *College Students’ Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2018. doi: 10.4324/9781315297293.

[3] A. Rock, “65% of College Students Are Lonely, New Report Finds,” *Campus Safety Magazine*, May 23, 2024. Accessed: Nov. 13, 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/65-of-college-students-are-lonely-new-report-finds/135281/

[4] J. Austin, *Personal Correspondence.* Nov. 13, 2025.

[5] N. D. Drezner and O. Pizmony-Levy, “I Belong, Therefore, I Give? The Impact of Sense of Belonging on Graduate Student Alumni Engagement,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 753–777, Aug. 2021, doi: 10.1177/0899764020977687.

Staff Senate Constituency Report

Virginia Tech Board of Visitors

November 17th-18th 2025

Presented by Amber Hagan, Staff Senate President

Good morning, Rector Rocovich, members of the board, President Sands, Provost Clarke, Executive Vice President Sebring, administration, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to update you today about our staff and non-student wage at Virginia Tech.

In August the Staff Senate was visited by Teresa Sweeney, the Waste and Recycling manager with Virginia Tech Facilities. She explained Virginia Tech's recycling program and answered questions from the senate. The staff senate is very interested in maintaining and improving the recycling plan. Staff believe there is a lot of value in sustainability and recycling. Senators are also interested in expanding this recycling service to include foundation buildings and our additional campuses in the future, as they are not currently serviced.

In October we hosted Sarah Dreier with Talent Development from Central HR. The Staff Senate has a sincere appetite for professional development opportunities. In this session we learned how to navigate the training websites and resources on campus. Opportunities to expand on current knowledge and to learn new skills are important to staff.

Our biggest opportunity for staff professional development is our annual McComas Staff Leadership Seminar, which takes place in the spring each year. McComas provides staff with a unique opportunity to engage in ongoing learning - especially on topics directly related to Virginia Tech. Currently, it stands as the only event specifically tailored for staff development. At our last seminar, we explored how to build a resolution, learned about the process behind it, and discussed its significance.

Our goal is to continue spotlighting internal processes at VT, featuring speakers from within the university. This ensures staff stay informed about current best practices and gain insights they might not otherwise encounter. We were fortunate enough to be able to host 200 staff and non-student wage

employees for a half day of professional development and networking at last year's event. Our hope is that we are able to host a more substantial number of our constituent base this year.

Earlier this month, the Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs hosted Rebecca Hubble from the leave team to speak with them about the current leave policy and is continuing its work on Bereavement leave for staff appointments. Benchmarking of our peer institutions has been completed, and CSPA will continue to meet with relevant stakeholders.

In the spirit of Ut Prosim the Staff Senate Executive Team is planning for a Staff Senate sponsored blood drive and are exploring additional service opportunities to give back to the community that serves us.

In closing, on behalf of the Staff Senate Executive Committee, Staff Senate, and all staff at Virginia Tech, I'd like to thank you all for your time and attention today.

Go Hokies!

Administrative and Professional Faculty Constituent Report
November 18, 2025
Presented by Dr. Marlena McGlothlin Lester, A/P Faculty Senate President

It is my privilege to present this report on behalf of the Administrative and Professional Faculty of Virginia Tech.

Since my last report in August, the A/P Faculty Senate has been actively engaged in several important initiatives. We have invited all AP faculty employees to Senate meetings, launched our Fall 2025 newsletter, and reviewed seven shared governance resolutions.

I am pleased to report that the Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs is systematically reviewing Chapter 7 of the Faculty Handbook to improve clarity, organization, and usability.

Our Senate meetings have featured valuable presentations on campus operations and priorities. In September, I provided an overview of the A/P Faculty Senate's role and functions. In October, we heard two informative presentations: "Supporting Campus Connections: Mail and Transportation Services" by Carrie Cox, Senior Director of Auxiliary and Business Services, and "Climate Action, Sustainability, and Energy Committee" by Nathan King, Campus Sustainability Manager, and Kristina Cook, Sustainability Program Coordinator.

Additionally, we have participated in the university's mobility framework initiative, promoted awareness of the IT Roadshow showcasing innovation and security initiatives, gathered insights into childcare needs for the Virginia Tech community, and partnered with the Graduate and Professional Student Senate and the Women's Center to support the Little Hokie Hand-Me-Down program.

I would also like to thank those who attended the Tour & Talk at the Corps of Cadets Leadership & Military Science Building on October 16th. We had excellent attendance and gained valuable insights into the Corps program.

Later today, I will host an A/P Faculty Senate Meet and Greet at Academic Building One from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. in Room 3100. I encourage all A/P faculty to join us.

Lastly, I also want to bring forward concerns I am hearing from our colleagues about potential enrollment growth, particularly from academic advisors. I want to emphasize the need to ensure we have an adequate number of advisors in each college as we make plans to grow.

We share a common goal of building a strong support structure for Virginia Tech students. However, achieving this is challenging when advisors manage high caseloads while facing additional demands on their time. Academic advising is critical to university success, yet some areas lack sufficient resources and support especially as student needs become increasingly complex.

A 2021 report EAB, previously known as the Educational Advisory Board, indicated advising is positively correlated with persistence, and institutions seeking to improve persistence and graduation rates should actively engage students with advising. The 2023 Boyer Commission report, *The Equity-Excellence*

Imperative: A Blueprint for Undergraduate Education at US Research Universities, recommends a maximum advisor-to-student ratio of 250:1 at large research universities.

Smaller caseloads enable advisors to proactively reach out to students before crises occur, providing the timely support and guidance that increases student retention and degree completion.

I ask that as we plan for enrollment growth, we continue to consider retention as a mechanism for growth and ensure adequate advisor positions are added to maintain recommended ratios and support student success.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve and represent our A/P Faculty. I look forward to sharing our continued progress at the next Board meeting.

Faculty Constituency Report to the Board of Visitors

Justin A. Lemkul
Faculty Senate President
November 18, 2025

Rector Rocovich, Vice Rector Davis, Members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, Provost Clarke, and Chief Operating Officer Sebring:

When we last met in August, I spoke of the uncertainty that the faculty, and indeed all members of the university community, faced. As we approach the end of the fall semester, we have gained some clarity on important issues while acknowledging that there is still important work ahead. I have come to appreciate that the most important duty in my position as Faculty Senate President and faculty representative to the Board is hearing directly from my colleagues, learning what drives and inspires them, and what gives them pause. I have spent recent weeks in every corner of the campus discussing issues and helping to navigate solutions. What I would like to share with you today is the perspective I have gained in this process through the lens of the daily life of a faculty member.

Our day often begins in classrooms furnished with equipment and desks that haven't seen a significant upgrade in decades. The contrast is hard to ignore: student-athletes, some benefiting from lucrative NIL deals, sit in these aging spaces while their athletic facilities receive multimillion-dollar renovations. This disparity between our working conditions and the investment in athletics weighs heavily on faculty morale, underscoring a sense of being undervalued and overlooked.

In the classroom, we have a front-row seat to the "eureka" moments when everything comes together for a student who has been giving their best effort all semester. At the same time, we carry the weight of knowing that same student was in our office, struggling with the fact that their parents have been laid off from their jobs and wondering if their tuition will be paid.

After class, we learn of a faculty member at another institution who has been attacked online and fired or reprimanded in a politically motivated attack. By doing their job, they have been punished. In the era of social media, AI-generated false content, and eroded discourse, this scene is becoming all too common.

We return to our office to find an email invitation to speak at a premiere scholarly conference. Such an invitation is a great honor and one that will serve our scholarly mission to disseminate our findings globally. Reduced availability of travel funds and research dollars that don't go as far as they have in years past make it questionable as to whether we can attend, let alone have sufficient financial support to finish the research project before the presentation.

The current moment is a test of whether Virginia Tech will remain a place where research flourishes, and students are prepared to lead globally, or whether it will succumb to short-term pressures that erode its mission.

The faculty soldier on, perhaps out of a sense of duty, perhaps out of an underlying professional imperative in an environment in which it is increasingly hard to succeed. Time and time again, despite external forces that malign and willfully misrepresent what we do, we choose to serve the mission of Virginia Tech. In the name of our students and colleagues. In the spirit of our land-grant ethos and *Ut Prosim*.

As the season changes and semester draws to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the institutional change that is upon us, and to thank Provost Cyril Clarke for his steady leadership over the past eight years. I have had the privilege of working directly with Provost Clarke on many important efforts and engaging with him directly on matters impacting the academic mission of Virginia Tech and the livelihood of its faculty, including the ongoing University Mission Initiative regarding doctoral student enrollment and funding. This effort reflects shared governance at its best, working with faculty on their priorities in concert with the vision from leadership, to advance a common purpose. On behalf of the faculty, thank you for your steadfast commitment to shared governance, academic freedom, and the land-grant mission of Virginia Tech. And from me personally, thank you for your wise counsel and the many opportunities you've given me to make a difference at a university I love.

It is auspicious that we find ourselves in Northern Virginia today, realizing the vision led by Dean Julie Ross, who is to be our next provost. The faculty look forward to working with Dean Ross in this new role, and we are confident that she will continue to serve Virginia Tech admirably as she has in her current role. Congratulations to Dean Ross on her selection as provost; we have much work to do together.

In closing, my colleagues from across campus and the entire innovation network of Virginia Tech have one message. Amidst societal and political unease, we ask for the support of the Board in championing our Principles of Community and our academic traditions, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression, continuing to rely on a system of shared governance that draws from the wisdom of the faculty to inform the leadership vision set forth by the Board and our administration, and providing support for faculty and related infrastructure in the context of responsible enrollment growth while maintaining a high-quality and supportive student experience. Only by demonstrating an unequivocal commitment to these principles will we achieve a common purpose for advancing the future of the university.

Thank you.