

**Board of Visitors Constituency Report**  
**William Storey, Undergraduate Representative**  
**August 28th-29th, 2023**

Good afternoon Rector Baine, members of the board, President Sands, administration, guests, and friends. I am grateful for this opportunity to be sitting here with you all today and for the board entrusting me with this position. I look forward to collaborating with the board in its mission to exemplify *Ut Prosim* for the betterment of all current and future hokies here at Virginia Tech.

My time here as a student has been unique when comparing my experiences with those of students before and after me. My freshman year was all online due to the pandemic and whilst some of my peers may resent their time learning over zoom, I do not, because it is during this time that I got to see what truly makes Virginia Tech great, the people. While living in West AJ, I became good friends with the custodian on my floor, Ivan, and with dining hall staff like Kareem, both of whom I still talk with today. Drawing from these interactions, I decided that I wanted to play a role, like Kareem and Ivan, in making this university exceptional. Thereafter, I quickly became involved in student leadership with organizations such as the Student Life Council, the class of 2024 Leadership Team, and SVCC Cultural Transformation subcommittee where I garnered rich experiences and relationships that have allowed me to become the student leader I am today. Of course, none of this would have been possible had I not had down to earth people like Ivan and Kareem to show me what it truly means to exemplify *Ut Prosim*.

As the 2023-2024 Undergraduate Representative, I will address a wide array of issues relating to student life. Including but not limited to: food insecurity, accessibility, affordability, sexual violence, mental health, and diversity. In addition, I will work towards improving the quality of student life by working collaboratively with deans, directors, and fellow student leaders. Currently, one of my top priorities is to work with the SSD center. As the student population has steadily increased over the past few years, the

center has outgrown its current space in Lavery hall. It has gotten to the point where many of my professors would rather have me take my exam in an adjacent classroom, lab, or office, than deal with the headache of finding a time that fits with the SSD's schedules. Because of this, I want to work towards expanding the opportunities and resources available to the SSD office so that they will continue to aid students' academic success. Similarly, I want to help make this campus as accessible as possible. As someone with a younger brother who has cerebral palsy, I have seen first hand how important it is to have an ADA accessible campus. Furthermore, having grown up working in local food banks, I have become open-minded to just how relevant food insecurity is in many people's lives, especially younger and vulnerable college students. I want to make sure that every student is able to obtain a healthy meal on campus, no matter their dietary restriction or socioeconomic class.

The issue of housing costs is not a spasmodic topic here at Virginia Tech. In the post pandemic era we are seeing off campus housing prices reach unprecedented levels. The average cost of rent for a student living off campus is now upwards of \$800. When combined with other costs of living such as utilities, food, and gas, the cost per month easily exceeds upwards of \$1000 per month. I and many of my peers, have found it difficult to find affordable housing here in the Blacksburg area, as anything affordable that is not an old trailer full of mold priced at anything less than \$700 a month gets quickly gobbled up. Much of this has been accelerated by the Town of Blacksburg's decision in last year's comprehensive plan to limit where student housing can be built in the future, a significant portion of this area being where student housing is already pre-existing. Unsurprisingly, cheaper student housing is now being bought up by mega leasing companies and being replaced with "luxury" apartments, with the average price per bed at \$1100. As Virginia Tech grows and expands towards its university master plan, I want to implore the university to seek out more cooperative options and initiatives with the town of Blacksburg for student housing, as the rift between the two only seems to widen each year rather than come together. I bring this issue up not because I hate economic development, or hate the town of Blacksburg, but because I love this town

and university and want it to be better. Furthermore, this issue is not something that only a few students are facing, but a significant portion of the student body, even the students on the board with you today.

Similar causes for anxiety and uncertainty amongst many students, especially those of underrepresented and underserved minority groups have arisen in the wake of the Supreme Court decision to overrule Affirmative Action for the college admissions process. I believe it to be axiomatic that we continue to strive for greater diversity and richness amongst the student body despite the potential setbacks from Affirmative Action being overruled. I know that the university is already doing incredible work with programs like InclusiveVT, but I emphasize that we need not let this decision by the Supreme Court keep us from making a campus that is welcoming and accepting of all students.

To conclude, I once again want to express my sincere gratitude for this incredible opportunity to work with you all on making this university better not only for current students, but all future Hokies. It is because of this board that Virginia Tech is more than just a research institution, it is a place where people from all nationalities, religions, and socioeconomic classes can truly feel at home. On behalf of all undergraduate students here at Virginia Tech, thank you!

## **Graduate and Professional Student Constituency Report**

### **Virginia Tech Board of Visitors**

**August 27 - 29, 2023**

**Presented by Emily Tirrell, Graduate and Professional Student Representative**

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

Thank you for the incredible opportunity to serve in this role. I am eager to get started and to collaborate closely with you throughout my term. My name is Emily Tirrell, and I am the Graduate and Professional Student Representative for the 2023-2024 year! I am a second year Ph.D. student in the Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health program and conduct research in the Robotics and Sensorimotor Control Lab in the Biomedical Engineering and Mechanics Department. I have been fortunate to be a student at Virginia Tech twice, and completed my undergraduate degrees in Biological Science and in Clinical Neuroscience. During my first few months as the Graduate and Professional Student Representative, I have connected with student leaders throughout the Virginia Tech community and connected with the deans of the graduate school, the medical and veterinary schools, and the different state - wide campus associate deans and representatives.

During my term I will give a voice to the graduate and professional student perspective, and impact how the board and university might improve our experiences here at Virginia Tech. First, I would like to share the complexities behind what a graduate and professional student really is. Our location for this board meeting provides an excellent opportunity for me to stress the importance of our graduate and professional students, the direct impact that we have, and the value we bring to our community and to the Virginia Tech brand. The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) and Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) combine in one of three thematic institutes associated with Virginia Tech, the others are the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) and the Virginia Tech National Security Institute (VTNSI). The Fralin Biomedical Research Institute (FBRI) and Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine (VTCSOM) alone house approximately 2% of graduate and professional students and contributes substantially to the research dollars brought into the university. These research institutes not only provide space for faculty and students to develop formative research questions and answers, but space for Virginia Tech to grow into the surrounding commonwealth

environment. I want to emphasize the importance of the institutes for Virginia Tech's strategic plan to achieve excellence as a comprehensive global land - grant university, and to specifically draw attention to the important role that graduate and professional students have in achieving that commitment.

So what is a graduate and professional student? We are first and foremost individuals and students of the university. We are also an extraordinary tool, resource, and contributor that the university has to promote its strategic plans and grow its research enterprise success. Our thematic institutes, departments, and research labs would not function or be productive without the work of graduate and professional students. In terms of rankings, when compared to our peer Land Grant Institutions, Virginia Tech ranked 16/112 overall in Fall of 2022, and recently gained recognition with a CASE 50 membership, acknowledging our value, quality, and fundraising excellence. These are both prodigious achievements, however, in Fall of 2022, Virginia Tech placed in the 251-300 range for the global ranking based on research excellence on a global scale. I segway into this comparison for one main reason: With the commitment to achieving excellence as a comprehensive global land - grant university, it is imperative that we attract and retain highly skilled graduate and professional students to increase our research enterprise success. Graduate and professional students will push Virginia Tech into achieving these goals and continue to raise our ranking. Two main topics impact graduate and professional student attraction and retention and I would like to focus on these throughout my term: student financial wellness and overall student engagement and wellbeing.

I am pleased to report that there have been great strides at the various campuses to improve student financial wellness. The DC Area Campus is installing a new metro pass initiative, partnering with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, to introduce the U-Pass to our graduate students. This pass allows full-time students unlimited Metrobus and Metrorail access to travel for about \$1 per student per day. This helps alleviate pressures to live close to campus, and encourages students to live in more affordable areas while still having direct access to campus. The Roanoke Area Campus has initiated a new "StarCard" reward program for students to get discounts at local restaurants and local establishments to offset some of the cost of living expenses. The Town of Blacksburg has provided free public transportation with the Blacksburg Transit Bus System. However, students are still struggling financially. To combat this and provide some financial relief, I am working with the Dean of the Graduate School and the Dean of Students to find additional sources of funding, using the student emergency fund, to help

provide additional support to our students. I ask that the board continue to discuss the financial wellbeing of graduate and professional students, and support these initiatives.

There have also been great strides at the various campuses to improve engagement with campus resources and overall student wellbeing. “TimelyCare”, a virtual health and well-being platform available to all Virginia Tech students, has been utilized at all of our campuses. “TimelyCare” offers flexibility for students to be seen at off-hours and reduces barriers to accessing mental health care. With 4.69% of our graduate and professional students (approximately 333 students) utilizing this resource, “TimelyCare” has been an incredible success. However, students still report a great disconnect between campus resource availability and need, and previous campus polling shows that upwards of 21% of graduate and professional students (approximately 1,491 students) need additional access to campus resources. I am working with the Vice President of Student Affairs, Cook Counseling, and Hokie Wellness to promote existing campus resources to all students and to increase resource availability to combat accessibility difficulties that our students are facing. I ask that the board continue to discuss the engagement and overall wellbeing of graduate and professional students, and support these initiatives.

Overall, I am working 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 consider student financial wellness and student wellbeing and engagement when discussing future university initiatives, and 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 sharing my ongoing progress in this role and collaborating with you all to make this an amazing year serving Virginia Tech! Go Hokies!

**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

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Times in Minutes

(counterclockwise)

Around Campus WC: 95

Around Campus Walking: 38

Orange Arrow: 13

Green Arrow: 6

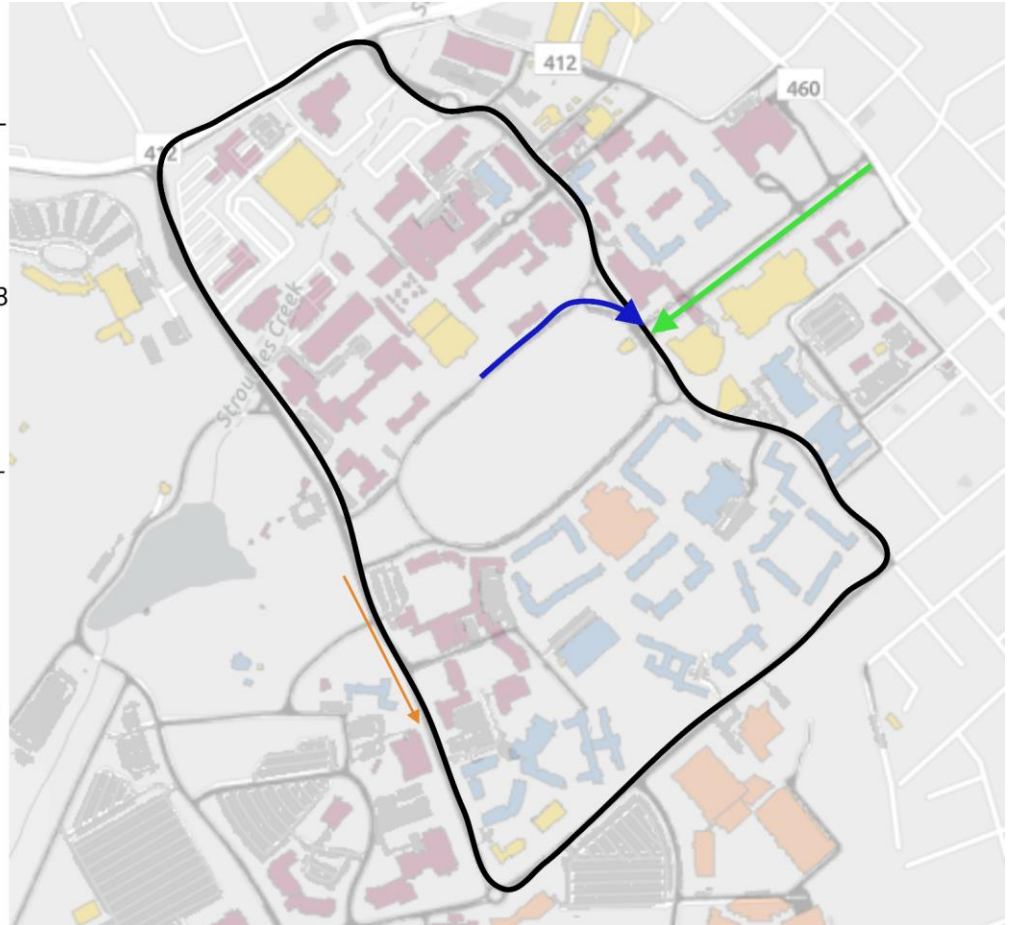
Blue Arrow: 11

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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!