

Board of Visitors Constituent Report
Seyi Olusina, Undergraduate Representative
March 26, 2018

Good afternoon Rector Treacy, President Sands, members of the board, administration, and distinguished guests.

Welcome back to Spring at Virginia Tech where there was no snow in the winter months but all the snow now. This academic year is really starting to pick up for students and faculty alike on campus.

Since the last time we met there has been a lot of great things going on. Our football team continued its streak of consecutive bowl appearances, our Men's basketball team made it to back to back NCAA tournaments and our Women's basketball team has continued to progress in the NIT tournament. One of the things that I am very proud since our last meeting is that Virginia Tech has been ranked as the 8th safest campus in the country by the National Council for Home Safety and Security. This I believe is a very important and amazing ranking. With tensions in our country at such a high I think it is important that students here now, as well as those to come, have faith that our campus is safe. I would like commend Mr. Sherwood Wilson, Virginia Tech Police, and the Emergency Management team for helping elevate Virginia Tech to this level and helping students feel safe. The work they are doing is truly encouraging.

There are some things that my constituents and I would like to bring to the attention of the Board. In the last 6 months there has been an increase all across the country of scandals that include fraternity and sorority life and athletics. There is a notion among students that we as university will not be looked into in either of these two categories because of lack of attention on our athletics or lack of incidences in the Greek community. Students hope that the Board will take a more proactive step and research and do their own findings into athletics and the Greek community. We do not want to wait until something tragic happens before we act. I ask the board to push the university to make sure that we are in compliance with every NCAA rule in every single sport across board and make sure that the integrity of Virginia Tech is also reflected in every sports team from the Coaches to the players. I hope that Greek life is encouraged to make sure they are doing more than just the bare minimum to hold credentials and that the processes put in place are fair for everyone. These two areas of campus life tend to have lives of their own and while Virginia Tech has managed them well historically I believe now is the time to do some self-evaluation to make sure we continue these positive trends.

With presentations coming this board meeting about Title IX, I would like to point to the need for additional support and resources to them and other resources like the Women's Center. The Women's Center continues to be busy but unfortunately, they do not have enough staff to be able to help students in a timely manner. This can lead to victims dealing with cases 4+ months after they initially started the process. This is not the fault of the Woman's center because the work they do is sensitive and needs to be thorough, but we as university need to support them so they can effectively support our students. Along the lines of resources, I would like to call attention the topic of mental health that is often brought up. We have for years been in "best practice" in regard to the number of counselors that we offer but best practices is not enough anymore. The need for more help is continuing to grow and students are growing tired and upset that they have to wait so long and are told that the resources are in best practice. Over the last 3-4 months we have had some unfortunate and extreme cases of mental health breaks. This is a spike from the trend of 0 from the last 6 years. Students are aware of this and want action. We as a university have the ability to redefine "best practices" by providing the true help and resources that are needed. Students want to be heard but especially in the areas of their mental health.

Students feel like there is still a great lack of communication with them when changes are made. The International Street Fair has existed at Virginia Tech for 50+ years but this year there is a big change. Students are no longer allowed to cook their traditional and native food and serve it to people. This was used as a big fundraiser for student groups. Cranwell International is a phenomenal resource and after recently getting a presentation from them I greatly appreciate the work they are doing. Students though feel ignored. The students partnered with Cranwell this year for the street fair and the change for food came as a surprise to them. They have been told that international food trucks will be there for food safety reasons, but students feel like they had no say in the decisions. For years this has been student run and they feel they have been robbed of some of their tradition. They also feel like when they have voiced their concerns and requested explanations the administration has been consistently dismissive and authoritative. This is an example of how Administration can do better in listening to the students and really understanding instead of just telling them why the change has been made and how the students cannot really change it.

Some positive things I would love to highlight is the Rescue Squad getting parking by the station and the success of giving back to the University. I was able to work with Parking Services last semester to get the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad free parking by their station. The Rescue Squad, which is student volunteer run, is one of the most accomplished squads in America and recently received a Silver Standard Award and are being looked at as benchmark for all Rescue Squads hoping to attain the Gold Award. They are on campus 24/7 365 days a year and the fact that they could not use the spots right beside their station without paying felt unfair. They send their thanks and gratitude to the University for helping them in what may seem a small thing to the school but a big deal for them. I believe it is the least the university could for students who give 20-40 hours a week to serve the school. This I believe shows the power of collaboration between administration and students. Virginia Tech also just participated in its first Giving day. We received about 5,000 gifts amounting to about 1.6 million dollars. This is amazing as Virginia Tech hopes to continue to grow in its philanthropy thanks to the help of Charlie Phlegar and Matt Winston and their teams. The senior class has also really started to understand the importance of giving back with the work of the Senior Class Gift and ISupport led by newly added Shaun Grahe. Seniors have been giving back \$20.18 to any college, department, club or organization, that they are a part of, at a phenomenal rate. This Senior Class gift program will continue to grow and continue to help instill the importance of giving back from an early stage.

This year has been incredible and I am enjoying my time as a representative and appreciate the honor to serve my fellow students. I look forward to training my successor in the coming months. With graduation around the corner I am sad to leave this place I have learned to call home, but I am excited because I will be going the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill to study Healthcare Administration. This means I will only be 3.5 hours away from Virginia Tech and will be back for every home game.

Thank you all for your time and service to the students of this University. The students appreciate the work that you all put into making our school amazing and I thank you for your commitment to us and Ut Prosim.

**Graduate Student Representative to the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
Constituency Report
March 2018**

Dear Rector Treacy, President Sands, members of the Board, administrators, and guests:

Spring is upon us but with the recent weather you wouldn't know it. The spring semester brings multiple opportunities to celebrate our diversity: African-American History in February; Women's History in March; Asian Pacific-American History and Jewish History in May; and LGBTQ+ Pride in June. Virginia Tech does an excellent job celebrating its diversity through its cultural centers and by hosting talks, banquets, and networking for these diverse identities. However, these events are typically hosted in Blacksburg. Graduate students in these identity groups at the Roanoke and National Capital Region campuses would like to feel connected and have the support to host similar events on these campuses.

GSA partnered with the Disability Alliance at Virginia Tech to present "The Great Accessibility Challenges in honor of InclusiveVT 's Principles of Community Week challenging faculty, staff, and students to take only ADA accessible routes to their offices, classes, meetings, meals, etc. and share their experiences via Twitter. The Challenge also asked individuals to figure out where accessible, single-stall bathrooms exist on campus, and try using only those bathrooms and Tweet about their bathroom routes. Through the Challenge, GSA and the Disability Alliance had individuals directly report, via ADA and Accessibility Service at Virginia Tech's online portal, the barriers they encountered, including missing signage, broken sidewalks, and long and meandering routes. I know that the Disabilities Support Task Force commissioned by Provost Cyril Clarke will examine these issues and others that affect individuals with disabilities.

Graduate and undergraduate students are still equally concerned about the status of mental health services on campus. The GSA and SGA are co-authoring a resolution regarding the mandatory addition of mental health resources to all course syllabi. This is a similar idea to the required language concerning the Virginia Tech Honor Code. We all know that the Division of Student Affairs plans to hire more counselors for Cook Counseling this next academic year. Nevertheless, the need for mental health providers will continue to grow and, while admirable, the co-sponsored resolution could place additional strain upon an already overworked office. While my time left in this position is short, I will continue conversations with key stakeholders to investigate if there are additional options to have all Hokies look out for each other " or as a part of the "No Hokie Left Behind" initiative.

Respectfully submitted,

Brett R. Netto

Staff Senate Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
March 26, 2018
Presented by Robert Sebek, Staff Senate President

Good afternoon Rector Treacy, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, administrators and distinguished guests. It is an honor to present to you updates from staff at Virginia Tech.

Staff Senate continues to explore issues of concern to our lowest paid staff members at the university. Jeri Baker, Director of Parking and Transportation, gave an informative presentation and had a valuable conversation at our March meeting on alternative transportation options, reduce parking pass fee options, and other services, highlighting changes that will improve the affordability of traveling to and parking on campus. Staff Senate will assist in raising awareness of these options.

As we near the end of tax filing season, staff have again raised the issue that employees who live in West Virginia, Maryland, and D.C. do not have taxes withheld as Virginia residents do. Senate leadership is continuing to reach out to Payroll to find out why we do not provide this service when many state agencies do. The burden of paying quarterly estimated withholdings hampers household budgeting for these employees.

I have established a Senate ad hoc committee to gather information and suggest solutions to issues around child care. The lack of access to affordable child care in the NRV affects the recruitment and retention of staff, faculty, and graduate students.

The Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs is continuing to look at the Winter Closing policy. After some researching, we have found that every other public college and university in Virginia moves some state holidays so they are observed between Christmas and New Year's. CSPA plans to survey employees on four possible ways of handling Winter Closing: 1. Do nothing. Employees will continue to use leave, or go on Leave Without Pay for those days. 2. Move state holidays to that time period. Some A/P faculty who do not receive state holidays would continue to use other leave for that period. 3. Declare those days Authorized Closing Days, like is done for severe weather and weeknight football games. There will be issues with how this is funded and entered in leave systems. 4. Cancel the Winter Closing. Individual departments may choose to close during that period and employees would negotiate with supervisors for time off, as they would any other time of the year.

Finally, Staff Senate is completing planning for our annual James. D. McComas Leadership Seminar, which invites staff across campus to attend a day-long program of speakers and discussions for improving and growing leaders on campus. This year's theme is mentoring leaders.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Sebek
President, Staff Senate

Faculty Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
March 26, 2018

Hans Robinson, President—VT Faculty Senate

Good afternoon Rector Treacy, President Sands, members of the Board, Provost Clarke, and all others gathered here today.

We live in an age of data, where it seems every aspect of our lives is subject to quantitative measurement and analysis. Higher education is not exempted from this, and the life of faculty is more and more defined by obtaining, analyzing, and being evaluated by numerical metrics purporting to provide an objective numerical measure of nearly every aspect of our work.

Now, numbers are just carriers of information. They reflect whatever flaws and biases are present in the human-devised processes that produced them. But for some reason, numbers have a seductive quality of detached objectivity and authoritative precision that makes it easy to avoid asking hard questions about what they actually measure and whether they have sufficient reliability and validity to be used for any purpose at all. This pro-numerical bias is quite pervasive, even at a university full of numerically savvy people who know how to do these things right.

Let me give you just a couple of examples.

At the end of each semester, students are asked to fill out what is known as a SPOT survey (for Student Perception of Teaching) where they evaluate each of their instructors. The SPOT survey has many components, but the most important is the question that asks students to rate their instructor's overall effectiveness. This score is frequently the main vehicle by which faculty teaching is judged in annual evaluations, and therefore has a real impact on our salaries.

The problem is that what SPOT scores actually measure is student satisfaction. While this certainly has value, it is not the same thing as teaching effectiveness. It then comes as no surprise that some of the things that figure into student evaluation scores are how well dressed instructors are, how good jokes they tell, and, most importantly, what grade students expect to receive. Female faculty and faculty who speak with an accent consistently receive lower scores than their colleagues, and one of the best ways to lower your student evaluations is to make your course more challenging and ask students to work harder. These distortions are well known, yet SPOT scores continue to play a primary role in faculty evaluation simply because of convenience and probably also the seductive quality of a numerical score.

Another metrics-heavy area is student learning assessment, which is the name we give to methods designed to measure how much knowledge and skill students have acquired during a course. Accreditation agencies are increasingly demanding that universities use learning assessments to improve their instructional program. The problem with this is that there are very few documented examples of learning assessments actually leading to improved instruction. As outlined in this article (David Eubanks, "*A Guide for the Perplexed*," Intersection Fall 2018, pp 4-13), doing assessment right requires specialized (and therefore scarce) expertise, more time and resources than is available to the average faculty member, and sample sizes that are larger than most courses provide. Short of this, learning assessments are prone to be inconclusive or downright misleading. The rigor required to avoid this is virtually never applied to learning assessments, and yet we are told that they are crucial, and we need to do more of them.

I can come up with several other examples in this vein, but since my time is very limited, I thought I would balance my examples by pointing out aspects of University work where more metrics would in fact be beneficial. As an example, I would like to spotlight the recently released Electronic Faculty Reporting System,

or EFARS, although I would like preface my remarks here by stating that I'm not trying to single anyone out, it's just that EFARS offers a recent and instructive example of a much broader issue.

As faculty, we are required to report annually on our professional activities in areas such as teaching, research, and service. Until recently, this reporting was entirely paper-based, and the purpose of EFARS is to bring it into the electronic domain, partly so that the faculty's scholarly and other work can be more easily quantified—and turned into metrics. Unfortunately, EFARS was rolled out before it was ready for primetime, using categorizations that were inappropriate for many faculty, and was weighed down with a very cumbersome interface. Many of us experienced a doubling or tripling of the amount of time required for activity reporting, which across the university has added up to many thousands of hours of wasted faculty time, corresponding to hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars in lost productivity.

EFARS is now in the process of being fixed, but if Virginia Tech had a mechanism in place for measuring the time cost for the routine administrative procedures such as faculty activity reporting, this problem would have been caught before it caused any damage. Somewhat ironically, such data would be much simpler to obtain than reliable measures of student learning or the impact of scholarly output.

That doesn't mean that we should give up on measuring such things. As a scientist, I believe in data. I believe it is possible to ask well-posed questions about how reality is put together and use the answers to enhance our understanding of the world and by extension improving the way we lead our lives. But I also know that doing this well is hard, and requires much more of us than simply going with the flow.

Given the pressures of today's environment, it is clear that Virginia Tech is all but destined to become ever more data-driven with the passage of time. And as the university undergoes this transition, I believe it is vital that we commit to letting decisions be guided by high quality data that is well understood and used only for the purposes it is designed for. If we don't do this hard work, we risk at best wasting resources on meaningless data collection tasks, and at worst creating perverse incentives that push the university in directions that are detrimental to its core mission. In other words, we need to do this right, or we need to not do it at all.

The good news is, as I just mentioned, that we have a university full of savvy people who know how to do this sort of thing right. Metrics and benchmarking is an issue that matters to faculty, and where we have all the requisite competency to make a difference. So it seems to me that this is an ideal subject for shared governance, and my purpose here today is to ask for a partnership with the administration to help answer questions on, of instance, the proper design and use of SPOT surveys, how to best use data to improve instruction, and how to measure scholarly impact without discouraging risk taking and creativity. If you take us up on this offer, I think you will find faculty more than eager to assist you in finding our way forward in an ever more data-driven and metrics-reliant world.

Thank you.