

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

TO: VMI Board of Visitors External Relations Committee

FROM: Lt. Col. Sherry Wallace
Director of Communications & Marketing
Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood
Assistant Director, Communications and Marketing

DATE: September 2024

RE: Communications & Marketing Update

This update covers the communications and marketing activities for the end of the spring semester 2024 and summer 2024, as well as projects currently in progress.

Regarding staffing, Sherry Wallace was announced as the new director of communications and marketing. She arrived to post Aug. 26. Kelly Sandridge, the assistant director of brand marketing started in her position July 1.

I. POST-WIDE SUPPORT, WORKING GROUPS, AND PARENTS COUNCIL

Members of the team participate in various working groups and long-term projects through the year. In the past few months, members of the team participated in the Barber Shop Working Group to enhance the communication efforts and services of the barber shop.

Also, the department supported the final design and text of the strategic plan, and then participated in brainstorming as tasks were created for the five initiatives of the plan. The team now is active in preparing for the rollout in November, with a website, social media elements, videos, giveaways, and more focused on the various stakeholders of the plan.

The Communications and Marketing department also acts as liaison to Parents Council, assisting with the coordination of three annual meetings, a pre-matriculation social for incoming families, and fall tailgating activities. Members of Parents Council reach out to the department almost daily to gather answers for other parents, or to assist in recruiting and retention initiatives.

Several members of the C&M department took shifts in the New Cadet Support Center during Matriculation Week. These volunteers offered a listening ear, support, and encouragement to rats who were struggling with the transition to VMI. These efforts greatly contribute to the retention efforts of the commandant staff and other leaders.

II. MEDIA COVERAGE

Between May 1 and August 29, there were more than 2,400 news items that mentioned or featured information about VMI.

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More than 90% of the news items are categorized as positive or neutral in sentiment.

III. NEWS & EDITORIAL SERVICES

The News & Editorial Services team actively worked with nearly every department on post to provide coverage of events, successes, milestones, and personnel recognition for the late spring and summer. The team averaged 10 stories per month for the VMI website, social media, local news coverage pitches, and for publications. These are in addition to coverage for items just used for social media posts, general media pitches, and public announcements of upcoming speakers or events.

The Institute Report, the most wide-spread publication developed by the NES team, continued to celebrate its 50th anniversary through the 2023-24 academic year. Each issue looked back over the decades, featuring highlights from the publication, including high-profile visitors to post, academic updates, the changes in technology on post, and construction over the years.

Other high-profile publications that were produced and distributed include the 2024 Superintendent's Newsletter, the VMI wall calendar, and the New Cadet Handbook.

TV news coverage included introducing CAVU to the world, a visit from the American Legion Riders, Summer Transition Program and College Orientation Workshop activities, Matriculation Day, the commandant change of leadership ceremony, Rat Challenge, etc. Several local/hometown papers have included stories about new members of VMI faculty and staff and VMI's great rating in Money magazine's Best College's list. Understaffed news stations and weekend events have been a challenge when it comes to getting coverage for many things. Video, photos, and stories are put together for news stations for each event to ensure they have the materials needed for any coverage opportunities.

Kelly Nye, the multimedia coordinator, attended the University Photographer's Association of America (UPAA) Symposium. There she was able to network with other higher education photographers and hear from the best in the field who offered guidance and lessons from their experiences.

Major event support, that featured photography, videography, stories for the website and social media, as well as programs, signage, media attendance, etc. included:

- May commencement and commissioning
- End-of-year parades and awards
- Guns and Hoses softball game
- Summer sessions and SURI projects
- Summer theater
- Matriculation
- Physical Plant efforts through the summer

Departments from across post have relied on our team for flyers, banners, logos, event programs, and other publications. These include:

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- Summer Undergraduate Research Institute materials
- Social Media logos for various departments and clubs
- Guest speaker events
- VMI Theatre programs and signage
- VMI catalog
- Title IX materials

Looking ahead, the team is getting ready for fall events like convocation, FTX, conferences, Founders Day, etc.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

The Publications team continues to support the needs of the entire post. During the period May-August, the publications team worked on the following projects:

- Graduation Program
- Joint Commissioning Ceremony Program
- Memorial Ceremony Program
- Memorial Ceremony boulevard banners
- Baccalaureate Program
- Awards Ceremony Program and Certificates
- Chaplain's Newsletter
- Rat Bible
- Cadet Charters (GC, OGA, CEA, RDC)
- Honor Court sheet
- Wearing the Uniform booklet
- White Book (Commandant)
- College Orientation Workshop certificates
- VMI Viewbook (update in progress)
- VMI Women's Brochure (update in progress)
- ROTC Brochure (update in progress)
- Parent Guide (update in progress)
- Admissions Spider handout (update in progress)

The Publications team also printed a number of reports, publications, and documents:

- Blue Book
- CLE Leader Journey books
- CLE workshop books
- Academic Convocation Program
- CE Departmental book
- EE Departmental brochure
- Master Plan
- Rat Survey

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- Cadet Accounting flyer
- Financial Aid flyer
- Posters for Chaplain

V. BRAND MARKETING

Kelly Sandridge joined as the new assistant director of brand marketing on July 1. She brings over 20 years of experience in communications and marketing to her role with VMI. She most recently led the communications, marketing, and community engagement teams for Roanoke City Public Schools, which is a minority majority, urban school division serving 14,000 students in Roanoke, Virginia. The Institute videographer also is part of the Brand Marketing team.

Videos

In addition to gathering b-roll for future projects, the videographer completed 12 video projects from May to August, including the following:

- Voices of Gratitude
- Three Cadet Collective videos
- Two Hair Standards Videos
- Welcome video for Col. Havird

She also attended the University Photographer's Association of America (UPAA) Symposium. There she was able to network with other videographers and attend sessions that will help her to continue to tell the story of VMI cadets in new and exciting ways.

Marketing

Since joining the team in July, the new assistant director of brand marketing has taken the lead on daily review of internal and external logo requests, and of the VMI licensing program. She has also:

- Begun working with admissions on recruitment marketing. Documents include the Viewbook, Parent Guide, the Women's and ROTC brochures, social media ads, and email campaign messaging. These reviews ensure consistent language and statistics across all VMI communications efforts.
- Completed an initial review and update of the identity standards to now include an Institute boilerplate.
- Started working on a stylized and more robust identity standards guide, which will be used to create an online Identity and Brand Guide for the public, and an internal portal for staff. The internal portal will ultimately include the ability to download letterhead and department lockups, and once created, templates for posters, flyers, brochures, and other items needed by departments and offices.
- Curated a listing of accomplishments by year for use by departments across post. This is to help ensure consistency when highlighting statistics about the Institute from year to year.

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In advance of the Fall Open House, a request is being made to academic departments to determine if assistance is needed to brand materials that will be distributed to families. At the same time, requests are being made for language to be used in admissions materials focused on academic majors.

Prior to Kelly joining the team, the Hanover Research Brand Perception Survey was completed and results were shared with the Institute. While the response rate was low, several key takeaways came from the results.

- ROI is key to prospects in their family. Many are coming to VMI for the military affiliation, but all groups are identifying the long-term employment benefits of attending VMI, whether in military or the civilian roles.
- Word-of-mouth is still a key avenue used when researching schools. When families hear from colleges, email is the preferred method of communication.
- There is a generational shift in social media channels: students prefer Instagram and LinkedIn, while parents prefer Facebook and Instagram.
- When asked about news coverage, most respondents remember news with a negative sentiment (alleged racism/sexism, DEI, hazing, statue removal, Washington Post coverage, etc.), but many acknowledged they believed these stories to be biased and unfortunately drowned out the positive stories coming out of VMI.

Logos/Royalties (May through August)

Since May, there have been 15 internal requests for logos, eight external requests, and four requests for logo creation. Created logos include those for wellness and VMI EMT.

Together with Digital Communications, we are also working to create a new request form in Smartsheet that will allow for better tracking and follow-up.

CLC

CLC is the licensing partner for VMI. The 2023-2024 Annual Report is now available and details that the program saw a decline last year:

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Total Sales: \$643,477 | YOY % Change: -19.2% |
| Total Royalties: \$81,522 | YOY% Change: 18.7% |
| Total Units: 38,762 | Change: -20.5% |

There was a year-over-year increase of 6.7% in the average unit price for apparel during the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Time Period

No. of Licensee's Reporting

Gross Royalties

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| | | |
|-----------------|----|-----------|
| May – June 2024 | 85 | 16,876.84 |
| May – June 2023 | 83 | 19,673.99 |

During the period May to June 2024, the top selling product category was Men's Fashion Apparel with 13.5% of the total. On post sales accounted for 46.4% of the total.

Upcoming

Work is being done to prepare for the rollout of the strategic plan. This includes a series of six videos highlighting the overall plan and each initiative, marketing materials, and collateral items to get both faculty and the VMI community excited and invested in the path forward.

We will be continuing to work updating identity standards and templates. We also plan to work with Auxiliary Services and Athletics on the rollout of an official Moe mark.

VI. DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Digital Communications team currently consists of C&M's assistant director of digital communication, social media specialist, and digital content specialist. The team collaborates with C&M's graphic designers, publishing team, news and editorial staff, photographers and videographers.

The digital communications team continues to work diligently to improve and streamline communication and messaging processes for VMI as a whole, along with digital content for departments and offices across post and to VMI's various audiences and stakeholders. The addition of new staff has increased the quantity, speed, reach, and variety of materials created to showcase VMI to stakeholders from high school students and families, to alumni, to internal VMI audiences, and the general public. Emphasis continues to be placed on projects targeting recruitment, user experience, and digital accessibility.

Project Highlights May – Aug. 2024:

Ongoing:

- Update vmi.edu focused on VMI brand and image, search engine optimization (SEO), user experience, and telling the VMI story with focus on recruitment and challenging misconceptions about the Institute.
 - Connect to social media and video projects as appropriate
- Create analytics reports for website and social media use and interaction and meet with offices to review and adjust content based on data
- Create and manage online forms/surveys for use on web and by C&M through Qualtrics
- Support and promote Admissions events through web design and content, social media promotion, registrations, and analytics
- Maintain all livestream and calendar events for the public

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- Provide oversight, content as requested, and guidance for VMI social media, including affiliated channels
- Review web contents, including PDFs, for accessibility and branding
- Collaborate with Human Resources to facilitate a newly designed organization chart, ensuring digital accessibility

May:

- Begin work on new virtual tour (full description in next section) including:
 - finalizing phase one location list
 - coordination of 360° photo shoot with vendor and coordination with departments and offices
 - research and writing of tour script
- Coverage on web and social media of graduation week events, including support of livestreams
- Launch [Voices of Gratitude project](#) (video, web, social media)
- Support summer session and STP registration and information releases

June:

- To alleviate increasing costs, the contract with Livewhale for the vmi.edu calendar was ended and a new system was built using Trumba, already purchased through IT, saving thousands of dollars. The entire calendar was redesigned and recoded by hand and launched at the end of June.
- A new [quick resources/help guide](#) was created to fulfill a legislative directive

July:

- Begin project discussion and needs list for Strategic Plan launch (news, marketing, digital comms)
- Prepare for August events including application promotion
- Promote and cover SURI projects and study abroad activities

August:

- Edits were made to the vmi.edu baseline template to upgrade functionality through custom code to address issues with older system still in place.
- Coverage of Cadre Week, Matriculation, and Matriculation Week were greatly expanded thanks to the expertise of and organization by the social media specialist, including facilitating greater departmental collaboration.
- IRB application was redesigned in Qualtrics to be able to retire an older, IT-hosted version that was no longer secure.

Upcoming Projects (as of August 29):

- Fall events coverage, including FTX and Family Weekend on web and social media, including live coverage

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- Continue to expand featured stories series focused on connections within VMI, cadet experiences, post-graduation plans, ROTC, and how STP prepared rats for their first weeks at VMI.
- Prepare content for shift to new CMS (targeted completion 2025-26)
 - File clean-up and accessibility remediation
 - Reorganization of existing content and creation of new content to fill gaps and address inconsistencies of VMI.edu's original 2015 design in comparison to competitors and industry standards
 - Still working with IT regarding approval to use official state contract vendor
- Continue to work on content improvements and additions for Virtual Tour. New target launch date of October due to project scope and staff availability.
 - This includes scheduling the next photoshoot as well as working to obtain contract(s) for external resources (additional video) as well as equipment to support internal staff in the build.

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DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS BY THE NUMBERS

| Month | Email Threads in <u>Webedits</u> Inbox* | New Piece of Content Created for vmi.edu ^ | Edits Made to Existing Content on vmi.edu ^ | Featured Stories Written for vmi.edu** | Facebook Posts | Instagram Posts + | X (Twitter) Posts | LinkedIn Posts |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| May 2024 | 100 | 29 | 194 | 5 | 42 | 155 | 39 | 35 |
| June 2024 | 76 | 53 | 171 | 6 | 31 | 41 | 34 | 32 |
| July 2024 | 106 | 49 | 277 | 7 | 52 | 80 | 49 | 45 |
| August 2024 | 108 | 60 | 258 | 2 | 40 | 145 | 34 | 34 |
| TOTAL | 390 | 191 | 900 | 20 | 165 | 421 | 156 | 146 |
| AVG./Month | 97.5 | 47.75 | 225 | 5 | 41.25 | 105.25 | 39 | 36.5 |

Please note, these statistics were compiled 29 August 2024 before noon.

* Change request threads vary from one item updates, such as adding a new staff member, to full section redesigns or large accessibility remediation projects. These numbers do not include requests or project needs sent directly to the Assistant Director for Digital Communication.

** Featured stories are predominantly written by the Digital Content Specialist, but also include input from other members of the digital comms team.

^ Involved major projects documented in this report which required a significant increase in edits to the site, including to page & site templates.

+ Includes story slides, visible for 24 hours, often used to provide live coverage of major events

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Digital Communications goals within VMI's Strategic Communications Plan:

1.1: INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH QUALITY PROSPECTS –

The digital communications team continues to support the Admissions Office in focusing on recruitment of and engagement with prospective applicants. A systemic overhaul of VMI main social accounts continues to incorporate more video/reels, update styling consistent with competitors while remaining 'on brand' for VMI, Platform content is also now tailored more specifically by audience, with Instagram being heavily tilted towards promoting VMI as a top choice for high school students. Open house and application promotion continue to be main targets, particularly with the use of the Common App and FAFSA changes. The assistant director of digital communication is supporting the new CRM with custom code and design work. The team also designs and supports web-based engagement tools and forms, custom page builds to support ad campaigns with VMIAA, and increased video content linked to subpages on the VMI homepage.

C&M continues to collaborate with Parents Council leadership on bettering their communication internally with current parents and externally with prospective parents. This also includes social media guidance and support, as well as acting as a go-between when local companies/entities reach out with events to recommend.

1.2: COMPREHENSIVE IDENTITY & BRAND GUIDE –

All members of C&M have worked to fill this gap left by the departure of the Assistant Director of Marketing in December 2022. **A new employee was hired for this position and joined the Institute July 1, at which point logo requests were moved under her responsibilities as planned.**

Efforts are ongoing to ensure all offices and departments are utilizing the most current VMI logos across post. Even though there is a Visual Identity Guide on VMI.edu, it is a concern of C&M that offices and departments do not always follow those branding guidelines. The proposed online comprehensive identity and brand guide will cover everything needed for internal use and external requests, and will be a major project for 2024-25. The digital communications team continues to build out resources to move forward with an online design toolkit, and is collaborating with the Web Administrator in IT as he overhauls design of internal resources. The web team continues to correct old branding on digital assets on vmi.edu as they are discovered,

C&M staff answers logo requests and licensed vendor product approvals daily while working with VMI departments, offices, and organizations on their specific materials and messaging on a case-by-case basis (e.g., presentations, forms, social media, etc.). They also perform reviews of emails and documents submitted by VMI internal stakeholders for branding compliance. The official online logo request form generated 10 requests from May 1 – Aug. 28, 2024. A new

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request system is being designed for better tracking and interaction.

1.3: EXPANSION AND BETTER LEVERAGING OF DATA –

C&M's digital communications team continues to work with IT, admissions, institutional research, and internally to obtain and utilize proper data for marketing and recruiting strategies and initiatives. This is handled within C&M using analytics from the vmi.edu website, social media platforms, and Qualtrics online forms. Data is shared more widely and more often with various stakeholders, particularly Admissions and Financial Aid.

The web team continue to focus on search engine optimization (SEO) for VMI.edu as well as various campaign websites. This includes the continued use of BrightEdge software for professional guidance and support in optimizing VMI.edu, with focus on not only increasing SEO efficiency, but specifically targeting competitor-shared keywords to increase enrollment.

This tool has been invaluable in streamlining the process of research, project selection, and results-based edits. Through competitor research, the web team has been able to specifically tailor web contents to compete more directly for online traffic with other SMCs and service academies, as well as other Virginia colleges and universities.

1.4: BOOST SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE & ENGAGEMENT –

Social media continues to be a crucial tool for Virginia Military Institute to communicate with the VMI community and the world, offering instant access to cadets, alumni, staff, faculty, prospective cadets, and other groups.

VMI's social media accounts publish pictures, videos, articles, and news briefs highlighting the best of the Institute, bolstering VMI's reputation, brand recognition & identity, and and recruitment efforts. Posts on social media accounts include:

- Major events, announcements, and activities on post
- Cadet-focused stories regarding academics, military life, and athletics, with emphasis on the leadership journey
- Cadet events, activities, clubs, and organizations focused on the VMI college experience
- Academic, ROTC, and Athletics achievements, milestones, and event promotion
- Performance and highlights of faculty staff contributions to VMI and beyond
- Photo and video highlights depicting everyday life at the Institute

Each platform continues to be analyzed and optimized to promote VMI and its cadets in the correct style and format based on audience, algorithms, and industry trends. This is particularly noted in the continued increase of video content on Instagram, a key for reaching interested students.

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| May - August 2023 VS May – August 2024, Year-Over-Year Comparison | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| FACEBOOK | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Impressions | Brand Awareness |
| AY22-23 | 36,725 | 251,790 | 2,799,174 | 2,093 |
| AY23-24 | 37,782 | 390,888 | 5,182,659 | 3,833 |
| % Change | + 2.9% | + 55.2% | + 85.1% | + 83.1% |
| INSTAGRAM | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Impressions | Brand Awareness |
| AY22-23 | 23,935 | 152,673 | 2,142,881 | 765 |
| AY23-24 | 26,263 | 117,550 | 2,167,129 | 963 |
| % Change | + 9.7% | - 23% | + 1.1% | + 25.9% |
| LINKEDIN | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Impressions | Total Reached Users |
| AY22-23 | 23,012 | 100,000 | 580,574 | 245,311 |
| AY23-24 | 20,827 | 172,061 | 681,033 | 321,495 |
| % Change | - 9.5% | + 72.1% | + 17.3% | + 31.1% |
| X (Twitter) | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Reposts | |
| AY22-23 | 5,615 | 1,551 | 50 | |
| AY23-24 | 6,384 | 2,486 | 295 | |
| % Change | + 13.7% | + 60.3% | + 490% | |

Data was compiled 28 August 2024

- Facebook has seen exponential growth in all measures of interaction and engagement. The platform has gone back to posting more photos, and is now specifically targeting community engagement through comments and open-ended questions related to VMI. Video, as seen elsewhere in this report, has been added in a more robust way, and is paying off.
- Increases in Instagram followers and impressions are encouraging as this is the platform most targeted to recruitment and shows the increased use of video is paying off.
- Engagement is down as May 2023 included our most viral graduation reel. Efforts will continue to ‘capture the magic’. The drop in Instagram engagement is likely due to a decrease in individual page visits. Since post engagement remains high, it's possible that our content is reaching more users directly in their feeds, reducing the need for them to visit our page.
- Another unexpected loss of followers occurred on LinkedIn, but impressions and reach increased significantly despite this. LinkedIn did report that it was cleaning up bot/fake accounts in late 2023, so the large drop may be at least in part attributed to that.
- X (formerly Twitter) is now part of the monitoring tool contract and more data is able to be shown, but there are still some gaps that should disappear in 2025-26 reporting. Work to share more often to this platform is paying off in large increases in interaction and sharing of VMI content.

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- Algorithm updates continue to be researched, and the trend towards ranking videos higher, and downgrading links, continues to steer post content.

A more common measure of social media success and growth can be seen by comparing a time period to the immediate period of same length before. It takes into account algorithms and platform expectations from a more closely related schema, and shows adjustments made each month based on performance analysis of posts and campaigns.

Note: Both Graduation and Matriculation can skew data points in both directions, though the team continues to try to minimize this, and has been predominantly successful.

| May - August 2024 VS January - April 2024 | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| FACEBOOK | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Impressions | Brand Awareness |
| | 37,782 | 390,888 | 5,182,659 | 3,833 |
| % Change | 1.2% | + 40.2% | + 12.8% | - 2.7% |
| INSTAGRAM | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Impressions | Brand Awareness |
| | 26,263 | 117,550 | 2,167,129 | 963 |
| % Change | + 4.7% | + 14.6% | + 8.5% | + 11.7% |
| LINKEDIN | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Impressions | Total Reached Users |
| | 20,827 | 172,061 | 681,033 | 321,495 |
| % Change | + 2% | + 103.3% | + 11.4% | - 1.7% |
| X (Twitter) | Fans/Followers | Engagement | Reposts | |
| | 6,384 | 2,486 | 295 | |
| % Change | + 3.9% | - 8.9% | + 2.4% | |

Data was compiled 28 August 2024

Social Media Content Analysis:

VMI’s social media accounts continue to actively emphasize Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins ’85’s “One Corps, One VMI” outcomes:

Honor - Diversity and Inclusion - The VMI Brand - Competing and Winning - One VMI

Efforts continue to be made to balance the three-legged stool of VMI in post selection and curation Posts continue to be developed to show a more inclusive and person-centered view of the Institute. Campaigns and series remain successful in setting not only expectations, but also keeping the VMI voice and brand front and center while balancing content with day-to-day news. The social media specialist works to incorporate more hashtags for wider reach to non-followers, and most posts now include a first comment aimed at encouraging followers to

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interact directly or share the post. Crowd-sourcing of images has also increased engagement as the VMI community can ‘see themselves’ even more clearly represented. This was a key feature in Matriculation coverage.

Video Remains Popular: Reels and videos continue to account for some of the most engaged with and seen content across platforms, targeted mostly to Instagram for recruitment, and Facebook for family and community engagement.

Please note: Data was compiled 28 August 2024. More recent posts have had less time to be seen. Best performing videos for each platform are in bold/highlighted in green.

| Video | Platform | Impressions * | Reach | Comments | Shares | Likes & Reactions |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|------------|-------------------|
| Voices of Gratitude – May 13 | FB | 29,100 | 26,462 | 24 | 52 | 490 |
| Voices of Gratitude – May 13 | IG | 17,211 | 11,005 | 17 | 69 | 902 |
| Countdown to Success (Grad) – May 17 | FB | 21,936 | 21,900 | 24 | 49 | 801 |
| Countdown to Success (Grad) – May 17 | IG | 20,650 | 15,635 | 20 | 134 | 1,740 |
| POV: Grad Reflection – May 24 | FB | 95,100 | 95,077 | 69 | 160 | 2,310 |
| POV: Grad Reflection – May 24 | IG | 13,329 | 10,655 | 8 | 64 | 1,261 |
| Memorial Day – May 27 | FB | 278,800 | 258,717 | 100 | 382 | 5,213 |
| Memorial Day – May 27 | IG | 39,820 | 27,575 | 10 | 358 | 2,115 |
| Cadet Collective: Benjamin Fong '27 – June 12 | FB | 6,700 | 6,428 | 38 | 7 | 149 |
| Cadet Collective: Benjamin Fong '27 – June 12 | IG | 9,500 | 7,187 | 9 | 88 | 571 |
| Hands on Research – June 24 | IG | 3,976 | 3,572 | 1 | 12 | 308 |
| Matric Advice: Col. Casper '04 – July 1 | FB | 6,200 | 5,997 | 1 | 6 | 93 |
| Matric Advice: Col. Casper '04 – July 1 | IG | 7,971 | 6,290 | 0 | 23 | 457 |
| Independence Day – July 4 | FB | 84,400 | 83,274 | 61 | 127 | 1,454 |
| Independence Day – July 4 | IG | 11,619 | 9,624 | 6 | 87 | 1,118 |
| STP Week Recap – July 12 | FB | 6,800 | 6,671 | 6 | 8 | 127 |
| STP Week Recap – July 12 | IG | 11,465 | 8,710 | 3 | 63 | 517 |
| Spain Study Abroad – July 17 | IG | 4,628 | 4,324 | 0 | 15 | 284 |
| Male Hair Standards – July 22 | IG | 8,274 | 7,526 | 8 | 93 | 619 |
| Female Hair Standards – July 22 | IG | 7,255 | 6,521 | 0 | 40 | 308 |

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| Video | Platform | Impressions * | Reach | Comments | Shares | Likes & Reactions |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|------------|------------|-------------------|
| Cadet Collective: Conner Felts '24 – July 24 | FB | 4,600 | 4,399 | 4 | 4 | 86 |
| Cadet Collective: Conner Felts '24 – July 24 | IG | 4,543 | 3,893 | 4 | 12 | 270 |
| VMI Applications Open – Aug. 1 | FB | 6,500 | 6,284 | 3 | 6 | 97 |
| VMI Applications Open – Aug. 1 | IG | 5,720 | 4,357 | 1 | 78 | 244 |
| Fall Sports Promo – Aug. 8 | FB | 5,500 | 4,859 | 6 | 9 | 135 |
| Fall Sports Promo – Aug. 8 | IG | 7,612 | 5,675 | 1 | 12 | 222 |
| Cadet Collective: Antonio Ahanj '24 – Aug. 14 | FB | 4,600 | 4,075 | 1 | 1 | 86 |
| Cadet Collective: Antonio Ahanj '24 – Aug. 14 | IG | 7,875 | 5,833 | 4 | 23 | 401 |
| Col. Havird '90 – Aug. 15 | FB | 5,900 | 5,276 | 23 | 9 | 206 |
| Col. Havird '90 – Aug. 15 | IG | 10,437 | 7,555 | 6 | 70 | 771 |
| Cadre Matric Teaser – Aug. 16 | FB | 13,700 | 12,777 | 37 | 29 | 541 |
| Cadre Matric Teaser – Aug. 16 | IG | 28,324 | 23,021 | 43 | 679 | 1,445 |
| Advice to Rats – Aug 16 | FB | 7,900 | 7,277 | 31 | 10 | 266 |
| Advice to Rats – Aug 16 | IG | 7,624 | 6,360 | 4 | 67 | 611 |
| Welcome to the Rat Mass – Aug. 17 | FB | 678,800 | 664,600 | 236 | 514 | 12,894 |
| Welcome to the Rat Mass – Aug. 17 | IG | 28,322 | 20,370 | 22 | 730 | 2,221 |

* = Impressions for Facebook are rounded as this is how they are presented according to API settings.

POSITIVITY FLOWS ACROSS PLATFORMS

After years of being plagued by negative social media comments centered around statue removal, DEI, and COVID policies, the Institute's accounts have turned the page. VMI's social media specialist has been able to bring about a seismic change in how fans and followers interact with posts across all platforms. Through careful content curation and targeted use of hashtags and open-ended questions, followers are now encouraged to share their thoughts, memories, words of encouragement, and general opinions more frequently. Particularly with the #MatriculationMonday series, platforms have seen exponential growth in engagement and interaction, with most of the sentiment positive and full of praise for VMI and its unique mission and purpose. While there are still negative opinions expressed, followers are more likely to be

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seen coming to VMI's defense and the negativity has slipped away significantly. Even some of VMI's common detractors have had kinder, more positive comments to post in recent months. Faculty, staff, and cadets have increased their sharing of content, and social media specialist has worked to call for community submissions, increasing the varied representation of the Corps, and providing families a way to interact directly. A new working relationship between S5 cadets and digital communications is already paying.

Polls Indicate a Win: A new initiative that has kicked off is the use of poll questions in VMI's story slides on Instagram (items that are live for 24-hours). These items encourage quick, snap reactions and are a way to engage incoming students, cadets, and prospective students, as well as the entire VMI community, anonymously.

| Story Slide | Reach | Total Votes | Likes | Shares | Profile Visits & Follows |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------|-------|--------|--------------------------|
| Guns & Hoses: Who will win? | 1,847 | 391 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| Matriculation: How are you feeling? | 2,929 | 561 | 14 | 6 | 30 |
| Matric Week: Have you seen your rat yet? | 3,386 | 683 | 17 | 11 | 41 |
| 1st Day Fall: Are you ready for the semester? | 3,010 | 576 | 18 | 0 | 13 |

SIGNIFICANT SUCCESSES

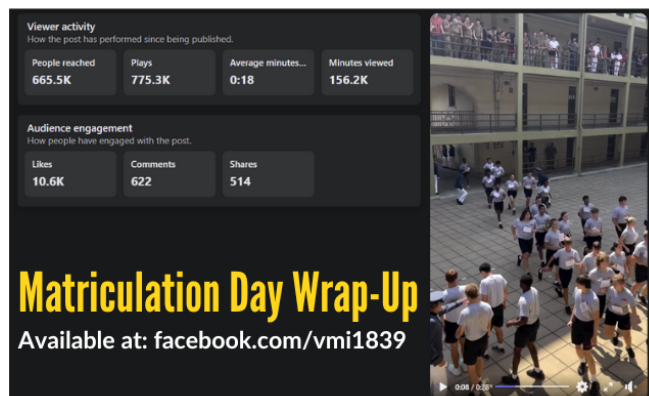
Live, On-Site Coverage

Giving the people what they want, all major events over the past months have seen live stories share the action as it is happening. Additionally, smaller scale, day-to-day events are starting to get into followers' feeds as the social media specialist, supported by the digital content specialist and videographer, are out and about nearly daily to capture what is going on on post, an industry expectation and request from cadet feedback. The social media specialist has also connected with members of the Corps to participate in trainings and briefings for the Rat Challenge to cover this more closely as it is a VMI highlight and has not previously had live, in realtime coverage.

Viral Video is Biggest Facebook WIN

REEL GOES VIRAL ON FACEBOOK

- Seen by over 665,000 accounts
- Nearly 12,000 points of engagement
- Played over 3/4 of a million times.



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TARGETED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (ONGOING):

- The Institute's official YouTube channel will undergo reorganization to serve as a more accessible research platform for families and potential future cadets seeking information about VMI. This restructuring will also enhance alums' access to historical videos without removing existing content.
- Improving the quality of video content is essential. Investing in a secondary video camera to capture high-quality footage during busy events when the primary camera is in use is strongly recommended, as is the acquisition of a music licensing contract for the Institute, a legal requirement and expectation in higher ed marketing.
- Designating specific social media cadets could empower cadets to contribute to VMI's online presence, fostering their investment in VMI's public image and social media platforms.

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SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM SNAPSHOT

**Please note: Earlier months may see higher reach and impressions are they were available for longer at the time this report was created 29 August 2024. Timestamps are also in PST, so cut-off from one month the the next may be slightly skewed.*

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/vmi1839/>

Monthly Averages by Post

| Month | Reach | Impressions | Engaged Users | Eng. Rate / Reach | Eng. Rate / Impress. | Clicks (links, images, etc.) | Video Views |
|-----------|-----------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| MAY 2024 | 9,354.61 | 9,729.05 | 596.38 | 5.64 | 5.37 | 355.34 | 8,056.52 |
| JUNE 2024 | 6,909.38 | 7,291.72 | 548.61 | 6.58 | 6.19 | 264.75 | 1,578.00 |
| JULY 2024 | 8,594.48 | 8,912.35 | 597.04 | 6.71 | 6.40 | 245.09 | 7,793.44 |
| AUG. 2024 | 26,278.88 | 27,219.95 | 1,589.40 | 11.65 | 11.00 | 1,024.78 | 68,868.25 |

*Viral reel of Matriculation Day posted Aug 17. Over ½ million plays.

Most Popular Posts by Month according to Reach

| Month | #1 | #2 | #3 |
|-----------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MAY 2024 | Memorial Day (Reel) – 125,470 | Graduation POV Recap (Reel) – 55,201 | Chessie Trail Award – 30,702 |
| JUNE 2024 | American Legion Riders – 20,197 | 5-Star Rating Money Magazine – 18,755 | Matriculation Monday Series Launch: What is Matriculation? –17,523 |
| JULY 2024 | Independence Day (Reel) – 79,891 | Study Abroad Wrap-Up – 25,337 | #VMIIHistory Archive Photo Carpenters '65 – 21,350 |
| AUG. 2024 | Welcome to the Rat Mass (Reel) – 667,982 | Matric Week Gear – 24,834 | Rat Hair Donation – 24,192 |

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Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/virginiamilitaryinstitute/>

Monthly Averages by Post

| Month | Likes | Saved | Comments | Shares | Total engagement | Eng. Rate / Impress. | Eng. Rate / Reach | Reach | Impressions | Total Plays |
|-----------|--------|-------|----------|--------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| MAY 2024 | 835.62 | 12.47 | 4.62 | 54.06 | 200.03 | 2.23 | 2.68 | 3,082.58 | 3,317.60 | 22,234.83 |
| JUNE 2024 | 619.67 | 6.33 | 2.93 | 26.14 | 440.63 | 5.49 | 6.82 | 4,833.32 | 6,032.98 | 10,460.00 |
| JULY 2024 | 660.64 | 8.14 | 3.53 | 66.89 | 376.77 | 4.35 | 5.42 | 4,648.00 | 5,703.91 | 11,923.71 |
| AUG. 2024 | 989.28 | 14.31 | 6.06 | 164.00 | 272.75 | 2.18 | 2.86 | 4,664.05 | 5,677.87 | 22,311.50 |

Most Popular Posts by Month according to Reach

| Month | #1 | #2 | #3 |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| MAY 2024 | Memorial Day (Reel) – 27,059 | Graduation (Reel) – 15,393 | Scenes on Post May – 11,302 |
| JUNE 2024 | D-Day 80 th Anniversary 14,774 | Matriculation Monday Series Launch: What is Matriculation? – 13,032 | Next Step: Alex Baber '25 – 11,691 |
| JULY 2024 | Havird Announcement – 24,824 | Matriculation Monday: Rat Bible – 10,321 | VA Ranked #1 Annoucement Graphic – 10,247 |
| AUG. 2024 | Cadre are ready/Matric Promo (Reel) – 22,411 | Matric Day PM Wrap-Up – 20,478 | Welcome to the Rat Mass (Reel) – 20,200 |

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LinkedIn <https://www.instagram.com/virginiamilitaryinstitute/>

Monthly Averages by Post

| Month | Impressions | Reach | Clicks | Likes | Shares | Comments | Engagements | Eng. Rate / Impress | Eng. Rate / Reach | Video Views |
|------------------|-------------|----------|----------|--------|--------|----------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| MAY 2024 | 3,885.97 | 2,502.74 | 767.60 | 92.69 | 2.66 | 4.51 | 867.46 | 17.15 | 26.97 | 2,666.00 |
| JUNE 2024 | 3,961.69 | 2,721.47 | 605.09 | 74.16 | 2.03 | 3.75 | 685.03 | 14.66 | 21.65 | 1,857.00 |
| JULY 2024 | 4,462.07 | 3,046.60 | 722.87 | 78.24 | 2.27 | 4.78 | 808.16 | 16.84 | 25.81 | 2,280.33 |
| AUG. 2024 | 6,015.09 | 4,012.38 | 2,253.38 | 123.53 | 3.50 | 6.88 | 2,387.29 | 27.43 | 42.88 | 1,481.50 |

Most Popular Posts by Month according to Impressions

| Month | #1 | #2 | #3 |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| MAY 2024 | Congratulations Graduates – 12,083 | Change of Command – 9,703 | Commissioning – 8,953 |
| JUNE 2024 | Next Step: Alex Baber '25 – 10,024 | P2 Work Feature – 9,669 | 5-Star Rating Money Magazine – 8,935 |
| JULY 2024 | Havird Announcement – 34,666 | Statement of Board President – 8,716 | Next Step: Jimmy Murphy '24 – 8,107 |
| AUG. 2024 | Matric Day PM Wrap-Up – 21,094 | Rat Hair Donation – 19,326 | Eskam Promotion – 15,054 |

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X (Twitter) <https://www.twitter.com/vmi1839/>

Monthly Averages by Post

| Month | Impressions | Likes | Reposts | Quote posts | Replies | Engagement | Engage. rate / impression | Video views |
|-----------|-------------|-------|---------|-------------|---------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| MAY 2024 | 723.64 | 11.05 | 1.28 | 0.21 | 0.72 | 34.87 | 4.78 | 268.50 |
| JUNE 2024 | 1,211.21 | 10.94 | 1.74 | 0.38 | 1.00 | 35.47 | 3.32 | 217.00 |
| JULY 2024 | 528.18 | 7.84 | 0.73 | 0.12 | 0.63 | 22.84 | 3.88 | 242.00 |
| AUG. 2024 | 810.41 | 15.12 | 2.09 | 0.26 | 0.71 | 51.74 | 6.32 | 255.00 |

Most Popular Posts by Month according to Engagement Rate

| Month | #1 | #2 | #3 |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| MAY 2024 | Awards Ceremonies – 12.7% | Commissioning – 8% | #FlashbackFriday '24 Breakout Recap – 1.9% |
| JUNE 2024 | Matriculation Monday Series Launch: What is Matriculation? – 8.2% | Matriculation Monday: Handbook – 7% | Happy 249 th Birthday @USArmy – 6.2% |
| JULY 2024 | VASID Athletic Academic All-State Keydets news share – 10.1% | W&L Closing Notice/Bomb Threat – 8.3% | STP Welcome/KickOff – 8.1% |
| AUG. 2024 | Havird Intro Video – 12.6% | Matric Day PM Wrap-Up – 12% | Matric Week Gear – 9.7% |

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V. WEB

The VMI Web Team continues to focus on providing timely, accurate, and engaging content across the vmi.edu site, with emphasis on best representing the benefits of a VMI education and its varied programs, the successes and achievements of a diverse and talented Corps of Cadets, and important information related to health, safety, and upcoming events. Special project rearrangements and schedule adjustments continue to allow for a focus on recruitment. Large portions of the website are also undergoing overhauls to compete in design and content more directly with other senior military colleges (SMCs) and the service academies, as well as other state and private universities. This is done in partnership with many departments across post, most notably the Dean's office, Commandant's office, and Admissions.

Significant issues with the content management system (CMS) vendor, TerminalFour and its many technical glitches continue to take away from the time the web team is able to spend on content creation and updates, and limits design options, but the team continues to create custom code and content to work around this major issue. The assistant director for digital communication is working to finalize a scope of work to present to administration and procurement for approval, thanks to financial support through the PELL-targeted grant. Right now, the process is with the IT department for review (mentioned earlier in this report).

The Academics sub-site continues to see overhaul of content and layout, along with newly developed pages to ensure that VMI competes not only with academies and SMC, but also with other colleges and universities, particularly in Virginia, with increased focus on strong academic programs and unique research and scholarly opportunities. This also was a requirement for the accreditation process of certain programs this summer.

Major design projects for this reporting period included:

- A new, more robust site for the [Office of the Chaplain](#), better explaining services and mission
- Creation of a new [Quick Facts](#) layout and new [VMI Rankings](#) page
- Creation of a new [events calendar](#) (referenced earlier in this report) to alleviate a nearly double price increase from previous vendor
- Reworking of base website code to better showcase visuals for the VMI Museum System sites on mobile devices
- Launch of a [Rat Line Highlights](#) page to tie social efforts into web traffic for first year students at the Institute

MAJOR NEW PROJECT

Thanks to Pell Grant funding, the assistant director for digital communications is working to launch VMI's first official virtual tour through a contract with Mass Interact. This large-scale project has taken a substantial amount of time to develop since May 2024, following vendor

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research and procurement procedures. As noted earlier in this report, an October launch is currently planned, hopefully coinciding with the first fall open house. The tour is designed to offer insight into post and the VMI experience, targeted at those who may not have the means to travel to in-person events. It is also a industry norm for anyone interested in exploring a college or university.

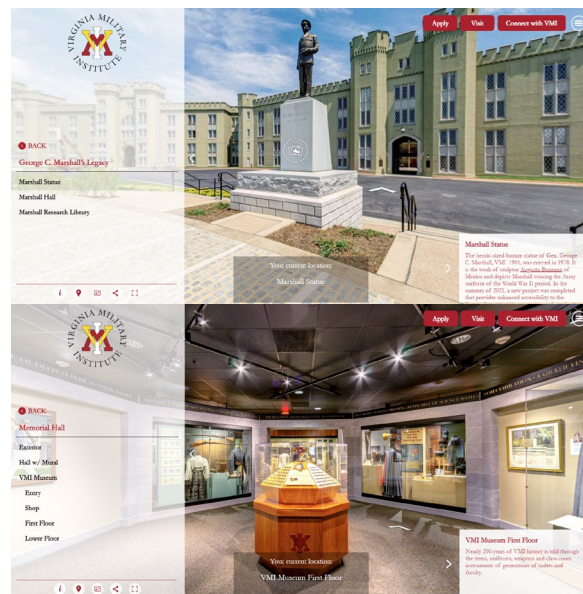
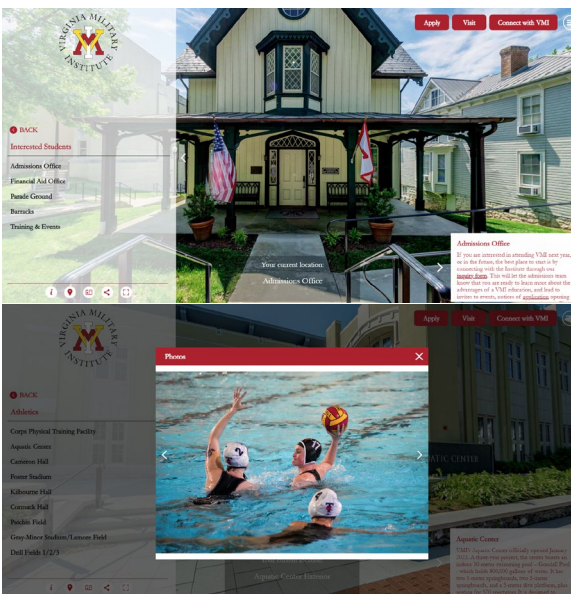
The project includes 360° photography of key locations across post. Each stop is accompanied by description text and narration. Many of the stops will also have supplemental photographs and links to further information. The tour is organized into themes:

- Iconic Post – an overview of VMI and key locations
- Interested Students – explores locations essential to the first-year experience at VMI
- Cadet Life – tackles housing, dining, training facilities, and events on post that help define a cadetship, including the ROTC experience.
- Academics – a tour of Academic Row and additional offices and learning spaces
- Athletics – a look at NCAA facilities, with focused images and text related to the Keydets
- History & Tradition – examines the stories behind nearly 200 years of the Institute

Tour stop selection and text were compiled in collaboration with stakeholders across post, including assistance and input from operations and planning leaders, the facilities team, athletics, academic committee chairs and departments, admissions, and more. The tour is in its first round of review and edit.

Planned over four years, additional phases will see the addition of more tour stops, supplemental video targeted at explaining how VMI is more than a collection of classrooms, fields, and buildings, but a truly immersive, transformative experience.

Sample Tour Stops (still undergoing style and content edit/review)



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WEBSITE ANALYTICS

Statistics are compiled as a year-to-year comparison now that the new Google Analytics formatting has been in place long enough. Overall, site views are down slightly. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that last year the Library website was still hosted on VMI's main domain in 2023 under Academics. Also, page consolidation and clean-up continue as the web team works to streamline content and enhance the user experience, means less pages to navigate to for the same amount of information. Slight drop-offs were expected. Homepage views are down, but hopefully this is in part to the fact that significant work has been done to drive organic search traffic and traffic from social media directly to key pages, meaning less clicking around the website while hunting for content. We also continue limit instructions being sent to the VMI community asking users to use vmi.edu to then move to my.vmi.edu.

Decreases in analytic tallies for the Admissions section and Apply page were expected as prospectives continue to interact with the Admissions CRM and CommonApp, linked from the web and social media. Expedited seating of this new class thanks to the work of the Office of Admissions also meant less late year recruiting needed on socials pointing to these pages. SEO work done to target ROTC keywords, along with moving it to top-level in the menu has paid dividends in increasing traffic.

MAY - AUG 2024 TOTALS & CHANGE COMPARED TO PRECEDING YEAR

| Site Section | Pageviews | Users | Views per User | Average Engagement Time | Events (Clicks, Downloads, etc.) |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Homepage | 147,292 -11.58% | 68,533 -4.9% | 2.15 -7.02% | 00:36 -0.47% | 516,651 -7.47% |
| About | 138,142 -15.35% | 46,878 -16.22% | 2.95 +1.03% | 01:21 +11.96% | 409,971 -11.29% |
| News | 61,908 -25.56% | 27,503 -37.53% | 2.25 +19.16% | 00:54 +68.45% | 166,995 -27.42% |
| Academics | 86,091 -41.66% | 29,108 -56.75% | 2.96 +34.89% | 01:23 +45.94% | 253,566 -44.6% |
| Admissions | 39,521 -25.41% | 18,386 -24.92% | 2.15 -0.65% | 01:12 +23.1% | 115,205 -23.39% |
| Apply Page | 6,968 -26.64% | 4,110 -12.22% | 1.7 -5.87% | 00:52 +1.35% | 20,072 -14.15% |
| Financial Aid | 16,200 +6.71% | 7,941 +6.42% | 2.04 +0.28% | 01:17 +15.62% | 47,438 +10.29% |
| Cadet Life | 67,035 -17.2% | 27,153 -20.57% | 2.47 +4.25% | 01:32 +6.91% | 194,890 -14.96% |
| ROTC | 21,784 +23.2% | 9,164 +4.7% | 2.38 +22.7% | 01:39 n/a | 67,240 +23.2% |

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MOST POPULAR PAGES OF MAY - AUG 2024

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Homepage | 6. Matriculation Schedule of Events |
| 2. Calendar (new version) | 7. Visit [Admissions] |
| 3. VMCW Landing Page | 8. About Landing Page |
| 4. Critical Dates and Academic Calendar | 9. Majors and Minors |
| 5. Admissions Landing Page | 10. Apply [Admissions] |

SUMMARY

Gains may also be largely attributed to the search engine optimization (SEO) work done in partnership with BrightEdge, a contracted vendor, serving VMI pages to more web users. Both BrightEdge automatic features and the web team content development focus on a faster, more enjoyable interaction with the site. The drops in some sections, as explained above, were not unexpected. The new menu launched last August creates simpler paths through the site, meaning less clicks on incorrect/extra pages by site visitors, as does an overall consolidation of content to create a better mobile device site experience. This includes removing pagination for some sections such as headline news to be more consistent with other college and university websites.

MOST VIEWED NEWS STORIES OF MAY - AUGUST 2024

Note: This table depicts the stories with the most views during the time period of this report, not necessarily items written during the same semester.

| Story Title | Pageviews | Date of Publication |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| VMI Alum Tapped as New Commandant | 5,514 | 07/15/24 |
| VMI Matriculates 498 Into Rat Mass | 1,656 | 08/09/24 |
| New Music Director Arrives to VMI | 1,462 | 07/23/24 |
| VMI Receives 5 Stars in Money Magazine Best Colleges List | 1,033 | 06/12/24 |
| Jamaal Walton '07 Named VMI Director of Intercollegiate Athletics | 846 | 05/24/24 |
| Board of Visitors Approves 2024-25 Tuition and Fees, New Officers | 663 | 05/06/24 |
| VMI Holds Commencement for Class of 2024 | 656 | 05/17/24 |
| A Look at VMI's Next Cadet Leaders | 602 | 03/25/24 |
| Eskam Promoted to New Role at VMI | 573 | 08/07/24 |
| VMI Commissions New Officers, Over 170 Take Oath | 519 | 05/15/24 |
| Constructing His Own Experiences - Owen Clifford '24 * | 502 | 07/20/23 |
| 2nd Class Ranks Announced for 2024-25 Academic Year * | 445 | 04/16/24 |
| VMI Begins to Relocate the Stonewall Jackson Statue | 405 | 12/04/20 |
| Personnel Update from the Superintendent | 377 | 01/30/24 |
| A Look Back: 25 Years of Women | 376 | 09/28/22 |

* Featured Story or Headline written by Digital Communications Employee(s)

NEW FEATURE SERIES DELVES INTO THE HEART OF THE INSTITUTE

At VMI, no one makes it through the Corps alone. That's the story behind how a new story series, The Cadet Collective, came about.

Showcasing the structure and dedication required at VMI, The Cadet Collective shares the stories of how the bonds created at the Institute can last a lifetime. From professors, coaches, or fellow cadets, this story series dives into those relationships that have helped pave the way for success. The series proved to be successful in terms of having a high average engagement rate on the web — ranging in the high 60 to 40% range.



The first in the series featured brothers and best friends, [Jake Kleinschuster '24](#) and [Matthew Kleinschuster '26](#). The two formed an even stronger bond while attending VMI together. Their friends have become each other's friends, making a larger family unit for them on post. This story had an average engagement rate of 53% with 194 views on the website.

The series then featured [Benjamin Fong '27](#), who traveled from California to the East Coast before Matriculation. He was unsure of how to get to Virginia Military Institute. Through the generosity of the VMI Parents Council and the Thomas family, who became his host family, Fong not only found a way to get to VMI but also a supportive community that helped him through the challenges of his first year. These relationships have been crucial for Fong, transforming his outlook and inspiring him to become a leader and mentor for others in the future. This story had an average engagement rate of 67% with 139 views on the website.



Next up was [Conner Felts '24](#), whose mentorship and networking were key to navigating the challenges at VMI. From his work with VMI basketball's media team to his weekly calls with mentor and alumnus Conor Powell '99, Felts has leveraged these connections to forge a journalism career. Now a VMI grad, Felts aims to extend the support he received to future cadets, embodying the resilient and supportive spirit of the VMI community. This story had an average engagement rate of 45% with 97 views on the website.

[Antonio Ahanj '24](#), an international studies major, attributes his growth and success to the unique environment at VMI, where supportive relationships and mentorship have played a major role in shaping his journey. Two individuals he credits are Mr. Todd Goen and Mrs. Patricia Hardin of the Office of Global Education. This story had an average engagement rate of 49% with 99 views on the website.



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO):

Every page on the vmi.edu site continues to undergo updates and upgrades, some more significant than others through targeted competitor research using the BrightEdge tool purchased for the web team. New pages created specifically to tackle SEO gaps since the purchase of this tool are indicated with an * below. Pages where VMI was not previously ranked in the Top 100 on Google at all are indicated with a ^.

Largest improvements in blended rank (place in Google results), August 29 VS April 29 :

| Keyword | Monthly Search Volume | Blended Rank | Blended Rank Change | Google Page # |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------|
| hydraulic engineering *^ | 1,600 | 19 | 82 | 2 |
| military academy usa | 590 | 18 | 81 | 1 |
| army careers *^ | 60,500 | 38 | 63 | 4 |
| sign up for the military ^ | 8,100 | 39 | 62 | 4 |
| career opportunities in the air force *^ | 60,500 | 41 | 60 | 4 |
| rotc scholarship deadline | 140 | 25 | 58 | 3 |
| Matriculation ^ | 60,500 | 47 | 54 | 5 |
| nrotc scholarship ^ | 2,400 | 49 | 52 | 5 |
| international studies degree ^ | 210 | 51 | 50 | 6 |
| economics vs business major *^ | 210 | 56 | 45 | 6 |
| careers army | 60,500 | 60 | 41 | 6 |
| rotc scholarship requirements | 590 | 43 | 41 | 5 |
| military training | 4,400 | 55 | 38 | 6 |
| american military academies | 590 | 41 | 38 | 4 |
| u.s. military colleges ^ | 390 | 65 | 36 | 7 |
| coast guard auxiliary | 6,600 | 36 | 35 | 4 |
| naval awards | 1,300 | 12 | 35 | 1 |
| navy rotc requirements * | 260 | 16 | 35 | 2 |

| Keyword | Monthly Search Volume | Blended Rank | Blended Rank Change | Google Page # |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Military ^ | 135,000 | 69 | 32 | 7 |
| army rotc scholarships ^ | 1,900 | 71 | 30 | 7 |
| office of global education ^ | 260 | 72 | 29 | 8 |
| navy rotc program | 210 | 19 | 27 | 2 |
| geotechnical engineering *^ | 12,100 | 76 | 25 | 8 |
| corps of cadets | 4,400 | 34 | 25 | 3 |
| military academy | 6,600 | 62 | 24 | 6 |
| military university ^ | 1,600 | 77 | 24 | 8 |
| rat training | 210 | 67 | 24 | 7 |
| marine corps rotc * | 390 | 18 | 20 | 2 |
| engineering in the military | 320 | 83 | 18 | 9 |
| nrotc scholarship requirements *^ | 320 | 83 | 18 | 9 |
| structural engineering *^ | 49,500 | 84 | 17 | 8 |
| military branch * | 22,200 | 30 | 16 | 3 |
| army rotc requirements | 390 | 65 | 16 | 7 |
| army rotc | 5,400 | 24 | 15 | 2 |
| military civil engineer * | 170 | 53 | 15 | 6 |

BrightEdge not only incorporates guided edit suggestions for the web team to target terms such as those above, but also does work in the background through coding implemented in conjunction with the assistant director of digital communication to target specific key points Google values in its ranking.

CASE STUDY: CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING

Following the success of ROTC page overhauls, the web team has turned its attention to academic majors and departments. The first department to embrace this initiative was [Civil and Environmental Engineering](#). A complete site overhaul was designed to incorporate additional keywords and information, targeting commonly search engineering program terms as well as hot topic questions. All photos were updated to incorporate more detailed ALT tags for keywords,

and better represent the current department. New pages were created for each sub-discipline, a feature of the civil engineering degree. The pages for structural, hydraulic, and geotechnical engineering can be found in the keyword successes chart above. These sub-discipline pages not only explain the programs, but also answer career path questions – a key concept for competing with other colleges and universities for search results as well as recruitment. A cadet testimonials page has also been added, and will be expanded upon. Phase 2 of the redesign process will target additional keywords for improved traffic to the Civil and Environmental Engineering webpages.

The redesign also coincided with the accreditation period for the program, and was able to address deficiencies found in the site during prior evaluations, before the current web team or SEO tools were in place.

Comparing August 2024 web traffic to August 2023 web traffic to the CEE subsite:

- Page views are up 45.88%
- Users are up 41.45%
- Views per User are up 3.13%
- Average Engagement Time is up 26.37%
- Event Counts (clicks, etc.) are up 60.39%

New systems for requesting web edits and larger scale projects will be implemented for AY24-25 to streamline the process, provide clear reporting, and ensure that all affected parties have all the needed information to provide expedient, high-quality service and end products. The digital communications team looks forward to expanding the pool of content contributors to continue to increase the range of voices and topics represented on the VMI.edu website and support the mission of One Corps, One VMI on the most visible marketing tool of the Institute.

Related C&M Plan Status Updates for Goal 2: Enhance Digital and Web-Based Communications

2.1 INCREASED FUNCTIONALITY

C&M was able, thanks to the support of Lt. Col. Shannon Eskam and Col. Bill Wyatt, to obtain some funding to purchase a new content management system (CMS) and facilitate some of the content shift. Approval is still pending from IT to move to the next phase of contracting with SiteVision, which holds VITA's statewide "Citizen Facing Website & Application and all associated services" contract, as well as a statewide hosting contract VA-190906-STVN, to move to a new service. A scope of work was finalized that would not only move the vmi.edu site to a more stable and better supported system with modern technologies, but also incorporates design and layout assistance to expedite the move. The hold-up in approval has pushed the potential launch date from 2025 to 2026.

The problems with TerminalFour continue in the meantime. Most notably, there is often a sizable lag between content updates in the CMS and its reveal on the live website. As a result, there should be the expectation that notices on the web may take up to 30 minutes following completion of work to appear live to the public. This will negatively affect the Institute's ability to communicate in a timely fashion during emergency notification situations or public relations concerns such as those we dealt with in relation to articles from the Washington Post.

The current system's customer support has been largely unhelpful, despite priority status ticket submission. The same issues are consistently reported, and T4 is unable to offer longterm solutions or workarounds. This includes not actually removing pages or PDFs when expected, not loading correct page versions, and duplicating content unexpectedly, all of which have negative impact on the user experience, and affect VMI's public image.

With the limitations of our current CMS, the team must constantly write new, custom code to implement modern, mobile-friendly design styles. This takes time away from content overhaul and actual page updates. It has also slowed implementation of a more user-friendly menu structure as new code is often incompatible with the structure of our current site in TerminalFour, our current content management system.

Finally, TerminalFour's contract with VCU has expired, meaning they are no longer connected to VASCUPP.

2.2: MODERN & ENGAGING DESIGN & 2.3: REPRESENTATION & VISIBILITY

The team continues to update content types, styles, and layouts to ensure a more modern and enticing design in line with our competitors. The shift to a new CMS, referenced elsewhere in this report, is key to fully harnessing the website as a recruitment tool, and allowing the team to spend more time on content and design with the elimination of constant troubleshooting.

The Web Team continues to update photos to best represent the current Corps of Cadets and showcase the benefits and uniqueness of a VMI education. These graphics are also a key resource for SEO through alternative text, also an accessibility requirement, offering a place to include more keywords to target our top competitors. An additional feature of the BrightEdge contract was the implementation of Autopilot. This automated service, which can be customized by the web team, optimizes images for a faster load without quality loss, creating a better mobile experience while also allowing more design freedom.

2.4 INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

Increasing the accessibility of content across the vmi.edu domain continues to be a top priority for the Web Team. Content editors within the CMS have also been contacted as to updated standards for design as they continue to add to the site. During the past year, the Web Team maintained an average of 99% accessibility for all HTML code on the site, and weekly reviews continue to ensure this high success goal.

A complete review and overhaul of all downloadable content is required to officially meet 100% accessibility for the site, as anything presented on the website, such as PDFs, must meet the same standards. Phase 1 of this process – cleaning unused PDFs off of the server, is underway. Each document must then be verified for accuracy by the owner and remediated as necessary by the web team. This is a time-consuming process that will take multiple years to complete.

Research will continue for the possibility of external remediation depending on the number of documents remaining as accessibility remediation is often a full-time role and the current staffing levels do not allow for any member of the team to focus solely on this important user experience and legal requirement project.

A new guide for accessibility in all products created in Microsoft Office has been created and is currently in review. Additionally, the Communications & Marketing team is exploring the possibility of purchasing transcription software to expedite closed captioning and transcripts for video and audio products, an ADA requirement for digital media.