

**BOARD OF VISITORS
MINUTES OF THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

May 3, 2024

Present:

- Mr. Hugh M. Fain III '80, Committee Chair
- Mr. Thomas E. Gottwald '83
- Ms. Meaghan Mobbs
- Ms. Nancy Phillips
- Mr. Damon Williams '90

Others:

- Col. Jeff Boobar '86, Finance and Support
- Mr. Noah Campbell '24, Cadet Regimental S5 Captain
- Brig. Gen. Dallas Clark '99, Deputy Superintendent, Finance & Support
- Col. Keith Gibson '77, Museum Systems
- Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood, Communications and Marketing
- Ms. Amy Goetz, Alumni Agencies
- Mr. Michael McCarthy '78, Chief of Staff Office
- Maj. Grace Moyer, Museum Systems
- Ms. Kristen Pace, Museum Systems
- Col. Kim Parker, Government Relations
- Mr. Zachary Poché '25, Cadet Regimental S5 Captain for next academic year

The meeting was called to order at 1531 in the Smith Hall boardroom by Mr. Fain.

Approval of minutes by motions of Nancy Phillips and Damon Williams.

Reports:

Cadet S5 Report.

- Mr. Campbell shared that it was the last day of classes, and they'll have a rest and study weekend.
- Campbell updated on the three admissions open houses in the spring semester – all within five weeks, with about 100 at each event.
- The S5 supported an Army Branch Night, as well as the VMFA Artmobile tours when guests and school children came on post.
- Military prep schools from Taiwan were on post, and they provided tours.

- Poché shared they supported several virtual post tours and virtual open houses. This included open houses for applicants who had been accepted. They are also working with the Global Education Office and supporting the Institute's social media.
- He shared they would be providing ushers and other support for graduation week events.

VMI Museums System Report.

- Gibson shared that it's always valuable to have cadets at the museums. Aleece Mickens '26 will be at the New Market Battlefield Museum this summer as the scholar in resident. She will be participating in all aspects of the museum operations.
- Gibson emphasized the visit of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Artmobile. It is a way to get high-profile art into more rural areas. There was a lot of background work to get local school systems there, as well as cadet classes to visit.
- Since the last BOV meeting, the Kohen Gallery of VMI Citizens and Soldiers in the museum has been updated. This was a full gallery overhaul. The VMI Museum is also working closely with the George C. Marshall Museum on the displays featuring Marshall's materials. Other updates include enhances to the HVAC system.
- Museum staff is participating in meetings on the CLE Phase II on how the museum will be relocated into that space. The timeline on this is contingent on state approvals.
- In working with the Shenandoah Battlefields Foundation, the fencing has been updated, along with other updates in New Market.
- Gibson and Moyer attended the Congressional Medal of Honor Society Summit on Capitol Hill. Gibson got emotional talking about hearing from young Medal of Honor recipients.
- Gibson introduced Kristen Pace, who joined the Jackson House Museum in February. She is a recent Liberty University graduate. She brings museum experience to her new role.
- Fain recognized the unique and special items in the VMI Museum and Jackson House Museum gift shops.
- When asked about the Confederate statue being moved from Arlington, Gibson shared there are continued reviews with the Secretary of the Army. It remains the governor's preference that it goes to New Market. There may be a decision by mid- to late-summer.

Government Relations Report.

- Parker provided an update from the McGuire Woods Consulting Report. The report introduces the new faces in legislature, which was a significant number this year – almost 1/3 of the members.
- Regarding the common ground budget, Parker shared that there are more than 230 amendments that will be reviewed in a special session in mid-May. She shared that higher education is a very high discretionary fund, and so when cuts need to be made, it may start there.
- In higher education legislation, this was a lighter year than normal in the updates, but there were updates in firearms legislation, which needed to be tracked. VMI needs to be compliant by July 1.
- Parker mentioned the cadet legislative visit that included 15 cadets this year. She emphasized the value in this time and the professionalism the cadets display consistently.
- She mentioned the SCHEV director retired, so a new director, Scott Fleming, was named. He will take his post on July 1.
- Boobar touched on local government relations, including participation in Chamber of Commerce events in Rockbridge County and Shenandoah County.
- The civil engineering department supported research and provided recommendations for the Miller House Museum at Jordan's Point.
- A feasibility study was requested for a local airport, which VMI provided a letter in support of this study, as did Washington and Lee. This is similar to a study done in the 1990's, but the airport was voted down.
- In February, the VMI Color Guard participated in a BMX event at the Virginia Horse Center. More than 5,000 were expected to be part of the event, from 46 states.
- Lexington has a new city manager who comes from Maryland. Boobar plans to get him to post for a proper tour.
- Boobar updated the group on the Route 11 bike path project, which will begin in August, and will be a 15-18 month project. Traffic will remain open during the time, but VMI will need to come up with a parking strategy to overcome the lost parking spots.
- Lexington has signed a contract with Brightspeed highspeed internet. VMI will support any efforts needed to execute this partnership.
- Boobar is one of from VMI to be part of a Sexual Assault Response Team to provide support to victims. The team includes all the local colleges, forensic nurses, local police, etc.

- Non-commissioning cadets (more than 400) completed thousands of hours of volunteer work with local nonprofits, including Lime Kiln, Boxerwood, SPCA, Habitat for Humanity, etc.
- Cadet parking and party concerns continue to be discussed with community members, in partnership with the commandant staff, Parents Council, etc.

Communications and Marketing Report.

- Lt. Col. Ellwood shared updates on staffing – a new assistant director of brand marketing will start on July 1 – the top candidate in the pool of applicants, and also reminded the committee of updates made by Maj. Gen. Wins in the earlier session about the search for the director of communications and marketing. Interviews have begun for this position.
- There were more than 4,000 news mentions in the last quarter, with more than 90% being tagged as neutral or positive. Since the last meeting, Capt. Jack Casey '19 passed away, garnering a lot of news coverage, including the memorial service held at taps one evening at VMI.
- The Institute Report continues to have stories looking back over the last 50 years of the publication.
- The department offered photography, videography, graphic design, programs, stories, etc. for each of the major events on post through the spring, including FTX, conferences, Honors Week, etc.
- For the website and social media, emphasis is focused on recruiting, image and brand awareness, and user experience. Videos and reels remain insanely popular, and the team is creating more of those. Some more high-profile social posts include Alumni's Day of Giving, and FAFSA and Call of Duty announcements.
- Feature stories continue to be a fan favorite – stories focused on cadet-athletes, clubs, etc. A feel-good video is coming sharing cadets reading letters to mentors on post, sharing what faculty, staff, coaches, etc. have meant to them.
- Ellwood shared details on the Hanover Research brand perception survey that recently kicked off. Parents of current and prospective students, as well as current cadets, and applicants were included in the survey. The results from this survey will guide marketing and branding efforts, highlighting what means the most to students looking for a college and the ROI from the VMI experience.

Alumni Agencies Report.

- Goetz shared they are wrapping up a brand and reputation campaign that lasted about 18 months, focused on the VMI values. It included 10 billboards, which have proven to have great visibility.
- The Call to Duty video has been sent to all alumni, and an article is featured in the newest Alumni Review with a link to the video.
- Day of Giving surpassed their fundraising goals and Compete to Win giving days are coming up.

Additional Business.

- One of the duties of the committee is to discuss awards and create committees to select recipients. It is time to have a recipient of the Jonathan M. Daniels '61 Humanitarian Award. Fain will chair this committee. The criteria include being a living person, an international humanitarian, and willing and available to come on post. Suggestions for the award were brainstormed briefly.
- McCarthy introduced himself to the group and shared his background, along with the details of his new role at VMI overseeing the schedule and initiatives in the VMI Strategic Plan.

The meeting adjourned at 1657.