

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

January 26, 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
Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood, Communications and Marketing
Ms. Amy Goetz, Alumni Agencies
Mr. Christian Heilman, Alumni Agencies
Maj. Grace Moyer, Museum Systems

The meeting was called to order at 1601 hours in the Smith Hall boardroom by Mr. Fain.

He offered a few welcomes:

- Noah Campbell, S5 captain
- Christian Heilman, director of digital content with Alumni Agencies
- Michelle Ellwood, acting director of communications and marketing

There was a brief review of the committee's charter to emphasize responsibilities of the group.

Approval of minutes by motions of Ms. Meagan Mobbs and Ms. Nancy Phillips

Reports:

Cadet S5 Report.

- Mr. Campbell, S5 captain for the 23-24 academic year, shared the staff participated in three open houses in the fall, ranging from 70-90 students.
- He highlighted the ease of the Common App helping with the application process.
- The Corps helped with Christmas and Thanksgiving recruiting – 60-70 schools visited over each furlough with provided materials.
- The S5 staff assisted with holiday suppers for the Corps with special faculty/staff guests for both Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- Looking forward, there are three spring open houses and tours scheduled for the spring semester.

- Campbell, along with board members, emphasized the benefits of the open houses, the significant number of current cadets who attended one before coming, and how it gives a real picture of what VMI is.

VMI Museums System Report.

- Maj. Moyer shared news about new artifacts in the museum, including a locket with the seal of VMI that was presented to the wife of a member of Class of 1941. A photo of the alumnus is on the inside of the locket.
- There has been an increased involvement in cadet classes and with other colleges. This includes a museum study class from SVU. A VMI computer information systems class visited with the museum system to learn about the database used to manager their collections. A VMI chemistry class came to study “metal through the ages.”
- There is currently a traveling exhibit in Preston Library. The “Military Mapping Maidens” will be on post through April.
- Col. Gibson has been doing alumni presentations, including Christmas at VMI over the years, etc.
- There is a new point-of sale-system at the museums which makes it easier to sell tickets and inventory at the three sites.
- Recent events at the museum include hosting superintendent graduation and ring figure receptions. Fall events at Jackson House include Apple Day, which is a festival back since before COVID, and a Christmas candle-lit tour of the house. Moyer highlighted the generational love of the tradition of Apple Day. New Market had Halloween and Christmas events.
- The Virginia Museum of the Civil War is partnering with Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation taking down trees and replacing fencing to show what it would look like in the 1860s.
- New Market also partnered with Shenandoah Valley Academy in their community service day. The group of students provided help in landscaping.

Communications and Marketing Report.

- Lt. Col. Ellwood emphasized that while media coverage is down, year over year, this is due to a inflated news in late 2022, so the decrease is not necessarily a bad thing. A spike in December 2023 was chatter of the Confederate monument being moved.
- She shared that in December, the Institute Report had its 50th anniversary. The publication is taking a look back on the last 50 years of stories and highlighting things in this year’s issues, including construction, unique visitors, increase in technology, etc.
- Regarding staffing, the position for the director of the department should be posted soon.
- A new social media specialist began about 10 days ago. She is in the National Guard and brings great public affairs experience and kicking off new campaigns.
- The team is reviewing candidates for the assistant director of brand marketing, a position that’s been vacant for more than a year.
- For social media, reels and videos are the most engaged with and seen content. Because of the new social media person, videographer, and digital content specialist, these feature stories will continue to be included on the website and on social media platforms.
- FOIA requests continue to exceed the last year, but not a huge increase over 2023.
- Ellwood discussed the new partnership with Hanover Research, which will offer data and strategic guidance in not only marketing and branding, but also with HR and strategic enrollment. The discussions will kick off a 12-week brand perception project, using surveys to figure out where we are with messaging and reaching audiences. This will not necessarily mean new messaging, but

more of what audiences need more attention, and what key messages need to be more emphasized and where. The information will be provided to a marketing firm to aid VMI in getting these steps moving forward.

Alumni Agencies Report.

- Amy Goetz shared Alumni Agencies survey results from more than 3,000 responses, which is a very high response rate in higher education. Comments are being reviewed by committees to share overarching impressions and trends of the alumni. Some of the issues raised will be addressed in videos with interviews. Mr. Gottwald shared concerns with some missing topics in the survey, and not getting into the “whys” of some of the results.
- For the first time, campaigns focus on educating legislature – digital geofencing marketing focused on area of state capitol with already a high level of click-through rates. This also includes four full-page ads in Richmond Times-Dispatch.
- Digital content is also heavily focusing on Call to Duty scholarships.
- Airport ads will move to nine digital billboards in Richmond area and one static billboard in a heavily-traveled area of Richmond.

Government Relations Report.

- Col. Jeff Boobar discussed local government relations, highlighting some fall events. Maj. Gen. Wins took part in a Chamber of Commerce presidents panel which featured all four presidents from local colleges. There was also the Gold Star Family Memorial event at Jordan’s Point where the VMI color guard and associate chaplain supported. Brig. Gen. Clark briefed the Rotary Club in October. The Regimental Staff, band, and Rat Mass participated in the Christmas Parade on Dec. 1.
- Boobar discussed a renovation project at Jordan’s Point updating the access road, parking, restrooms, and trails that will impact some Alumni events and Corps training.
- Boobar also mentioned the bike lanes to be installed along Route 11/Main Street through post, which greatly impact parking and movement across post. This project will begin this spring or summer.
- There are some cadets parking their cars in a neighborhood near post, which are leading to complaints from homeowners. Boobar and Col. Bogart are working with the City of Lexington and local residents to learn more and to address the issue with the Corps of Cadets.
- Regarding state government relations, Clark discussed the legislative education committee chairs and Wins’ visits with these leadership positions and moving capital projects forward.
- The strategy is to meet with the members to do introductions and share the strategic plan. In-person meetings are most effective to learn about the Institute and the people here. Wins and Clark have made several trips to Richmond to meet with legislators and government leaders, and additional trips will be conducted during the ongoing legislative session.
- The VMI legislative reception is scheduled for 22 February 2024 in Richmond.
- VMI is maintaining a legislative tracker in order to track pending legislation and amendments in both the House of Delegates and the Senate. The tracker allows various departments on post to provide real-time updates, actions, and/or concerns regarding new bills.
- Visits and studies will occur in coming weeks on cost efficiency in higher education with the Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission.

Additional Business.

The meeting then went into closed session at 1711 by motions of Ms. Mobbs and Mr. Gottwald.
The committee was back in open session at 1730.

The meeting adjourned at 1730.