

# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

## **Board of Visitors Executive Committee Meeting September 11, 2023**

A meeting of the VMI Board of Visitors Executive Committee was held in Lexington, Virginia on September 11, 2023, pursuant to public notice.

Executive Committee members present:

Thomas R. Watjen '76, president  
Hugh M. Fain '80  
Thomas E. Gottwald '83  
Gussie Lord '01

Board of Visitors members present:

Scot Marsh '81

Others present:

Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85  
Patrick O'Leary '90  
Col. John Young  
Col. Bill Wyatt  
Alyssa Astphan  
Nancy Harvey  
Thierry Lemercier '98  
David Prasnicki

1. Tom Watjen called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.
2. Watjen acknowledged the death of VMI Board of Visitors member Lt. Gen. (ret.) Charles Dominy who, at the time of his death, served as a member of the Executive Committee. Watjen told the committee he had asked board member Scot Marsh '81 to sit in on the Executive Committee meeting in an unofficial capacity in Dominy's absence.
3. Mr. Fain made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 13, 2023, Executive Committee meeting. Motion was seconded by Mr. Gottwald. Motion passed unanimously.
4. Maj. Gen. Cedric Wins '85, VMI superintendent, provided an update to the executive committee on a number of topics:
  - a. 491 cadets matriculated on Aug. 19. This exceeded the stated goal of 450 cadets. Wins acknowledged the team effort to bring the incoming class back to near historic levels. VMI is off to a great start for the 2023-24 admissions cycle using new tools including the Common App.

Mr. Fain asked about retention efforts. Wins estimated 25 cadets of the 491 had left the Institute thus far. The Institute continues to monitor retention numbers and employ efforts to keep cadets at VMI.

Mr. Gottwald asked about retention among the upper classes. Wins estimated



the total Corps size around 1,550 – 1,560 which is about what administrators anticipated.

With the introduction of the Common App, Watjen suggested the numbers at the top of the funnel will be hard to compare to previous years.

- b. A draft of the strategic plan was circulated to members of the Board of Visitors. Wins said the plan was based on feedback from sensing sessions, his initial planning guidance, committees, board members, and survey results from cadets, faculty, staff, and alumni. The draft plan contains five initiatives with corresponding objectives. Wins will brief in detail to the full board.
- c. Wins gave a budget update. The General Assembly has finalized a budget agreement that is now ready for the governor's signature. VMI finished the year with a \$800,000 budget surplus that positions the Institute better for the coming year. Athletic budget discussion needs to include a conversation about what do we want the athletic experience to be for VMI's cadet-athletes. Experience for VMI athletes needs to be one where we are positioned to compete to win.

Mr. Gottwald commended the efforts to close the budget year with a surplus and acknowledged the Institute will not have to cut as deeply into reserves. He explained the athletic budget is getting worse, not better. Gottwald encouraged the Institute to understand what has changed since the athletics budget ran surpluses in five of the previous 10 years.

- d. Maj. Gen. Wins briefed the Executive Committee on the development of policies and procedures to accommodate transgender cadets. A lot of work has been done to consider the steps taken to ensure the Institute is prepared for transgender and non-binary cadets. The workgroup has produced a resolution for the board to consider and suggested changes to existing policies and standard operating procedures related to the issue.

Mr. Fain asked if VMI has used the service academies as a guide. Wins said the federal service academies have been consulted as well as Norwich and the Citadel.

Mr. Gottwald reminded the group that there was discussion at a previous board meeting of having the full board consider any policy changes. Wins said the resolution would direct the administration to develop policies which is consistent with the Institute's marriage and family policy. Gottwald reiterated the board needs to be involved in approving the actual policy.

Ms. Lord expressed concern about having the full board discuss all the details of the daily routines of a transgender cadet. Gottwald said he's not suggesting



the full board spends hours discussing the day-to-day, but the board needs to look at the full range of issues and approve any policy.

Maj. Gen. Wins said the policy work began back in 2018 and have resumed where the group left off. He said GO 13 and 16 are likely to be modified with the addition of a new policy specific to transgender cadets. Standard operating procedures would govern the daily routine of a transgender cadet.

Discussion occurred regarding the timing of consideration of the policy. Col. Young, VMI's chief of staff, encouraged consideration sooner rather than later and discussed the existence of a group of cadets who are beginning to offer their assistance in moving a policy forward.

A consensus existed for the Executive Committee to review and endorse to the full board the proposed policies and procedures prior to consideration by the full board at the January 2024 meeting.

- e. Maj. Gen. Wins provided updates on key Institute personnel. Alyssa Astphan was introduced as the Inspector General / Title IX coordinator. An announcement is forthcoming soon for the Institute's new chief diversity officer. Other key vacancies include chief information officer, director of the Miller Academic Center, and executive assistant. Wins told the committee that the grant received from the state to boost enrollment of Pell Grant cadets will fund the proposed strategic enrollment position.

Wins told the committee that he is planning on splitting the board secretary responsibilities from the executive assistant position.

- f. Maj. Gen. Wins clarified the Institute did not initiate conversation between the media about the Virginia Press Association awards. The Institute did initiate contact with the VPA about the award given to the counseling center article written by The Cadet newspaper. Wins said he has asked the inspector general to investigate the circumstances surrounding the communication with the media and VPA about the awards and to determine if any policies or procedures have been broken. He said the inspector general is hoping to wrap up the investigation by the end of September.

Gottwald expressed concern that a conflict of interest may exist with a member of the superintendent's staff (inspector general) investigating the matter.

Mr. Fain said he hoped the conversations about the findings of the investigation would be held in closed session. Mr. Gottwald disagreed. Pat O'Leary, VMI's legal counsel, advised these matters appear to be more appropriate for closed session. Gottwald said he wanted to have discussions



about communications policy and the relationship with The Cadet which are appropriate for open session. Gottwald reminded the superintendent and the board president he was not satisfied with the way the situation was being handled and believes the full board should have some understanding of what the issues are.

5. Mr. Gottwald raised concern about the inclusion of the “social identity wheel” as part of Inclusive Excellence training for rats. He was under the impression that did not work and caused problems. Maj. Gen. Wins explained the new approach this year where each class’ training builds on the training provided the year before. Wins said the cadets suggested the training. Part of learning to lead is understanding who you are, he continued. Mr. Marsh said the cadet trainers briefed the Board of Visitors Inclusive Excellence Committee on the training in August.
6. Mr. Watjen made a motion, that was seconded by Mr. Fain to enter closed session. The motion passed unanimously, and the executive committee entered closed session at 5:59 p.m. to discuss:
  - a. Matters related to the employment, assignment, appointment, or performance of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of the public body, and evaluation of performance of departments or schools of public institutions of higher education pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711 (A.) (1.) relating to review of the superintendent’s performance objectives, his special staff, and evaluation of specific departmental operations.
  - b. Consultation with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711 (A.) (7.) pertaining to actual or probable litigation of the Institute.
  - c. Consultation with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711 (A.) (8.)
7. The executive committee returned to open session at 6:35 p.m. Mr. Watjen made a motion seconded by Mr. Gottwald to certify the closed session. The motion passed unanimously. Each executive committee member was then asked, via roll call, to certify that only matters lawfully exempted from public disclosure and only those matters identified in the closed session motion were discussed in closed session. Board members Fain, Gottwald, Lord, and Watjen all voted yes, thereby certifying the closed session.
8. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

