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BOARD OF VISITORS

201 SMITH HALL, LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

We hope you had a good summer and share our excitement for the upcoming year at VMI. On Aug. 20, we welcomed a class of highly qualified, energized young people to the Institute. A great deal of preparation was undertaken for this important week, with the main objective being—as it has always been—to provide the new rat class a life-changing experience and set the stage for their cadetship and life beyond VMI. For more than 180 years, VMI strives each year to be better than the year before.

We are concerned with the level of misinformation circulating regarding Inclusive Excellence training being implemented at VMI. While we can't change the way the "media" elects to characterize things, we can work harder to assure that our alumni are equipped with the facts.

Let's start with the context of our training initiative. In July 2021, the VMI Board of Visitors approved three very simple objectives to guide VMI's diversity and inclusion initiatives. These objectives were neither politically motivated nor motivated by any report or allegations. Instead, it was motivated by our effort to include key elements in the VMI experience to best prepare our graduates to lead others and contribute to their communities. The term used regularly in these discussions was to fulfill our "obligation of mission-readiness for our cadets."

The three objectives were as follows:

1. To create and foster a more diverse VMI.
2. To create and foster a safe, equitable, and inclusive environment for all on post.
3. To ensure VMI maintains a safe, rigorous process for resolving issues which have even the potential to violate the code of the cadet.

These objectives have served us well and continue to be the Board of Visitor's focus, as restated in a **statement from the BOV** dated March 15, 2022. These are not new concepts at VMI. Living honorably and having civility toward others have always been a part of our expectations for VMI cadets and alumni, but stating them in this manner has brought greater focus, attention, and resources to bear on these critically important objectives. Other institutes of higher learning and the Department of Defense have followed similar paths when preparing leaders for the future.

Cadet Inclusive Excellence training is vital to achieve the second objective—to raise the awareness of our differences and, in doing so, help each cadet (and all of us) be better prepared to engage others. This is an essential component of an effective leader. Reflecting on VMI's training and some of the "chatter" in the media and elsewhere, we'd ask you keep a few things in mind:

- As we think about diversity, it is not only about race. Diversity includes race, but also gender, ethnicity, religious differences, sexual orientation, socioeconomic backgrounds,

and political ideology. Inclusive Excellence training at VMI focuses on providing cadets critical thinking skills while respecting and understanding individual differences.

- While we are steadfast in our commitment to provide Inclusive Excellence training, Institute leadership and the Board of Visitors recognize, as with any new initiative, we will learn how to improve its effectiveness as we move forward. Knowing how important this was to our ability to achieve one of our objectives, the Board of Visitors established a **subcommittee of the DE&I Committee** to oversee the training process. This subcommittee consists of members of the Board of Visitors, Institute staff, and faculty, as well as representation from the VMI Alumni Agencies and the VMI Parent's Council. A number of suggestions have come from this subcommittee which have resulted in adjustments to our training content and direction.

- We are not alone in introducing training of this nature to its students. In fact, VMI was one of the last institutions in the state to do so. This training is intended to be similar in fashion and scope to the program implemented by the Commonwealth of Virginia for state employees by Gov. Youngkin and the programs utilized by senior military colleges, military academies, and the Department of Defense. We owe it to our cadets to prepare them for leadership roles they will assume in the military and in private industry by conducting training on these important issues.

No one wants this aspect of leadership training at VMI to be successful more than the members of the Board of Visitors. We will continue to work with the Superintendent and his team as we all work toward fulfilling our objectives.

If you are interested in these elements of the discussion, I have a few requests. First, on any issue, please take the time to gather the facts. For example, the work of this subcommittee and the outcomes of their work can be found in **the minutes of the recent meeting**. Please take the time to read that information, which I think you will find is often materially different from what you are hearing/reading from others outside of VMI. Therefore, please don't react to everything you hear!

Second, trust the process. Members of the Board of Visitors perform their role with the utmost of care and integrity. There is a regular dialogue with Maj. Gen. Wins and his team on all matters VMI, but especially in these areas.

Finally, please be patient! As you can see, through these discussions, we assure you that we are making our programs most effective and appropriate for VMI. VMI has always undergone change to keep up with the modern-day world without changing in a way that undermines the commitment to our mission, purpose, and unique method of education.

Please join us as we continue to position VMI as one of the leading colleges not just in the state, but the nation; one that continues to produce the leaders so very needed today.

Respectfully,

Tom Watjen '76
VMI Board of Visitors President

Gene Scott '80
BOV Member
DE&I Committee Chairman

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