

November 2022

Mr. Thomas Watjen '76
President, VMI Board of Visitors
Virginia Military Institute
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Dear Mr. Watjen:

We, the undersigned members of the Class of 1986, are deeply concerned about the current state of affairs at our beloved Institute. We hope this letter will communicate the basis of our concerns.

The ultimate strength of the VMI Experience is the Brother Rat phenomenon that is the essence of the fabled Spirit of VMI. The Brother Rat Spirit is built through the Ratline, the adversative system, and an uncompromising code of personal honor. This methodology has endured 183 years at VMI, never failing in its mission. The mission is predicated on the notion of eliminating all prior station and status in the new cadets and reducing them all to the lowly status of a Rat. From there, they are built back up into a cohesive unit that puts a premium on selflessness and being part of something larger than oneself.

Our belief is that the DEI program is in direct conflict to the time-proven Rat system. Contrary to the unity built and nurtured through the Rat system, DEI seeks to label and divide cadets by race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. DEI may sound good and may even be well-intentioned, but it is divisive at its core. It literally and figuratively tears apart the very fabric of the VMI Experience. VMI has always been about one corps – that is why we all sign a pledge on matriculation day not to join any fraternity or secret society. The Ratline is administered without bias and we believe that VMI is the most egalitarian society we have ever experienced; where any cadet may rise to excellence and ascend “to be whatever they resolve to be”. Why would the VMI Leadership allow an ideology to infiltrate and undermine the very system that makes VMI great?

Despite countless salacious print media assertions and a million-dollar inquisition masqueraded as an investigation, the allegations of systemic racism at VMI have been unfounded. We have been disappointed that the Board of Visitors has not defended the Institute against these attacks. The Superintendent did refute them once, albeit mildly, when he acknowledged in an interview with Virginia Business magazine that the evidence he had learned in his tenure did not bear out that systemic racism existed at VMI. However, during a later interview with the Military Officers Association of America, he subsequently agreed with the results of the Barnes & Thornburg Report. That vacillation gives us pause.

The result of the woke policies hastily implemented at VMI coupled with these unfounded attacks and failure to defend the honor of the Institute against them has resulted in a lower applicant pool and the smallest matriculating Rat mass in the last 25 years or more. Meanwhile, applications and admissions are up at most every other Virginia college to include our comparable rivals, the VPI Corps of Cadets, as well as The Citadel. Clearly, VMI is on the wrong trajectory.

Our desire is to support a VMI that believes in, is confident in, and loyal to, the time-proven mission to produce the citizen soldiers so desperately needed in this country. To accomplish this, VMI must also have the courage not to succumb to the political and social whims that endanger its mission. Therefore, we, the undersigned members of the Class of 1986, reserve the right to withhold our monetary support from VMI until the detrimental narrative of the DEI program is expunged from the VMI System and the Board of Visitors DEI committee is disbanded.

Sincerely,

Members of the Class of 1986

Some 92% of the Class of 1986 members contacted responded to the request to sign this letter. The letter listed 100 signatures at the time it was sent to the VMI Board of Visitors.