

Minutes of the Academic Affairs Committee Meeting
1400-1600 hours
14 November 2022
Smith Hall Board Room/Teams

Present (Via Teams*):

Board Members	Staff	
Mr. Adams*	MG Wins	LTC Eskam
Mr. Fain	BG Moreschi	LTC Hagy
Ms. Lord*	COL Bissell	LTC Young
Mr. Scott	COL McDonald*	Mrs. Battaglia
	COL Rakes	Ms. Dirscherl
	CAPT Sebastino	Ms. Hyde
	COL Wyatt	Mr. O’Leary

Ms. Lord called the meeting to order at 1405 and called for a moment of silence for the University of Virginia students who were killed in a campus shooting in Charlottesville.

As noted by BG Moreschi, Ms. Lord called this special meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee because of the Committee’s responsibility for oversight of issues related to cadet enrollment and lingering concerns from the low enrollment numbers for the Class of 2026. Ms. Lord felt that, with new directors in Admissions and in Financial Aid, that it would be helpful to receive an update on the admissions process for the Class of 2027.

LTC Hagy opened the report by providing an update to the admissions data that was reported on 24 October 2022 (Attachment 1). He highlighted improved numbers in completed applications and in early decision applications compared to the same point in time in 2021. While there is still much work left to be done, he felt that the new strategies being employed are starting to show positive results and trends are moving in the right direction.

In response to a question from Mr. Adams, LTC Hagy outlined the early decision process, which runs from 1 August to 15 November and results in a binding commitment to enroll in VMI; although, we have historically allowed a small number of applicants out of their commitment. Early decision applicants typically have VMI as their number one choice, so we traditionally have a very high yield on those appointments. These applicants tend to be either very strong applicants, or very weak with low likelihood of acceptance – few are in between.

LTC Eskam explained changes being implemented to the financial aid process whereby those selected for early decision would be given their financial aid package – based on current pricing and subject to adjustment – when they are accepted. They would no longer have to wait until spring to receive their financial aid. Financial Aid is now preparing financial aid packages for applicants as soon as they complete their FAFSA

(Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. By providing this information earlier, applicants can factor their likely financial aid into their decision. In addition, we have begun contacting individuals who have sent their FAFSA to VMI, but who have not yet applied, in order to facilitate their application. These students, regardless of their application status, will receive a financial aid package prior to the end of the fall semester annually.

Mr. Fain asked when merit scholarships are awarded, and BG Moreschi explained the process for reviewing applications for the Institute Honors Program and awarding merit scholarships after applicants have been accepted for enrollment. He highlighted that we moved the timeline for Honors selection up last year from mid-April to early-March, which resulted in a much higher yield. We are working with the Foundation to get the available funding earlier to support an even earlier award date this year. MG Wins noted a future strategy to be implemented would be to contact candidates for the Institute Honors Program as early as their junior year in high school.

Mr. Scott asked about applicants who receive ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) scholarships and how we supplement those scholarships with additional financial aid. LTC Hagy said that we are currently examining how we might do that in order to be more competitive with schools that offer supplemental scholarships to ROTC recipients. LTC Young noted a recent trend in higher education – not limited to military colleges – to supplement these scholarships with room and board support ranging from partial to full coverage. MG Wins has directed BG Clark and his team to examine this issue, estimate how much it would cost to offer supplemental support, and work with the Foundation to finance the program.

LTC Hagy next reviewed the actions taken over the first 30 days in order to improve recruiting. He highlighted 90 cadet recruiters who will be conducting recruiting events while they are home on Thanksgiving and Christmas furloughs as well as 40 events to be coordinated with the Alumni Agencies targeted towards state, and national, areas of previously successful recruiting based on ten years of enrollment data. He also highlighted seven new admissions agreements with military high schools in Virginia, as well as an additional agreement with the Marine Military Academy in Texas, through which graduates of those schools who meet specific requirements would be guaranteed admissions to VMI. The goal for summer 2023 is to execute similar agreements with all 64 military high schools in the nation. The requirements for guaranteed enrollment include a 3.25 GPA, a leadership component, completion of at least one advanced math course, and extracurricular activities. Our requirements are higher than similar agreements in place between these schools and other military colleges. In response to a question from Ms. Lord, LTC Hagy said he is working with Mr. Prasnicky and Mr. King of the Alumni Agencies to coordinate alumni participation in recruiting activities, and he is very happy with the support he has received from the Agencies. In addition, he noted that the increase in recruiting activities should enhance “organic” lead generation, which is currently at 8-10% with the remainder coming from a paid service, to approximately 20%, which is preferred. Based on the strategies that have been implemented, LTC Hagy believes the goal of a matriculating class of 450 in August 2023 is a realistic possibility.

In response to a question from Ms. Lord regarding efforts to increase the number of international cadets enrolled at VMI, LTC Hagy reported those efforts are the subject of an ongoing discussion with Mr. Goen, Director of Global Education (OGE). He is aware that some events for international recruitment have been identified, but the focus has been primarily on national recruiting. BG Moreschi further explained that he has been in discussions with LTC Young about whether or not international recruiting would be based in OGE or in Admissions, and what administrative/personnel changes might be needed to support that. In addition, guidance would be needed from the Superintendent regarding the enrollment goal for international cadets.

LTC Hagy went on to describe the composition of the “Tiger Teams,” their geographic assignments both in Virginia and nationally, and the flow of communication to support their efforts. He emphasized the importance of relationships with Alumni groups across the country, which can help us to be pro-active, rather than reactive, in recruiting new cadets. In addition, he reviewed the weekly meeting schedule with Institute leadership and the Tiger Teams to ensure all parties are kept informed and focused on goals and objectives. LTC Young noted that the plan laid out by LTC Hagy represents a culture change in recruiting at VMI that is forward thinking and keeps recruiting at the forefront on a daily basis. It also supports the creation of a culture of analytics and using data to inform decision making. LTC Hagy then reviewed the Tiger Teams’ recruiting responsibilities and activities/goals, but he also emphasized that everyone has a responsibility to assist in recruiting no matter their position at VMI.

Mr. Adams noted that, in recent years, there appears to be a significant drop off from Post View accounts created to application submitted, and he asked what are the obstacles encountered by a potential applicant at that transition point? Furthermore, he asked if our participating in the “Common App” could help alleviate that problem? LTC Hagy responded the issue is not related to VMI’s not participating in the Common App, but he would like to eventually move to that. He felt that drop off was more due to the reactive nature of our shepherding applicants through the recruiting “funnel” rather than proactively helping them through the process. COL Wyatt commented that, currently, the number of steps involved from when an interested student clicks on the “apply” button on our admissions website to the completion of an application is far too many and too complicated when compared to other schools. In response to a question from Mr. Fain as to what would be needed in order for VMI to participate in the Common App, LTC Hagy explained we would need to have a customer relations management (CRM) system in place to manage a potentially large influx of applications at the top of the funnel, and we are in the process of reviewing CRM’s for potential use. He further commented that, in his opinion, VMI has allowed the technology used in recruiting to drive the recruiting process rather than having the process determine the technology used. LTC Young noted that we would need to develop a strategic timeline for implementing the Common App, and that implementation would need to occur prior to the start of a new class’ recruiting cycle – not mid-cycle. LTC Hagy estimated the annual cost of using the Common App would be \$12,500. COL Wyatt explained another advantage of using a CRM system would be in generating inquiries for additional information.

Currently, students interested in receiving more information about VMI have to complete an entire form, which some students may find too time consuming. With a CRM, we would be able to send these students more information with just their name and a phone number/e-mail address. We could then nurture them through the recruiting process and obtain additional information from them as they move through the funnel.

LTC Hagy reviewed the typical recruiting timeline noting year-round and time-specific activities. He then discussed digital strategies reiterating that we have become too reliant on paid, lead generation over organic lead development, which leads to a lower return on investment. Switching from our current contract with EAB to a lower cost contract for name purchasing services would enable us to use those saved funds on other recruiting activities with a higher return. In addition, he described how new QR codes have been developed, which will be printed on business cards and other recruiting materials to facilitate gathering of information from potential recruits. These QR codes will also enable us to track the source of the inquiry, which will allow for assessment of the success of different recruiting efforts. In addition, Admissions is working with the ROTC departments to obtain information on students who did not receive ROTC scholarships, but who listed VMI, or other SMC's (Senior Military Colleges) on their applications so that we may recruit those students. We are also pursuing students who were rejected from the federal service academies as potential recruits. LTC Hagy reviewed admissions loss points noting the goal of inquiries who create Post View accounts is 15%; currently, we are at about 7.5%. He emphasized the success of personalized follow-up with interested students in a higher return in terms of creating accounts and completing applications.

LTC Hagy reviewed some of Admission's short-term strategies, and he noted that the Strategic Enrollment Management Committee is developing a five-year strategic enrollment plan with performance metrics, which will be in alignment with the Superintendent's vision and the Institute's new strategic plan. He described reorganization and the hiring of additional staff in Admissions to improve efficiencies, customer service, and reduce funnel attrition. He emphasized the importance of personal, customer service as a focus of the reorganization efforts. He also noted that Admissions is being more flexible in hiring recruiters, and they are willing to consider hiring people who would be located in prime recruiting areas and would only travel to Post a couple times per month. In addition, he reported that Admissions is beginning to implement text-based recruiting and eliminating the \$40 application fee, which can be a barrier to low-income recruits.

LTC Hagy presented the Admissions targets for the next five years beginning with a target of 450 matriculants with the Class of 2027 and increasing annually to 495, 515, 525, and 550 for the Classes of 2028, 2029, 2030, and 2031 respectively. In response to a question from Ms. Lord regarding the physical capacity to house a Rat class of 550 in barracks, MG Wins said he believed we could support that; however, it might require some Rats being housed on the third stoop – at least initially. In closing, LTC Hagy reviewed the timeline for implementation of recruiting strategies highlighting items that have been completed as well as those planned through October 2023. Mr. Fain asked if

implementation of the Common App could be added to the timeline. LTC Hagy responded that he believed that was feasible, but that the implementation would likely not take place until August 2023.

LTC Eskam reiterated how providing financial aid packages would improve recruiting, but she also explained how it would improve retention. Financial aid packages will also be provided earlier to returning cadets, which would help them plan for their payment of tuition and fees earlier. She reiterated how sending financial aid packages upon completion of the FASFA would help in recruiting to include NCAA athletes. She noted that DII colleges typically start recruiting athletes in January; therefore, providing financial aid packages to athletes we are recruiting by December will help secure those commitments. LTC Eskam further explained how Financial Aid is beginning to automate processes that are currently performed manually. Increased automation will improve efficiency in communicating with cadets regarding required documentation/forms, and it will free-up staff to provide more financial aid counselling. Finally, she addressed desired improvements in the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) notifications process in order to improve cadet retention. Currently, cadets are notified one time annually in the spring if they are at risk, academically, of not returning or of losing their federal financial aid. She would like this notification to occur at least once per semester depending upon capabilities. She would also like to see improved clarification, or coordination, of the differences between SAP and Academic Probation. Mr. Scott and LTC Young both emphasized the importance of retention as part of an overall enrollment management strategy. In response to a question from Ms. Lord regarding the assistance Financial Aid provides to cadets who may have lost an academic scholarship, such as an ROTC scholarship lost due to medical reasons, LTC Eskam noted that VMI is primarily a need-based institution in terms of financial aid, but that she is working with the Foundation to explore the possibility of non-need based aid for these types of scenarios. In response to a question from Mr. Fain, LTC Eskam explained the coordination between Financial Aid and the Keydet Club/Athletic Department in the recruiting of NCAA athletes.

COL Wyatt reported on marketing efforts in support of cadet recruiting. Last August, a strategic enrollment consultant visited Post and made recommendations for improvement in two areas. The first area was digital advertising, and we have contracted with a firm to conduct targeted digital advertising to applicants in order to facilitate their transition from completing an application to paying a deposit. We focused on this area of digital advertising over lead generation because of the declining yield from applicants to deposits in recent years. We will also be able to take the characteristics of these applicants and identify “look-alike” students who we can target in recruiting. The second area was Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which involves the manipulation of the back-end of our website so that it appears higher up in the results of web searches conducted by high school students looking for information on prospective colleges to attend. We have contracted with a company named BrightEdge to help with SEO and increasing our web presence. We estimate there is the potential for an additional 9,000 visitors to our website per month, which should result in more students coming into the top of the recruiting funnel. While these marketing changes may have some impact on

enrollment for the Class of 2027, most of the impact should be seen in future classes.

Mr. Adams asked about the Institute's acceptance rate in recent years and what effect that might have on the various college rankings, such as the U.S. News and World Report and if that is a concern. MG Wins noted that our acceptance rate has increased from 47.7% to 69% in recent years largely due to balancing declining applicants while trying to maintain the size of the matriculating class. COL Rakes commented that the rankings are more weighted towards graduation and retention rates than acceptance rates, and MG Wins emphasized our focus on academic success – i.e., retaining and graduating the cadets we enroll. BG Moreschi added that academic retention, aside from cadets who leave for non-academic reasons, is historically good. Cadets who are successful academically as Rats have high retention. The challenge is in identifying what academic support we can provide to improve retention without sacrificing academic standards. That involves a cost-benefit analysis as we do not want to spend \$500K to retain one additional cadet. COL Rakes further added that VMI provides a high return on investment for its graduates in terms of employment rate and starting salary, which are comparable to some of the best schools in the state/nation. Mr. Adams commented that the return on investment of a VMI degree is a powerful recruiting tool.

LTC Young asked the Committee if the information provided in today's meeting is the type of information they need to effectively monitor cadet enrollment. Mr. Fain asked if there was a "dashboard" available where the Committee could view up-to-date enrollment statistics. LTC Hagy said Admissions produces a weekly report on all the pertinent measures, and that this report could be provided to the Committee members. There was some additional discussion about the tangible benefits of a VMI degree and the need to emphasize that in recruiting. By emphasizing the positives, we can start to overcome the effects of some of the bad publicity received in recent years – most notably from the Washington Post.

Ms. Lord closed the meeting by expressing her appreciation for the hard work that has been done and stating that she is very impressed with the efforts to address the enrollment issues. She asked for an additional Committee meeting in January, prior to the full Board meeting, to update the Committee on the numbers and to provide an assessment on the cooperation between the various entities involved in enrollment management across Post. She also noted there has been some discussion on developing a BOV position statement on admissions. This may be something to consider for next year and could be discussed at the next meeting.

The Committee adjourned at 1605 hours.