
THE CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAM

The distinctive VMI approach to higher education, which is the result of over 170 years of development, continues to prove its effectiveness in providing young men and women an environment that fosters intellectual, physical, and character development. The unique cadet lifestyle and all non-academic activities comprise the co-curricular program. Cadets live within a military framework; they wear the cadet uniform; they live in Barracks, and eat their meals in a dining facility. Because military training is combined at the Institute with a demanding academic program, cadet life requires much of the individual. For cadets to fully achieve their educational goals, it is essential that cadets willingly accept the military way of life found at the Institute.

VMI's mission is to produce "citizen-soldiers," men and women educated for civilian life and also prepared to serve their country in the Armed Forces. Historically about 20 percent of VMI graduates have made the military a career. However, approximately 50 percent are commissioned each year upon graduation. Cadets must take four years of ROTC instruction and are encouraged to take a commission in the service of their choice, but commissioning is not mandatory.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT

The General Committee

One of the three major agencies of student government is the General Committee, composed of officers of the three upper classes, elected by their classmates and a secretary chosen by the 1st class officers. This body enforces rules that govern the conduct of the Corps and grants increasing privileges to classes as they advance in seniority. The administration recognizes the General Committee and class officers as official representatives of the Corps and their separate classes, and it extends to them wide authority in self-government.

The Honor Court

The heart of VMI's student government is the honor system. Although honor, like many idealistic concepts, defies exact definition, it clearly refers to relationships which govern society and which yield to the members of that society immediate and tangible benefits. The honor system at VMI is not so much a set of rules—although rules are published and distributed to every cadet—as it is a way of living. Lying, cheating, stealing, or tolerating those who do are considered violations of the Honor Code. A cadet's statement in any controversy is accepted without question as truthful; examinations are not proctored; the word "certified" on a paper means that the work is the cadet's own and that the cadet has neither given nor received help.

The Corps as a whole has always been the guardian of its own honor, and its honor is its most cherished possession. To administer the system, the Corps elects an Honor Court. Any suspected violation is reported to this Honor Court, which conducts an investigation of the circumstances. An accused cadet may admit guilt and leave the Institute or may request trial. If found guilty, the cadet is dishonorably dismissed. If the accused is acquitted, the case is closed, and all records pertaining to the case are destroyed.

The Cadet Regiment

The third major agency of student government at VMI is the Cadet Regiment, made up of two battalions of four rifle companies each plus the regimental band. The basic structure of the corps is that of an infantry unit, and all cadets drill as infantry troops under their own leaders. On the basis of demonstrated qualities of leadership and proficiency in military and academic studies, cadets are appointed to non-commissioned and commissioned cadet rank. The First Captain, as the highest-ranking cadet, commands the regiment. A major share of the administration of the Corps of Cadets is entrusted to cadet officers and their staffs.

BARRACKS LIFE

The Barracks is the focal point of a cadet's life at VMI, and the fact that all cadets are required to live under one roof facilitates student government and helps promote and strengthen ties of friendship. Rooms are furnished sparingly but with essential equipment, and three, four, five or six cadets share a room. They have equal responsibility for keeping the room clean and in order for daily inspection.

Personal items authorized in cadet rooms vary by class. For example, only First Class cadets may keep civilian clothes in their rooms. Fourth Class cadets may not keep electrical equipment, such as razors, radios and videogame systems. If personal items are brought to VMI and found to be unauthorized, limited storage space for these items is provided until such time as they are authorized.

MILITARY SYSTEM

The military system characterizes and distinguishes life at VMI. It fosters punctuality, order, discipline, courtesy, and respect for authority. By placing all cadets on a uniform plane, it enables them to advance through self-reliance, initiative, and strength of character.

The combination of military and academic training constitutes a strenuous program requiring diligent application and conscientious attention to both academic and military duties. For a cadet to derive the greatest benefit from what is admittedly a heavy program, absences from the post and from Lexington are limited.

The military system of administration of the Cadet Corps extends wide authority to individuals and holds all responsible for faithful exercise of assigned duties. The characteristic dependability of the VMI graduate results from life within this framework of authority and responsibility.

Although they have some features in common, the military system should not be confused with the system of new cadet orientation, which is briefly described below.

THE NEW CADET SYSTEM

One of the Institute's oldest traditions is the system of initiation applied to new cadets by old cadets, who themselves have successfully completed it. Regardless of background or prior academic training, every cadet in the first year at VMI is a

“rat” and must live under the “rat” system. Among its purposes are to teach or promote the following in the shortest span of time possible:

1. Excellence in all things, particularly academics.
2. Military bearing, discipline, and conduct.
3. Self-control, humility, and self-restraint.
4. Respect for authority and the forms of military courtesy.
5. Habits of neatness, cleanliness, orderliness, punctuality, and the importance of attention to detail.
6. The history and traditions of VMI and cadet life.
7. Class unity and the “brother rat” spirit that result from shared experiences in a stern and challenging environment.

The system is equal and impersonal in its application, tending to remove wealth and former station in life as factors in one's standing as a cadet, and ensuring equal opportunity for all to advance by personal effort and to enjoy those rewards that are earned. Throughout most of the “rat year,” the new cadet walks at rigid attention a prescribed route inside barracks known as the “rat line,” and double-times up and down barracks stairs. The cadet must be meticulous in keeping shoes shined, uniform spotless, hair cut, and in daily personal grooming. The new cadet must memorize school songs, yells, and other information.

ABSENCES FROM DUTY

Although provisions are made for recreation and necessary absence, justice cannot be done to studies or to military obligations if these absences are frequent or long. Saturday afternoons and Sundays are usually free of scheduled activities, given that a cadet has not incurred restrictions. There are also opportunities during the week for afternoon visits to town. The summer, Thanksgiving, winter, and spring furloughs compare with similar vacation periods at other colleges, and should be used for such purposes as medical and dental appointments, when needed. During the second semester of the freshman year, a new cadet is allowed a weekend furlough, the number of such furloughs increase as the cadet advances toward the First Class. Athletic teams make trips to participate in games, and publications staffs are granted absences to conduct their business. Cadets who make the Dean's Honor List are eligible for special furloughs, Academic Days, and First Class cadets may make a limited number of trips to be interviewed by prospective employers and to visit their homes for personal matters.

In addition to leaves of absence mentioned above, emergency leaves are allowed for the following reasons:

- * Deaths in the immediate family.
- * Urgent medical treatment of a specialized nature that cannot be obtained in Lexington.
- * Critical illness in the immediate family when the family physician requests the presence of the cadet at home.

Cadets and parents should realize that these rules are made and enforced for the benefit of the Corps as a whole and to improve the opportunities to learn. Therefore, parents should not ask permission for their son or daughter to be absent except as provided in the regulations, as absences disrupt academic work and cannot, in justice, be extended to one and denied another.

ACTIVITIES

Athletics

For cadets of special athletic ability, a highly developed program of intercollegiate athletics is maintained. VMI is a member of the Big South Conference for most sports. All sports compete at the NCAA Division I level. Teams are fielded in baseball, basketball, men's and women's cross-country, football, lacrosse, men's and women's rifle, men's and women's soccer, men's and women's swimming, men's and women's indoor track, men's and women's outdoor track, women's water polo and wrestling. Every cadet is welcomed as a candidate for participation in any sport in which he/she may be interested. All athletes must meet certain academic standards prior to participating in intercollegiate competition. Freshmen are certified by the NCAA Eligibility Center in accordance with NCAA Bylaw 14.3 prior to initial intercollegiate competition and then each semester thereafter by VMI in accordance with NCAA Bylaw 14.4. Upper-class cadet-athletes are similarly certified each semester by VMI.

Cadets who do not participate in varsity athletics are encouraged to participate in club sports or other athletic programs. Athletic competition develops the cadets physically and enhances their team building skills. This is an essential aspect of VMI's method of developing leadership in each of our cadets. Club sports compete with clubs at various colleges and universities throughout the country and fall under the guidance of the Office of Cadet Life.

Rat Challenge

“Rat Challenge” is an outdoor experiential program designed, organized, and supervised by the VMI Department of Physical Education.

The program is designed to foster self-confidence and physical conditioning in new cadets by creating training situations, stressful enough to demonstrate that they are capable of performing tasks, which surpass their previously self-imposed mental and physical limits. New cadets can expect to run distances (as much as 5 miles), conduct a forced march up a mountain, fight with pugil sticks, wrestle in a muddy pit, make a high-level entry into water, negotiate a number of group and individual obstacles, run two obstacle courses, and rock climb and rappel (approximately 150 feet).

The day-to-day operation of the program is administered by upperclass cadets (cadre) in order to provide opportunities in leading and teaching activities, which have calculated elements of risk, making safety and professionalism paramount. Many of the activities are derivatives of “Outward Bound” and various military training programs.

Participation in “Rat Challenge” is mandatory during the fall semester for all new cadets not involved in intercollegiate athletics. The program is conducted twice a week from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. during the fall semester.

Cadet Publications

Cadets write, edit, and manage the following periodic publications:

The Bomb, yearbook established in 1885 as the first college annual in the South.

The Cadet, weekly newspaper established in 1907.

Religious Services

Numerous opportunities are provided to encourage and develop the faith of our cadets. The Institute Chaplain oversees and develops ministry to nurture the Christian faith of our Corps. A non-denominational chapel service is conducted each Sunday of the year. A Chapel fellowship of cadets, staff and faculty families, local college students and community members make up a vibrant congregation of people who are committed to one another and to God. Our families are committed to the growth and nurturing of cadets and they regularly invite our students to their homes. Bible Study groups meet weekly on campus and in town. The Baptist Student Union, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Newman Club and Officer's Christian Fellowship meet the spiritual needs of a number of our cadets.

More than a dozen churches in Lexington offer worship opportunities and many of them provide campus ministries. Our students are frequently adopted by local church families and cared for while they are away from home. The Institute Chaplain is the liaison officer to the local churches and the point of contact for our students regarding concerns of a religious nature.

The religious convictions of our students are respected regardless of one's faith preference. While the Institute has a Christian Chaplain, the religious freedom of all students is assured through the Chaplain's guardianship.

Societies

Active student chapters of professional, technical, and scientific societies as well as local societies are sponsored by the various departments to stimulate a serious and professional approach to studies. Programs are planned and conducted by cadets. Visiting speakers address the societies, and often cadets prepare and deliver papers. Participation in regional conferences may be included in the activities. The following societies function at the Institute:

- American Chemical Society
- American Society of Civil Engineers
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers
- Beta Beta Beta, the biology honor society
- Beta Gamma Sigma, an honor society in business
- Delta Phi Alpha, an honor society in German
- Engineering Society
- English Society
- Eta Kappa Nu, an honor society in electrical engineering
- Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers
- Omicron Delta Epsilon, an honor society in economics
- Omicron Delta Kappa, an honor society for leadership and academic excellence
- Phi Alpha Theta, an honor society in history
- Phi Eta Sigma, national scholastic honor society
- Phi Kappa Phi, an honor society in all academic fields
- Pi Delta Phi, an honor society in French
- Phi Sigma Iota, an honor society in Modern Languages
- Pre-Law Society
- Sigma Delta Pi, an honor society in Spanish
- Sigma Pi Sigma, a national physics honor society
- Sigma Tau Delta, an honor society in English
- Society of Physics Students
- Tau Beta Pi, an honor society in engineering
- The Virginia History Society

Cadet Clubs and Organizations

The Office of Cadet Life manages over 50 cadet clubs, club sports and organizations at VMI. These include Civil War Roundtable, Timber Framers, College Republicans, College Democrats, Golf, Lacrosse, Martial Arts, Women's & Men's Rugby, Wrestling, Jiu Jitsu, Marathon, Powerlifting, Triathlon, Ultimate, Trap & Skeet, Men in Grey, Jazz Band, Boxing, Ice Hockey, Soccer, and Basketball. VMI is committed to providing opportunities for all cadets to participate in clubs, organizations, and extracurricular activities that will contribute to the total quality of cadet life.

Musical Organizations

Opportunities are plentiful for cadets with musical interests, both as participants and as listeners.

The VMI Glee Club presents concerts on Post and throughout the eastern United States. They appear on telecasts, tape cassette and CD albums, and in concerts at alumni gatherings and at various colleges; within the club is a small select group, The Sentinels.

The Regimental Band organized into its own company of 152 cadets within the Corps and provides music for ceremonies on Post as well as for athletic events. It has an impressive record of award winning performances across the state, country, and abroad. The band also performs in Presidential and Gubernatorial inaugural parades in Washington and Richmond. Within the band are smaller units such as the Pep Band, Brass Ensemble, Commanders (a dance band, which performs for dances and concerts both on and off post), Herald Trumpets, Quintet, VMI Drummers, and others.

The VMI Pipes and Drums provide music for ceremonies on Post and receive frequent requests to perform at special events throughout the United States. Cadets are taught to play the bagpipes or specialized drum techniques by a world-class bagpipe instructor. The unit is composed of approximately 30 cadets from all classes.

The Timmins-Gentry Music Society maintains a music collection in a room in the library to foster interest in classical music within the Corps. The English and Fine Arts Department and this society sponsor concerts at VMI that are offered to the entire Corps at no admission charge. The Society sponsors trips to musical events in nearby cities, and each spring members travel to New York to attend the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic.

Social Events

The Regimental S-7 is responsible for the Corps' social events such as movie nights, concerts and mixers. The Office of Cadet Life also oversees many social events throughout the year to include the Midwinter Formal, Ring Figure Weekend, Homecoming Hop and the Cadet Life Ski Trip.