

Staff Senate Constituency Report
Virginia Tech Board of Visitors
April 1, 2019
Presented by Robert Sebek, Staff Senate President

Good afternoon Rector Treacy, members of the Board of Visitors, President Sands, administrators and distinguished guests. It is an honor to present to you updates from staff at Virginia Tech.

Staff Senate hosted over 200 staff employees last week at our annual James McComas Staff Leadership Seminar. This year's theme was Empathic Leadership, and our speakers explored leading others while considering those followers' needs and concerns, an interest that has guided my leadership of the Senate. The day-long seminar was well received and planning has already begun for next year's seminar.

Today I am asking for Virginia Tech to invest in its future. We have done a great job investing in our students: we have amazing residence halls for our students to live in, award-winning dining halls where they can eat, innovative classrooms and laboratories where they can learn, and outstanding networks and technology for them to communicate and collaborate. It's now time to invest in the employees that support those endeavors: the custodians who keep those residence halls clean, the chefs, cooks and nutritionists that make those award-winning meals, the grounds workers who clear the snow to allow students to get to the classroom buildings, the lab managers who set up equipment and guide students in its use, and yes, the faculty who teach, advise, and collaborate with our students.

Last August, the Board discussed means to budget for increasing faculty and staff salaries, to increase faculty percentile placement among our peer institutions and staff salaries to market levels for this area. At the November meeting, you directed the administration to report on compensation levels, parking, and child care access.

I served on the Total Compensation task force that reviewed full-time and part-time staff wages and parking issues. The university seems to have committed to raising the floor of our lowest salary bands to a market level of \$12/hour. I appeal to the university administration to commit to similar pay reforms for our part-time staff. Our *Principles of Community* state that, "We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding." Paying part-time staff, who are doing the same work as full-time staff, significantly less does not affirm their value, nor respects their contributions to our campus.

Many of our part-time employees have worked in those positions for years—they are not transient employees. Some choose to remain part time because they cannot afford afterschool child care. Others are waiting to move into full time positions as they become available. Still others work in areas that are not active 12 months of the year, like Dining. [I understand the Division of Student Affairs is planning to review select, long-term, part-time positions in Dining for conversion to 9-month, full-time positions, which I highly endorse.]

Raising part-time wages is more complicated, since part-time positions are paid from operating budgets. Any solutions needs to account for this difference in funding to ensure departments and auxiliaries can afford market-level wages without a significant decrease in work force size.

On the other hand, no similar university task force investigated access to affordable child care. I have directed the Staff Senate's child care committee to continue to research solution proposals. I will present at tomorrow's Governance and Administration Committee session to follow up on my November presentation to the Board on access to child care, including the suggestion to form a similar university-wide task force to continue exploring short- and long-term solutions to the problem on access to affordable child care in the New River Valley region.

The need for child care options only continues to grow as the size of our work force and student body increases. The ability to recruit new faculty and graduate students with families will be impacted by the lack of capacity in the New River Valley as well as the lack of affordability. I understand any solution will cost the university money, but it is an investment that will pay off in terms of recruitment and retention of quality employees and students, better engagement and loyalty of employees, and a more productive work force.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Sebek
President, Staff Senate