

# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

Phone 540-464-7212

Fax 540-464-7719

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Dear Parents, Guardians, and Families,

As I write this letter, some cadets have already returned to post while the rats and the Old Corps will arrive in the very near future. The faculty and staff are looking forward to having students back at VMI after their long absence to begin the 2020-2021 academic year.

The fall semester will look different, of course, due to COVID-19. Along with all VMI employees, the faculty and staff on the academic team have been hard at work the past several months reimagining an academic program that will be safe and flexible, while still providing an excellent education for the cadets.

Our mission remains the same, to educate young men and women and to mold them into honorable citizen-soldiers needed by the military, private enterprise, the commonwealth, and the nation. To accomplish this in a COVID-19 environment, we have made modifications to the delivery of the academic program while creating an environment in compliance with evolving public health guidance.

VMI faculty are passionate about cadets and the opportunity to use our enviable 10 to 1 student/professor ratio to be able to teach and mentor your son or daughter. Safety protocols, along with the small physical size of most of our classrooms, prevent us from delivering all of our courses in person. **But we have worked hard to modify the academic day and classroom configurations to deliver as many courses in person as possible. Some of these changes are detailed below:**

- I am encouraged to report that about 44% of all courses will be delivered in person, 34% hybrid, and only 22% are completely virtual. "In person" means what it always has, where cadets will come to the classroom on each scheduled class day. "Hybrid" means that the professor will meet the students in person *at least one time per week* while meeting virtually at other times. We have not specified a single model for hybrid as we are allowing our faculty to determine what is best for each particular course. Hybrid courses



are needed because there are not enough classrooms with a sufficient number of seats to allow the course to meet in person each scheduled class period with appropriate social distancing. “Virtual” courses are those for which the faculty member has a personal situation which precludes their ability to be safely in the classroom or on post, or those courses which are being taught online for pedagogical purposes.

- For risk mitigation, classroom seating will be at most 50% of a room’s maximum capacity. Each classroom was reviewed by faculty and staff to confirm the configuration, and based on that information, furniture was moved to provide a safe environment. VMI Physical Plant employees spent the summer building framed, movable Plexiglas barriers for the classrooms. These barriers will allow the professor the option to remove his/her mask while having mobility in the front of the room. Cadets are required to wear their masks while in academic buildings and during the entirety of every in-person class. The same requirement applies during all in-person meetings in academic buildings with faculty or other cadets. We have acquired acrylic face shields and will make them available to cadets and faculty. The acrylic face shield can be worn in classrooms and labs in addition to the mask. Cadets will also be in assigned seats in all in-person courses for the duration of the semester which will help with contact tracing, if necessary. Disinfecting cleaning supplies will be available in each classroom and cadets will be required to wipe down their desk and chair prior to the start of the class. Building HVAC systems have been recalibrated to not just recirculate air, but also to periodically “flush” the building with outside air.
- A cadet might be in isolation or quarantine and not be able to come to the classroom for a period of time. Faculty have spent the summer creating course materials and delivery that will allow them to pivot from in person to virtual for one student or for the entire class, and then to pivot back to in person. Faculty were required to attend training sessions on best practices for virtual course delivery and the use of *Canvas*, our course management system. The look of Canvas was modified to make it more uniform, making it easier for students to navigate across their own academic program.
- The academic day has also been altered. Instead of 10 minutes between classes, there are now 15 minutes. While the academic day still begins at 8 a.m., the academic day ends at 4:30 p.m. instead of 4:00 p.m. This semester, with the exception of labs, course locations have been moved throughout post to take full advantage of the locations of our largest classrooms. Some of the largest classrooms are in Kilbourne Hall, where the ROTC units are housed. The extra five minutes between class periods is necessary to maximize the number of in-person courses, allowing for extra transit time between buildings. To free up some of these larger classrooms for more traditional academic courses during the 8 a.m. – 11 a.m. period, some ROTC



courses are being offered in the 11 a.m. and noon hours. In addition, to provide sufficient spacing in the mess hall (Crozet), the lunch period will be extended from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., and with some ROTC courses being offered during the lunchtime periods, we can make more efficient use of the academic day and available spaces.

- In non-COVID-19 times, we encourage cadets to avoid studying in barracks and to find alternative space for quiet study time. Given the physical distancing requirements and the necessity of hybrid and virtual courses this fall, study space in academic buildings during the academic day will be limited. We are asking cadets to treat barracks as study space, especially during the academic day, to allow cadets who are in virtual classrooms to be able to participate in the class without distraction. Please remind your cadet to be mindful of this need as we all work together to achieve a successful academic year.

**There are several related matters to the academic program that I would like to highlight.**

- Whether in person, hybrid, or 100% virtual, accountability and honor still matter and will be enforced. We have developed methods to take attendance when a class is not meeting in person. And of course, no matter the delivery mode of an academic course, observance of the honor code as it pertains to academic honesty and integrity is always assumed and expected of all cadets.
- We have spent the past few months making sure all faculty have the needed technology to deliver their courses. Cadets will have access to loaner laptops as needed. The IT help desk will be available, by appointment, for all the usual assistance for cadets. We have equipped classrooms with cameras (all have computer monitors/keyboards) to facilitate virtual learning.
- All academic support services are available: Preston Library, Registrar, Career Services, Miller Academic Center, Math Education Resource Center, Writing Center, Center for Undergraduate Research, International Programs, and meetings with faculty and athletic advisors. We anticipate that the library will be open every day of the week from morning to late into the evening. The only alteration of academic support access from normal is that in each of the non-library support areas, cadets will meet either virtually or, if in person, by appointment. To maintain a well-spaced and safe environment, drop-in meetings are not allowed. One exception to this policy will be allowed during the drop/add period the first week of the semester. During that week, drop-in visits to the Registrar will be allowed for cadets who need to modify their fall academic schedule.



**I would like to leave you with some closing thoughts:**

- One question often asked about virtual learning is why should students attend a college in person if some or all of their courses are virtual? At VMI, the answer is twofold. First, for many students, home life offers challenges and distractions to learning due to technology limitations, not to mention social/family challenges. Second, as important as academics are to each student, for all cadets, being in residence at VMI is vitally important to the leadership and followership opportunities outside the classroom, whether in military activities or in barracks life.
- While some of the look and feel of the academic program will differ from usual, this creative and dedicated academic team is focused on offering your son or daughter an exceptional education program. Faculty choose to be part of the VMI community because they desire to mentor these young men and women in the unique VMI system. COVID-19 has altered how we go about our daily responsibilities, but it will not prevent the academic team from fulfilling their part of the VMI mission.
- The entire 2020 operations plan can be found on the VMI COVID-19 website at <https://www.vmi.edu/fall-2020/>

Thank you for entrusting your student to our care. We look forward to welcoming you to the fall semester!



BG Robert W. Moreschi  
Deputy Superintendent for Academics and Dean of the Faculty

