

**Minutes of the Academic Affairs Committee Meeting**  
**0900-1100 hours**  
**11 January 2023**  
**Smith Hall Board Room/Teams**

Present (Via Teams\*):

<b>Board Members</b>	<b>Staff</b>		<b>Other</b>
Mr. Adams	MG Wins	LTC Eskam	Mr. Tingley
Mr. Fain*	BG Clark	LTC Hagy	
Mr. Garcia	BG Moreschi	LTC Ryan*	
Ms. Lord*	COL Bissell	LTC Young	
Mr. Scott*	COL McDonald*	Mrs. Battaglia	
	CAPT Sebastino	Ms. Dirscherl	
	COL Sen	Mr. Lawhorne	
	COL Wyatt	Mr. O’Leary	

Ms. Lord called the meeting to order at 0901.

The minutes of the 20 September 2022 meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee were unanimously approved (Attachment 1).

The minutes of the 14 November 2022 meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee were unanimously approved (Attachment 2).

LTC Hagy began the admissions update on recruiting for the Class of 2027 (Attachment 3) by reviewing the five major challenges: to increase inquiries, applications started, applications completed, and appointments, which would ultimately lead to the final goal of matriculating 450 new cadets in August. Based on the current admissions data and trends, he anticipates meeting the August ’23 matriculation goal.

LTC Hagy next reviewed Admissions’ efforts in “Funnel Management” to work with leads and prospects through the admissions process to matriculation. He emphasized the daily and weekly communications schedule used by the Admissions staff to move prospective cadets through the “funnel” using text messages, e-mail, phone calls, and mailed letters. He noted that, while the numbers of prospects at various points in the funnel may be lower than in years past, we are converting these prospects from level to level at much higher rates. He pointed out that approximately 50% of high school students have decided on the colleges to which they will apply by August, so the prospective cadets with which we are working for the Class of ’27 likely began the process prior to the implementation of the new recruiting strategies. The majority of the prospects in the funnel now are for the Classes of ’28 and beyond. For the Class of ’27, the emphasis is on converting “organic” prospects (i.e., those identified through VMI contacts) as opposed to “paid” leads (i.e., those purchased through a recruiting service) into matriculants. Ms. Lord asked about efforts to recruit at Virginia high schools, which LTC Hagy responded were ongoing. However, he noted that Admissions has received

some resistance to its efforts to schedule recruiting visits in the spring from high schools in the three major metropolitan areas of Virginia, because this is not a traditional recruiting period. He also noted that 31 January is a critical date in recruiting as only about 5-12% of new, college applications are started after that date.

LTC Hagy then provided an “Admissions Snapshot” for the Class of ’27 as of 10 Jan 2023 highlighting the following:

- 3.703 average GPA for appointed students.
- 444 students appointed (17.5% female/82.5% male). Only 43.7% of the appointments are from VA with 56.3% from out-of-state. Out-of-state applications tend to be submitted earlier in the recruiting cycle, and he expects to see an increase in the number of VA applicants going forward.
- 40 reservations/partial reservations. “Reservations” have paid a deposit, so we can say, at this point, there is a high likelihood we have seeded 8.9% of our target of 450 matriculants in August. Most of these students have some connection with VMI alumni.
- 770 additional prospects remain in the funnel at various stages.

Moving prospects from starting to completing an application is one of the most challenging steps in moving them through the funnel, because the application process is so cumbersome. To date, 84% of the prospects for the Class of ’27 have completed an application, which is an improvement from 67.6% of the prospects for the Class of ’26 at this same time last year. The appointment goal is 600 by 31 January, which is 18-20% higher than last year, and we are on track to reach that goal. This estimate is based on a 45% yield, which is higher than last year’s 42%, but lower than the average yield of approximately 50% from the years prior.

Mr. Fain asked if a 50% yield rate from appointments to matriculation is typical across higher education. LTC Hagy noted that it can differ depending on the strategy used. In comparison, Norwich and the Citadel employ a different strategy using a higher acceptance rate, but with the expectation of a lower yield. We try to be more selective and use a higher yield rate.

LTC Hagy emphasized that the number of inquiries is down compared to recent years, and that approximately 92% of those leads are from paid sources. This is higher than a “healthy” ratio of 80/20 of paid/organic leads. Most of the new leads between now and August will be organic, and he again noted that our conversion rate through the funnel this year has been very encouraging.

In response to a question from Mr. Adams, LTC Hagy explained how we count “inquiries” to include organic inquiries, which typically yield at a much higher rate. Mr. Adams also asked why we are not close to the preferred 80/20 ratio of paid/organic leads, which LTC Hagy attributed to a decrease in the number and quality of paid leads. He noted that we are still in the process of implementing the new recruiting strategies, such as targeting affinity groups likely to produce a higher yield rate, which started late for the

Class of '27. In addition, organic leads may still be down as a result of some carryover from COVID. COL Wyatt stated that he did not believe we have historically come close to the 80/20 ratio, and the push towards more organic leads is very recent.

In response to a question from Ms. Lord regarding the success of the furlough recruiting efforts by cadets, LTC Hagy said there have been 65 “clicks” associated with the QR (quick response) code provided to the cadets. However, he also noted there have been over 200 organic inquiries since mid-December associated with the QR code or otherwise, and he believes the cadet recruiting played a role in those inquiries.

Mr. Scott asked LTC Hagy if there are any areas in which he feels the recruiting efforts have underperformed. LTC Hagy replied that converting Post View accounts created to completed applications has been less than ideal, largely due to the cumbersome process currently in place, which is explained in a 14-page PDF document. However, Admissions is currently in the process of implementing a new customer relations management (CRM) system, which should help simplify the process for Classes after 2027. Mr. Adams raised the issue of VMI using the Common App for admissions. LTC Hagy responded that it was not implemented for the Class of '27 because the Admissions Office currently lacks the infrastructure and the staff that would be required to handle the increased number of applications that using the Common App would generate. LTC Young noted that we are in the process of modernizing our admissions/recruiting process making greater use of data analytics, but this needs to be contextualized with external factors affecting college admissions.

Mr. Fain asked about the marrying of the financial aid package with appointments. LTC Eskam clarified that we have changed the process from one that had gone step-by-step through admissions to financial aid to two processes running in parallel. Starting this year, Financial Aid no longer waits for an admissions decision to provide a financial aid package. Once they have received a prospect's FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and other financial aid documentation, her office is issuing the financial aid package. The wording in the package has been changed to state that the support is tentative and subject to change but will give the prospect a good idea as to the level of financial aid they could expect to receive. While it cannot definitively be said this change in procedure has helped increase the yield on appointments, so far, anecdotally it certainly seems possible.

Mr. Fain also asked if VMI was implementing a scholarship program for cadets who receive 3-year ROTC scholarships whereby VMI would pay for the fourth year of college. LTC Eskam said VMI has implemented the “Call to Duty Scholarship” for cadets who receive 3–4-year ROTC scholarships, through which VMI would pay for the cadets' room and board. However, there is no funding available from the Foundation to cover the fourth year of tuition for 3-year ROTC scholarship recipients. The Alumni Agencies have also established a similar scholarship to cover the room and board of quality cadets who have a 3.8 GPA called the “Alumni Scholarship.” Information on these new scholarships has been provided to applicable prospects as well as ROTC recipients who have not applied to VMI.

Mr. Scott asked about the number of prospects generated by VMI Alumni Chapters and whether we could create a competition between the Chapters to generate leads. LTC Hagy said Admissions actively works with the Chapters, which regularly provide leads, and he likes the idea of creating a competition. Leads received from the Chapters are labeled “high priority” and given a little extra attention by Admissions helping them through the funnel. LTC Hagy then provided an update on recruiting efforts implemented/completed highlighting personnel changes in Admissions, CRM procurement, guaranteed admissions agreements, “Infinite Scholars” recruiting fairs, and data sharing with ROTC.

LTC Eskam provided an updated status on financial aid packages that have been provided to date to include both new prospects for the Class of '27 as well as returning cadets. As was mentioned previously, these packages are estimates and are worded as such. LTC Eskam said that she would explain any changes to the packages to the recipients as budgets and costs are finalized. Financial Aid has also received many FAFSA's that are not linked, which means the student requested the information be sent to VMI, but they have not yet applied for admission. They are following up with these students to prompt them to apply.

In response to a question from Mr. Scott about the impact of changes to financial aid on the retention of upper-class cadets, LTC Eskam explained that cadets who are placed on Academic Probation lose their federally funded financial aid. These cadets are informed that they may appeal this loss of aid; however, the percentage of cadets who submit appeals has traditionally been very low. She is working to increase this percentage. Additionally, approximately 90% of the financial aid we provide to cadets is need based. However, if their financial situation changes, their need-based aid could be reduced making it difficult for the cadets to return to VMI. She is working with the Foundation to help these “fringe” cadets for whom a few thousand dollars in non-need-based aid could make the difference in their ability to return. In addition, LTC Eskam noted that she has been reviewing the restrictions associated with our scholarships and working with the Foundation to try and reduce excessive restrictions that have resulted in some scholarships not being awarded. Currently, the process for reviewing cadet eligibility and awarding scholarships is done manually. Implementation of a CRM should help improve the efficiency of awarding available scholarships. Further complicating the awarding of scholarships is that the authority to award them may reside in another department, which requires further coordination before the financial aid package can be finalized.

In response to a question from Ms. Lord regarding athletic scholarships, LTC Eskam said she has received two lists of scholarships from Athletics, but she does not have the breakdown by team. MG Wins noted that different sports have different windows in which the athletes can be recruited, which would affect when those scholarship decisions would be made.

LTC Hagy began briefing the Committee on enrollment marketing; specifically, a one-time, admit/yield campaign to be run through the Communications and Marketing

(C&M) Department to help Admissions build out the Class of '27. He described the two-pronged strategy of the campaign to be launched at the end of January, which will use targeted banner ads and videos customized to match the interests of appointed students. The videos are delivered through text and e-mail. The focus of this campaign is to push students through the final steps of the admissions process to pay a deposit and secure a reservation in the Class of '27. LTC Young asked how we are addressing the parents of these students, since the parents typically play a key role in college decisions. LTC Hagy replied that the Parents Council has been engaged in reaching out to these parents; however, COL Wyatt noted that parent data for these students is sometimes lacking. This should improve with the implementation of a CRM and enable increased engagement with parents.

COL Wyatt briefed the Committee on additional marketing efforts beyond the Class of '27. He began with a description of our efforts in the area of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). VMI signed a contract with a company named BrightEdge, which examines our website and makes recommended changes to increase our rankings in relevant keyword searches. In the two months since we have worked with BrightEdge, we have seen positive results through improved search rankings. However, this is an ongoing process since search algorithms are regularly updated and our competitors also employ SEO to gain an advantage. In addition, the C&M web staff spent the better part of the 21-22 AY updating our website and creating new content geared towards admissions. These efforts have been successful based on a comparison of web traffic from September to December 2022 and the same period in 2021, which shows increase traffic on Admissions and Financial Aid web pages. He also provided an update on C&M staffing.

In response to a question from Mr. Garcia, LTC Hagy reiterated his confidence in meeting the goal of 450 matriculants in August based on current trends and the recruiting efforts currently underway. Mr. Fain asked if any additional resources are needed to meet the goal. LTC Hagy responded that currently, they have the necessary resources including those needed to procure and implement a CRM. However, moving forward he expects that additional staffing will be needed to support the increased number of inquiries in the top of the funnel resulting from improved recruitment strategies and adapting the Common App.

MG Wins emphasized that the current, competitive nature of college admissions resulting from the national trend of declining enrollment makes it imperative that we do not “take our foot off the gas” in January-February as competing schools will continue to recruit our prospective cadets to change their decisions. LTC Hagy reiterated that we continue to contact all students in the funnel on a weekly basis. Ms. Lord asked about our efforts in recruiting international students. LTC Hagy noted that discussions are ongoing to determine our strategy for expanding in this area going forward, and Admissions has begun to look at vendors that provide recruiting leads for international students.

The Committee adjourned at 1035 hours.