

Minutes of the Academic Affairs Committee Meeting
1300-1400 hours
20 March 2023
Smith Hall Board Room/Teams

Present (Via Teams*):

Board Members	Staff	
Mr. Adams*	MG Wins	LTC Hagy
Ms. Chambers*	BG Moreschi	LTC Ryan
Mr. Fain	COL Bissell	LTC Young
Mr. Garcia*	COL McDonald*	Ms. Dirscherl
Ms. Lord	CAPT Sebastino	Mr. Lawhorne
Mr. Scott*	COL Wyatt*	Mr. O’Leary*
Mr. Watjen*	LTC Eskam	Mr. Tyree

Ms. Lord called the meeting to order at 1300 hours.

The minutes of the 27 January 2023 meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee were unanimously approved (Attachment 1).

LTC Hagy began the Admission, Financial Aid, and Enrollment Marketing Update (Attachment 2) for the Class of 2027 with an Admission Snapshot as of 17 March. As of that date, 858 students have been appointed to the Class of 2027 as well as two re-admits. The gender breakdown of appointees is 83.7% male/16.3% female. The racial breakdown is 72.6% white, 16.3% single-race minority, 4.7% dual race, and 6.4% did not report their race. He reported on prospective cadets still “in the funnel” noting that three applications are complete and ready to be reviewed. There are 254 incomplete applications, which have been submitted, but are missing some required information; another 193 applications have been started, but not submitted. In addition, 235 Post View accounts have been established with no corresponding application submitted for a total of 684 prospective cadets remaining in the funnel. In response to a question from Mr. Fain on the difference between the aforementioned categories, LTC Hagy responded that Admissions has a 90% conversion goal of the incomplete applications.

LTC Hagy reported there were 128 reservations and 87 partial reservations for a total of 215 deposits as of 17 March; this number has since increased to 228 as of this morning. In response to a question from Ms. Lord, LTC Hagy clarified that a “deposit” indicates the student has paid the \$300 deposit and has submitted all required admissions paperwork excluding medicals. Prospective cadets who have received an appointment and subsequently taken some action (e.g., paid the deposit, submitted required paperwork) are classified as “appointed” status. We currently have 301 students in this category. A “reservation” status indicates the deposit has been paid, all required admissions paperwork has been received, and the student has been medically cleared. Based on these numbers, we can safely say we have seated approximately 48% of our goal of 450 new cadets matriculating in August.

LTC Hagy provided a detailed breakdown of the funnel data noting that inquiries are still down compared to last year; more so compared to 2-3 years ago. However, the “rate of loss” from the funnel has decreased over time thanks to the “boots on ground” recruiting effort. For the fifth week in a row, the number of Post View accounts created has increased. Applications started and completed are down compared to last year, but – again – the rate of loss is decreasing. In response to a question from Mr. Fain about the downward trend in inquiries in recent years, LTC Hagy speculated that we have moved away from paid, generic lead generation, which may produce large numbers of inquiries from students who are unlikely to come to VMI, to more targeted inquiries to students in affinity groups, such as those who attend a military high school, live near a military base, or participate in JROTC. This is a shift from “quantity” to “quality.” MG Wins commented how the “Don’t Do Ordinary” marketing campaign, which was launched when Third Barracks opened to help increase enrollment, was discontinued once we passed our enrollment goals. Mr. Adams expressed the opinion that the Institute should hire a public relations firm to help with marketing and boost enrollment, as well as in other areas. LTC Hagy provided some additional clarification on the funnel data and noted there has been some confusion over the “priority date” listed on the website where prospective cadets understood that to be the deadline date. Admissions has been contacting students who are still in the funnel to inform them that we are still accepting applications for fall 2023. In response to a question from Ms. Lord, LTC Eskam explained how Financial Aid works with Admissions to move students from “appointed” status to the “reservation/partial reservation” status.

LTC Hagy provided an overview of the academic quality of the Class of 2027 as compared to the previous three classes. However, he noted that there is no way to compare “point-in-time” data in this area, so all information from previous classes is based on the final, matriculating cadets. He referenced the “Average VMI Ranking,” which represents the score assigned by Admissions to each application using a standard rubric; approximately 65% of this score is based on academic performance. The average score of those students appointed so far (31.1) compares favorably to recent class averages. Other measures, such as GPA, academic GPA, and class rank, also compare favorably to those of recent classes. All of these standards of evaluation have remained unchanged from the standards used in previous years giving us a true “apples to apples” comparison to previous classes. Ms. Chambers asked about the low number of applications turned down compared to previous years and questioned how we could have such a low turn down rate while still maintaining average academic quality. She asked if we were appointing students with a broader range of academic quality in order to maintain the average. Mr. Adams asked if this is the result of a smaller pool of higher quality applicants. LTC Hagy speculated that may be the case as the current labor market, which makes it relatively easy to get a good paying job, has led to many borderline students to go directly into the job market and forgoing college. Many others in this category are going to community college instead. Mr. Garcia also noted that grade inflation has been widespread in high schools since the COVID-19 pandemic and may have also helped boost the apparent quality of the appointees. Mr. Adams asked LTC Hagy to run a comparison of average GPA for students who have reservations/partial

reservations in the Class of 2027 to the average GPA of matriculants for the previous three classes and provide that to the Committee.

LTC Hagy briefed the committee on the latest fall enrollment projections for the Class of 2027 based on historical, point-in-time data over the past three years to estimate how many more Post View accounts might be created, and how many more applications might be started/completed for this class. However, historical, point-in-time data for appointments is not available, so his projected appointments are based on low-to-high ranges. Based on this information, he estimates we will make 975 to 1100 appointments. Assuming this range of appointments, the final number of matriculants would depend on the yield on those appointments. While he does not believe we will reach the historic yield rate of 50%, he is optimistic we will exceed last year's yield rate of 43%. He noted that the admit/yield campaign is going well, and that we are seeing increases in deposits and reservations/partial reservations. Assuming we are able to achieve a yield rate of 45-46%, he projects we will matriculate a class in the range of 439 to 495.

LTC Hagy then provided updates on several Admissions activities. He reported on the status of implementing the new CRM (customer relations management) system, which should be fully implemented by 1 July 2023. Admissions is working with a new sophomore/junior lead vendor named Spark 451 and providing them with historical data they will use for predictive modeling. This will produce a list of names ranked according to their likelihood of matriculating, which will enable Admissions to concentrate their efforts on the best prospects. In addition, he reported that we have sent almost 27 thousand text messages to prospects in the Class of 2027 through the Mongoose Cadence texting platform, and that the Common App kick-off is scheduled for 24 March 2023, which will be available for applicants to the Class of 2028. He reported on recruitment/yield efforts conducted to date and scheduled going forward, which included in-person and virtual recruiting events and guaranteed admissions agreements with military high schools. In response to a question from Mr. Adams, COL Bissel reported that Open House attendance is returning to pre-COVID levels. In response to a question from Ms. Lord, LTC Hagy reported that the new admissions application would ask if an applicant is applying through a guaranteed admissions agreement so that we may assess the effectiveness of the agreements. In closing, he reported that Admissions currently has two full-time and one part-time positions vacant, which has been challenging in recruiting, but the challenge has been lessened thanks to the efforts of alumni and others across Post.

LTC Hagy provided an update on the admit/yield campaign, which included an overview of the campaign's activities. Currently, the campaign is focused on (1) generating additional, last-minute applications, and (2) targeting appointed students who have not yet paid a deposit and secured a reservation. Appointed students are sent custom videos tailored to their individual profile. These personalized ads are designed so the applicant can see themselves at VMI. The campaign will run through October 2023 and will transition from enhancing the numbers in the Class of 2027 to a focus on attracting applicants to the Class of 2028. He noted that Admissions has requested funding support in its FY24 budget request to continue the campaign when the current contract expires.

LTC Young commented that there is a two-part effort underway. The first part is focused on reaching our goals and seating the Class of 2027. However, there is a second effort to modernize and improve the admissions/recruiting system going forward. Ms. Chambers reiterated her concerns about the high acceptance rate compared to recent years, and LTC Hagy reviewed the standards against which applicants are evaluated, which has not changed from recent years. While we do not have a minimum GPA cut-off, the evaluation rubric is so heavily weighted to academics (65%) that it drives up the academic quality of appointees. She asked LTC Hagy to provide the range of GPA's of the students who have been accepted into the Class of 2027 at the April 2023 Board meeting. She is concerned that, if these matriculants are not of sufficient academic quality, that academic support services may not be adequate to meet increased demand. MG Wins emphasized that we are focused on recruiting students who are fully prepared for all the challenges presented by VMI and providing them with the support needed to be successful. Efforts are underway to enhance the support services offered to ensure all cadets – especially Rats – have access to these programs.

LTC Eskam provided a Financial Aid update reporting that 435 financial aid packages have been offered to prospective cadets in the Class of 2027. In addition, 214 applications for the “Call to Duty” scholarship have been received. This scholarship covers room and board for ROTC scholarship recipients, and 45 have been awarded. They have also awarded four “Alumni Scholarships,” which are essentially Call to Duty scholarships (i.e., room and board) made to cadets not enrolled in ROTC. While the priority is seating the Class of 2027, Financial Aid is also preparing financial aid packages for the upperclassmen so those cadets will know the aid they will receive to return to VMI. She outlined two focused efforts over the past couple of weeks using non-restricted financial from the Foundation, which is not need-based. First, they have been offering high caliber students, who did not receive an Honors Program interview, named scholarships for which they are eligible to encourage them to enroll. Second, in an effort to increase deposits, they have been offering \$1,000 scholarships to appointees if they pay their deposit within a specified time frame. She noted that the total funds spent on financial aid for the Class of 2027 should be comparable to recent years; however, she expects to generate additional student revenue by leveraging Foundation scholarship funds to attract students who might not otherwise be able to afford to attend VMI. BG Moreschi noted that there is a group of students who received an Honors Program interview, but who were not awarded a merit scholarship and are not on the alternate list, who should be targeted for Foundation scholarships as this is also a group of a high caliber students we would like to enroll. LTC Eskam agreed and asked for that list of students. In response to a question from Mr. Scott, LTC Hagy reported that Admissions has “softened” the language in the Honors Program denial letters to include offers of other scholarships in order to make these students feel wanted and encourage them to enroll. LTC Eskam also noted that, while the deadline for some scholarship applications has passed, she is using non-restricted Foundation funds to make alternative offers of support. In addition, she reported that Financial Aid continues to follow-up with students who have submitted their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to VMI, but who have not yet been appointed to encourage them to take the necessary steps in the admissions process.

Mr. Fain revisited the issue of acceptance rates, and he noted that VMI's acceptance rate of 64% in 2022 was fourth lowest in the state. LTC Hagy noted that many schools have shifted to a higher acceptance rate across a broader range of academic quality with the understanding that increased competition will lead to a lower yield rate. However, once the students are enrolled, these schools provide them with the assistance they need to be successful. MG Wins noted that Virginia Tech plans to increase the size of its Corps of Cadets to 2,000 creating increased, competition for VMI. In response to a question from Mr. Adams about the definition of "acceptance," LTC Hagy stated the acceptance rate is the percent of students admitted from those who apply. LTC Hagy noted that some confusion was created by the presentation at the January 2023 Board meeting by COL Sen and MAJ Murray, because the acceptance numbers they reported did not follow the standard criteria used by SCHEV (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia) for determining acceptance percentages. BG Moreschi noted that, while SCHEV carefully moderates degree programs in order to avoid competition for students amongst state colleges and universities, they do not appear to be concerned with competition between VMI and Virginia Tech over students interested in receiving an education in a military environment. In response to a question from Mr. Scott about our efforts to retain cadets, COL Bissel outlined the efforts to identify reasons behind cadet attrition and to address those reasons. LTC Eskam added information on how Financial Aid is working with cadets to help them retain their federal financial aid, which can help with retention.

The Committee adjourned at 1426 hours.