



BOARD OF VISITORS

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, September 12, 2023

2:00-3:30 pm

PRESTON LIBRARY

ROOM 701

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA 24450-0304

Board of Visitors

Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion Committee Meeting Agenda

September 13, 2023

Smith Hall Boardroom

AGENDA

- I. Review and Approval of the August Inclusive Excellence Committee Minutes
- II. Meet 2023-24 Cadet Facilitators
- III. Revisit 2023-24 Cadet Inclusive Excellence Training
- IV. Braver Angels Debate – September 25, 2023
- V. Discussion on Revising the Committee By-laws
- VI. Report from West Point Diversity Conference

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE
Lexington, Virginia
Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Committee
Thursday, August 25, 2023

Minutes:

Minutes:

Board Members Present: | Chairman, Mr. Lester Johnson, Jr. '95 | Nancy Phillips | Rear Adm. (Ret.) Terence E. McKnight '78 | Col. (Ret.) James P. Inman '86

Online Board Members: | President, Thomas “Tom” Watjen '76 | C. Ernest Edgar IV '87 | Meaghan Mobbs | Damon Williams '90 | Scot W. Marsh '81

Non-Members: | MG. Cedric T. Wins | Chief of Staff John Young | COL. Bill Wyatt | MAJ. Briana Williams | Vaughn McBean

Chairman Lester Johnson welcomed everyone to the BOV before allowing new and online members to introduce themselves. The April meeting minute was amended to include Meaghan Mobs, whose name was inadvertently absent from the attendee record. The motion to approve the April 28th meeting minutes with the recommended changes was approved unanimously. The Chairman read the by-laws verbatim and highlighted the Inclusive Excellence Committee's goals and responsibilities.

Major General Cedric T. Wins Remarks:

Major General Cedric Wins discussed that in 2021, the board of visitors assigned a task to VMI to create an inclusive excellence program. A Chief Diversity Officer was hired to lead this initiative, and her primary duties were to establish the program and submit an inclusive excellence plan by early September. Initially, she worked alone, but additional staff were hired with allocated funding over time.

During the first year, the program was developed using curated products based on best practices from various sources, including military programs. In the second year, the training was further refined. MAJ Briana Williams is now the acting director, and she will provide insights into the program's evolution, focusing on leadership development and experiential learning. The goal is to foster young leaders who appreciate diversity and its role in building strong organizations. Efforts are also being made to strengthen connections within the barracks, Cadet Governance, and the Center of Leadership Ethics. This update reflects the current status of the program.

MAJ Briana Williams Remarks:

MAJ Briana Williams expressed gratitude for the support and input received during the summer while developing the inclusive excellence training. She mentioned considering feedback from various sources, including advice from students and board members. Additionally, the training was structured to have different levels and tailored lessons for each class of cadet. She highlighted the importance of integrating facilitator training into VMI's mission, aligning it with the leadership development model in the Center of Leadership and Ethics.

Major Williams also acknowledged the guidance from COL Dave Gray and Dr. Tucker at the CLE. Also, she mentioned collaborating with Major General Cedric T. Wins to make the training more relevant to the Cadets' experiences and interests. The training aligns with VMI's mission and the leadership development system. The CLE's leadership theme for the academic year focuses on adapting to a complex environment, which ties into the BOV executive committee's goals and the inclusive excellence plan adopted in July 2021. Correspondingly, the Department of Defense and the NCAA emphasize the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion, with the NCAA having specific goals for Division One institutions.

Guest Speakers:

Two Cadets from the inclusive excellence training facilitators program spoke at the meeting. The first speaker aspired to be part of the cadre this year but was not selected. Despite this, she wanted to find a way to engage with RATS (new cadets) and her fellow cadets, actively contributing to VMI's culture and promoting diversity. Drawing on her parents' experience at a federal service academy, she highlighted the distinctions between the two institutions and the unique, diverse perspectives they offer. Ultimately, she aims to make a meaningful impact and leave her mark at VMI.

The second speaker wanted to become a diversity training facilitator at VMI because her dyke was a facilitator, and they believe Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DOI) is about understanding and respecting each other's differences. She found last year's training less engaging but is committed to creating a better curriculum this time. Her final remark emphasized that DOI will always be about speaking for the unspoken and being comfortable with the uncomfortable, which is what VMI was all about.

Furthering Discussions:

Discussion 1 Share Identity/Characteristics

Prompted by MAJ William's presentation on the Cadet shared identity exercise, one board member asked whether the activity's objective considered the framework surrounding social psychology, specifically its

centrality and emotional significance (valence) in a person's self-perception. The member emphasized the importance of the VMI's training exercise in promoting unity around a shared value system and individual characteristics.

In response to the question, MAJ Williams stated that Facilitators would guide conversations to explore the shared values and identities among participants to promote understanding and productive discussions among participants. She further remarked that during a preview activity with facilitators, it was surprising to discover that both men and women identified their gender as a significant aspect of their identity, even in an environment that might be predominantly male. Additionally, she discovered similar commonalities when discussing religion, which brings families and communities together, transcending specific religious differences. In closing, MAJ Williams highlighted that the goal of the activity was to identify commonalities and foster productive conversations among participants.

In finalizing the discussion, the board member acknowledges the importance of recognizing that individuals may present themselves differently due to their diverse identities. The primary objective at VM.I. is to cultivate leaders characterized by shared core beliefs, such as selfless service, responsibility, and kindness. While it's crucial to acknowledge and understand differences, the speaker emphasizes that the ultimate focus should be on achieving an expected outcome. This outcome is the development of leaders of character who are united by their shared values, including service, selflessness, and sacrifice.

Discussion 2 | Core Values

MAJ Williams's presentation on developing core values among cadets highlighted the use of Word Cloud to identify the commonalities of core values within a specified group. A decision was made to eliminate the word honor in the activity, assuming it was already a prevailing value among all Cadets given the standard of VMI's regimental requirements. MAJ Williams added that the decision was made solely by Cadet Facilitators after discussing it among themselves. Consequently, a board member asked for clarification on whether the decision to leave out the word "honor" in the activity was unanimous. Upon invitation from MAJ Williams, the Cadet guest speaker responded by stating that the primary focus of the training was to explore the diversity of core values among Cadets and noted that if honor remained a top value for everyone, then the activity lacked diversity. Choosing to attend VMI is a commitment to honor, and using words like achievement, empathy, and duty all encompass the concept of honor.

In closing, the board member highlighted cadet facilitators' significant impact on the committee's meetings. The member stressed that these facilitators have consistently improved and transformed the program over the

years, serving as role models for other cadets and helping the organization understand how the Corps is embracing the training. The member also expressed the hope that cadet facilitators will continue to be included in future meetings because of their invaluable contributions and effectiveness in improving the training activities.

Other Topics Discussed:

- Shared Value and Characteristics.
- Circle of Influence
- Reflecting on Core Values

With no further items tabled, the meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Inclusive Excellence

Cadet Facilitators & Revisit 2023-24 Training



Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion

Virginia Military Institute

Lexington, Virginia 24450

Proposed Inclusive Excellence Training for 2023-24

This training aligns with:

- VMI's Mission
 - *to produce educated, honorable men and women, prepared for the varied work of civil life, imbued with love of learning, confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership, possessing a high sense of public service, advocates of the American Democracy and free enterprise system, and ready as citizen-soldiers to defend their country in time of national peril.*
- VMI's Leader Development System
- CLE theme for 2023-24: Adapting to a Complex Environment
- BOV Executive Committee Objectives 1 and 2 adopted in July 2021:
 - To create and foster a more diverse VMI
 - To create and foster a safe, equitable and inclusive environment for all on post
- Inclusive Excellence Plan: Goal 2, Objective 1 & Goal 3, Objective 1:
 - Goal 2 (1) – Create and maintain a climate that acknowledges and celebrates diversity and employs inclusive practices throughout its daily operations, aligned with VMI's vision, mission, and values
 - Goal 3 (1) – Offer courses, art/artistic events, and learning opportunities at the undergraduate level that achieve DE&I learning goals
- Department of Defense Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan 2022-23
- The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Position Statement (excerpt):

While there are no specific benchmarks regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts for SACSCOC member institutions, all are encouraged to continue to regularly engage in thoughtful discussions about diversity, to intentionally cultivate and sustain inclusive and equitable processes, and to implement strategies to create and maintain respectful and supportive learning environments in which to learn and work.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Inclusion Statement (excerpt):

As a core value, the NCAA believes in and is committed to diversity, inclusion and gender equity among its student-athletes, coaches, and administrators. We seek to establish and maintain an inclusive culture that fosters equitable participation for student-athletes and career opportunities for coaches and administrators from diverse backgrounds. Diversity and inclusion improve the learning environment for all student-athletes and enhance excellence within the Association.

Rat/Fourth Class Activity

Objective: Understand what DOI is and their individual identities within VMI's culture.

Leadership Development Stage: Lead Self/Followership

VMI Core Leadership Principles: Respect & Honor

Activity: Social Identity Wheel – Facilitators will give a brief overview of DOI and the dimensions of diversity. They will then hand out the social identity wheel and give students time to complete it.

Facilitators will emphasize that it is okay to leave a section of the wheel blank if a student is uncomfortable with sharing or unsure about their answer. While students are completing their wheels, facilitators will set up signs with the various identity categories around the room. Once the wheels are complete the facilitators will read off four or five questions about the wheel. Student participants will move to the sign that best fits their answer and comfort level. Once every participant has made a choice, they will discuss with the small group at their station why they chose that particular aspect of their identity. At the end, students will share as a larger group what they learned about each other and themselves.

Goals: To encourage participants to think about their identities and how they fit within society and the VMI community. They will have the opportunity to reflect on how various identities can be more keenly felt in different social contexts. Students will start to recognize why some identities are more important to other people. For example, gender could be an identity that is more keenly felt by female students at VMI. Participants should become aware of the shared identities within their class and company but also the richness of the diversity that is present. To lead themselves, it's important to respect and understand themselves and their unique identities. Furthermore, to successfully integrate within the system of followership under the VMI Honor Code, they must value their shared identity as

Rats and future VMI cadets. Participants will understand that although disparate experiences and backgrounds have brought them to VMI, they are united in the fact that they are each committed to embodying the VMI Honor Code and way of life.

Third Class Activity

Objective: Analyze Their Own Biases

Leadership Development Stage: Influence Others

VMI Core Leadership Principles: Fairness & Trust

Activity: Circle of Influence Bias Assessment – Facilitators will give an overview to cadets about various types of bias. Cadets will come to understand that we all have biases and that bias originates from the natural tendency of our brains to find mental shortcuts when processing large volumes of information, this is known as heuristics. Facilitators will then lead cadets in the circle of influence bias assessment activity to analyze their peer relationships. Cadet participants will be asked to list five to ten influential people in their lives who are not family members. The people can be friends, coaches, teachers, religious leaders, etc. After the names are listed facilitators will read out some of the dimensions of diversity such as race, gender, religion, educational background, etc. The dimensions of diversity to be assessed in the activity will be up to the facilitators' discretion. Cadets will then place check marks by the names of the people on the worksheet who share the same dimension of diversity as themselves. For example, if educational background were the category cadets would place a check next to the people on their list who are or have pursued undergraduate education. Once the chosen diversity categories are read and checks have been made, facilitators will lead cadets in a discussion about what they noticed about the activity. They may ask questions such as, "Are any dimensions of diversity absent in your close circle of influence?" or "Who do you feel most comfortable discussing sensitive or hot-button topics with such as politics or religion?" Facilitators will then ask how many cadets find their circle to be diverse and explore what made the circle diverse. For cadets who felt their circle was not as diverse, they may discuss why they think that is. Reasons could include regional

location or lack of transportation to attend cultural events. Facilitators will emphasize that having a homogenous circle of influence does not mean you should get rid of your friends or that something is wrong. Actually, most people tend to have fairly homogenous social influences. However, as future leaders, you may want to consider avenues for adding more diverse perspectives to your thinking. Facilitators will offer suggestions such as reading a book, listening to a podcast, or inviting someone who is different from you to hang out. Cadets who have a very diverse circle are encouraged to continue to pursue diverse perspectives and experiences.

Goals: Cadets should understand that everyone has biases but that it is important to search for our biases and attempt to address them. Mitigating our own biases and identifying our blind spots is essential to making leadership decisions that are fair, building trust with followers, and influencing others. By assessing the people who influence them, cadets can begin to think about the experiences that lead them to develop their judgments, preferences, and decision-making skills.

Second Class Activity

Objective: Reflect on Their Core Values

Leadership Development Stage: Lead within the Organization

VMI Core Leadership Principle: Honor

Activity: Core Values Reflection – Facilitators will hand out a values word bank sheet and a core values assessment worksheet. You will notice that honor is not a word on the values word bank. This is because we assume that honor is a value that every cadet holds dear and is the leadership principle for the activity. Selecting from the lists of values, cadets will be asked to place their values in categories ranging from “always valued” to “least valued”. Each category can have a maximum of 13 values. All spaces on the values worksheet should be filled out at the end of the first round. Over the next minutes, cadets will be asked to narrow the values lists they have created. Facilitators will remind cadets that narrowing the list does not mean the value has been discarded from their lives. The point is for each cadet to identify their core values. Cadets will reduce their list to 10 values and then five. Finally, cadets will continue to condense their lists until they each have two core values that they are willing to share with others. Facilitators will then pull up a Poll Everywhere QR code for cadets to scan and share their values in a class word cloud. Then in small groups, cadets will be asked to share (as much as they are comfortable) what their two core values are. Facilitators will lead the class in discussions about the process for narrowing their values list, the difficulties they faced, and the ways in which cadet’s core values show up in their lives at VMI. They might ask how their core values align with the mission of VMI or if there are times when their values have been challenged, particularly when it comes to decision-making. Facilitators will also ask the group to examine the class word cloud and consider the benefits of having a corps whose members share different core values.

Goals: Cadets will have the opportunity to reflect on and explore their core values. They will be able to see what the common values are within their company and what differences may exist. Conversations about their values can help cadets understand the various cultural contexts that created their values. As the second class prepares to assume leadership of the corps, having another opportunity to reflect on their values will help to reinforce the connections between their walk on the VMI Leader Journey and the true meaning of honorable living.

First Class Activity

Objective: Design and develop solutions to diversity-related problems

Leadership Development Stage: Command

VMI Core Leadership Principle: Lead-by-example

Activity: Guest Speaker Event - The speaker will be a military or industry leader who is able to discuss how diversity and inclusion-related situations have played out in their career and impacted their decision-making.

Goal: Cadets should understand how integrating diverse perspectives can strengthen teams. Studies show that diverse teams are smarter, more innovative, and experience less turnover than their homogenous counterparts. However, achieving the benefits of a diverse team is not as simple as having a group of people from various backgrounds working together. To get the most out of diverse teams all members must feel included, represented, and that they belong. The work of leading a diverse group can have moments of misunderstanding, tension, and even conflict that must be skillfully managed to see positive gains. By allowing cadets an opportunity to learn how a high-achieving leader has effectively engaged with diversity and inclusion, cadets will gain a greater appreciation for DOI and why making a practice of understanding the diversity that people bring with them to their jobs is an essential leadership skill.

Inclusive Excellence

Activity Worksheets



Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion

Virginia Military Institute

Lexington, Virginia 24450

Rat/Fourth Class Inclusive Excellence Activity Worksheet (Front)

Only fill in the sections you are comfortable with

PERSONALITY

YOUR NAME

RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL AFFILIATION

GENDER

ACADEMIC MAJOR

NCAA STATUS

PLACE OF ORIGIN

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

POLITICAL VIEWS

RACE

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

ONE CORPS. ONE VMI.

Activity adapted for VMI from Inclusive Teaching at University of Michigan

Rat/Fourth Class Inclusive Excellence Activity Worksheet (Back)

Examples of Social Identity Groups

You can use your own respectful terms



Academic Major	Economics, Biology, In major but Undecided
Political Views	Conservative, Republican, Liberal, Moderate Democrat, Independent
Religious or Spiritual Affiliation	Agnostic, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Atheist
Race	Indigenous, Black, Asian, Biracial, White Multiracial
Gender	Female, Male, Transgender, Nonbinary, Cisgender, Gender non-conforming
Socio-economic Status	Lower Middle Class, Working Class, Upper Class, Middle Class, Upper Middle Class
Place of Origin	Virginia, West Coast, USA, India, Europe
NCAA	Athlete, Lacrosse player, Non-athlete
Sexual Orientation	Gay, Straight, Bisexual, Questioning Lesbian, Queer, Asexual

Activity adapted for VMI from Inclusive Teaching at University of Michigan

Second Class Inclusive Excellence Activity Word Bank (Front)

VALUES WORD BANK



<p>Achievement accomplish goals & successfully complete projects</p>	<p>Aggression taking forceful and dominate action</p>	<p>Ambition the desire and determination to work hard to achieve something</p>	<p>Authenticity being genuine and true to who you are</p>	<p>Belonging to fit in and be an integrated member of group</p>
<p>Beauty aesthetics. Shapes, colors, forms that are visually pleasing</p>	<p>Candor frank. expressing your opinions in way that is direct but respectful</p>	<p>Challenge pushing and testing your limits (physical, mental, emotional)</p>	<p>Citizenship upholding, advancing, and adhering to the values of your nation</p>	<p>Collaboration seeking individuals with different skills than your own to come together to solve a problem or create something new</p>
<p>Community fellowship with a group of people who share a narrative that informs their identity</p>	<p>Competency the ability to do something well</p>	<p>Competition an activity done by several people in an effort to be better than the other participants</p>	<p>Courage doing something even when it frightens you</p>	<p>Creativity original ideas and crafting something new</p>
<p>Curiosity strong desire to understand one's environment</p>	<p>Determination focusing your effort to accomplish your will</p>	<p>Devotion being dedicated to an activity or cause</p>	<p>Duty commitment to an action you must take because it is morally right & your responsibility</p>	<p>Efficiency achieving maximum productivity and results in a manner that is not wasteful of resources or time</p>
<p>Empathy understanding and being sensitive to the experiences of others</p>	<p>Ethical truthful, honest, fair. High moral principles</p>	<p>Excellence being the best, having high standards for quality. The pursuit of mastery in a skill</p>	<p>Fairness treating others in an impartial manner free from favoritism or bias</p>	<p>Faith complete trust and belief in something, someone, or a higher power</p>
<p>Family maintaining strong and positive relationships with your relatives</p>	<p>Friendship nurturing strong affectionate, sympathetic, and mutually beneficial bonds between individuals</p>	<p>Generosity readiness to give abundantly without pettiness or meanness of spirit</p>	<p>Growth developing new skills, abilities, and capacities in your knowledge, behavior, and habits</p>	<p>Harmony existing peacefully in agreement and accord with others</p>

Second Class Inclusive Excellence Activity Word Bank (Back)



<p>Health physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being</p>	<p>Hope approaching people and situations with the confidence that the outcomes will be positive and successful</p>	<p>Humility meekness, avoiding arrogance</p>	<p>Humor maintaining a light-hearted amusing outlook</p>	<p>Inclusion providing access to resources and opportunities for everyone. Making others feel comfortable and welcomed</p>
<p>Independence autonomy, freedom, the ability to be self-determining</p>	<p>Integrity the inability to be corrupted, dishonest, or unethical. Remaining morally whole</p>	<p>Intelligence the ability to acquire and apply knowledge. High cognitive ability</p>	<p>Justice advocating for the equal and fair treatment of all people</p>	<p>Love affection, self-sacrifice, and caring</p>
<p>Loyalty unwavering support and allegiance. Fidelity</p>	<p>Mercy showing forgiveness towards someone you have the power to punish</p>	<p>Moderation avoiding extremes. Shying away from excess</p>	<p>Openness being receptive to new ideas, experiences, and opinions</p>	<p>Power to have control and authority over others</p>
<p>Professionalism being productive in ways that are appropriate, effective, and polite especially in a work or school setting</p>	<p>Progress moving toward a more developed or improved state</p>	<p>Recognition worthy of being singled out, praised, or rewarded for your positive attributes or contributions</p>	<p>Reliability being someone who can be depended on</p>	<p>Resilience the ability to regroup, refocus, and bounce back after a setback or failure</p>
<p>Respect sincere regard and care for the opinions, rights, feelings, or qualities of others</p>	<p>Security freedom from danger or worry (can be personal or financial). Safety</p>	<p>Self-Discipline the ability to correct and regulate oneself for the sake of improvement. Staying true to a goal despite the temptation to abandon it.</p>	<p>Service taking intentional actions to benefit the welfare of others. Putting others above yourself</p>	<p>Spirituality searching for a meaningful connection to something bigger than yourself. Concerned with the soul as opposed to physical or material pursuits.</p>
<p>Status hierarchy of rank or position in relation to others</p>	<p>Sustainability to live in harmony and preserve the natural world. Not being wasteful with resources</p>	<p>Tact dealing with people and situations in a manner that is diplomatic, discrete, and effective</p>	<p>Tradition beliefs & practices that are passed on from generation to generation. Long standing ways of thinking, being, or doing something</p>	<p>Wisdom good judgement that stems from having experience and knowledge</p>

Sample Word Cloud

Values Word Cloud



Heritage, Diversity, and Inclusion Holidays & Observances

September – Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur

Braver Angels at VMI

Debate



Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion

Virginia Military Institute

Lexington, Virginia 24450



DOES A COMMITMENT TO CIVILITY TAKE CARE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ISSUES?

A Braver Angels debate open to the VMI community – cadets, faculty, staff and alumni

**When: September 25, 2023 from 1900 to 2100
Where: Hall of Valor, CLE**

For more information, contact:

COL Dimitrova-Grajzl / Dimitrova-grajzlv@vmi.edu



To register, use the QR code on this flyer



VMI Promotes Civil Discourse Through Debate Program

LEXINGTON, Va., Jan. 17, 2023—Virginia Military Institute has been designated as one of only ten colleges in the nation to be named a “Community of Practice” from Braver Angels, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting civil discourse, in their College Debates and Discourse Program, through a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

In an era when civility is not often the norm in resolving disputes, Braver Angels’ trained experts teach students to express their views, frame persuasive arguments, listen deeply, and engage respectfully with each other around issues that are typically difficult and divisive. Their debates are not competitive, but a collective exercise in thoughtfulness, respect, and a search for the truth. They are conducted in a light parliamentary style and guided by a trained chairperson. Each debate centers around a resolution which is chosen in advance. Each speaker has up to four minutes to present their argument, then answer questions from audience participants who address their questions to the chair. At the end of the debate, there is a short debriefing session.

According to Lt. Col. Kim Connolly, assistant director for programs and conferences for the [Center for Leadership and Ethics \(CLE\)](#) at VMI, the relationship between Braver Angels and VMI began in 2017 when David Blankenhorn, one of the founders of Braver Angels, was invited to speak at the CLE’s Annual Leadership and Ethics Conference, “Speaking Truth to Power: Candid and Courageous Civil Discourse.” In 2021, the CLE invited Braver Angels back to demonstrate their newly developed college debate programming. “They sent four trained facilitators to run debates on contentious topics during the Leadership and Ethics Conference. That year’s theme of the conference was on citizenship and social responsibility. We invited the VMI Building BRIDGES club to attend the conference and participate in the debates with an eye toward the club carrying the idea forward as a cadet-led activity,” explained Connolly.

Building BRIDGES and the CLE subsequently partnered and held two debates last year. As a result of VMI’s enthusiasm for the program, Braver Angels offered them the two-year research grant. According to Lt. Col. Sara Whipple, associate professor in the [psychology department](#) and co-advisor for Building BRIDGES, the grant provides for one faculty fellow and two student fellows, and stipulates that VMI conduct one debate post-wide, as well as one debate in a class each semester for three semesters. The fourth semester will involve data analysis. “The purpose of the grant is to provide research on the impact of the debates on those who participate, including their ability to exhibit calm and confidence when conflict arises, and on their leadership skills. Data will be gathered by the ten partner institutions and sent to the University of Delaware for analysis,” said Whipple.

Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, professor in the [Department of Economics and Business](#) and faculty co-advisor for BRIDGES, stated that the first debate is planned for early spring, and the topic will be of particular interest to cadets and life on post. The two student fellows are responsible for determining the topic, publicizing the debates, and recruiting participants. They will be trained to lead the debates by Braver Angels.

The two student fellows chosen for the research grant are Katie Lloyd ‘23 and Devin Thomas ‘24, who are both majoring in [international studies](#). To qualify for the fellowship, cadets had to provide a writing sample and pass multiple interviews. Lloyd has been involved with the Braver Angels program since the initial partnership with Building BRIDGES. “I really enjoy watching cadets talk and communicate in the ways that these debates facilitate. I’m looking forward to watching more community members get involved and find the same passion about civil discourse that I have,” she said.

Thomas is confident the program has the potential to become a staple for the VMI community. “Everyone has the opportunity to practice productive discourse within the environment Braver Angels offers by sharing viewpoints on controversial topics while also working to expand perspective by listening to the convictions of others. Through this program, we hope to achieve a shared understanding and respect for others, with the end goal being a more united Corps and greater cadet community,” he said.

Dimitrova-Grajzl plans on introducing the debates in her Institutions and Economics Development class, and would like to see other faculty follow suit. “Braver Angels will conduct training sessions this spring for faculty members who would like to integrate the debates into their classes. I am looking forward to getting more people involved. Through this program, we can foster honest, and respectful conversations,” she said.

Within a year, VMI hopes to host an intercollegiate debate or a community debate, to teach and expand the philosophy of the Braver Angels: deep listening, critical thinking, and thoughtful communication.

Marianne Hause

Communications & Marketing

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE



Braver Angels, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting civil discourse visited VMI last year to facilitate a debate.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin

Inclusive Excellence
Committee By-law Revision



Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion

Virginia Military Institute

Lexington, Virginia 24450

BY-LAWS (Revised & Adopted by board action, September 2013, September 2014, May 2015, 6 May 2017, 10 June 2020, 1 May 2021, 21 September 2022, and 28 January 2023.)

Article I

Section 6 - Committees:

8. ****Inclusive Excellence: The Inclusive Excellence Committee**** is responsible for the oversight of all matters relating to the Institute's excellence in diversity across all programs and departments. This Committee shall consist of Board of Visitors members, and may also include ex-officio non-voting member representatives from the VMI faculty, staff, Corps of Cadets, Alumni, staff from the Alumni Agencies, and others, as the Board President deems appropriate. In exercising its oversight and providing recommendations to the full Board for approval, the Committee shall consider, among other things, VMI's mission and method of education and VMI's mission of producing citizen-soldiers imbued with honor, civility, and respect and shall ensure that all VMI policies properly reflect the Institute's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The Committee shall review the Institute's inclusivity performance and commonality of purpose, and compliance with the Institute's statement on equity and maintenance of a welcoming and affirming environment; and the timely review of reports on gender and ethnicity data related to recruitment, admissions, and composition of the Corps of Cadets, faculty, and staff.

****Changes adopted by the Board at its January 28, 2023 meeting.**

Section 4 - Adoption, Effective Date These By-laws are hereby adopted and made effective as of 28 January 2023.

Report

2023 West Point Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Conference



Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion

Virginia Military Institute

Lexington, Virginia 24450

Day 1

Welcome

West Point Superintendent Lieutenant General Steven W. Gilland; Command Sergeant Major, USMA;
 Command Sergeant Major Phil K. Barretto; Dean of the Academic Board, USMA Brigadier General Shane R.
 Reeves; Commandant, USMA Brigadier General Lori L. Robinson; Command Sergeant Major, USCC
 Command Sergeant Major Robert T. Craven

Key Take Aways:

- We have to be able to outthink our adversaries because we are not going to be able to outshoot them. However, we also need to be able to leverage the power of all Americans so that we are in a position where we are not in armed conflict.
- In times of war, technology is often the first thing to be cut. We cannot just rely on tech. You have to be able to think when you have been cut off and it is going to be people working together that solve the problems and win.
- Our diversity causes us to challenge each other, while some might see this as a perceived disadvantage when facing a foe with a homogenous fighting force (ex. China, Russia), studies continuously show that diverse teams are smarter and more innovative.

Proceedings

Speaker - Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower & Reserve Affairs, Ms.

Yvette K. Bourcicot

Key Take Aways:

- We are united by our values despite our differences. The Army seeks to create unity not only through shared values but through diverse formations where every soldier feels safe and included. However, the fruits of the Army's diversity did not come to harvest overnight. It was through effort and careful cultivation.

- West Point graduated its first female cadets in 1980 (VMI 1990s) and it might seem like a long time ago to some, but it is not. We have come far but there is still work to be done and we should be excited and not intimidated by this knowledge.
- Not talking about important issues because the conversation may be uncomfortable is not productive. It is important to teach cadets how to think about these complex topics, not what to think about them.
- Army Manpower & Reserve Affairs supports diversity and inclusion work and wants a diverse Army that is cohesive, strong, lethal, and ready. We need to draw on the widest possible set of backgrounds, talents, and skills to accomplish this goal.

Panel – “Diversity in National Security: Views from Academia and Practice”, Mr. Ravi Satkalmi, USCP Director of Intelligence and Dr. Nakissa P. Jahanbani, Assistant Professor and Researcher Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Science, USMA

Key Take Aways:

- Mr. Satkalmi discussed his journey in the intelligence community as a gay man of Southeast Asian descent and a practicing Hindu. He wonders how much of his mental and emotional capacities were spent trying to fit in or hide aspects of his identity that could have been better spent on his work. When people are allowed the space to bring their whole selves to work and to the mission, they are more successful.
- Arguably, one of the most important skills that someone who works in intelligence will need is the ability to put themselves in someone else’s shoes and think the way someone else would think. Diversity and inclusion help to build that skill set.
- Biased views of who can and cannot be a terrorist can leave us open to attack.

Workshop – Theme: “Inclusive Intelligence”, Mr. Terry L. Allbritton Executive Director, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Assault and Harassment Prevention Office (DEI&HPO) Veterans Health Administration

Key Take Aways:

- We are all diverse and diversity and inclusion include everyone. White, straight, men are an essential part of this conversation.
- Everyone can bring something valuable to the table, but we must give people the opportunity to be included and engaged in the process.

Panel – Theme: “Measuring DEI Success”, Dr. Jerry Bell Jr., Colonel Paul F. Evangelista, USMA Chief Data Officer, and Dr. Milton J. Perkins

Key Take Aways:

- If you do not have the right data, it is hard to make the right decisions. Asking the right questions is crucial to obtaining the right data. We must always be willing to reevaluate the questions we are asking.
- There is fear that surveys are not anonymous and that can be a pain point for organizations. Do you have a process in place to protect responses and will those responses be acted upon?
- The Johari Window Model. Are we realizing our “unknown unknowns”? Diversity and inclusion can help us identify our blindspots.

Panel – Theme: “Diversity is Universal”, Honorable Charles F. Bolden Jr., Major General, USMC, Retired Former Administrator of NASA; Dr. Ramsey Smith, Special Assistant, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force Space Acquisition and Integration; Colonel (Ret.) Robert Shane Kimbrough, Astronaut Retired

Key Take Aways:

- Are we doing a good job including introverts in the conversation? We could miss key information and feedback if we are only hearing from outgoing and assertive people.
- Empathy is a component of leadership that might be overlooked in a military context but is a necessary skill. Listen to the people that you are leading. They often do not want you to solve their problems but want you to care about their problems.

- There was very little innovation in the Russian spacecraft built by a homogenous team. NASA and Space X crafts were far more innovative and were built by diverse teams.
- It is important to entertain every member of your unit and their ideology, whether you like it or not. You will be a better leader by considering their perspectives.
- You are going to find yourself working with people you do not like or people from an opposing country. When that happens, it is not about the technology, it is about your ability to build relationships, take care of your people, and work together.

Panel – Theme” “Best Practices on Recruiting, Hiring, and Retention”, Brigadier General Pascal Godbout, CD, Commandant, Royal Military College of Canada; Mr. Dan Streetman, CEO Tanium; Major Steven Papenthien, Deputy G1, USMA

Key Take Aways:

- The Royal Military College of Canada has 1200 cadets. Their mission is to educate, develop, and inspire bilingual, fit, and ethical leaders who serve the Canadian Armed Forces and Canada. Their focus on diversity and inclusion is on four designated federal groups: women, members of visible minorities, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities. However, they also attempt to create a welcoming environment for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other gender identities, and sexual orientations (2SLGBTQI+).
- They want to be a university and employer of choice for all Canadian students. To do this they require evidence of core competencies in diversity and inclusion for senior officers that include emotional intelligence assessments. Leaders are expected to strengthen the organizational culture and create a safe environment that creates a sense of belonging.
- General Godbout discussed how changes in uniform policies have allowed a greater diversity of Canadian citizens to consider careers in the military. They have relaxed their beard policy for all (they already had religious exemptions), however, safety requirements always come first. There are still

environments where personnel must be clean-shaven. They are working on gas masks that provide a protective seal even with a beard. They have gender-neutral grooming standards where everyone can have long hair if they choose. If it looks professional, they can wear the style, and photographs of appropriate styling are provided for reference. Earring standards are the same across genders and the full color palette of hair colors is now permitted. These changes have allowed Canada to access a talent pool that previously believed they did not have a place in the military. The Canadian view on military grooming standards was a viewpoint that I was unfamiliar with. I found it to be an intriguing approach to recruitment and retention and am not advocating for VMI or the U.S. military to adopt such changes. General Godbout acknowledged that these changes have received pushback from veterans.

