

# VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

TO: VMI Board of Visitors External Relations Committee

FROM: Lt. Col. Michelle Ellwood  
Acting Director of Communications & Marketing

DATE: May 2024

RE: Communications & Marketing Update

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This update covers the communications and marketing activities for the spring semester 2024, as well as projects currently in progress.

Regrading staffing, the assistant director of brand marketing role was filled early in the semester. She will begin her position with VMI on July 1 after fulfilling her contract for her current position. A committee is currently reviewing candidates for the director of communications and marketing.

## I. MEDIA COVERAGE

Between January 1 and April 10, there were more than 4,100 news items that mentioned or featured information about VMI.

More than 90% of the news items are categorized as positive or neutral in sentiment.

## II. NEWS & EDITORIAL SERVICES

The News & Editorial Services team actively worked with nearly every department on post to provide coverage of events, successes, milestones, and personnel recognition for the spring 2024 semester. The team averaged 9 stories per month for the VMI website, social media, local news coverage pitches, and for publications. These are in addition to coverage for items just used for social media posts, general media pitches, and public announcements of upcoming speakers or events.

The Institute Report, the most wide-spread publication developed by the NES team, celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in December. Each issue this academic year takes a look back over the decades, featuring highlights from the publication, including high-profile visitors to post, academic updates, the changes in technology on post, and construction over the years.

TV news coverage included a recruiting visit from the Secret Service and community support during FTX. Also, the tribute to Capt. Jack Casey '19 was featured on several TV stations and in numerous publications. Several local/hometown papers have included stories about local cadets receiving rank for the upcoming academic year. Understaffed news stations and weekend events

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have been a challenge when it comes to getting coverage for many things. Video, photos, and stories are put together for news stations for each event to ensure they have the materials needed for any coverage opportunities.

Major event support, that featured photography, videography, stories for the website and social media, as well as programs, signage, media attendance, etc. included:

- Environment Virginia Conference/Governor's Visit
- Spring FTX
- Honors Week
- Breakout
- Legislative Reception
- Admissions Open Houses
- CyberFusion
- 1<sup>st</sup> Class Rank Announcements
- Parents Council Spring Meeting
- Visits from the Secret Service and Swedish Chief of Defense
- A memorial event honoring Capt. Jack Casey '19

Departments from across post have relied on our team for flyers, banners, logos, event programs, and other publications. These include:

- Summer Undergraduate Research Institute materials
- Social Media logos for various departments and clubs
- Apple Blossom Festival marketing materials
- Guest speaker events
- VMI Theatre programs and signage
- Cadet academic planner

Looking ahead, the team is getting ready for graduation week events. Also, they are getting price quotes and preparing content for the New Cadet Handbook and the annual VMI calendar. The department is also working in partnership with the Barber Shop Working Group on preparing videos to help incoming cadets understand hair standards, recommendations, and barber shop services prior to arriving at VMI.

### III. PUBLICATIONS

The Publications team continues to support the needs of the entire post. During the period January-April, the publications team worked on the following projects:

- Admissions Business Reply Envelopes
- VMI Admissions Appointment Envelopes
- Army ROTC Tactics Smartbook
- Electrical Engineering Open House Handout
- Guaranteed Admission Agreement with VFMA for Admissions
- Banners for Legislative Reception (7)

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- Provisional Appointment Certificate
- Employee Service Certificates
- Cadence Literature Book
- Class of 1984 40<sup>th</sup> Reunion Memorial Service Program
- “You’re Not Everyone” Booklets for Admissions
- Table Display Design for Admissions
- Peay Scholarship Certificates for Dean’s Office
- Merit Scholarship Certificate for Dean’s Office
- Women’s Faculty Working Group Spring Programs
- Field of Honor Banners Design
- VMI Photo Book Design
- VMI New Market Medal/Memorial Service Program
- VMI Commencement Program Cover
- Admissions business reply envelopes

The Publications team also printed a number of reports, publications, and documents:

- VMI Post Facilities Master Plan Update
- Your Guide to the General Assembly booklets for Finance & Support
- Virginia Government booklets for Finance and Support
- Posters for CLE Courageous Leadership Speaker Series
- Welcome Booklets for Human Resources
- CLE Seminar Booklets
- Appointment Certificates
- Appointment Letterheads
- DOI Committee Booklets (BOV)
- 1098 Letters for Cadet Accounting
- Financial Aid Flyers
- Phi Alpha Theta Programs and Poster
- Lacrosse Game Day Programs
- Board of Visitors Resolutions
- Spring Retreat Poster for Chaplain
- Mission Trip Poster for Chaplain
- Civil Engineering Booklets for Open House
- CLE Black History Month Posters
- Posters for Construction Office
- Environment Virginia Posters
- Corps Leadership Booklets for Commandant (3)

## IV. DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

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The Digital Communications team currently consists of C&M's assistant director of digital communication, social media specialist, digital content specialist, and a videographer (reporting to the director of communications and marketing). The team collaborates with C&M's graphic designers, publishing team, news and editorial staff, and photographers.

The social media specialist position was filled in January 2024 after months of vacancy. The assistant director of brand marketing position remained vacant during the time period covered in this report. ***Please note, statistics and project details for this section of the report cover January through March due timelines for the report, staff availability, and analytics software. April will be wrapped into the next report.***

The digital communications team continues to work diligently to improve and streamline communication and messaging processes, branding initiatives, and digital content for departments and offices across post and to VMI's various audiences and stakeholders. The addition of new staff has increased the quantity, speed, reach, and variety of materials created to showcase VMI to stakeholders from high school students and families, to alumni, to internal VMI audiences, and the general public. Emphasis continues to be placed on projects targeting recruitment, image and brand awareness, user experience, and digital accessibility.

### **Project Highlights Jan. – March 2024:**

#### Ongoing:

- Update vmi.edu focused on VMI brand and image, search engine optimization (SEO), user experience, and telling the VMI story with focus on recruitment and challenging misconceptions about the Institute.
  - Connect to social media and video projects as appropriate
- Create analytics reports for website and social media use and interaction and meet with offices to review and adjust content based on data
- Create and manage online forms/surveys for use on web and by C&M through Qualtrics
- Support and promote Admissions events through web design and content, social media promotion, registrations, and analytics
- Maintain all livestream and calendar events for the public
- Provide oversight, content as requested, and guidance for VMI social media, including affiliated channels
- Review web contents, including PDFs, for accessibility and branding
- Evaluate potential vendors and products for content management system (CMS) upgrade and replacement, new virtual tour (via RFP), and replacement online calendar

#### January:

- Assist with updates of NetPrice Calculator for VMI (Financial Aid)
- Continue to assist Cadet Counseling with digital marketing materials for TimelyCare
- Expand content collaboration and coordination with VMI Athletics on web and social media
- Collaborate with Web Administrator in IT on branding and design for portal overhaul

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- Follow-up on web projects in development from Fall 2023 awaiting final client decisions
- Work with Computer and Information Sciences team to update website to better reflect the track options within the major

### February:

- Continue Admissions and Financial Aid updates and upgrades, as well as promotions of upcoming events and sharing FAFSA changes
- Work with Innovation Programming Director and Advisory Committee to develop web, social, and marketing materials for new initiatives, particularly the Summer Undergraduate Entrepreneurship Program (SUEP)
- Collaborate with VMIAA for Day of Giving promotion and content shares
- Create additional stops for custom-built visitor tour for Jackson House Museum
- Breakout realtime coverage by entire digital comms team

### March:

- Design and launch searchable, sortable data pages for URS and senior thesis projects, targeted at increasing academic content on the web
- Work with Admissions team to create and prepare for upcoming digital events aimed at appointed students for reservation completion
- Redesign Admissions landing page to increase SEO and more closely compete with acadmy and SMC design and content
- Finalize review and selection process for Virtual Tour vendor
- Coverage of Honors Week, including social media and featured stories
- Redesign and revamp [www.vmi.edu/NeverSettle](http://www.vmi.edu/NeverSettle) to support ad campaign with VMIAA
- Design materials to promote #VoteforMoe for SoCon mascot challenge

### Upcoming Projects (as of April 1):

- Finalize registration materials for summer session and STP
- FTX Coverage on web and social media, including live cover
- Graduation week promo and coverage
- SURI and Study Abroad features
- New featured stories series focused on connections within VMI, cadet experiences, post-graduation plans, and Army ROTC
- Prepare for shift of calendar.vmi.edu to new service for cost savings (by July 1)
- Prepare content for shift to new CMS (targeted completion 2025)
- Design all text and audio content for new virtual tour (targeted completion for phase 1 is August 2024)

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## DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS BY THE NUMBERS

Month	Email Threads in Webedits Inbox*	New Piece of Content Created for vmi.edu ^	Edits Made to Existing Content on vmi.edu ^	Featured Stories Written for vmi.edu**	Facebook Posts	Instagram Posts <sup>+</sup>	X (Twitter) Posts	LinkedIn Posts
01/2024	116	110	309	4	36	54	30	29
02/2024	102	35	230	5	49	160	56	45
03/2024	111	193	318	5	35	110	33	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>AVG./Month</b>	<b>109.67</b>	<b>112.67</b>	<b>285.67</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>39.67</b>	<b>33.3</b>

\* Change request threads vary from one item updates, such as adding a new staff member, to full section redesigns or large accessibility remediation projects. These numbers do not include requests or project needs sent directly to the Assistant Director for Digital Communication.

\*\* Featured stories are predominantly written by the Digital Content Specialist, but also include input from other members of the digital comms team.

^ Involved major projects documented in this report which required a significant increase in edits to the site, including to page & site templates.

+ Includes story slides and main feed posts/reels.

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## **Digital Communications goals within VMI's Strategic Communications Plan:**

### **1.1: INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH QUALITY PROSPECTS –**

The digital communications team continues to support the Admissions Office in focusing on recruitment of and engagement with prospective applicants. A systemic overhaul of VMI main social accounts continues to incorporate more video/reels, update styling consistent with competitors while remaining 'on brand' for VMI, Platform content is also now tailored more specifically by audience, with Instagram being heavily tilted towards promoting VMI as a top choice for high school students. Open house and application promotion continue to be main targets, particularly with the use of the Common App and FAFSA changes. The assistant director of digital communication is supporting the new CRM with custom code and design work. The team also designs and supports web-based engagement tools and forms, custom page builds to support ad campaigns with VMIAA, and increased video content linked to subpages on the VMI homepage.

C&M continues to collaborate with Parents Council leadership on bettering their communication internally with current parents and externally with prospective parents. Specific improvements are focused on the recruiting and communications committees.

### **1.2: COMPREHENSIVE IDENTITY & BRAND GUIDE –**

All members of C&M have worked to fill this gap left by the departure of the Assistant Director of Marketing in December 2022. A new employee has been hired for this position, with a confirmed start date of July 1.

Efforts are ongoing to ensure all offices and departments are utilizing the most current VMI logos across post. Even though there is a Visual Identity Guide on VMI.edu, it is a concern of C&M that offices and departments do not always follow those branding guidelines. The proposed online comprehensive identity and brand guide will cover everything needed for internal use and external requests, and will be a major project once the branding position is filled. The digital communications team continues to build out resources to move forward with an online design toolkit, and is collaborating with the Web Administrator in IT as he overhauls design of internal resources. The web team continues to correct old branding on digital assets on vmi.edu as they are discovered,

The current assistant directors in C&M answer all logo requests and licensed vendor product approvals daily while working with VMI departments, offices, and organizations on their specific materials and messaging on a case-by-case basis (e.g., presentations, forms, social media, etc.). They also perform reviews of emails and documents submitted by VMI internal stakeholders for branding compliance. The official online logo request form generated 10 requests from Jan. 1 – March 31, 2024.

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## 1.3: EXPANSION AND BETTER LEVERAGING OF DATA –

C&M's digital communications team continues to work with IT, admissions, institutional research, and internally to obtain and utilize proper data for marketing and recruiting strategies and initiatives. This is handled within C&M using analytics from the vmi.edu website, social media platforms, and Qualtrics online forms. Data is shared more widely and more often with various stakeholders, particularly Admissions and Financial Aid.

The web team continue to focus on search engine optimization (SEO) for VMI.edu as well as establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) and SMART goals for those visiting the No Ordinary recruiting landing page, new Never Settle campaign page with VMIAA, and VMI.edu. This includes the continued use of BrightEdge software for professional guidance and support in optimizing VMI.edu, with focus on not only increasing SEO efficiency, but specifically targeting competitor-shared keywords to increase enrollment.

This tool has been invaluable in streamlining the process of research, project selection, and results-based edits. Through competitor research, the web team has been able to specifically tailor web contents to compete more directly for online traffic with other SMCs and service academies. Naval ROTC's SEO-focused overhaul launched in early 2024, joining Army and Air Force. This included not only rearranging content, but also developing multiple new pages to offer one-to-one points of competition with other ROTC programs. The Call to Duty video produced by VMIAA was also incorporated to emphasize the financial benefits of ROTC at VMI.

## 1.4: BOOST SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE & ENGAGEMENT –

Social media is a vital way for Virginia Military Institute to communicate with the VMI community and the world, offering instant access to cadets, alumni, staff, faculty, prospective cadets, and other groups.

VMI's social media accounts publish pictures, videos, articles, and news briefs highlighting the best of the Institute, bolstering VMI's reputation, brand recognition & identity, and and recruitment efforts. Posts on social media accounts include:

- Major events, announcements, and activities on post
- Cadet-focused stories regarding academics, military life, and athletics, with emphasis on the leadership journey
- Cadet events, activities, clubs, and organizations focused on the VMI college experience
- Academic, ROTC, and Athletics achievements, milestones, and event promotion
- Performance and highlights of faculty staff contributions to VMI and beyond
- Photo and video highlights depicting everyday life at the Institute

After the departure of the social media specialist in mid-October 2023, other members of the digital communications team stepped up to ensure this crucial recruitment tool continued to be



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utilized and keep sharing the VMI brand and stories of the Institute. A new specialist came onboard in mid-Jan. 2024, and will be reviewing reporting options moving forward.

Each platform continues to be analyzed and optimized to promote VMI and its cadets in the correct style and format based on audience, algorithms, and industry trends. This is particularly noted in the continued increase of video content on Instagram, a key for reaching interested students.

Jan – March 2023 VS Jan – March 2024, Year-Over-Year Comparison				
FACEBOOK	Fans/Followers	Engagement	Impressions	Brand Awareness
AY22-23	36,275	131,701	3,448,765	1,454
AY23-24	37,363	145,403	3,953,987	3,520
<b>% Change</b>	<b>+ 3%</b>	<b>+ 10.4%</b>	<b>+ 14.6%</b>	<b>+ 142%</b>
INSTAGRAM	Fans/Followers	Engagement	Impressions	Brand Awareness
AY22-23	21,145	82,330	1,286,401	741
AY23-24	25,085	74,303	1,602,038	598
<b>% Change</b>	<b>+ 18.6%</b>	<b>- 9.75%</b>	<b>+ 24.5%</b>	<b>- 19.3%</b>
LINKEDIN	Fans/Followers	Engagement	Impressions	Total Reached Users
AY22-23	22,440	75,480	465,941	216,549
AY23-24	20,312	67,494	504,583	270,856
<b>% Change</b>	<b>- 9.48%</b>	<b>- 10.6%</b>	<b>+ 8.29%</b>	<b>+ 25.1%</b>

- An unexpected loss of followers occurred on LinkedIn, but impressions and reach increased. It is possible, as this is the channel most followed by alumni, that we are still seeing some fall off connected to criticism of VMI, but the content being posted resonates well with the followers. Increasing followers will continue to be a 2024 goal.
- The large increases in Instagram followers and impressions are encouraging as this is the platform most targeted to recruitment and shows the increased use of video is paying off. Efforts will be made to increase per-post engagement.
- The addition of more video content, including livestreaming from Breakout, has significantly impacted the success of getting the VMI brand and message across on Facebook – popular with families of current cadets as well as alumni.
- Algorithm updates continue to be researched, and the trend towards ranking videos higher, and downgrading links, continues to steer post content.
- X (formerly Twitter) is now part of the monitoring tool contract and will be seen more clearly in future reports as the API catches up to posts.

A more common measure of social media success and growth can be seen by comparing a time period to the immediate period of same length before. It takes into account algorithms and

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platform expectations from a more closely related schema, and shows adjustments made each month based on performance analysis of posts and campaigns.

*Note: Both Winter Furlough and Breakout can skew data points in both directions, though the team continues to try to minimize this, and has been predominantly successful. The reporting service has been added for X (formerly Twitter) so this chart will reflect that platform in upcoming reports.*

Jan. - March 2024 VS Oct. – Dec. 2023				
<b>FACEBOOK</b>	Fans/Followers	Engagement	Impressions	Brand Awareness
	37,363	145,403	3,953,987	3,520
<b>% Change</b>	+ 0.6%	+ 4%	+ 4.6%	+ 21.9%
<b>INSTAGRAM</b>	Fans/Followers	Engagement	Impressions	Brand Awareness
	25,085	74,303	1,602,038	598
<b>% Change</b>	+ 3.1%	-22%	+9.7%	- 4.5%
<b>LINKEDIN</b>	Fans/Followers	Engagement	Impressions	Total Reached Users
	20,312	67,494	504,583	270,856
<b>% Change</b>	+2.1%	-32.7%	+16.4 %	+41.6%

## Social Media Content Analysis:

VMI’s social media accounts continue to actively emphasize Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins ’85’s “One Corps, One VMI” outcomes:

## Honor - Diversity and Inclusion - The VMI Brand - Competing and Winning - One VMI

Efforts continue to be made to balance the three-legged stool of VMI in post selection and curation, continuing to increase both NCAA and club sport coverage. Posts continue to be developed to show a more inclusive and person-centered view of the Institute. This includes continuous competitor and trend research for topics and styles that work well with the VMI ‘brand’. The continued calendar consistency of campaigns and series has been successful in setting not only expectations, but also keeping the VMI voice and brand front and center while balancing content with day-to-day news. Use of archival photographs resonates strongly with alumni, often increasing weekly engagement and bringing more positive responses and interactions. Jackson statue comments still abound but are less prolific than previous years since the removal.

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**Video Remains Popular:** Reels and videos continue to account for some of the most engaged with and seen content across platforms, most notably Instagram which is the main channel for recruitment efforts. The work of VMI’s videographer as well as hiring a social media specialist with significant video experience have been key to increasing the Institute’s ability to reach a wider, younger audience.

Some stats are not registered for shorter videos (Reels) on Facebook due to API settings.

Video	Platform	Impressions	Reach	Comments	Shares	Likes & Reactions
<b>Happy New Year ^</b>	FB	n/a	35,052	42	38	772
<b>Happy New Year ^</b>	IG	9,372	8,155	1	19	682
<b>Captain Feature: Miles Johnson</b>	FB	n/a	101,031	26	41	939
<b>Captain Feature: Miles Johnson</b>	IG	11,566	9,265	9	31	498
<b>Somber Stillness: Winter on Post</b>	FB	n/a	97,709	163	86	1,326
<b>Somber Stillness: Winter on Post</b>	IG	18,984	14,436	3	110	1,474
<b>First Snow</b>	FB	n/a	13,657	47	22	715
<b>Commencement #TBT</b>	FB	n/a	4,578	6	4	106
<b>Commencement #TBT</b>	IG	7,250	6,525	0	7	499
<b>Extra Mile: Trap &amp; Skeet</b>	FB	n/a	3,549	6	9	133
<b>Extra Mile: Trap &amp; Skeet</b>	IG	12,922	9,018	0	69	613
<b>Scenes on Post</b>	IG	8,095	7,425	0	13	641
<b>Rat Drill Competition</b>	FB	n/a	230,246	279	158	2,754
<b>Rat Drill Competition</b>	IG	17,161	15,047	33	192	1,227
<b>A Message to the Rat Mass: Fakeout</b>	FB	n/a	25,585	22	27	446
<b>A Message to the Rat Mass: Fakeout</b>	IG	14,845*	12,793	16	192	1,220
<b>Breakout AM Wrap-Up</b>	IG	32,674	23,398	33	556	2,148

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Video	Platform	Impressions	Reach	Comments	Shares	Likes & Reactions
<b>Breakout Final Wrap – What If? ^</b>	IG	44,004	30,449	29	380	2,100
<b>Honoring the Life of Capt. Jack Casey ‘19</b>	FB	n/a	16,319	135	237	1,575
<b>Leap Day (Athletics Focus)</b>	FB	n/a	4,010	2	4	55
<b>Leap Day (Athletics Focus)</b>	IG	11,682	9,445	2	26	450
<b>Career Fair Cadet POV</b>	FB	n/a	4,816	2	2	73
<b>Career Fair Cadet POV</b>	IG	10,472	9,297	3	75	398
<b>Jonathan Daniels Ceremony Live</b>	FB	n/a	3,117	4	14	133
<b>Introducing RCO Brian Pritchard</b>	FB	n/a	160,889	75	55	1,462
<b>Introducing RCO Brian Pritchard</b>	IG	81,632	75,990	40	302	4,276
<b>VMI Women Intn’l Women’s Day</b>	FB	n/a	3,941	7	12	132
<b>VMI Women Intn’l Women’s Day</b>	IG	16,666	11,700	5	67	688
<b>St. Patrick’s Day ‘Green’ Post</b>	FB	n/a	8,159	17	28	414
<b>St. Patrick’s Day ‘Green’ Post</b>	IG	2,464	7,825	2	12	818

\* = Ad money spent

^ = Skewed by PST reporting, posted midnight Jan 1 EST.

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## NEW PATH FOR SOCIAL MEDIA FINDS SUCCESS

VMI's new social media specialist came on board in January and hit the ground running. The first initiative tackled was to assess VMI's social media presence in efforts of continuous refinement and enhancement. Through candid discussions with VMI alumni and students, insight was gained into the current state of VMI's social media presence. While improvements over the past year have been noticed, there remains a collective desire to enhance engagement, tailor content to specific audiences, and explore innovative approaches. Along with department discussions, key findings from these discussions and analytics observations, along with a critical look at what's working well, helped to outline actionable steps for improvement to ensure VMI's social media platforms effectively reflect its mission and values while reaching the optimal audience.

### **Social Media Tone Adjustments:**

- Instagram: Tailored to prospective students and current cadets.
- Facebook: Geared towards cadet families, cadets, and alums.
- X (formerly Twitter): Targeted at current cadets, prospective students, and the local Lexington community, as well as emphasis on upcoming events and athletics news (main channel for most college sports).
- LinkedIn: Aimed at VMI faculty, staff, and alumni, with an aim to shift towards employee recruitment.

### **Overall Sentiment:**

After engaging in candid conversations with VMI alumni and cadets, most indicated that while VMI's social media presence has improved, there's still room for growth. Specifically, a desire for more content showcasing the day-to-day lives of cadets was shared, along with increasing military-affiliated content on Instagram. Furthermore, respondents voiced a call for a more "eclectic and timeless" tone.

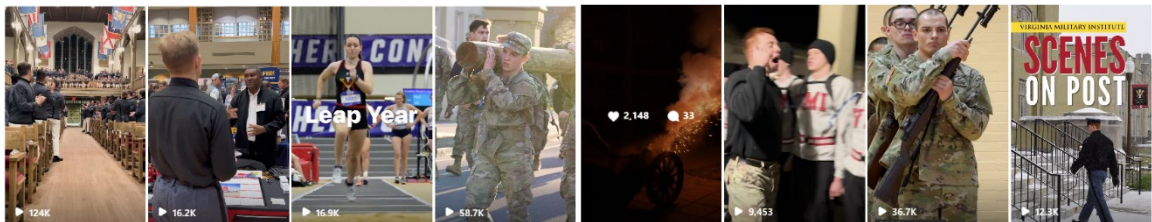
Alumni and cadets have expressed a strong interest in long-form YouTube content providing detailed information about VMI. This initiative benefits potential future cadets and caters to the widespread use of YouTube as the second-largest search engine. VMI's videographer and social media specialist will continue to tackle this project, and have already begun a shift in format and marketing, such as the '[What is Breakout?](#)' feature. Released at the beginning of March, it has already been view over 1,600 times, making it the 4<sup>th</sup> most viewed video of 2024.

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## What's Working:

- Viral reels featuring traditional VMI events like Rank Announcements and Rat Drill Competition have been highly successful (over 124,000 and 330,000 plays respectively), particularly when incorporating trending audio, effectively boosting brand awareness and engaging non-followers.
- Content showcasing day-to-day cadet life has received positive feedback on Facebook and Instagram.
- Live streaming content from VMI events, especially on Facebook, has been warmly received by parents and the wider VMI audience. This was particularly successful during Breakout.
- Content featuring alumni and archival photos on LinkedIn, Facebook, and X has garnered significant attention and positive feedback.
- Facebook and Instagram stories have gained popularity and are excellent tools for promoting traditional content. This shift was only possible due to filling this role and assistance from other members of the digital communications team to spread event coverage.
- More cadets, faculty, staff, and alumni are now submitting content to share on the main Institute platforms, including through a new submission form to be able to better track these collaborations.



## Targeted Areas for Improvement:

- The Institute's official YouTube channel will undergo reorganization to serve as a more accessible research platform for families and potential future cadets seeking information about VMI. This restructuring will also enhance alums' access to historical videos without removing existing content.
- Improving the quality of video content is essential. Investing in a secondary video camera to capture high-quality footage during busy events when the primary camera is in use is strongly recommended, as is the acquisition of a music licensing contract for the Institute, a legal requirement and expectation in higher ed marketing.
- Designating specific social media cadets could empower cadets to contribute to VMI's online presence, fostering their investment in VMI's public image and social media platforms.

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**The Story Behind Story Slides:** Video clips have also seen strong positive reaction when used in stories on Instagram – posts seen for 24 hours. Stickers on these stories allow for users to be directed to additional VMI materials, as well as connecting to locations and hashtags that make the content more easily found by non-followers. These story slides help to capture more about cadet life and post in realtime, a key for the platform and brand marketing and awareness. This process has been made possible by all members of the digital communications sharing the role of in-person event coverage both before and after the hiring of a social media specialist, and the entire team being flexible on days and hours worked.

Story Slide	Impressions	Reach	Likes	Shares	Sticker Taps
Upcoming Drone Video Teaser 1	2,708*	2,696*	23	1	n/a
Upcoming Drone Video Teaser 2	2,981*	2,937*	51*	11*	14
Upcoming Drone Video Teaser 3	2,618	2,594*	18	1	2
First Day of Class	2,812*	2,772*	60*	5*	55*
Basketball vs. Citadel 1	2,668	2,573*	22*	0	4
Basketball vs. Citadel 2	2,657	2,563*	19*	0	7
Basketball vs. Citadel 3	2,794*	2,704*	92*	74*	20*
20-Mile March	3,662*	3,555*	60*	6	n/a
Fakeout 1	3,500*	3,192*	53*	112*	n/a
Fakeout 2	3,413*	3,126*	46*	24*	n/a
Breakout 1	4,482*	4,203*	99*	101*	n/a
Breakout 2	4,287*	3,934*	62*	4	n/a
Breakout 3	4,226*	3,873*	45*	3	n/a
Breakout 4	4,191*	3,827*	51*	21*	n/a
Breakout 5	4,458*	4,188*	133*	30*	37*
Breakout 6	4,323*	4,053*	55*	17*	n/a
Breakout 7	4,256*	3,968*	55*	38*	n/a
Breakout 8	4,245*	3,954*	51*	15*	n/a
Breakout 9	4,210*	3,989*	51*	25*	n/a
Breakout 10	4,155*	3,968*	63*	98*	n/a
Breakout 11	4,222*	4,046*	73*	34*	n/a
Breakout 12	4,179*	3,954*	178*	44*	n/a
Breakout 13	3,970*	3,847*	72*	16*	n/a
Breakout 14	3,902*	3,802*	59*	18*	37*
Breakout 15 (2024 Old Yell)	3,866*	3,783*	80*	7*	n/a
Breakout 16 (2027 Old Yell)	3,869*	3,745*	155*	87*	n/a
Wrestling on Post	2,665	2,507	26*	0	n/a
Lunar New Year 1	2,538	2,441	17	3	n/a

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Story Slide	Impressions	Reach	Likes	Shares	Sticker Taps
Lunar New Year 2	2,436	2,354	10	3	n/a
Remembering Capt. Casey 1	2,472	2,405	52*	13	n/a
Remembering Capt. Casey 2	2,407	2,344	27*	10	n/a
Remembering Capt. Casey 3	2,372	2,307	21*	0	n/a
Remembering Capt. Casey 4	2,332	2,279	21*	0	n/a
VMI Diving – Valentine	2,430	2,382	28*	28*	5
Open House Parade 1	2,252	2,190	35*	6*	n/a
Open House Parade 2	2,190	2,121	21*	14*	n/a
Open House Parade 3	2,168	2,121	27*	10*	n/a
Army ROTC PT	2,876*	2,847*	25*	27*	83*
Air Force ROTC PT	2,716*	2,716*	24*	2	64*
Basketball	2,558	2,542	12	0	33*
Baseball	2,481	2,418	15	1	18*
Naval ROTC PT in the Rain	2,782*	2,730*	22*	10*	55*
Career Fair 1	2,268	2,231	12	2	n/a
Career Fair 2	2,142	2,090	15	0	n/a
Career Fair 3	2,099	2,046	9	0	n/a
Career Fair 4	2,067	2,027	10	3	n/a
Career Fair 5	2,040	2,001	8	2	n/a
Career Fair 6	2,018	1,977	8	0	n/a
What is Breakout? Teaser	2,955*	2,827*	77*	13*	n/a
Rank Announcement 1	2,704*	2,480	17	0	n/a
Rank Announcement 2	2,606	2,401	16	3	n/a
Rank Announcement 3	2,546	2,373	13	5*	n/a
Rank Announcement 4	2,521	2,363	19*	3	n/a
Simulated DUI Event 1	3,364*	3,206*	23*	28*	n/a
Simulated DUI Event 2	3,249*	3,103*	15	8*	n/a
Simulated DUI Event 3	3,180*	3,028*	21*	28*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 1	2,796*	2,696*	22*	7*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 2	2,671	2,566*	9	5*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 3	2,611	2,491	12	19*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 4	2,600	2,460	13	18*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 5	2,579	2,437	9	10*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 6	2,576	2,441	9	37*	n/a
Midwinter Formal 7	2,570	2,437	12	2	n/a
Open House Welcome/Reasons	2,917*	2,827*	24*	15*	n/a



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Story Slide	Impressions	Reach	Likes	Shares	Sticker Taps
Open House Academic Fair	2,827*	2,776*	17	0	n/a
Army ROTC Branch Info Night 1	2,554	2,474	18*	3	n/a
Army ROTC Branch Info Night 2	2,298	2,249	14	9*	n/a
Army ROTC Branch Info Night 3	2,206	2,138	12	3	n/a
Army ROTC Branch Info Night 4	2,150	2,071	10	0	n/a
Army ROTC Branch Info Night 5	2,103	2,036	14	0	n/a

\* Higher than typical according to Meta (FB/IG) Reporting for Channel

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## SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM SNAPSHOT

*\*Please note: Earlier months may see higher reach and impressions as they were available for longer at the time this report was created in early April 2024. Timestamps are also in PST, so cut-off from one month to the next may be slightly skewed.*

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/vmi1839/>

### Monthly Averages by Post

Month	Comments	Reactions	Shares	Reach	Impressions	Clicks (links, images, etc.)	Reel Plays
JAN. 2024	36.46	458.43	26.94	20,930.51	22,114.29	762.94	167,944.50*
FEB. 2024	105.67	719.84	42.09	11,679.93	12,424.47	1,223.73	4,492
MAR. 2024	26.79	331.24	14.12	13,066.85	12,185.88	598.82	53,700

\*Viral reel of Rat Drill Competition posted Jan 29. 330,922 plays.

### Most Popular Posts by Month according to Reach

Month	#1	#2	#3
JAN. 2024	A somber stillness – video of post during winter furlough. <b>97,260</b>	Rat Drill Competition – video of event in Cocke Hall <b>87,499</b>	Looking forward to 2024 – New Year post with drone footage of parade <b>34,538</b>
FEB. 2024	TAPS – Capt. Jack Casey – Photo & news <b>151,095</b>	Breakout – 2027 photo <b>40,296</b>	Message to the Rat Mass – Interview reel following Fakeout <b>21,433</b>
MAR. 2024	RCO Brian Pritchard Intro – Reel with popular sound <b>160,839</b>	Scenes on Post – highlight photos from March <b>28,907</b>	VMI Cop Wins MVP – news and photos <b>27,173</b>

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Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/virginiamilitaryinstitute/>

## Monthly Averages by Post

Month	Impressions	Reach	Engagements	Shares	Plays	Likes	Comments	Saves
JAN. 2024	9,927.78	8,231.13	989.91	93.00	11,029.71	923.03	5.35	13.83
FEB. 2024	10,891.45	8,864.16	1,175.97	123.67	21,650.75	1,041.65	9.58	21.81
MAR. 2024	11,740.38	10,297.29	959.00	14.20	28,752.00	896.38	5.90	11.38

## Most Popular Posts by Month according to Reach

Month	#1	#2	#3
JAN. 2024	Rat Drill Competition – video of event in Cocke Hall <b>14,402</b>	Who’s wishing for snow? – archive images <b>13,567</b>	A somber stillness – video of post during winter furlough. <b>13,482</b>
FEB. 2024	What if? – Breakout recap video with popular sound <b>26,330</b>	Breakout AM – Recap Reel with popular sound <b>23,135</b>	Breakout – 2027 photo <b>21,532</b>
MAR. 2024	RCO Brian Pritchard Intro – Reel with popular sound <b>76,296</b>	VMI Women Pave the Way – reel for #InternationalWomensDay <b>11,711</b>	Rank Announcements – photo carousel from event <b>9,286</b>

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LinkedIn <https://www.instagram.com/virginiamilitaryinstitute/>

## Monthly Averages by Post

Month	Impressions	Reach	Clicks	Likes	Shares	Comments	Engagements	Eng. Rate / Impress	Eng. Rate / Reach	Video Views
JAN. 2024	4,738.66	3,221.17	500.69	96.21	2.90	5.52	605.31	12.64%	18.75%	2,447.80
FEB. 2024	6,495.58	4,326.38	544.42	112.24	6.44	7.00	670.11	11.58%	18.24%	1,676.50
MAR. 2024	3,720.62	2,534.04	599.73	81.38	2.81	4.23	688.15	14.86%	22.79%	n/a

## Most Popular Posts by Month according to Impressions

Month	#1	#2	#3
JAN. 2024	Faculty Authors Published – news link for Atwell and Wise <b>17,690</b>	A somber stillness – video of post during winter furlough. <b>11,763</b>	Two Brothers/Keydet Club Award – news link and photo <b>10,743</b>
FEB. 2024	TAPS – Capt. Jack Casey – Photo & news <b>138,985</b>	Capt. Casey Memorial Event in Barracks – Photos <b>16,072</b>	Breakout – 2027 photo <b>9,362</b>
MAR. 2024	Today Show Link/Video of Father at Graduation <b>7,782</b>	Rank Announcements – photo carousel from event <b>7,604</b>	VMI alums complete Ranger School – provided by AROTC <b>6,811</b>

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X (Twitter) <https://www.twitter.com/vmi1839/>

## Monthly Averages by Post

Month	Impress.	Engage.	Engage Rate	Retweet	Likes	Profile Clicks	URL Clicks	Media View	Media Engage
JAN. 2024	664.31	27.69	3.64%	0.92	11.33	1.69	1.33	37.33	6.74
FEB. 2024	1182.02	53.79	3.92%	0.45	16.73	3.14	6.98	16.93	8.39
MAR. 2024	731.85	31.24	4.33%	0.24	10.58	2.30	4.76	5.79	5.79

## Most Popular Posts by Month according to Engagement Rate

Month	#1	#2	#3
JAN. 2024	Throwback to Breakouts from years past <b>9.46%</b>	Happy New Year Short Video <b>8.10%</b>	All SoCon Faculty Announcement <b>7.48%</b>
FEB. 2024	Breakout Recap – photo collection <b>8.6%</b>	Scenes on Post – highlight photos from the month <b>7.5%</b>	Vote for Moe – graphic and link <b>7.1%</b>
MAR. 2024	Today Show Link/Video of Father at Graduation <b>12.7%</b>	Rank Announcements – photo carousel from event <b>12.3%</b>	Extra Mile: Pre-Law – Featured Story <b>7.9%</b>

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## V. WEB

The VMI Web Team continues to focus on providing timely, accurate, and engaging content across the vmi.edu site, with emphasis on best representing the benefits of a VMI education and its varied programs, the successes and achievements of a diverse and talented Corps of Cadets, and important information related to health, safety, and upcoming events. Special project rearrangements and schedule adjustments continue to allow for a focus on recruitment. Large portions of the website are also undergoing overhauls to compete in design and content more directly with other senior military colleges (SMCs) and the service academies, as well as other state and private universities. This is done in partnership with many departments across post, most notably the Dean's office, Commandant's office, and Admissions.


Significant issues with the content management system (CMS) vendor, TerminalFour and its many technical glitches continue to take away from the time the web team is able to spend on content creation and updates, and limits design options, but the team continues to create custom code and content to work around this major issue. A large amount of time has been spent over the past year to work with a new vendor to develop a plan to migrate the site to a more modern, technically advanced, and supported framework and host. The assistant director for digital communication is working to finalize a scope of work to present to administration and procurement for approval, thanks to financial support through the PELL-targeted grant.

Financial Aid and Admissions pages continue to be updated to reflect changes not only in the VMI Admissions & Aid process, but also changes to the FAFSA which impact all colleges and universities. Additionally, the Academics sub-site continues to see overhaul of content and layout, along with newly developed pages to ensure that VMI competes not only with academies and SMC, but also with other colleges and universities, particularly in Virginia, with increased focus on strong academic programs and unique research and scholarly opportunities.

The largest design changes occurred on the [Naval ROTC](#) portion of the site and the [Admissions landing page](#). Taking design and layout cues from VMI's competitors, the landing page now incorporates video and quick link content. It then covers why interested students should choose VMI, and the next steps they should take. This step-by-step content helps to align the presentation of the admissions process to line up more closely with West Point and The Citadel. This is just one of the many collaborations between C&M and the Admission team, under the guidance of the Deputy Director of Enrollment Marketing & Engagement, aimed at harnessing the site as a true recruitment tool. The design also lines up to the CRM being used by the admissions team, aiming for a cohesive marketing and visual story at all stages of recruitment.

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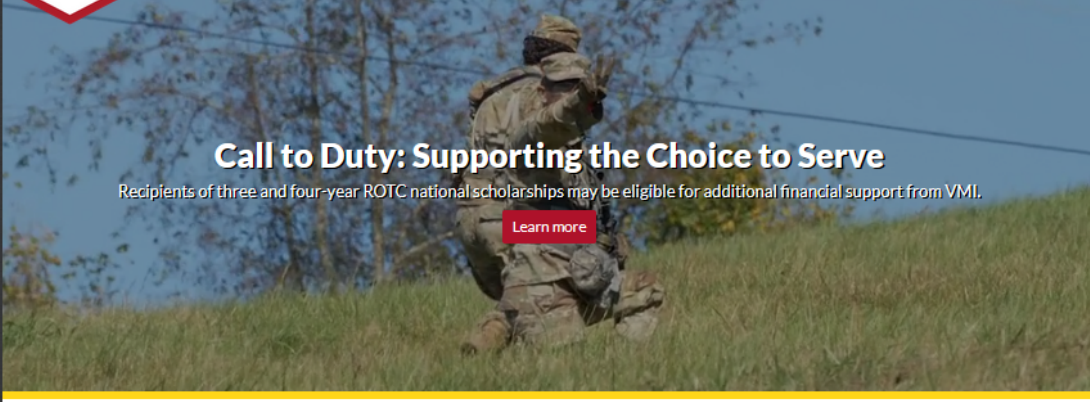
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START YOUR JOURNEY: [INQUIRE](#) [VISIT](#) [APPLY](#)

MYVMI OFFICES A-Z CALENDAR GIVE

[About](#) [Admissions](#) [Academics](#) [ROTC](#) [Cadet Life](#) [Athletics](#) [Community](#)



## Call to Duty: Supporting the Choice to Serve

Recipients of three and four-year ROTC national scholarships may be eligible for additional financial support from VMI.

[Learn more](#)

ADMISSIONS AND AID | [Visit](#) [Talk to Us](#) [Prepare](#) [Apply](#) [Costs and Aid](#) [Appointed Students](#) [Our Graduates](#) [Staff](#)

### Why choose VMI?

- High-quality undergraduate degree programs in engineering, the sciences, and humanities taught by dedicated, award-winning faculty in small classes, allowing for individual attention and support.
- Military training under the largest ROTC program in the nation.
- Daily life and traditions built on honor, civility, self-discipline, and lifelong bonds through the "brother rat" spirit.
- Access to funding for qualified applicants and cadets through various types of aid aimed at making your education dollars go further.

### I'm interested in attending VMI. Where should I start?


- #### 1. Introduce Yourself to the Institute

If you are interested in attending VMI next year, or in the future, the best place to start is by connecting with the Institute through our [inquiry form](#). This will let the Admissions team know that you are ready to learn more about the advantages of a VMI education, and lead to invites to events, notices of application opening dates, scholarship opportunities and more.
- #### 2. Visit Post & Meet with Admissions

The best way to experience all that VMI has to offer those who choose to 'Never Settle for Ordinary' is to visit post (VMI's campus) and meet with faculty, staff, and cadets during an [in-person open house](#). Our admissions team is also standing by ready to meet with you through a [one-on-one](#) interview, in person or digitally.
- #### 3. Prepare Academically & Physically


It is important that you begin practicing good study habits and self-discipline in high school, [taking courses](#) that will help you be competitive in the college admission process. Applicants should also prepare for the [physical demands](#) of VMI. Explore our [academics](#), [ROTC programs](#), and [cadet life](#) to learn more about what you'll do as a member of the Corps.
- #### 4. Apply to VMI's Corps of Cadets

Ready to accept the challenge of attending VMI and become part of something bigger than yourself? [Apply today](#) through the Institute's application or CommonApp. Explore what you'll need to have on hand to apply and which version of the online application is right for you, including how to [apply for financial aid](#). There are various [scholarships, loans, and grants](#) for applicants and current cadets.




97%

of VMI graduates are employed, enrolled in graduate school, or commissioned into the armed forces within 6 months of graduation.



10:1

student to faculty ratio means VMI cadets receive focused, individualized instruction across 14 undergraduate degree programs.



Over 50%

of VMI graduates regularly choose to commission into the United States Armed Forces through VMI's ROTC program.

VMI: Forging 21st Century Leaders

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## WEBSITE ANALYTICS

Overall, the website saw a relatively significant increase in traffic compared to the previous three months. Views were up 5.82% with a 9.81% increase in users. Additionally, users interacted with pages at an increased rate, meaning more clicks, downloads, and scrolls to go beyond the first paragraph on pages. Large jumps in ROTC subsite analytics in all categories are connected strongly to the work done by the web team with search engine optimization (SEO) explained later in this report. The Financial Aid pages also saw more traffic, most likely due to not only the Admissions cycle but the FAFSA updates linked from the homepage and social media. Year-to-year comparisons will resume in the fall once the Google Analytics shift is completed, allowing for addition tracking of traffic changes and patterns.

Decreases in analytic tallies for the Apply page were expected as once applicants are in the VMI pipeline, they will interact predominantly with the Admissions CRM, which is new this cycle. Drops in visits to the Cadet Life section were also expected as the bump in Oct. - Dec. From events skews that section of the website.

## JAN – MAR 2024 TOTALS & CHANGE COMPARED TO PRECEDING PERIOD

Site Section	Pageviews	Users	Views per User	Average Engagement Time	Events (Clicks, Downloads, etc.)
<b>Homepage</b>	<b>150,604</b> 2.22%	<b>69,184</b> +13.94%	<b>2.18</b> -10.28%	<b>00:31</b> -9.14%	<b>525,700</b> +3.21%
<b>About</b>	<b>118,196</b> +10.17%	<b>39,139</b> +10.53%	<b>3.02</b> -0.33%	<b>01:19</b> +2.56%	<b>353,290</b> +11.37%
<b>News</b>	<b>48,109</b> +4.57%	<b>21,905</b> +39.73%	<b>2.20</b> -10.85%	<b>00:50</b> -7.37%	<b>134,315</b> +32.38%
<b>Academics</b>	<b>78,313</b> +12.78%	<b>25,808</b> +16.62%	<b>3.03</b> -3.3%	<b>01:25</b> -6.93%	<b>236,732</b> +12.88%
<b>Admissions</b>	<b>36,582</b> +13.39%	<b>15,720</b> +11.54%	<b>2.33</b> +1.66%	<b>01:20</b> +11.02%	<b>111,216</b> +15.71%
<b>Apply Page (Admissions)</b>	<b>7,672</b> -16.45%	<b>4,510</b> -5.39%	<b>1.37</b> +0.12%	<b>00:33</b> -0.79%	<b>22,527</b> -15.11%
<b>Financial Aid</b>	<b>16,143</b> +21.11%	<b>7,432</b> +10.05%	<b>2.17</b> +10.05%	<b>01:24</b> +24.2%	<b>47,754</b> +23%
<b>Cadet Life</b>	<b>36,598</b> -9.72%	<b>16,083</b> -12%	<b>2.28</b> +2.59%	<b>01:27</b> +3.01%	<b>108,889</b> -8.76%
<b>ROTC</b>	<b>16,223</b> +16.83%	<b>6,874</b> +4.07%	<b>2.36</b> +12.26%	<b>01:44</b> +21.55%	<b>50,825</b> +17.04%



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## MOST POPULAR PAGES OF JAN – MAR 2024

1. Homepage
2. Critical Dates & Academic Calendar
3. Visit Page [Admissions]
4. Apply Page [Admissions]
5. Admissions Landing Page
6. VMCW Landing Page
7. Majors and Minors [Academics]
8. About Landing Page
9. Offices A-Z [About]
10. Job Openings [Human Resources]

## SUMMARY

Of note are the large increases in traffic to the Admissions and Financial Aid portions of the website, a goal of the digital comms team in coordination with the respective departments for the opening of the 2024-25 admissions cycle and FAFSA changes. Gains may also be largely attributed to the search engine optimization (SEO) work done in partnership with BrightEdge, a contracted vendor, serving VMI pages to more web users. Both BrightEdge automatic features and the web team while developing content have emphasized page-to-page links to drive traffic throughout the site. Cadet Life will be targeted heavily in spring 2024, and academics should see a bounce back once the ROTC and Library shift are no longer reflected in comparison data.

## MOST VIEWED NEWS STORIES OF JAN. – MARCH 2024

*Note: This table depicts the stories with the most views during the time period of this report, not necessarily items written during the same semester. Criticism of VMI searches for content regarding statues, DEI/DOI, and the superintendent have dropped significantly this quarter.*

Story Title	Pageviews	Date of Publication
<b>TAPS — Capt. Jack Casey ‘19</b>	2,997	2/9/2024
<b>New Corps Leadership Takes the Stage</b>	2,238	3/6/2024
<b>A Look at VMI’s Next Cadet Leaders</b>	1,332	3/25/2024
<b>Personnel Update from the Superintendent</b>	533	1/30/2024
<b>Barr Sets National Powerlifting Records</b>	488	2/22/2024
<b>A Look Back – 25 Years of Women at VMI</b>	450	9/28/2022
<b>VMI Employee Creates Brine Sprayer, Saving Taxpayers Thousands</b>	399	2/26/2024
<b>Two VMI Professors Land Book Deals</b>	360	1/17/2024
<b>Environment Virginia Symposium to Be Held at VMI</b>	336	2/5/2024
<b>Birdsong Excels with Bagpipes</b>	331	2/2/2024
<b>VMI Begins to Relocate the Stonewall Jackson Statue</b>	318	12/4/2020
<b>Rank Announcements Usher in New Corps Leadership</b>	305	3/9/2023
<b>Behind the Balance – Tyloer Mousaw ‘24, Keydet Wrestling *</b>	299	2/12/2024
<b>Institute to Host Military School Band &amp; Choir Festival</b>	295	2/12/2024
<b>Keydets Swum and Dive Break Multitude of Records *</b>	280	2/19/2024

<b>Honors Week – Barracks Security at VMI *</b>	274	3/28/2024
<b>Secret Service Visits Post to Recruit Top Talent</b>	267	1/23/2024
<b>Former CIA Officer Brings Principles of Leadership to VMI</b>	265	2/8/2024
<b>VMI Welcomes Female Combat Helicopter Pilot</b>	259	4/3/2023
<b>Gifts Lead to Extraordinary Connection for VMI Alum</b>	258	12/4/2023

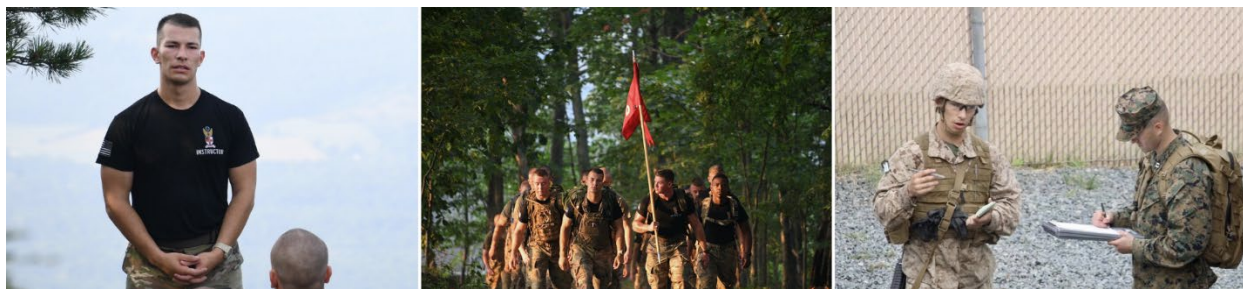
\* Featured Story by Digital Communications Employee(s)

## FEATURES CONTINUE AS FAN FAVORITE CONTENT

January through April saw 15 new feature stories on the website ranging from extracurricular activities, athletics, academics, and ROTC. Overall, there were nearly 10,000 page views from all feature stories in this time with just over 4,500 users checking out that section of the website. On average, each person was clicking each story twice, with an average engagement time of 52 seconds. The continuation of two recently added story series — Midshipmen Moments and Behind the Balance — proved to be high winners for engagement.

Midshipmen Moments features Naval and Marine ROTC midshipmen at VMI. The stories have ranged from what each has done on specific summer assignments, to overall leadership opportunities cadets have engaged in. The Naval ROTC program provides two programs in which cadets can enroll in — U.S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps.

The mission is to develop midshipmen mentally, morally, and physically, and to instill the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty to commission them as Navy or Marine officers. The NROTC program fosters high-level responsibilities of command, citizenship, and government. These stories showcase elite abilities and have really taken off with our audiences. The story featuring Sebastian Ramirez saw a nearly 34% engagement rate with 219 page views.



Behind the Balance features cadet-athletes and how they balance cadet responsibilities along with being a NCAA Division I athlete. These stories specifically shine light on various cadets that are involved in sports teams but may not be the captains or head leaders of each team. We wanted to feature those who not only work hard but may fly under the radar more.

Cadet-athletes at VMI not only have their responsibilities with their selected sport but cadet duties on top of that. By showing how each cadet handles the stresses of cadet life and athlete

responsibilities, these stories provide an honest example of what to expect once deciding to attend VMI for athletics and academics. The main stressor of these stories is the high workload many of these cadet-athletes take on for academics, many with full course loads along with their mandatory practices and other cadet responsibilities.

The Behind the Balance story featuring Tyler Mousaw, a wrestler, saw 30% engagement rate and 299 page views.



The story series, The Extra Mile, also continued during this time, highlighting VMI's various extracurricular clubs with photos, video, and feature writing. We saw that some older stories showed up on our analytics like one featuring the Hockey Club, with 202 page views and an engagement rate of nearly 66%. Another one featuring the Rugby Club had 135 page views and an engagement rate of 73%. This shows that people are coming back to these evergreen stories to learn more about what VMI offers, reaffirming that feature stories are a huge content investment.

This story series has wrapped for the year, but there are still opportunities for the next school year to showcase the remaining clubs that have not been featured.



Stories featuring athletes and sports also topped the engagement and views. The feature story about the swim and dive team breaking multiple records saw 280 views and an engagement of 42%. Another Behind the Balance, featuring basketball player Devin Butler, saw 203 page views and an engagement rate of 34%.

Moving forward, there will be a new story series called The Cadet Collective, which features the bonds created at VMI and the story behind them. VMI requires structure and dedication. It also becomes a place where bonds are created that can last a lifetime. Maybe it's a professor, a coach, or a fellow cadet. No one makes it through VMI alone. The Cadet Collective tells the stories of those relationships that help pave the way for success. Several interviews have been done on just under a dozen cadets for this series, which will be launched in mid-April.

**SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO):**

Every page on the vmi.edu site continues to undergo updates and upgrades, some more significant than others. New metatags are being added to the website to increase search engine optimization (SEO) and properly format link sharing across social media and email tools. Additionally, photos are being selected and formatted to include important keywords in their tagging to not only continue to update the site to best represent VMI as it is and hopes to be, but also to target interested applicants, targeting keywords and topics most in competition with service academies, senior military colleges, and other Virginia colleges and universities.

There have already been significant improvements to SEO and vmi.edu visibility. The work done by the web team is facilitated largely by the purchase of the BrightEdge software contract, which does research and analysis that would take multiple staff members months to do, and would never match the 24–48-hour turnaround time of BrightEdge analysis. Efforts continue on increasing traffic to admissions, financial aid, and ROTC.

**Largest improvements in blended rank (place in Google results), March 31 VS Dec 31 :**

<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Monthly Search Volume</b>	<b>Blended Rank</b>	<b>Blended Rank Change</b>	<b>Google Page #</b>
<b>air force rotc requirements *</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>+99</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ratlines</b>	<b>1,900</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>+99</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>military academy usa</b>	720	27	+74	2
<b>air force rotc scholarships *^</b>	1,000	43	+58	5
<b>military schools</b>	22,200	51	+40	5
<b>us navy flag officers *</b>	390	63	+38	7
<b>navy rotc program *</b>	170	53	+38	6
<b>navy rotc *</b>	3,600	26	+29	3
<b>top military colleges</b>	320	43	+25	5
<b>military programs</b>	320	82	+19	9
<b>academic major</b>	320	75	+18	8
<b>best rotc programs</b>	170	34	+18	4
<b>american military academies</b>	720	73	+17	8
<b>army rotc</b>	6,600	33	+17	4

Keyword	Monthly Search Volume	Blended Rank	Blended Rank Change	Google Page #
<b>military colleges in us</b>	880	21	+16	3
<b>military branch</b>	18,100	52	+12	5
<b>army degrees</b>	5	86	+11	9
<b>Naval ROTC *</b>	3,600	20	+11	2
<b>army branch</b>	<b>6,600</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>+11</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>majors and minors</b>	1,900	91	+10	9
<b>medal of honor recipient</b>	12,100	66	+8	7
<b>cadets</b>	18,100	26	+6	3

BrightEdge not only incorporates guided edit suggestions for the web team to target terms such as those above, but also does work in the background through coding implemented in conjunction with the assistant director of digital communication to target specific key points Google values in its ranking.

#### CASE STUDY: ROTC PAVES THE WAY

The [Army ROTC unit subsite](#) at VMI was the first SEO-guided rewrite of vmi.edu. In conjunction with faculty and staff, the VMI web team created new content, pages, layouts, and metadata to allow Army ROTC at VMI to more closely compete with other programs, particularly The Citadel and West Point. Improvements in search results continue to be seen months later. New pages from that project are indicated in green.

Following the success of the design and research concepts, similar overhauls were completed with Air Force ROTC and Naval ROTC. Pages above with an asterisk (\*) indicated successes seen from these overhaul and redesign projects, including additions of brand new pages (^) targeted as competing with the related academies, SMCs, and other ROTC options.

New systems for requesting web edits and larger scale projects will be implemented for AY24-25 to streamline the process, provide clear reporting, and ensure that all affected parties have all the needed information to provide expedient, high-quality service and end products. The digital communications team looks forward to expanding the pool of content contributors to continue to increase the range of voices and topics represented on the VMI.edu website and support the mission of One Corps, One VMI on the most visible marketing tool of the Institute.

## **Related C&M Plan Status Updates for Goal 2: Enhance Digital and Web-Based Communications**

### **2.1 INCREASED FUNCTIONALITY**

C&M will continue to submit a budget request for a new content management system replacement to address flaws and shortcomings explained in previous reports. The delay in purchase, and therefore implementation, of the new system means that we will continue to see negative impacts with our current system. Most notably, there is often a sizable lag between content updates in the CMS and its reveal on the live website. As a result, there should be the expectation that notices on the web may take up to 30 minutes following completion of work to appear live to the public. This will negatively affect the Institute's ability to communicate in a timely fashion during emergency notification situations or public relations concerns such as those we dealt with in relation to articles from the Washington Post.

The current system's customer support has been largely unhelpful, despite priority status ticket submission. In fall 2023, this included major issues with the need to custom build the required megamenu and renamed and deleted pages still displaying to the public. This caused significant problems with DOI contents and the new ROTC launch.

With the limitations of our current CMS, the team must constantly write new, custom code to implement modern, mobile-friendly design styles. This takes time away from content overhaul and actual page updates. It has also slowed implementation of a more user-friendly menu structure as new code is often incompatible with the structure of our current site in TerminalFour, our current content management system.

Finally, TerminalFour's contract with VCU has expired, meaning they are no longer connected to VASCUPP.

The team is currently in talks with SiteVision, which holds VITA's statewide "Citizen Facing Website & Application and all associated services" contract, as well as a statewide hosting contract VA-190906-STVN, to move to a new service. A scope of work is being finalized that would not only move the vmi.edu site to a more stable and better supported system with modern technologies, but also incorporates design and layout assistance to expedite the move. Pending final contract negotiations and approvals, a new site is planned for launch in 2025.

### **2.2: MODERN & ENGAGING DESIGN & 2.3: REPRESENTATION & VISIBILITY**

The team continues to update content types, styles, and layouts to ensure a more modern and enticing design in line with our competitors. The shift to a new CMS, referenced elsewhere in this report, is key to fully harnessing the website as a recruitment tool, and allowing the team to spend more time on content and design with the elimination of constant troubleshooting.

The Web Team continues to update photos to best represent the current Corps of Cadets and showcase the benefits and uniqueness of a VMI education. These graphics are also a key resource for SEO through alternative text, also an accessibility requirement, offering a place to

include more keywords to target our top competitors. An additional feature of the BrightEdge contract was the implementation of Autopilot. This automated service, which can be customized by the web team, optimizes images for a faster load without quality loss, creating a better mobile experience while also allowing more design freedom.

The goal remains to continue to increase the recruitment style of all pages and emphasize the breadth and depth of academic offerings to compete with other state colleges and universities, particularly for those non-commissioning recruits. A new majors and minors page was launched to better match industry norms in searchability and organization, making it clearer what is on offer at the Institute.

## 2.4 INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

Increasing the accessibility of content across the vmi.edu domain continues to be a top priority for the Web Team. Content editors within the CMS have also been contacted as to updated standards for design as they continue to add to the site. During the past year, the Web Team maintained an average of 99% accessibility for all HTML code on the site, and weekly reviews continue to ensure this high success goal.

A complete review and overhaul of all downloadable content is required to officially meet 100% accessibility for the site, as anything presented on the website, such as PDFs, must meet the same standards. Phase 1 of this process – cleaning unused PDFs off of the server, is underway. Each document must then be verified for accuracy by the owner and remediated as necessary by the web team.

Research will continue for the possibility of external remediation depending on the number of documents remaining as accessibility remediation is often a full-time role and the current staffing levels do not allow for any member of the team to focus solely on this important user experience and legal requirement project.

A new guide for accessibility in all products created in Microsoft Office has been created and is currently in review. Additionally, the Communications & Marketing team is exploring the possibility of purchasing transcription software to expedite closed captioning and transcripts for video and audio products, an ADA requirement for digital media.