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**Graduate and Professional Student Senate  
 GPSS Resolution 2021-22R  
 Resolution to Reform Transparency and Democratic Input Across University Affairs**

First Reading by GPSS:	Nov 4th 2021
Second Reading by GPSS:	date
Staff Senate Review:	date
Faculty Senate Review:	date
Undergraduate Student Senate Review:	date
First Reading by University Council:	date
Approved by University Council:	date
Approval by University President:	date
Approved by Board of Visitors:	date
Effective:	upon approval

**WHEREAS**, Virginia Tech is a land grant institution that strongly values *public responsibility*, *community input*, and *transparency*. Furthermore, Virginia Tech takes seriously its mission of *ut prosim*, “that I may serve,” which emphasizes the importance of public service and serving one’s community; and

**WHEREAS**, while Virginia Tech has been very successful in some of its transparency initiatives, many important elements of the university remain opaque such as administrative organization, the Board of Visitors (see Appendix 1) and the Virginia Tech Foundation (see GPSS resolution 2021-2022C); and

**WHEREAS**, some of these gaps in transparency have been identified and addressed at the state level (see Appendix 2), but in many ways only provide limited opportunities for input and transparency. We take the spirit of this resolution to be a public desire for increased accountability at Virginia Tech; and

**WHEREAS**, Virginia Tech has been unfortunately limited in its accountability to the community. While efforts have been made to improve this, such as with the 2020 Climate Action Commitment that values ongoing community involvement, this is a relatively uncommon facet of university operations; and

**WHEREAS**, the town-gown relationship provides many opportunities for community partnerships that build upon and extend past our existing relationships with town council who typically already are affiliated with or employed by Virginia Tech; and

**WHEREAS**, Virginia Tech does not operate under democratic decision making processes, with shared governance structures and a few community groups currently operating purely as advisory bodies and having little to no power in decision making itself; and

**WHEREAS**, some of this is rectified by the incoming shared governance overhaul by placing certain relevant commissions underneath senates, but we take that to be a strong first step towards larger institutional reforms and more bottom-up decision making and assert that the university should build upon these changes to continue empowering the lower level senates with decision making authority; and

**WHEREAS**, we recognize that Virginia Tech is limited in how much it can redistribute decision-making powers because it is a public institution beholden to both state and federal regulations; and

**WHEREAS**, however, Virginia Tech still has an ethical obligation to improve the democratic decision-making processes available to the university community and surrounding communities impacted by Virginia Tech's decisions and has many opportunities to generate internal policies receptive to democratic decision making barring legal necessity; and

**WHEREAS**, below are some recommendations that can begin the process of addressing the gaps in our community transparency, accountability, and democratic decision-making but should not be taken as an endpoint; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that human resources or another relevant body of the university produce clear, public organizational charts for the university that allow the community to easily ascertain the roles and responsibilities of members of the administration at a glance; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Board of Visitors build upon the progress made by H.B. 2120 and open up public comment to the wider Virginia Tech community including students, graduate students, and staff as well as implement easier access to meeting minutes/recordings and offer multiple channels for input beyond Board of Visitors representatives. Lastly, we would like these practices to be audited for their accessibility so that they can be readily accessed by disabled members of the community; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the lower levels of shared governance be invested with greater decision-making authority and are transitioned over the next three years from purely advisory bodies to decision-making entities; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that a working group be established that regularly audits the transparency, accountability, and democratic decision-making functions of the university and strives to fulfil our motto of *ut prosim* by going above and beyond state and federal compliance

with the end goal of establishing Virginia Tech as a leader in democratic, public decision-making among our university peers; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that each of these recommendations should be treated independently even if captured by one resolution such that disregarding one is not grounds for disregarding others.

### **Appendix 1: Article demonstrating evidence in support of the resolution**

Local news article capturing our failures to be transparent with the Board of Visitors:

[https://roanoke.com/news/education/virginia-tech-earns-an-f-for-governing-board-accountability-advocacy-group-says/article\\_891e3544-55dd-11eb-8f8f-3fd80f68d932.html](https://roanoke.com/news/education/virginia-tech-earns-an-f-for-governing-board-accountability-advocacy-group-says/article_891e3544-55dd-11eb-8f8f-3fd80f68d932.html)

And more information concerning Board of Visitor transparency that could potentially generate best practices:

<https://www.pcapt.org/initiatives/college-governing-board-accountability-assessments-virginia>

### **Appendix 2: State Laws Increasing Transparency for Board of Visitors and Foundation**

Board of Visitors: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?211+ful+HB2120H1>

Foundation:

- <https://legiscan.com/VA/bill/HB1223/2020>
- <https://legiscan.com/VA/bill/HB510/2020>
- <https://legiscan.com/VA/bill/HB1529/2020>

We take these state laws to be emblematic of a public desire for more accountability at our public institutions, especially in the realm of finance. We agree that they represent good progress and a direction that the university should take the lead in advancing further.