WHEREAS, the summer of 2020 saw the largest social movement in United States history unite around abuses in the criminal justice system, calling for the abolition of police departments and mass incarceration; and

WHEREAS, many departments and university administrators have issued strong calls to action for addressing mass incarceration and the systemic racism (Appendix 1) of which policing and surveillance technologies are a major part (Appendix 2); and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has invested significant resources into developing surveillance and policing technologies including but not limited to developing drone technologies for border surveillance, drone / Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technologies for U.S. police forces, algorithms for surveilling students/civilians, and carceral criminal justice education; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that some applications are not necessarily unethical, such as agricultural research using drones. We are not referring to those projects, but rather recognize the need to distinguish socially useful projects from harmful research and development. Accordingly, enhanced scrutiny ought to be leveled at projects focusing on technologies with human subjects and recipients of surveillance and sources of algorithmic data. Further scrutiny should be directed towards projects with fiscal relations to criminal justice, policing, and carceral
institutions, their affiliates such as The GEO Group, or projects easily appropriated for the purposes of tracking, AI surveillance, predictive policing, or autonomous policing; and

WHEREAS, as an example, we have established “security” as a guiding principle for many of our research centers—including the newly established School of Environmental Security or the Hume center for security—when other frameworks oriented toward justice could be employed instead (Appendix 2); and

WHEREAS, the development of certain policing, security, and surveillance technologies contributes to the systemic racism that is the target of the 2020 protests and longer histories of racial justice protests; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has an ethical responsibility to protect the marginalized members of our community who directly experience violence from policing and border surveillance; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has a further responsibility to avoid complicity in the development of weapons and training for policing and border security; and

WHEREAS, current IRB and ethical review processes do not sufficiently protect vulnerable communities from the development of anthropotelemetric surveillance technologies and procedures that unequivocally target individuals based on racial, gender, and cultural prejudices; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that a task force be immediately charged with auditing the ethics of drone, surveillance, and other technologies with military or security applications for their ethical standards, and with working to develop guidelines that broaden ethical oversight beyond the current IRB protocol. The stakeholder portion of this task force (see GPSS 2021-2022A) should not include members from VTPD or security centers and instead be focused on recruiting students from overpoliced backgrounds and faculty who have critical expertise with security technologies. The broader ethical oversight should be applied to multiple levels of university management, with clear moral criteria that build upon existing practices, guided by the ethical values demonstrated in the above statements. The recommendations made by the task force should have the ultimate goal of increasing ethical oversight of research programs, resulting in a complete moratorium on the development of further technology and educational programs that support mass incarceration, drone warfare, and potentially harmful surveillance of marginalized communities at home and abroad.

Appendix 1: Statements of Support

Teach-in on BLM following the protests:

Presidential statement:
https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2020/05/president-inclusivevt-statement-may31.html


Statement from STS: https://liberalarts.vt.edu/about/inclusion-and-diversity/sts-scholars-for-justice.html

Statement from History: https://liberalarts.vt.edu/about/inclusion-and-diversity/historians-for-justice.html

Virginia Tech’s Unfinished Conversations on Race
https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/index/VT_UCOR.html

Appendix 2: Academic Literature on Policing


Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Tamara K. Nopper, 2021


**Appendix 3: Carceral Research Program Examples**

The Hume Center lists “cybersecurity, autonomy, and resilience for the national security community” as core principles for its organization.

Website: [https://hume.vt.edu/](https://hume.vt.edu/)

In 2020, Virginia Tech approved the “School of Environmental Security” as part of the College of Natural Resources and the Environment’s expansion into Northern Virginia. This center uncritically deploys the language of security in ways that stigmatize climate refugees and treats the environment as a resource for national security experts to control. The resolution specifically identified partnerships with border security and national security agencies as the potential application for work done at this School as well in addition to the problematic language.

Resolution here: [https://bov.vt.edu/assets/Attachment%20K_Resolution%20to%20Approve%20School%20of%20Environmental%20Security%20in%20College%20of%20Natural%20Resources%20and%20Environment.pdf](https://bov.vt.edu/assets/Attachment%20K_Resolution%20to%20Approve%20School%20of%20Environmental%20Security%20in%20College%20of%20Natural%20Resources%20and%20Environment.pdf)

The Virginia Tech Applied Research Corporation works in partnership with Virginia Tech resources to develop UAV technologies directly linked to national security projects whose board of directors includes Virginia Tech administration, Virginia Tech faculty, and Virginia Tech Foundation Administration.

Website: [https://vt-arc.org/about/](https://vt-arc.org/about/)

In 2014, Virginia Tech engineers started to experiment with UAV applications for policing, including using it to investigate crime scenes. The Virginia Tech Police Department is nationally recognized for its work on drones, which this resolution specifically identifies as a major ethical problem.
Virginia Tech’s department of sociology hosts a criminology major that uncritically supports and perpetuates security frameworks leading to discrimination and increased surveillance. While some efforts have been made to ameliorate this by encouraging students to take certificates in African American Studies and other more critical fields, the program exists to funnel people into security industries and some faculty members who work on “crime prevention” facilitate this lens.

There are more examples but many are rendered unavailable because of Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security information clearances. This lack of transparency only compounds the issues identified by this resolution.