



# INSTITUTE REPORT

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

Volume 49, Number 1, September 2020

## Despite Pandemic, Largest Class Ever Matriculates

By Mary Price

In a Matriculation Weekend unique in many ways due to the coronavirus pandemic, the largest class in VMI's 181-year history arrived on post Aug. 15-16, wearing masks and staying socially distanced throughout.

Once the two days were done, 522 rats had matriculated, up from 515 in 2019 and 519 in 2018. This year's rat mass, which will become the Class of 2024 after Breakout, hails from 33 states and four foreign countries. There are 64 women and 103 recruited NCAA athletes. Approximately 60 percent of the class is majoring in the STEM fields of science,



Troy Smith '21, regimental commander, leads matriculants up Letcher Ave. to begin their time at VMI.—VMI photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

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## Fall 2020 Semester Begins; Many Changes Cadets, VMI Community Adjust to a New Normal

By Mary Price

This fall, as cadets return to post from their longest absence since the Civil War, Institute leaders are striving to create the safest possible environment for cadets, faculty, and staff in the face of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. With that goal in mind, VMI has made a large number of changes to its regular

operations—changes that will affect nearly every aspect of life on post, from meals to military training to going to class. What

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# New Full-Time Faculty

- » **Applied Mathematics**—Maj. Katherine Crowley, visiting assistant professor
- » **Biology**—Maj. Alison Burke
- » **Chemistry**—Dr. Caleb Brown, visiting assistant professor
- » **Chemistry**—Maj. Kaitlyn Cartwright
- » **Civil and Environ. Eng.**—Maj. Rebekah Martin
- » **Civil and Environ. Eng.**—Maj. Rodney Wilkins
- » **ECBU**—Maj. Steven Landgraf
- » **ECE**—Lt. Col. David Feinauer
- » **ERHS**—Maj. Kimberly Anderson
- » **ERHS**—Maj. Adam Cody
- » **History**—Maj. Christopher Blunda
- » **History**—Dr. Madeline Ramsey
- » **Mechanical Engineering**—Maj. Craig Altmann
- » **Modern Languages**—Dr. Isaac Garcia Guerra
- » **Modern Languages**—Maj. Hicham Assaoui
- » **Physics and Astronomy**—Dr. Anushika Athauda

## Adjunct / Part-Time Faculty

- » **Civil and Environ. Eng.**—Adjunct Kacie D'Alessandro
- » **Civil and Environ. Eng.**—Adjunct Steven Hildreth
- » **CIS**—Adjunct Denis Gracanin
- » **ECBU**—Adjunct Kelechi Anyanwu
- » **ERHS**—Adjunct Christopher Yates
- » **ERHS**—Adjunct Kerry Smith
- » **ERHS**—Adjunct Elizabeth McKagen
- » **International Studies**—Adjunct Kenneth Lizzio
- » **International Studies**—Adjunct Wesley O'Dell
- » **International Studies**—Adjunct Glenn Shive, Eugenio Lopez chair
- » **Modern Languages**—Adjunct Xiaoming Hu, Project GO

## Athletic Staff

- » **Athletics**—Samuel Rice
- » **Athletics (M Soccer Coach)**—Maxwell Watson
- » **Athletics**—Patrick Ashford
- » **Athletics**—Craig Burks
- » **Athletics**—Logan Dahms
- » **Athletics**—Paige Engleman
- » **Athletics**—Haley Shotwell

## New ROTC

- » **Air Force ROTC**—Tech. Sgt. Michael Deboef
- » **Army ROTC**—Lt. Col. Joseph Brannon
- » **Army ROTC**—Capt. Tyler Thornton
- » **Navy ROTC**—Lt. Emily Shrum
- » **Navy ROTC**—Lt. Drew Yuen
- » **Navy ROTC**—Capt. Steven Beck
- » **Navy ROTC**—Gunnery Sgt. Luis Ledesma
- » **Navy ROTC**—Lt. Joseph Ziobro
- » **Navy ROTC**—CMDCS Terrance Foote 🇺🇸

# Determining What Helps Migrants Integrate

By Mary Price

This summer, Thomas Muldowney '21 worked on a research project that involved a lot of number crunching—with the goal of finding out which policies actually benefit people.

Muldowney, an economics and business major, was trying to determine what factors influence successful migrant integration in Europe, a continent that has seen millions of refugees arrive, many by boat, from North Africa and the Middle East over the past decade.

Muldowney's work, which took place under the auspices of the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute, was inspired when he took part in a summer 2019 trip to Europe led by Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl and Col. Tinni Sen, professors of economics and business, and Col. Howard Sanborn, professor of international

studies. Studying the integration of migrants, Muldowney wrote in his SURI proposal, would help him learn more about the opportunities and challenges facing Europe today.

"Even though the European migration crisis was at its peak in 2015, European Union member states still have to find ways to successfully integrate the migrants that remain in their countries into society," Muldowney wrote in an email.

Muldowney's research was split into two parts. The first was a qualitative analysis of current European Union policies relating to migration and refugees, with case studies focusing on Greece, Spain, and Germany. The second was a quantitative analysis in which Muldowney examined how one set of variables affects another set.

For the second part, he gathered an exhaustive data set of explanatory variables such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, urban versus rural population percentages, etc., for 50 European countries and paired it with another set of dependent variables that included the unemployment rate of migrants by country, the unemployment gap between native and foreign-born workers by country, and the percentage of adults who want less migration in their country.

To put all of these numbers together and understand how one set of factors influences the other, Muldowney used software called Stata, which is often used for statistical analysis in the social sciences.

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# INSTITUTE REPORT

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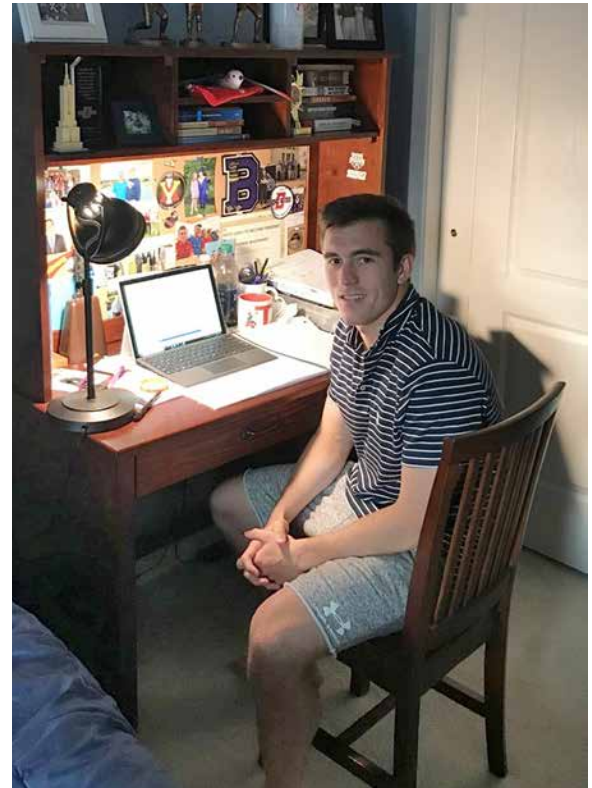
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"The most interesting aspect of my research is the research process itself," wrote Muldowney, who hopes to commission into the Navy. "Trying to relate variables such as GDP per capita, attitudes toward migrants, education levels, and people's level of trust in each other and EU institutions in order to figure out how well migrants can be integrated into society is very complex. I had to learn this coding software called Stata that helped me to compile the data I collected and use it to produce results that can then be interpreted to answer my main research questions."

He also had to face the challenge of working from home in Northern Virginia and communicating remotely with Dimitrova-Grajzl, his faculty mentor. "I am missing the face-to-face interaction with Col. [Dimitrova-Grajzl] and we have to resort to phone and Zoom calls, where even sometimes it is hard for me to communicate a question or problem I have or get an answer that makes sense to me," Muldowney commented over the summer. "But we have made it work, and I think it has been a great experience."

For her part, Dimitrova-Grajzl sees Muldowney's work as important to the creation of public

policy that can help migrants integrate more smoothly into their adopted countries. "We have seen a rise of populism in a lot of European countries, partly driven by the migration crisis in the 2010s," she stated. "Understanding what determines people's attitudes toward immigrants can help counter some of those populist trends." ❁



Thomas Muldowney '21 researches what helps migrants to Europe integrate into their new societies successfully.—Photo courtesy of Thomas Muldowney '21.

## Tenured and Promoted Faculty

Brig. Gen. Robert "Bob" Moreschi, deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty, has announced the promotion and granting of tenure to several faculty members. All promotions and tenure were effective Aug. 1, 2020, and are listed here by department.

### Promoted:

- » **Biology**—Col. Anne Alerding, promoted from associate professor to professor.
- » **Civil and environmental engineering**—Col. Wakeel Idewu, promoted from associate professor to professor.
- » **History**—Col. Houston Johnson V, promoted from associate professor to professor.

### Promoted and Granted Tenure:

- » **English, rhetoric, and humanistic studies**—Lt. Col. Steven Knepper, promoted from assistant professor to associate professor.
- » **Computer and information sciences**—Dr. Ramoni Lasisi, promoted from assistant professor to associate professor.
- » **Civil and environmental engineering**—Col. Thomas Timmes '92, promoted from associate professor to professor.
- » **Psychology**—Lt. Col. Sara Whipple, promoted from assistant professor to associate professor. ❁



# Alumnus Uses VMI Training; Leads to a Spark

By Maj. Michelle Ellwood

United States Space Force Captain Even Rogers '10 typically flies from Colorado to Arizona when visiting his family, but the small plane he has was in the shop. Isn't that how all stories of fate begin?

Rogers was visiting his mother and stepfather in April of this year as his stepfather battled the challenges of colon cancer. Because he drove, he was able to take his mountain bike. The trails in Sedona offered plenty of adventure and sometimes he'd stray from his usual course, which is exactly what he did on April 17.

Sydney Linden was on the same path, as she ran the Adobe Jack Trail frequently, but one wrong step caused Sydney to fall, fracturing her tibial plateau. She called a friend to help, but she was more than a half mile into the trail. As Even rounded a turn and saw her, she hinted that something was wrong. "I had sensed immediately that, if I stopped, I was in it for the long haul," Rogers shared. "As we had small talk, I was working out a plan in my head. Between Army ROTC and Rat Challenge, I knew exactly what to do." As he learned in his



Even Rogers '10 and Sydney Linden built a strong relationship after he rescued her on a trail in Arizona last spring. —Photo courtesy of Even Rogers '10

training with fellow cadets, he lifted her and carried her just over a half mile using the fireman's carry.

With rough terrain, Rogers was concentrating on getting Linden down the trail as safely as possible. Small talk continued, which comforted Linden and took her mind off her injury, but once at the base of the

trail, the realization of her injury hit. She was crying as her friend arrived to get her to the hospital. There was no good moment for an exchange of contact information, so Rogers and Linden parted ways—Linden to medical care and Rogers back up the trail to get his bike.

This story could have ended at the foot of the trail, but a text from Rogers' mom changed everything about two weeks later. Linden had been interviewed for an article in the *Sedona Red Rock News* looking for her "trail angel." She only knew his first name and that he was in the Air Force. Rogers' mom learned about the article from a friend and sent him a photo of the article. He emailed the writer of the story who then passed along Linden's phone number. Phone tag, followed by hours-long phone and Zoom calls, and then several dates have led to a blossoming relationship that only the Hallmark Channel could've predicted.

Besides being excited about spending time with Linden as much as he can in their

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## Construction Update

Over the summer, a new entrance to VMI from Letcher Avenue took shape, including the placement of bricks in the Letcher Avenue pavement to highlight the entrance to post and the construction of new Limits Gates. Nearby, the new headquarters for the VMI Post Police is almost complete, with window placement as one of the final tasks. The post police should be able to move into their new building by the beginning of October. Construction of a new, two-lane bridge over Woods Creek on Anderson Drive was finished just before matriculation. Scott Shipp Hall, under renovation since the summer of 2019, is on track for a fall 2021 completion. Over the Christmas furlough, the new addition to the building, along with the 1955 annex, will be readied for occupancy. Work will then begin on renovating the original portion of the building, which dates to 1918. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, and Mary Price.





long-distance relationship, Rogers reflects back on the moments on the trail and his time at VMI. "There are habits of mind that I developed at VMI. I learned how to learn, and how to think. I started to develop an intuition for when a moment is asking for something, so to speak. These skills have served me throughout my career."

Rogers visited VMI in high school during a leadership program that brought him

from Colorado to Virginia. They visited Washington & Lee University, and attended a parade at VMI. "I fell in love with the place," he says.

Since graduating with an English degree and a minor in writing, he joined the Air Force through Officer Training School, and is weeks away from earning his master of arts in social sciences from the University of Chicago. He is a

graduate of the United States Air Force Weapons School and will transfer to the United States Space Force in a few weeks, where he will continue his work on operational test and evaluation of Space Force spacecraft.

Rogers feels lucky to have been able to explore such a wide array of opportunities, but maybe one line on his resume should simply read "Trail Angel." ✪



## Cadre Week

Cadre Week, in which upper-class cadets prepare to lead the incoming rats, takes place the week before matriculation. Members of cadre practice march-up for the incoming matriculants in Cameron Hall. This week is also an opportunity to prepare corporals for their rat training duties, which include demonstrating new safety guidelines due to the coronavirus pandemic. Cadre members also take the VMI Fitness Test during Cadre Week. Cadets are not required to wear masks during physical training. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin, Kelly Nye, and Mary Price.



follows is a brief overview of key areas, but not an exhaustive listing of all the changes that have been made.

## Barracks

Life in barracks is much more strictly regulated than in years past. Cadet rooms are treated as family units for social distancing purposes, and visitation between rooms is not permitted unless authorized. Even sleeping positions are regulated: cadets must position themselves so their heads are facing a roommate's feet when they lie in bed.

The movement of cadets through arches and stairwells has also changed, as these areas involve passing fellow cadets in close proximity. Traditionally, rats have only been allowed to enter and exit barracks via Jackson Arch. This year, rats are allowed to use any arch that their company is allowed to use. Stairwells, meanwhile, are labeled for "up" or "down" use only, with no restrictions on which stairwells rats may use.

Shower usage is limited to a certain number of cadets to minimize the number of cadets in an enclosed space at any given time.

## Academics

As with everything else, going to class looks much different this academic year than it did in years past.

This fall, 44 percent of courses are being delivered in person, 34 percent in a hybrid environment (a mix of in person and online), and 22 percent online only. Hybrid courses are necessary because there are not enough classrooms with a sufficient number of seats to allow the course to meet in person each scheduled day with appropriate social distancing.

Classroom seating is, at most, 50 percent of a room's maximum capacity. This summer, Physical Plant employees built framed, movable Plexiglass barriers for the classrooms, which allow the professor the option to remove his/her mask while having mobility in the

front of the room. Cadets are required to wear their masks while in academic buildings and during the entirety of every in-person class. Acrylic face shields are also available for cadet and faculty use.

New classroom use procedures call for cadets to use disinfecting cleaning supplies to wipe down their desk and chair prior to the start of each class. In addition, classes have assigned seating to help with contact tracing.

To help move stagnant indoor air, building HVAC systems have been recalibrated to not just recirculate air, but also to periodically "flush" the building with outside air.

This year has also brought with it a lengthening of the academic



Col. Troy Siemers, professor of applied mathematics, teaches in the Turman Room of Preston Library on the first day of class, Aug. 31. —VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

day, which now ends at 4:30 p.m. instead of 4 p.m. Breaks between classes last for 15 minutes, up from the traditional 10 minutes, to give cadets traveling from one end of post to another more time to get there—a change especially needed now that more classes are being held in Kilbourne Hall, down Letcher Avenue and across Main Street from the other academic buildings.

Some ROTC classes are now offered at 11 a.m. and noon—times previously reserved for the dean's hour and lunch—and because of this and the need for social distancing at meals, the lunch period now extends from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Study spaces, too, have changed due to the pandemic. Normally, cadets are encouraged to find quiet places outside of barracks for

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study. This year, study space in academic buildings during the academic day is limited, and cadets are urged to study in barracks as much as possible.

The pandemic has also changed how cadets can access academic support services, including but not limited to the Writing Center, the Mathematics Education Resource Center (MERC), and the Office of Career Services. Walk-ins are no longer allowed at any of those offices. Rather, cadets must make appointments, and in some instances, support services are being offered virtually rather than in person.

## ROTC / Military Training

Each ROTC branch on post has its own guidelines for how to accomplish military training, but common regulations include social distancing indoors and out, the use of personal protective equipment, and having cadets broken into platoon-size groups.

Temperature and symptom checks are also part of the plan, as are hand-washing stations.

Many of the same regulations apply to physical training conducted by the commandant's office rather than an ROTC unit. Physical training that requires a partner has been eliminated, and as many workouts as possible are taking place outdoors. Use of the weight room in Cocke Hall—which is indoors and requires that cadets share equipment—is tightly regulated, with no more than 25 cadets at a time allowed to use the facility.

## Health Screening

At the beginning of each day, all cadets, in addition to on-post employees, are required to conduct an online health screening through the LiveSafe app downloaded to their cell phones. Cadets with symptoms will be directed to seek medical care through the VMI Infirmary.

If a positive COVID-19 case is reported in the Corps of Cadets, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will be notified through the communicable disease portal on the VDH website and the VDH representative will be notified so that contact tracing can be initiated as required.

In addition to contact tracing that is happening, a communication plan is in place to alert other groups of a positive case (auxiliary services, registrar, communications and marketing, etc.). Task forces continue to meet regularly to discuss changes evolving in areas such as athletics.

## Quarantine / Isolation

Cadets who have had close contact with a positive COVID-19 case will be quarantined in barracks. While in quarantine, cadets will not be authorized to visit other cadet rooms or have other cadets visit their room. Quarantined cadets must use bathrooms designated for quarantine on their respective stoop and wear facial coverings when in transit between their room and the bathroom. Meals will be delivered from Crozet Hall to cadets in quarantine.

Cadets diagnosed with COVID-19 by the Institute physician will be isolated in a room for 10 days or until symptoms subside and deemed not infectious by the Institute physician. As with cadets in quarantine, cadets in isolation will have meals delivered to them. Cadets in

quarantine and isolation, if medically able, will continue to attend classes virtually.

## Facilities

Many VMI facilities previously open to the general public are now closed. Preston Library, the VMI Museum, and the George C. Marshall Museum are among the locations closed to the public. The Stonewall Jackson House, which was closed over the summer, is expected to reopen to the public in mid-September, and the New Market Battlefield State Historical Park reopened over the summer, with a Monday through Friday schedule.

However, two outdoor VMI-owned venues popular with the public remain open: the track around Foster Stadium and the Chessie Nature Trail. Both are open from dawn to dusk seven days a week.

## Dining

In a departure from years past, Crozet Hall is no longer offering the self-serve/buffet-style dining that many alumni remember. Rather, employees of Parkhurst Dining, VMI's food service partner, now serve cadets from six serving lines.

Individually wrapped disposable utensils and disposable cups are provided. Individual packages of the most common condiments are available upon request, as well as individual cartons of milk and juice. Desserts, individual fruits, and salads are served or are pre-made and individually wrapped and available on the cold bar. Touchless soda fountains are available to dispense beverages; however, Parkhurst employees serve coffee.

To reduce the number of cadets in Crozet at any one time, there are three formations for breakfast roll call and supper roll call, and the lunch hour has been extended from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Cadets seat themselves with no more than six cadets per table downstairs and eight upstairs, with the tables spaced so the backs of the chairs are six feet apart. The upstairs tables are available at lunch only. A new option this fall is a grab-and-go lunch, available in the sub's mess accessible through the side doors on Stono Lane.

Even the entrance and the exit from Crozet Hall are regulated: entrance is by the two side doors on the front of the building, with the main center door to be used as an emergency exit only. Cadets exit Crozet by the side door next to the accumulator where they throw out their trash and turn in their plates.

## Parents Weekend / Visitation

Due to the pandemic restrictions in place, it became necessary to cancel Parents Weekend activities originally scheduled for Oct. 2-4, 2020. Additionally, in order to limit the outside exposure to COVID-19, VMI is asking parents, family, and friends to refrain from visiting their cadets except for those visits that are absolutely necessary. Cadet medical needs can be coordinated through the infirmary, while family matters should be worked through the chaplain's office.

VMI continues to work closely with the Virginia Department of Health officials in the Shenandoah Valley region. As conditions permit, restrictions on visitation will be eased or lifted accordingly. ❁

## Matriculation *continued from page 1*

technology, engineering, and mathematics, and 40 percent in the liberal arts.

Normally done on one day—usually the third Saturday in August—this year matriculation was spread out over two days, with half of the rat mass arriving on Saturday and the other on Sunday, to allow for proper social distancing. All incoming rats and those accompanying them were required to go through a health screening, including a temperature check, before receiving wristbands necessary for admittance to facilities on post. Matriculating rats were limited to only two guests to keep the numbers down each day.

But the mask requirement and wristbands weren't the only changes for these new cadets. Immediately after marching out of Cameron Hall and up Letcher Avenue to barracks, rats met with their administrative handlers, who began to start the tasks necessary to complete matriculation. This year, Matriculation Week ran for 16 days rather than the traditional nine. Because of the protocols required during the pandemic, Matriculation Week was divided into two parts: an administrative period and a training period.

"Everything takes longer due to COVID," said Col. William "Bill" Wanovich '87, commandant, in explaining the schedule changes. "Physical training takes longer. Hygiene takes longer. We needed more time to do it."

For the rats, their late afternoon and evening hours on Matriculation Weekend were spent listening to a presentation about COVID-19 safety precautions, learning about the Honor Court, and on Sunday evening, they were given the option of attending a chapel service. Over the course of Matriculation Week, rats got their hair cut, received their uniforms, and participated in company athletics, among many other activities. Meet your cadre took place one week after matriculation, on Sunday, Aug. 23, and was followed by more intense military training.

But while this year's matriculation was unusual, it wasn't unheard of in all of Institute history, noted Col. Keith Gibson '77, director of the VMI Museum System. Quick drop-offs weren't uncommon when he was a cadet, and in the Institute's early days, transportation difficulties often delayed cadets.

"In the early days of the Institute, it was very common for cadets to arrive late," said Gibson. He added that one of VMI's most famous alumni, Gen. George C. Marshall, VMI Class of 1901, matriculated a week late—and the Old Corps was already on the Parade Ground training when Marshall walked through the Limits Gates. ❀

## Matriculation Week

Family members said goodbye in Cameron Hall Aug. 15-16, and matriculants began their VMI experience, including uniform fittings, haircuts, and training. This year marks the first time new cadets matriculated over a two-day period.—VMI  
Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and Mary Price.







# 'Real Busy, Real Quick'

## New Human Resources Director Perseveres through Pandemic

By Mary Price

Little did Lt. Col. Eleanor "Ellie" Kania know when she graduated from California State University, Sacramento with a bachelor's degree in business administration that life would take her across the country to Virginia—and then land her as director of human resources at Virginia Military Institute on the eve of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Kania, who came to work at VMI in the late summer of 2016, was named interim director of human resources in early March after Lt. Col. Richard "Rich" Parella left for an opportunity elsewhere. In mid-July, she was promoted to her current rank and named director.

Taking the job of interim director might have seemed like a normal progression—but within days of Kania accepting the job, life at VMI and around the globe became anything but normal. Cadets were sent home in March for what would become their longest absence from post since the Civil War, and most employees capable of doing so were asked to work from home.

The onset of the pandemic was accompanied by a barrage of state and federal regulations for emergency leave. "I didn't have much time to think about it," recalled Kania. "It just got real busy, real quick."

Working nearly around the clock, Kania and her three-person staff had to interpret and apply not only the state's public health emergency leave, but also the federal government's Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which provides both paid emergency sick leave and expanded family medical leave to employees caring for children whose schools have closed in response to the pandemic.

It was no small task, as VMI has nearly 800 employees, each with a unique configuration of job and family responsibilities.

"We had two different leave systems that hit us kind of at the same time, and we had to make sure that we were administering them properly," Kania explained.

Brig. Gen. Dallas B. Clark '99, deputy superintendent for finance, administration, and support, noted that the new rules didn't come with much of a playbook for implementation, nor did they consider secondary effects.

"There were constant inquiries coming from the employees and their supervisors, and the supervisors didn't have the answers," said Clark. "Then the directors didn't have the answers. It all funneled back to [Kania] and the HR team. In some cases, we had to rely on her good wisdom, her experience, and her judgment."

Clark also appreciated Kania's unflappable nature. "She just stayed really, really calm and reassuring," he noted.



Lt. Col. Ellie Kania

Having a steady hand on the tiller is always good, of course—but according to Kania, it's vital when you work in human resources. She'd be the first to acknowledge that in her line of work, a carefully planned-out day isn't likely to stay that way.

"You can plan for certain things to happen, but you have to be okay with juggling and changing things up because you never know what's going to happen in a day in HR," she commented. "Anytime you're dealing with human beings, things happen. ...You have to be okay with constant change."

With its emphasis on social distancing, the pandemic has also challenged Kania's ability to implement the kind of people-first philosophy she believes in. Before the pandemic hit, VMI's human resources office saw a good deal of foot traffic, and Kania's door was always open. Even before many VMI employees began working from home in mid-March, the office had to close to walk-in visitors to protect employees.

"Shutting our doors has been a big challenge because that's not how we want our department to be," said Kania. "We don't want people to think we're inaccessible."

Currently, Kania and her staff are strategizing as to how to both welcome new employees and offer retirement counseling in a socially distanced fashion.

"The human part of it, the interactions we're accustomed to doing face to face, will be difficult for us," she acknowledged.

People skills, Clark noted, are one of Kania's great strengths. "She listens, and she understands," he commented. "She lends a great value to our employees and retirees."

Kania was rising to challenges long before she came to work at VMI. In her first few jobs, she developed a background in human resources and benefits administration, and later, after her children were grown, she earned a master of business administration degree from the University of Scranton, graduating summa cum laude. A few years later, she added a senior professional in human resources (SPHR) designation to her resume.

"After I got my MBA, VMI was the first place that contacted me and was interested in me," Kania remembered.

Once on the job, Kania found her footing quickly. "[Human resources] is something I've discovered," she noted. "I just have a natural affinity for it and ability to deal with the multiple duties and people issues that come through that office."

It's often a reactive job, no matter how proactive a human resources professional might want to be.

"I have to put out a lot of fires, but I have a lot of help," said Kania. "Gen. Clark and I work very closely together. He's all in. He's put in

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a lot of his time, and he's been a big help. I consider him a mentor to me."

Going forward, Kania knows she and her staff need to be prepared for just about anything.

"Because of the uncertain nature of the pandemic, I'm not really sure what challenges we'll be facing, but I'm really proud of what we've done at VMI to keep our employees informed, to keep things running," she stated.

Away from work, Kania keeps up with her family, now consisting of three grown children and three grandchildren, with a fourth grandchild expected in late January, and she's an avid reader.

But even as the pandemic presses her personal life to the sidelines, Kania is grateful to all of those who've supported her throughout a very tumultuous 2020, especially her hardworking staff. On the home front, there's her husband of 28 years, Gerry Kania, who

has taken over the household responsibilities so his wife can focus on her job.

"Without his support, I wouldn't have been able to work the hours I've had to work and do the things I've had to do," Ellie Kania commented.

Kania also singled out praise for Lt. Col. Michelle Caruthers, director of physical plant, and Lt. Col. Lee Clark III '93, director of auxiliary services, along with Ms. Marsha Mayhew, payroll manager, and Dr. David Copeland, Institute physician, a member of VMI's COVID Intake Assessment Team.

Not surprisingly, Kania is also grateful for her fellow employees who've persevered through the pandemic's uncertainty with grit and grace. "This hasn't been easy," she stated. "I've had many conversations with employees this has been difficult for. I'm really proud of their spirit to keep moving forward and doing their jobs." ❁

## SURI Project Seeks Motivation for Memes

By Mary Price

"Memes are just an interesting concept."

That's what Josie Freeman '23 had to say about her Summer Undergraduate Research Institute project, "Motivation for Memes." Freeman, a psychology major who hopes to commission into the Air Force, chose her topic because she is amused with the cultural phenomenon of memes, which are ideas conveyed through text, graphics, photo, or video and then shared widely via social media.

"Memes are very popular, especially among my age group, and I was like, 'Well, why do people look at memes?'" she commented.

After shifting her research goal to focus on of what kinds of people look at memes, Freeman worked with her academic and SURI adviser, Col. Scott Frein, professor of psychology, to design a survey that was sent out to VMI cadets.

The survey, which included approximately 100 questions, asked participants how often they look at memes, how does looking at memes make them feel, and how often do they create memes. The participants were then asked questions from accredited scales designed to measure personality traits and mental health.

Once the results were in, Freeman ran a t-test, which is a statistical tool often used in the social sciences to determine if the means of two groups are statistically different from one another.

"In [Freeman's] research, one analysis she did was to divide the participants into



Josie Freeman '23 studies what kinds of people look at memes, which are concepts on the internet conveyed by text, graphics, photos, or videos.—Photo courtesy of Josie Freeman '23.

high and low meme viewers based on their survey responses, and then she compared those two groups on a number of items," explained Frein.

The t-test resulted in an interesting finding. "There was a significance with how people scored in agreeableness and conscientiousness on the Big 5 scale and those who looked at memes less," said Freeman. The Big 5 scale includes five traits broadly used to describe the human personality: extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Freeman wasn't exactly sure what to think of her results, but she did have a few preliminary thoughts. "The high conscientiousness makes sense," she commented. "Maybe [conscientious people] don't want to waste their time on memes. They're more responsible with their time management. High agreeableness did shock me."

It's a correlation she can't quite understand. "You'd think that people with high agreeableness would want to look at memes more because they're popular," Freeman stated.

Down the road, Freeman would like to test another hypothesis: that memes are a form of sensation-seeking. It's a research angle that Frein supports. He noted that

Freeman's results will need to be validated with another group of test subjects, and then there are options for what to study next.

"We might try to study the effects of meme viewing in some way," Frein wrote in an email. "For example, this summer we asked people about their meme viewing behavior, but we did not actually have any participants look at memes as part of our study. In a future study, we might ask participants to view memes and see what effect, if any, it has on their mood." ❁

# Preston Library Reopens; Renovations Wrapping Up

By Mary Price

Near the end of August, an event central to VMI's educational mission quietly took place: the reopening of Preston Library to the VMI community after a \$19.3 million renovation and a pandemic-related closure.

The renovation—the library's first in nearly 25 years—had been planned for a while. At the time the work was mapped out, a decision was made to keep the library open as the work took place, moving materials from floor to floor, and sometimes off post, as necessary.

That plan held until mid-March, when the coronavirus pandemic resulted not only in cadets being sent home for the rest of the academic year but the entire post being closed to the general public. At that point, the library closed, and library staff shifted to providing support and services online and remotely.

"The old building was kind of long in the tooth. There's been a lot of improvements and a lot of changes," said Lt. Col. Tom Panko, head of technical services and library coordinator, who took over as the main point of contact for the library earlier this year after library director Col. Diane Jacob retired. A search is now underway for a new library director.

Prior to the renovation, the library entrance, the fifth floor, was somewhat dark and involved two sets of doors. Now, visitors walk through one door into a brighter, wider vestibule and can see the service desk just to the right of the elevator straight ahead.

The position of the elevator is no accident, explained Lt. Col. Liz Kocevar-Weidinger, head of research and instruction for the library. It's there so alumni who come to use the archives can walk straight back to the elevator, take it one floor down, and immediately find the archives on their left.

Likewise, the seventh floor of the library, once inaccessible by elevator, is now accessible. That floor, formerly home to the Mathematics Education



The Preston Library service desk now features a self-checkout system.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.

and Resource Center (MERC), is now the site of a conference room boasting what could be the best view on post of the Parade Ground—and House Mountain as a bonus in the background.

The sixth floor provides space for academic support services—the MERC, the VMI Center for Undergraduate Research (VCUR), and the Office of Sponsored Programs, which supports faculty research. It's also home to a large study space for cadets and rows upon rows

of books.

"This is meant to be the noisiest space," said Kocevar-Weidinger of the sixth floor. "The trend in education is towards more and more collaborative work."

One floor below is the main floor of the library, where library patrons and visitors enter off Letcher Avenue. It's where to find the Turman Room, redone with conference room-style seating. With the need for social distancing, and classroom space in short supply, the Turman Room will be used as a classroom this fall.

In addition, the newly renovated learning commons features a bank of computers for cadet use, and offices for reference librarians close by.

"We're meant to be directly accessible to the cadets," Kocevar-Weidinger noted.

Nearby, the Class of 1969 Memorial Room is set up for the learners of 2020 and beyond, with comfortable chairs and electrical outlets in the floor below for charging laptops, tablets, and phones.

The library's top three floors—the seventh, sixth, and fifth—are all complete. On the floors below, work is ongoing, with the goal of completion by Thanksgiving.



The Turman Room now has conference-style seating and will be used as a classroom this fall.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.

*Continued on next page*

VMI Institute Report



As it was before, the fourth floor will be the location of the VMI Archives, home to many irreplaceable documents pertaining not only to Institute and Lexington history, but also alumni involvement in many of our nation's wars.

With seemingly endless rows of stacks, the third floor will be the place to find many of the more than 209,000 physical books in the library's collection, along with bound periodicals. Many of those books—approximately 60 percent at any given time—were moved to Richmond for safekeeping and storage during the renovation process, and some are still there. Thankfully, the renovations didn't do anything to disturb the over 585,000 ebooks the library has access to—those stayed accessible the entire time.

The second floor will be used for gift processing, back office functions, and the server room. Currently, the second floor is also being used to house materials from the VMI Archives, as they were deemed too valuable to risk a trip to Richmond.

Throughout the library, users can now enjoy wireless internet access at fast speeds—a critical feature now that so much research takes place online. Prior to the renovation, wireless access was available, but “dead spots” were a common problem.

“Information Technology has saturated the building with hot spots,” explained Panko.

There's another new feature for library users as well—print release technology. In years past, cadets seeking to use the library's printers often hit “print” on their computers even if the printer in question was out of paper or otherwise out of service. There's also been instances in which a cadet has picked up another cadet's paper off the printer by accident.



The learning commons on the fifth floor of the library features many computers for cadet use.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.

minimizes contact, but it will also help cadets get in and out of the library faster if all they need to do is print a paper quickly.

“Whatever printer doesn't have a line, you go to it, swipe your card, print, and walk out,” he explained.

Completing the print release technology is a self-checkout system near the service desk, where cadets, faculty, and staff can scan books themselves and get a receipt sent to their VMI email address.

Sadly, the realities of COVID-19 are postponing the use of one of the newly renovated library's key features: group study rooms. The small rooms, each accommodating six to eight cadets, simply aren't large enough for social distancing, so they will be repurposed this academic year. One of those rooms will be used specifically for a COVID-19-related purpose: quarantining library materials after they're returned.

But in spite of COVID-19's challenges, members of the library staff are happy to see the building reopen and cadets return.

“Overall, we're happy,” said Panko of the renovation. “It was a lot of work by a lot of people.” ❁

## New Course Focuses on Constitution

By Mary Price

This fall, Col. Turk McCleskey, professor of history, will be teaching a new course centered around a document essential to this country's governance: the U.S. Constitution.

History 300, the American Civic Experience, is meant to give cadets a framework for understanding and discussing constitutional issues from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Efforts to build a new course began approximately three years ago when members of the Board of Visitors asked how cadets learned about the Constitution. The answer was that while cadets taking U.S. history classes learn much about the Constitution, not all cadets

take those classes—so there was an excellent opportunity to develop a new course.

“Since VMI develops citizen-soldiers, we believe cadets should be well-grounded in their understanding of the Constitution, much more than a superficial memorization of the document,” said Brig. Gen. Robert “Bob” Moreschi, deputy superintendent for academics and dean of the faculty.

According to Moreschi, it's likely that in approximately two to three years, following VMI procedures for new curriculum approval, the course could be made a core curriculum requirement for upper-class cadets.

Furthermore, Conrad Hall '65, a member of the Board of Visitors, has provided funds to endow a chair for a constitutional historian, who would be charged with developing the course further, teaching at least some sections of it, and building a co-curricular program, including guest speakers, to support it. A national search for such a historian is now underway, with the goal of having the new hire start in the fall of 2021.

“We are searching for an experienced academic at the associate or full professor

# POST BRIEFS

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## International Studies Professor Co-Editor of Book

Col. Ryan R. Holston, professor of international studies and political science, is co-editor of a recently released book, *The Historical Mind: Humanistic Renewal in a Post-Constitutional Age*. This book is a compilation of essays from scholars in various disciplines who argue that Americans' consumerism,

self-indulgent behavior, and cultural hedonism is rooted in an inability to learn the lessons of historical experience and restrain their appetites. Included in the book is an essay by Holston in which he defends the ideas of early 20<sup>th</sup> century traditionalist thinker Irving Babbitt against his former student

and sympathetic critic, T.S. Eliot, on matters of religion. Holston, who holds the Jonathan Myrick Daniels '61 Chair for Academic Excellence, shared editing duties for *The Historical Mind* with Justin D. Garrison, associate professor of political science at Roanoke College.

## Alumnus Wins Award for Military Writing

VMI alumnus and military historian Col. David M. Glantz '63 is the 14<sup>th</sup> recipient of the prestigious Pritzker Military Museum & Library Literature Award for Lifetime Achievement in Military Writing. Author or co-author of more than 60 publications, Glantz is recognized as a leading expert on the Eastern Front during World War II and the role of the Soviet Union during the

conflict. Glantz founded and was editor of the *Journal of Soviet (Slavic in 1989) Military Studies* in 1988, a position he held until January 2018. In 2000 he received the Society for Military History's Samuel Eliot Morison Prize for his work in the field of Soviet military history. After earning a degree in history from VMI and graduating as a distinguished military graduate,

Glantz commissioned into the U.S. Army as an artillery officer, beginning a military career that would last for more than 30 years. He also earned a master's degree in modern European history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1965. In the past decade, he has returned to speak at VMI and also mentored a cadet interested in military history.

## Two Named to Board of Visitors

Gov. Ralph Northam '81 appointed Lester Johnson Jr. '95 of Richmond, Virginia, and Grover Outland III '81 of Arnold, Maryland, to four-year terms on the VMI Board of Visitors in June.

Johnson is the owner and managing partner of the popular Richmond restaurant Mama J's, one of the most notable soul food restaurants

in the country. Johnson holds a bachelor's in mechanical engineering from VMI and an MBA from Virginia Commonwealth University. Outland is a distinguished graduate of the Institute with a degree in modern languages and went on to earn a J.D. degree from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1984. With his appointment to the Board of Visitors,

Outland brings to a close 15 years of service on the VMI Alumni Association Board of Directors. Reappointed to the board for an additional four-year term were Lt. Gen. Charles Dominy, USA, Ret., and Mr. Scot Marsh '81. Lt. Gen. Carl Strock '70, USA, Ret. is leaving after four years of service, and George Collins '62 is leaving after eight years of service. ✪

## Constitution *continued from page 13*

level," said Moreschi. "We want someone who's willing to tell an even-handed but full story—certainly the positives but the negatives too."

McCleskey, who's piloting the course this fall, is an early American historian.

"My scholarship in recent years has turned in a more legal direction, which made me a better fit for discussion of constitutional issues than other members of the department," he noted.

Interest in the course is high: after the 12-cadet cap was reached, McCleskey allowed three more to enroll, bringing the total to 15. All of them are 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Class cadets from a variety of majors. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the course is being taught totally online.

One of McCleskey's main goals for the course is helping cadets see the Constitution as a living document, not a

dry, dusty piece of parchment from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

"The Constitution is something that's written on paper," he stated. "But in reality, it functions more like a coral reef. It's organic. It changes in different directions."

In this framework, he noted, Supreme Court decisions can be seen as new layers on that coral reef—they are added to the existing structure, and in turn, they change the structure.

"That's a more sophisticated understanding of the Constitution, and that's an important goal for me with cadets," McCleskey commented. "I want them to be able to understand that evolution."

Of course, the evolution of the Constitution from 1787 to the present day involves the Supreme Court, which is charged with interpreting the document in response to new issues as they arise.

"We have to look at the more historically significant Supreme Court cases," said McCleskey. "What's happening that these lawsuits are responding to?"

But to understand the rulings of the Supreme Court, cadets must be able to interpret what the justices are really saying.

"Supreme Court cases are a form of literature, and you have to be able to read them," McCleskey noted. Ultimately, his goal is for cadets to be able to compare the essential arguments being made among similar cases.

By the time the course is over, McCleskey hopes that cadets, many of whom plan to serve in the military, will have a clearer idea of their obligations as citizen-soldiers. Military officers, he stated, take an oath to support and defend the Constitution.

*Continued on next page*



“If our graduates are going to make such an important and solemn promise, then it’s vital for them to understand the thing to which they are committing themselves,” said McCleskey.

The history professor mentioned that the new course comes at an opportune time because constitutional issues, such as the recent impeachment trial of President Donald Trump, are so much at the forefront of the national news.

“To a greater extent than our present offerings ... the course allows cadets the chance to ask questions about the Constitution and constitutional governance that are arising in their own lives,” he said. ❀

## Daniels Courtyard Reopens

By Mary Price

This August, the newly renovated Jonathan M. Daniels ’61 Memorial Courtyard reopened for use by the VMI community after an almost six-month refurbishing project.

The work, which was part of the post infrastructure improvement project, included regrading the courtyard area to improve drainage and reinstalling the existing pavers. Now, cadets, faculty, and staff can once again use the courtyard, which is located between Old Barracks and Shell Hall, as a place for study or quiet reflection.

Daniels, valedictorian of the Class of 1961, began studies to become an Episcopal priest after graduation from VMI and soon became involved in the civil rights movement. He was killed Aug. 20, 1965—55 years ago—when he gave his life to save a young Black girl, Ruby Sales, in Hayneville, Alabama.

On that day, Daniels, Sales, and two others were attempting to enter a store to buy sodas when a white man serving as a part-time sheriff’s deputy, Thomas Coleman, brandished a shotgun and told them to stay off the property. The group ignored his command, and just before a shotgun blast rang out,



The Daniels Courtyard offers a quiet space for cadets to study or relax outdoors.—VMI Photo by Mary Price.



Jonathan Daniels ’61 poses for a photo with Judith Upham, a fellow seminary student, and Ronnie Fuller, a local high school student, in Alabama in 1965.—Photo courtesy of VMI Archives.

Daniels threw himself in front of Sales. He was killed instantly.

Sales, who was 17 at the time, went on to a life of civil rights activism and has visited VMI in the past. Richard Morrisroe, a former Catholic priest who was wounded in the same shooting incident which killed Daniels, has attended VMI’s presentations of the Jonathan M. Daniels ’61 Humanitarian Award. This award was instituted by the VMI Board of Visitors in 1997 to honor individuals who have made great personal sacrifices to protect or improve the

lives of others, and was most recently presented to Carolyn Miles, CEO of Save the Children, in March 2019.

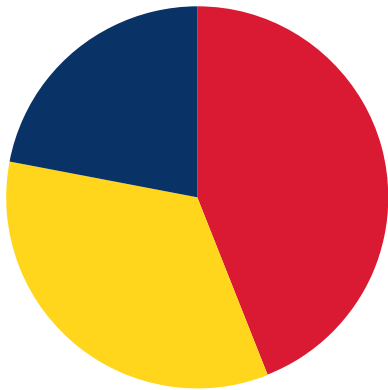
Shortly after Daniels’ death, Coleman was acquitted of a charge of manslaughter by an all-white jury. Thanks in large part to Coleman’s acquittal, the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity partnered with the National Council of Churches and other groups to establish Operation Southern Justice, which had the goal of integrating Southern juries.

For more than two decades, the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama and the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast have co-sponsored a pilgrimage to the small town of Hayneville each August to commemorate the life of Daniels, who is recognized as a martyr by the Episcopal Church. This year’s event, which took place Aug. 15, was held online rather than in Hayneville due to the coronavirus pandemic. ❀



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About **44%** of courses will be delivered **in person**, 34% hybrid, and only 22% are **completely virtual**.



Rat class: 1,632 applied, 972 accepted (59%), 39% out of state, **12% women**



4 masks issued to cadets

2 masks issued to faculty and staff



Classroom seating will be at most 50% of a room's maximum capacity



10 to 1 student/teacher ratio

The VMI COVID-19 information portal is now available at [www.vmi.edu/COVID](http://www.vmi.edu/COVID).

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