



INSTITUTE REPORT

Volume 53, Number 3, November 2024

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Exercise Study Recruiting VMI and W&L Alumni

By Marianne Hause

How does the VMI cadet experience influence lifetime exercise behaviors? How do those behaviors compare to those of undergraduates who attended a more traditional, non-military college like Washington and Lee University (W&L)? A new research study comparing the exercise habits between four populations: VMI cadets, VMI alumni, W&L students, and W&L alumni, both in the short- and long-term, is being conducted by Maj. Katherine Baur, assistant professor in the Department of Human Performance and Wellness at VMI.

Given that the two colleges are located side-by-side in a small geographic area, have similar demographics but distinctly different cultures, Baur believes it would be an interesting comparison, and is recruiting both VMI and W&L alumni to participate. "College years represent a key period



Col. Jeff Boobar '86 runs on post as part of his regular exercise routine.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

of personal growth with lifestyle changes that often carry into adulthood. While a lot of research has considered physical activity behaviors in college students, almost no research has looked at differences between specific college populations like senior military college cadets. Having a better understanding of physical activity behaviors and influences at these different life stages, and in these unique college populations, helps us as professionals to tailor interventions that promote exercise and overall well-being," she explained.

Alumni of VMI and W&L may participate voluntarily and anonymously in the study by completing a brief, 15- to 20-minute one-time survey. Questions include general demographic information, physical activity history, motives, beliefs and influences, and general health. At the end of the survey, there is a separate link for participants to enter a raffle for a chance to win a \$25 Amazon gift card. A total of 200 to 800 participants—50 to 200 from each of the four mentioned populations—will be recruited for the study. For each subgroup, 10 participants will be randomly selected to win. Gift cards will be disbursed one month after the last recruitment efforts are made in each subgroup, on or before Dec. 2, 2024. More information and a link to the survey may be found at https://vmi.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7U4sN4vfh5BNBk2.



Woods Discusses Current Global Security Challenges

Rear Adm. Tim Woods, CBE, British defense attaché at the British Embassy in Washington D.C., participated in a lively discussion focused on the United Kingdom's perspective on current global security challenges Oct. 24 in Gillis Theater. Sponsored by the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis, the event began with Woods explaining his role as a key custodian of the UK's special relationship with the United States and his assessment of the two nations' common foreign policy challenges in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region. Following introductory remarks, Woods took questions from Col. David Gray, executive director of the Center for Leadership and Ethics, and Col. Spencer Bakich, director of VMI's National Security Program, before opening the floor to questions from cadets. More than 300 cadets, faculty members, and staff were in attendance for the engaging event.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



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On the cover: Marine ROTC cadets participate in a night training event during fall FTX.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.


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Leadership Conference Focuses on Leading Into the Future

By Marianne Hause

VMI's 15th annual Leadership and Ethics Conference hosted by the Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) was held Oct. 28-29 in multiple venues throughout post. This year's theme was "Leading into the Future," an extension of the CLE's academic year theme of "Paradigm Shifts," and focused on leadership and ethics in modern society, and preparing future college graduates to lead through rapidly changing environments.

The conference opened in Marshall Hall with pageantry as the VMI color guard marched in carrying the flags as the Herald Trumpets played "The Star-Spangled Banner" in four-part harmony. Col. Dave Gray, executive director of the CLE, greeted the assembly and charged them to "think creatively and critically, and engage with each other through civil discourse during the highly interactive conference."

Nearly 180 participants made up of students and staff members from many colleges, universities, and military academies from across the nation including Christopher Newport University, East Tennessee State University, Hampden-Sydney College, Norwich University, Texas A&M University, The Citadel, U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, U.S. Naval Academy, Virginia Tech, Washington College, as well as many VMI cadets, gathered to hear inspirational speakers, participate in collaborative activities, and network. Central to the conference's programming were small group discussions, interactive activities, and speakers focusing on leading across generations, adaptability, vision in guiding organizations through technological advancements, and fostering personal and team resilience.

During his welcoming remarks, Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, VMI superintendent, shared that each generation faces new challenges. "I was born between the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X. Most of you are part of the Millennial generation, and each of



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 welcomes Leadership and Ethics Conference participants to VMI.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

you are being called upon to play increasing roles as leaders. That's what we're here today to talk about, that paradigm shift into the role of assuming leadership in whatever path your journeys take. How you respond will be a direct reflection of how you are prepared. VMI is one of the premier leadership institutions in the nation, and has been at the forefront of training top leaders in military and industry. Our mission is forging 21st century leaders for our nation. Our cadets are taught how to lead, and have the opportunity to practice it every day through peer leadership, arguably some of the toughest leadership experiences that any young man or woman has to undergo." Wins evoked VMI's most famous graduate, Gen. George C. Marshall Jr., VMI Class of 1901, who said, "We cannot train without planning and we cannot teach without preparation," and imparted to the audience, "We would all be wise to heed this point and begin to anticipate challenges in our various leadership roles."

The first speaker of the conference was Raven Solomon, CSP®, author of, "Leading Your Parents: 25 Rules to Effective Multigenerational Leadership for Millennials and GenZ." During her lighthearted, often humorous interactive talk, Solomon spoke about cross generational leadership, and the differences of the living generations which include: the Greatest Generation, born before 1928; the Traditionalists, born between 1928 and 1945; the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; GenX born



Dr. Ben Freakley declares Cmdr. Julie Shank the winner of a rock-paper-scissors contest.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Continued on next page

between 1965 and 1980; Millennials born between 1981 and 1996; and GenZ, born between 1997 and 2012, which comprised of 80% of her audience. She disclosed that in the current workforce, there are five generations working together, more than there have ever been in the past. Solomon acknowledged that generational differences may cause tension, frustration, and contention, but emphasized that each generation possesses

strengths, capabilities, and skills, which should be embraced and used to the betterment of the organization, and better decisions are made when multiple generations provide input. She pointed out that each generation is motivated and inspired differently because of the current events going on in the world during their formative years, their culture, as well as familial dynamic and history. She taught the group useful techniques to implement in earning the trust and respect of each generation that fall under their leadership, and insights to what motivates them.

That afternoon, former VMI head soccer coach Ben Freakley, Ed.D., CMPC, founder of Ready. Set. Resilient., and his colleague, Tyler McDaniel, Ph.D., an Air Force psychologist, led a presentation in the Corps Physical Training Facility, testing multiple leadership values against hands-on challenges. Freakley opened by stating that effective leaders must possess both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. The first intrapersonal skill he shared is “Know Your Enemy of Attention,” which is anything that steals your attention, including social media, multi-tasking, negative recurring thought patterns, and social comparison. The second skill is “Know Your Personal Values,” which he described as the lighthouse in the storm, a guide in troubled times. The third intrapersonal skill is “Committed Action.” “There are times in life when we get stuck and can’t reach our goals, but we must remain committed, and set and reach short-term goals until we get unstuck,” Freakley said.

The first interpersonal skill is “Empathy.” “The more empathy



Raven Solomon talks to Col. David Gray just before her lecture in Gillis Theater.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

people are given, the more trust they will return, the more engaged they will be, and will offer more innovation, and enjoy better morale,” Freakley shared. The second interpersonal skill is “Curiosity.” “Learning is the only sustainable competitive advantage. Ask really good open-ended questions in order to learn about people and what they are experiencing,” he advised. The group was then divided into eight teams and guided through a Leadership Reaction Course (LRC), a problem

solving, physically demanding obstacle course requiring critical thinking, leadership skills, and teamwork. After completing the LRC, participants shared what they learned about themselves and their teams.

The second day opened with Michelle Ray, the Caroline Dawn Wortham '12 Leadership Speaker. Ray speaks globally on topics of leadership, accountability, change, and workforce trends, and is author of, “Leading in Real Time.” Ray’s highly interactive presentation was a mix of conversation and energetic activities with her audience, whom she challenged to be ready to lead. “Great organizations have great people, and great people need great leaders. People want to know they matter. Never forget the human side of leading people, because when we take an interest in other people, they take an interest in us. So, your conversations need to

be focused on your people, and when your people are aligned with your vision, it’s a beautiful thing,” she said. Ray went on to discuss change, and acknowledged there are three reasons people fear change: It creates discomfort, preference with the status quo, and fear of loss. She quickly followed with eight ways to effectively lead in the midst of change: 1. Recognize change as an emotional experience; 2. Address the receiver’s fears; 3. Tell the recipient how change will benefit them; 4. Show them at least one benefit of the change; 5.



Michelle Ray asks participants a question during her talk in the Gillis Theater Oct. 29.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

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Ask for input; 6. Tell the recipient how the change will benefit the organization; 7. Involve the recipients in the change process; 8. Celebrate the victory. She concluded her presentation with inspiration, “Your resolve will be tested, and when it happens, you need to dig deep within yourself, and look to your role models for encouragement.”

A highlight of the interactive activities at the conference was a game called SynergyK, developed by Play with a

Purpose, which uses software to measure a team’s communication, adaptability and unity of purpose. The game incorporates tabletop boxes with four different control stations, encouraging cooperation and forcing team members to rely on each other to progress through different minigames, which combine puzzle-solving, coordination, and other skills. At the conclusion, a representative from Play with a Purpose led the attendees through a debrief that gave a breakdown of how the software analyzed and tracked team performance. The game was a hands-on example of how artificial intelligence crafts high performing teams made up of members with different skill sets, illustrating one of the conference themes of technology changing the work environment.

The keynote and concluding speaker of the conference was the H.B. Johnson Jr., Class of 1926, Distinguished Speaker, retired U.S. Army Capt. Florent “Flo” Groberg, who spoke in Cameron Hall to the entire Corps of Cadets, guests of the conference, and members of the community. Born in France, Groberg became a U.S. citizen in 2001 at age 18. He graduated from the University of Maryland (UMD) with a degree in criminology and joined the Army in 2008, and served two tours in Afghanistan’s Kunar Province. On Aug. 8, 2012, while leading a security detail, Groberg identified and tackled a suicide bomber, pushing him away from the formation. For his extraordinary heroism and selflessness, Groberg was awarded the Medal of Honor,



A team works together to progress through the game challenges of SynergyK.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

the highest military decoration, becoming the 10th living recipient for actions in Afghanistan.

Groberg opened his talk with a dramatic, heart wrenching story about his uncle that established the foundation for him to enter the military. “My uncle was a member of Special Forces in Algeria, and was killed in 1996 by a terrorist organization called the GIA. It was during a Ramadan ceasefire, but he was ambushed, shot, beheaded,

dismembered, put in a box, and his remains were sent to my grandfather. What the terrorists did not realize was that at 13 years old, my life changed. My youth was stolen from me. Even though I was 1,000 miles away, for the first time in my life, I was exposed to evil. Fast forward a few years later, I become a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2001 and later that year, terrorists attacked my new adopted country on 9/11. I knew at that point that my path was cemented. I was going to join the military and fight for this country.”

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Florent Groberg, retired Army captain, speaks in Cameron Hall Oct. 29.—VMI Photo by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.

Holiday Events at VMI

As the holiday season approaches, festivities are being planned not only on VMI's post, but also at the New Market Battlefield State Historical Park and the Jackson House Museum.

Parades

Rats will march in the Lexington Christmas parade, to be held Friday, Dec. 6, at 6 p.m. on Main Street in downtown Lexington. The VMI Regimental Band, and Pipe Band will appear in the Dominion Energy Richmond Christmas parade for the 30th time since 1989. That parade will be Saturday, Dec. 7, at 10:15 a.m. on Broad Street.

Spirit Night

VMI will welcome visitors to "Carols in the Courtyard" Wednesday, Dec. 11, at 7:30 p.m. Members of the community will gather with cadets in the courtyard of barracks to hear carols performed by VMI musicians. The VMI Chaplain's Office will host a candlelight service in Memorial Hall

at 8 p.m. following the conclusion of "Carols in the Courtyard."

VMI Museum Holiday Open House

The VMI Museum, located in Memorial Hall, will hold its annual holiday open house Friday, Dec. 13 from noon until 5 p.m. There will be refreshments, door prize drawings, and discounts on many items in the store.

Jackson House Museum

The Jackson House Museum will host "Christmas at the Jacksons" Sunday, Dec. 15 from 5 to 7 p.m. Step back in time and experience Christmas in 1858 while interacting with costumed interpreters. Visitors will decorate a Christmas tree with handmade gifts, churn butter in the kitchen, and help visitors from 1858 choose the proper outfit for dinner. The last tour will be at 6:40 p.m. Admission for the event is nonperishable food for humans and/or pets to benefit the Rockbridge Area Relief Association food pantry. For

more information on "Christmas at the Jacksons," call 540-464-7704 or visit www.vmi.edu/jhm

Christmas on the Farm

The New Market Battlefield State Historical Park will be the site for "Christmas on the Farm," to be held Saturday, Dec. 7, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Virginia Museum of the Civil War, located in New Market. Explore the museum, make crafts, enjoy festive treats, and see a special Christmas film. Take a step back into 1859 and visit the Bushong family as they cook, sing, and tell stories in anticipation of a special Christmas visitor. Event tickets go on sale at 10 a.m. Dec. 7 and can be purchased at the Virginia Museum of the Civil War. Event prices are \$10 per adult (ages 13 and older), \$6 per youth (ages 6-12), children 5 and under are free. Bring two non-perishable canned food items to benefit the local food pantry to receive \$1 off the ticket price. For more information call 540-740-3101 or visit www.vmi.edu/newmarket 🌟

Chinese Folk House Visit

Cadets in Chinese Civilization, Introduction to Advanced Chinese, and Cultural History of Chinese Martial Arts classes went on a field trip Oct. 26 to the China Folk House in West Virginia. This traditional Chinese farmhouse, originally built in 1989 in Yunnan Province, China, blends Tibetan, Naxi, Bai, and Han architectural styles. It was dismantled and shipped to the United States in 2017 and has since been fully restored. Cadets participated in a guided tour and learned about the symbols and traditional construction techniques used in the house. They also did some hands-on service activities, including building stone walls and preparing soil in the ethnobotany teaching garden, while others worked on the foundation for a pottery kiln, and some applied tung oil to the house timbers and lime wash to the walls to help preserve them.

The trip was organized by the Phi Sigma Iota Honor Society, the National Collegiate Chinese Honor Society, the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, and the Department of History.—*Photo courtesy of Dr. Laura Xie.*



Leadership Conference continued from page 6

After graduating from UMD, Groberg entered the Army, and soon found himself leading a squad in Afghanistan as a young lieutenant. “I was scared, but I set my ego and pride aside. Those things don’t belong in battle. I admitted to my men that they all had more combat experience than I did, and I was here to learn from them, but I would be responsible for the decisions. We were a team. I trusted my guys to be professional, and I earned their respect.”

During his second deployment, Groberg, 20 of his men, and some Army officials they were escorting were in an Afghan town walking on a one-way road when a suicide bomber approached them. “I couldn’t see a weapon, so I couldn’t actually engage with my rifle. I didn’t want to shoot a civilian, but when I looked in his eyes, I knew he was bad. I ran toward him, struck my rifle across his chest, and felt the bomb vest. I let go of my rifle, grabbed him by the vest and yelled, ‘Bomb, bomb, bomb!’ I had to get him away from everybody as quickly as possible, as far as possible, so I threw him, and he detonated. I woke up a couple minutes later, 30 feet away. My foot was facing me, my fibula was gone, blood was everywhere, my head was spinning.” Groberg survived, but sadly, four men were killed that day.

Groberg spent the next four and a half months at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, where he had 34 surgeries. During his time in the hospital Groberg became suicidal, blaming himself for the deaths of those four men, and believing he should have died instead. Travis Mills, a quadruple amputee also wounded in Afghanistan, visited Groberg in the hospital. “Within 15 minutes of his visit, he had me rewired. He gave me back my purpose, as well as an opportunity to help others. Mills is now a close friend.”

Groberg concluded his talk by answering a question he is frequently asked, why he tackled the suicide bomber. “It’s love of brotherhood and sisterhood. It’s the mindset of being willing to die for people who are white, black, Asian, Latino, gay, straight, for people who come from France or Zimbabwe, Mexico, California, Belfast, or Maine, for people with GEDs, college degrees, master’s degrees, people who are rich or poor, people who have different religious beliefs or political affiliations. This is what makes this country different. This is what makes this country special, because of all the professions we have, we choose to wear that uniform and we choose to go fight.”

“Around my wrist, I wear a bracelet bearing the names of the four men who died that day, and each morning when I wake up, I look at this bracelet to set the expectations for the day. I’ve got to set a good example, not just for my son, but also for the families of those men.” Then speaking directly to the cadets he added, “I sleep soundly at night because of people like you who will be leading our military and protecting this great country of ours. Thank you.”

Next year’s Leadership and Ethics Conference will be held Oct. 27-28, 2025, with an announcement of the theme and title coming in the spring. To stay informed, visit the conference website and join the mailing list at <https://conferences.vmi.edu/leadership>.



Family Weekend

Friends and family were on post Oct. 18-20 to spend time with cadets. Members of Parents Council attended their fall meeting in the Hall of Valor Friday. Visitors to post had the opportunity to attend multiple performances by the Glee Club and VMI Theatre, as well as attend athletic events and join cadets in class. After a parade, tailgating, and march down, the Keydets fought hard against The Citadel Bulldogs, but ultimately fell 13-10.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and Kelly Nye.



VMI Army Cadets Make History

Win Bronze Medal in Welsh Event

By Marianne Hause

Eight VMI Army ROTC cadets—members of Ranger Challenge, the “varsity sport” of the Army ROTC program—made history when they traveled to the Welsh mountains of the United Kingdom (U.K.) to participate in Exercise Cambrian Patrol (ECP), the British Army’s premier patrolling event Oct. 4-13. They are the first ROTC unit from the United States to participate, and they won the bronze medal.

ECP is a continuous, 48-hour long-range international military patrol exercise across rough terrain. It originated in 1959 when a group of Welsh Territorial Army (now Army Reserve) soldiers designed a weekend training event which included long distance marching and a shooting competition. ECP is both mentally and physically demanding, and considered to be one of the most difficult and esteemed of military competitions. Participants carry 80-pound



Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85 meets with the cadets and ROTC faculty who participated in the Cambrian Patrol.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

rucks, get limited sleep, and have minimal food. It is open to regular military, reserve military, and ROTC units. Units outside the U.K. must first qualify by winning a similar competition in their home country. This year, over 125 teams from more than 30 countries competed at ECP.

According to Capt. Pauline Johnson, assistant professor of military science and officer in charge of Ranger Challenge, the VMI team qualified for the competition after placing fifth in the annual Sandhurst Military Skills

Competition at the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point in April 2023. “It was Colonel Jason Wayne, ROTC 1st Brigade commander, who observed the VMI team and suggested they train to go to Wales. It is the next progressive event after Sandhurst, so the team was enthusiastic to commit to it and train hard for weeks in addition to their regular VMI schedule of physical training, attending classes, and studying. We are all very proud of them,” she said.

Kevin Garroway '25, a civil engineering major from Ellicott City, Maryland, who served as patrol commander at ECP, said the team pushed themselves to exhaustion. “We all love to get out and challenge ourselves, and this was an immense endeavor. This was a great test for any military unit.”

Ethan Fogle '25, a physics major from Knoxville, Tennessee, agreed. “The Cambrian Patrol was full of obstacles and challenges that pushed us to our mental, physical, and spiritual limits, however the eight guys who made it through the exercise became family. We kept morale high and carried each other through, no matter what we faced. When other teams were falling apart and



Cody McGuire '25 eases out of the reservoir at the water crossing stand at Exercise Cambrian Patrol in Wales.—Photo courtesy of DVIDS, Sarah Windmueller.

Continued on next page

feeling sorry for themselves, we were cracking jokes and enjoying our time suffering together.”

Cody McGuire '25, an international studies major from Franklin County, Virginia, said his team knew little of what to expect at ECP but it was through their team chemistry and refusal to quit that they were able to achieve what many countries failed to do. “The Cambrian Patrol Exercise was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Our team of unexperienced, yet eager cadets were able to travel internationally and compete in NATO’s hardest patrolling exercise.”

Johnson reported that one-third of the teams, many of which were regular military, did not even finish the competition, making VMI’s accomplishment all the more meaningful.

Tryouts for next year’s Ranger Challenge team will be held in the spring. 🌿



Army ROTC cadets from VMI exit the CBRN stand at Exercise Cambrian Patrol Oct. 8 in Wales.—Photo courtesy of DVIDS, Sarah Windmueller.

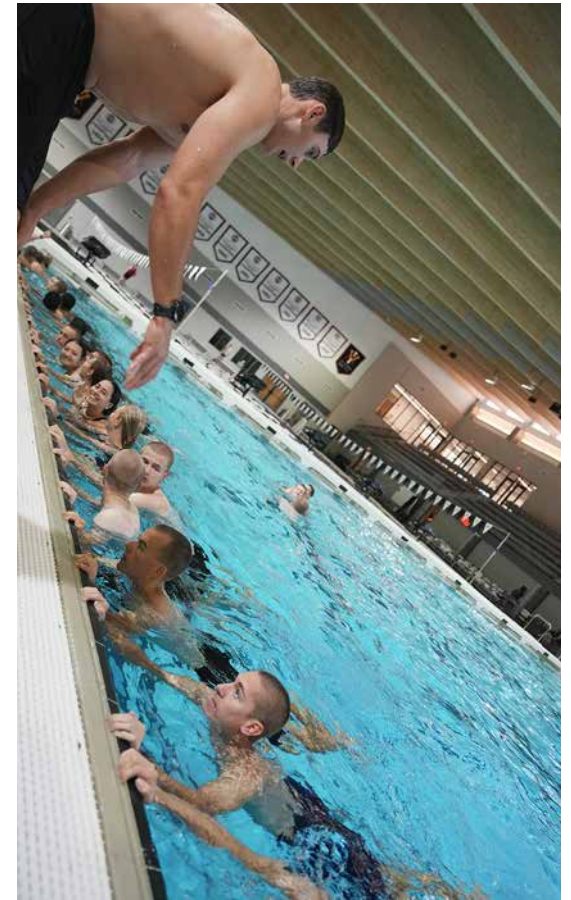
Employee Celebration of Strategic Plan

Faculty and staff from departments across post joined together in Marshall Hall Oct. 24 for the employee rollout of the new strategic plan, “Forging 21st Century Leaders.” Maj. Gen. Cedric T. Wins '85, superintendent, offered brief remarks on the five initiatives of the 10-year plan and how each employee would play a part in moving the goals forward. “Faculty and staff, your role in this transformation is vital,” he said in his remarks. “You are the lifeblood of this institution. It is your commitment, your passion, and your expertise that will turn this strategic plan into a living, breathing reality.”

Wins presented certificates of special recognition to several employees for their significant efforts in the plan development and execution thus far, emphasizing that recognition would continue over the years for those who contribute to the plan’s tasks along the way.

Stay tuned for more on the strategic plan rollout in the December Institute Report.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.





Fall FTX

Cadets participated with their respective ROTC units in field training exercises—FTX—Oct. 4-6. Utilizing various locations on post, as well as McKethan Park, cadets learned land navigation skills, participated in team-building exercises, trained in various mission scenarios, and practiced tactical maneuvers. Those in the Coast Guard Auxiliary University Program headed to Smith Mountain Lake for hands-on training.—VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin and Carter Wasser '25.



Botany Class Learns Practical Uses

By Marianne Hause

Seven cadets enrolled in a general botany class participated in a unique learning-by-doing exercise recently. Col. Anne Alerding, professor in the Department of Biology, whose specialty is plant biology, makes a point to bring practical applications into class, enhancing the learning experience of her students.

“I incorporate human uses of plants into my labs. For example, sushi making with algae, terrarium-making with mosses and ferns, autumn leaf bookmark making with collected and pressed leaves, and the Japanese method of ikebana flower arranging, but this was the first time we’ve had a hands-on experience for the students to participate in and learn an ancient and valuable human use of stems. It combines community involvement in the classroom with students learning an artisanal skill.”

Alerding met local chair caner, Andrew Hart, a few years ago at the Rockbridge Community Festival. A carpenter by trade, Hart started caning four years ago as a hobby. It wasn’t long though before his pastime grew into a successful full-time business called Pleasure to Seat You. Alerding invited Hart to demonstrate his craft in her class Oct. 17.

Among other botanical mediums, Hart uses flat reed, the inner core of the rattan palm, to cane. The plant is similar to sugar cane and bamboo. It was with the flat reed that Hart taught the cadets,



Andrew Hart instructs Joshua Addis '25 and Luke Cockerham '26 on splint bottom weave caning during their botany class Oct. 17.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

who worked in pairs, how to splint bottom weave the seat of a child’s chair.

Joshua Addis '25, a biology major from Fredericksburg, found the exercise enjoyable yet challenging.

“The techniques used to get the chair to look absolutely perfect were difficult. Fortunately we had an expert showing us along the way. I believe that by learning the practical uses, or as we refer to them in class as human uses, we are better able to understand the individual plants we are learning about,” shared Addis. 🌿



Col. Anne Alerding watches Madelyn Kennedy '25 cane a children’s chair.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.



Flat reed strips are woven to make the seat of a chair.—VMI Photo by Kelly Nye.

VMI Collaborates on Teaching Tools Using Animation

By Marianne Hause

VMI, in collaboration with Virginia Tech, has developed a project called, “CryptoQuest,” which uses cartoon animations and virtual and augmented reality to teach high school and college-level students cryptography, post-quantum cryptography, and cybersecurity in a more engaging and interactive way. The project is funded by a grant from the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative (CCI).

According to Sherif Abdelhamid, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Computer and Information Sciences at VMI and project principal investigator, cryptography is a way to hide information so that only the right person can read a message. Post-quantum cryptography is about creating innovative methods to keep information safe, even from super powerful computers like quantum computers. Cybersecurity is all about keeping systems, networks, data, and programs safe from online attacks.

VMI cadet Hayden Rose '26, a computer science major from Grafton, Wisconsin, recently presented a paper on the project titled, “CryptoQuest-Interactive Animation Series for Teaching Cryptography, Post-Quantum Cryptography, and Cybersecurity

Using Extended Reality (XR)” at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Frontiers in Education (FIE) Conference

in Washington, D.C. FIE is a major international conference on innovations and research in engineering and computing education. The paper was authored by Abdelhamid; Maj. Blain Patterson, assistant professor in applied mathematics; Maj. Sarah Patterson, assistant professor in applied mathematics; Rose; and recent VMI graduates, Rukshana

Sarkari '24 and Gabriele Woodward '24. Rose had also presented the paper at the CCI Student Researcher Showcase last March, where he won an award for best presentation.

Rose explained how the program works. “Students watch a video in a series assigned by their teacher that presents the concepts of the lesson in the context of a story. The students are then tasked with helping the characters in the story by interacting with the virtual environments to find clues. The students can use these clues in the assignments and when they submit correct work, they are able to progress the storyline.”

CryptoQuest is an ongoing

project, and will be completed by the end of the academic year, but new episodes will be added over time. ✨



Two characters, “Crypto” and “Gino,” as they appear in CryptoQuest.—Photo illustration courtesy of Sherif Abdelhamid.



Hayden Rose '26 presents the paper on the CryptoQuest project at the Frontiers in Education Conference in October.—Photo courtesy of Sherif Abdelhamid.



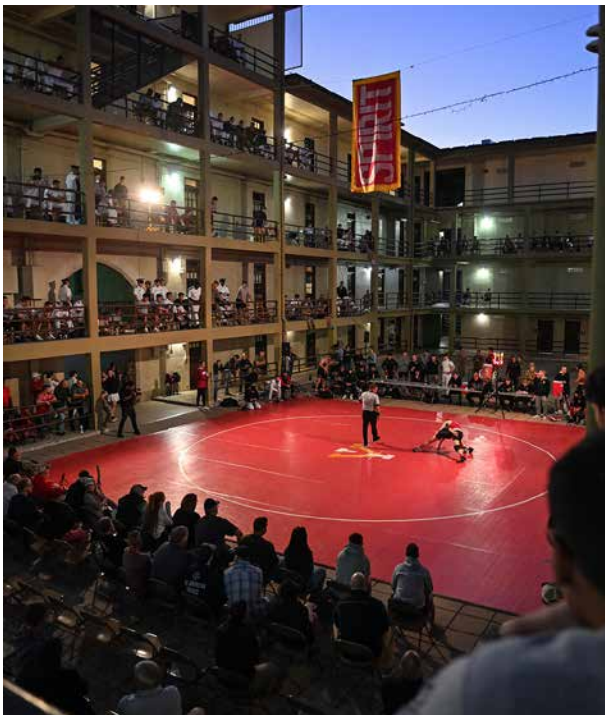
Fall Career Fair

More than 50 employers were on post in Marshall Hall Oct. 9 for the fall career fair. The event allowed cadets to meet with employers from Dominion Energy, the U.S. Secret Service, Target, Virginia State Police, Kjellstrom + Lee Construction, among others. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.



Wrestling in Barracks

Wrestling in Barracks took place Oct. 24 in New Barracks courtyard featuring an intrasquad match with 10 rounds of action. With results going back and forth between the two groups, the black team narrowly defeated the red team overall, 23-22. Regular season matches kicked off Nov. 2. —VMI Photos by H. Lockwood McLaughlin.





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Olmsted Foundation Visit

Col. Mark B. Elfendahl, executive vice president of the George and Carol Olmsted Foundation, visited post Oct. 18 and 19. He spoke about the Olmsted Scholar Program to a group of cadets, sharing how the program financially supports young military officers pursuing graduate study at a foreign university. He and his wife, Leanne, had lunch with the applicants of VMI's Olmsted undergraduate trip to Greece scheduled for Spring 2025.

The Olmsted Foundation's Undergraduate Program offers overseas travel and cultural immersion opportunities to cadets, midshipmen, and ROTC students attending or associated with the federal service academies and selected senior military colleges, including VMI. The Office of Global Education, the Department of History, the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis, and the Center for Leadership and Ethics, together with significant financial support from the Olmsted Foundation, facilitate the annual trip that will take eight deserving cadets abroad this spring. Final selections for the trip will be announced soon.—VMI Photos by Kelly Nye.