

Constitution & Bylaws

Adopted July 12, 2023

Preamble

We, the members, are the source of the Union's power. We stand in unity to advocate for the rights and welfare of all graduate students, professionals, and working people on campus and beyond. We stand in solidarity with other unions at Virginia Tech.

Article I — Name and Affiliation

Section 1. The name of this organization shall be the Graduate Labor Union (hereafter 'the Union') of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (hereafter 'Virginia Tech' or 'the University').

Section 2. The Union shall be affiliated with the Virginia Education Association (hereafter 'VEA'), and through them with the National Education Association (hereafter 'NEA').

Article II — Purpose

The purpose of this organization shall be:

Section 1. Community, Democracy, and Organizing

- a. To stand in solidarity with other unions, movements, and progressive organizations in their fights for economic and social justice.
- b. To form a democratic organization in which a representative body is formed to advance the economic, political, and social well-being of the membership.
- c. To provide a voice for all members and their interests.
- d. To promote the inclusion of graduate students on University committees and task forces.
- e. To hold itself and the Virginia Tech community to our motto of *Ut Prosim/That I May Serve.*

Section 2. Affordability, Equity, Social Progress, and Welfare

- a. To advocate for all workers' rights to fair and sufficient compensation (e.g., a living wage and comprehensive benefits) that is regularly adjusted to account for economic trends.
- b. To hold the University accountable for their commitments to affordability and access.
- c. To advance the common good both at Virginia Tech and across our community in collaboration with others as outlined in Section 1.
- d. To combat all forms of discrimination based on gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, religion, disability status, socio-economic status, citizenship status, national origin, as well as discrimination at the intersection of such identity categories or any other identity in order to build a culture of mutual respect and empowerment.
- e. To advance Virginia Tech's commitment to inclusion and diversity.
- f. To promote the welfare and protection of all Virginia Tech community members, including but not limited to domestic and international graduate and professional students; domestic and international undergraduate students; academic faculty; administrative and professional faculty; and staff.

Section 3. Accountability and Transparency

- a. To uphold and improve due process, accountability, and real recourse for situations of abuse, harassment, intimidation, or discrimination.
- b. To secure, protect, and maintain a safe working environment for all.
- c. To provide a platform for and support in filing grievances.
- d. To advocate for transparency at all levels of University governance, including academic and administrative policies.
- e. To build an organization whose leadership is accountable to its members and regularly solicits and considers rank-and-file perspectives on Union matters.

Section 4. Education and Research

- a. To promote quality instruction and research practices.
- b. To support graduate student practitioners of teaching and research at Virginia Tech, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, across the United States, and globally.
- c. To ensure access to the resources needed for professional and academic success and achievement.

Article III — Membership

Section 1. Categories of Membership

- a. Active Membership shall be extended to all graduate and professional students and candidates at Virginia Tech who are employed by the university.
- b. Reserve Membership shall be open to any person: (i) who is on a leave of absence of at least six (6) months from the employment that qualifies member for Active Membership; or (ii) who has held Active Membership in the Association but whose employment status no longer qualifies that individual for such membership.

Section 2. Affiliation

Active Membership is limited to persons who support the principles and goals of the Union and shall be defined as members in good standing as defined in the Bylaws of the NEA. Active Membership in the Union includes membership in the VEA and the NEA.

Section 3. Rights and Limitations

- a. No one eligible for membership in this organization shall be denied membership for any reason. Membership is open to all persons without regard to sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity); race; age; national origin or citizenship; religious or political belief; disability; genetic information (including family medical history); or special disabled veteran status.
- b. Eligibility for membership in the Union shall be determined by the Union in alignment with the NEA/VEA Bylaws. Employment positions eligible for membership in the Union shall be determined through secret ballot of the general membership.
- c. Applicants for membership shall be placed in the classification that best describes their employment or leave status.

- d. Members may appeal their assigned class of membership to the Union Representative Council.
- e. Membership Year shall be September 1st through August 31st
- f. Active Membership shall be continuous unless (i) terminated for cause, (ii) resigns from employment with Virginia Tech or (iii) by the member's written notice to the Union.
- g. All Active Members in good standing of this Union has the right to nominate and vote; express opinions on all subjects before members of the Union; to attend all membership meetings and express views, arguments and opinions on all matters and business, including candidates for Union office, properly before the meeting; to meet and assemble freely with other members; and, generally, to participate in the activities of the Union in a responsible manner consistent with good conscience in order to present and discuss factually and honestly the issues upon which the membership must base its decisions. These rights shall at all times be subject to the rules of procedure governing meetings and other uniform rules and regulations contained in the Bylaws of the NEA, Bylaws of the VEA, Bylaws of the Union, and other official rules of the Union.
- h. All active members shall be eligible to receive special services, to vote, hold office or serve as delegates, to obtain assistance in the protection of professional and civil rights as it pertains to membership of the Union and employment with Virginia Tech, and to receive reports and publications of the Union.
- i. Each member shall adhere to the NEA Code of Ethics for Educators and the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. Violation of the rights and privileges of membership shall be considered conduct unbecoming of a Union member and may be cause for censure.
- j. All rights, title and interest, both legal and equitable, of a member in and to the property of the Union shall end upon the termination of membership.

Article IV — Dues

Section 1. Membership Dues

- a. The annual membership dues of the Association for all membership classes shall be established by the Representative Council.
- b. Once the Representative Council has adopted a dues amount for Active Members, calculation of dues for the various other membership classifications shall parallel the dues calculation structure adopted by the VEA.
- c. Any members who are granted an official leave of absence from their employment position may retain membership status by paying their membership dues directly to the Union and complying with qualifications for membership as prescribed in **Article III** for the appropriate membership classification.
- d. Any person (i) who joins as an Active Member for the first time after the commencement of the Membership year, (ii) who becomes eligible for Active Membership after the commencement of the Membership year, or (iii) who returns to an educational support position from a limited leave of absence after the commencement of the Membership year shall be enrolled in full standing for the remainder of the Membership year by paying the amount of dues which is commensurate with the remaining portion of the Membership year.
- e. Enrollment can be accessed: (i) electronically and will be processed through VEA Membership department with notifications emailed to local leadership and to the UniServ

office, (ii) paper enrollment form which will be processed when delivered to the UniServ Office Administrator.

f. Membership becomes Active the date of the first payment of dues.

Section 2. Dues Transmittal and Enforcement Procedures:

The Union shall enter a contract with the VEA governing the transmittal of VEA dues and NEA dues. The Union shall have the full responsibility for transmitting VEA dues and NEA dues on a contractual basis. Standards and contracts for transmitting dues shall be developed between the VEA and the Union.

Article V — Governing Bodies

Section 1. Board of Directors

The Board of Directors shall consist of the Executive Council and the Representative Council.

Section 2. Executive Council: Powers and Duties of Office

The Executive Council is an elected body that is representative of the Union's overall membership and elected through traditional competitive ballots. The Executive Council takes on fiscal responsibility and administrative oversight for the Union. Each member will have one vote; there will be no proxy voting.

- a. The Executive Council shall consist of the following roles:
 - i. Chair
 - ii. Vice-Chair
 - iii. Treasurer (Chair of Budget/Fiscal Committee)
 - iv. Parliamentarian (Chair of Research and Policy Committee)
 - v. Communications Director (Chair of Communications Committee)
 - vi. Elections Administrator (Chair of Elections Committee)
 - vii. Organizing and Membership Director (Chair of Organizing and Membership Committee)
 - viii. Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Director (Chair of Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Committee)
 - ix. Union Mediator
- b. **Chair.** The Chair of the Executive Council is primarily responsible for facilitating meetings. This includes setting and following meeting agendas, recognizing members to speak, and modeling respectful communication. The Chair may be asked to serve as an alternative spokesperson for the organization.
- c. **Vice-Chair.** The Vice-Chair of the Executive Council is responsible for serving as an alternate to the Chair and must therefore be able to undertake the Chair's duties. The Vice-Chair is responsible for announcing meetings, taking notes at meetings or appointing a notetaker, maintaining minutes for all meetings, and distributing minutes to Union members.
- d. **Treasurer.** The Treasurer serves as the chair of the Budget and Fiscal Committee and is responsible for carrying out duties pursuant to **Article VI, Section 2, paragraph A.** The Treasurer is responsible for delivering regular budget reports, including yearly budgets

for the Representative Council's approval, tracking dues payments, and communicating with members about dues.

- e. **Parliamentarian.** The Parliamentarian serves as the chair of the Research and Policy Committee and is responsible for carrying out duties pursuant to **Article VI, Section 2, paragraph D.** The Parliamentarian will ensure that Board of Director meetings follow modified Robert's Rules of Order (**Article XV**) and should serve as a resource for interpreting the organization's bylaws and an assistant for the Chair in running meetings.
- f. **Communications Director.** The Communications Director serves as the chair of the Communications Committee and is responsible for carrying out duties pursuant to **Article VI, Section 2, paragraph C.**
- g. **Elections Administrator.** The Elections Administrator serves as the Chair of the Elections Committee and is responsible for carrying out duties pursuant to **Article VII.**
- h. **Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Director.** The Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Director serves as the Chair of the Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Committee and is responsible for carrying out duties pursuant to **Article VI, Section 2, paragraph F.**
- i. **Organizing and Membership Director.** The Organizing and Membership Director serves as the Chair of the Organizing and Membership Committee and is responsible for carrying out duties pursuant to **Article VI, Section 2, paragraph E.**
- j. **Union Mediator.** The Union Mediator of the Executive Council is responsible for mediating conflicts within the Union and assisting members in pursuing resolution and remediation of grievances. The Union Mediator is responsible for knowing Virginia Tech's Title IX and Office of Equity and Accessibility's processes.

Executive Council members may resign their role by submitting a written resignation to the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Executive Council. Vacant Executive Council seats are to be filled by vote of the Representative Council. The Executive Council are encouraged to work as a collaborative collective and are able to share responsibilities as needed or desired among each party with the exception of the Union Mediator. We are striving to build a horizontal ethos of participation and this ought to be modeled by the Executive Council's sharing of responsibilities.

Section 2. Representative Council

- a. The Representative Council is the general delegation of members that are committed to voting on Union directions brought forward by the Executive Council, representing the needs and interests of their constituent groups, voting for Executive Council members, and participating in the various organizing communities that moves the Union forward. Voting members of the Representative Council also include the elected members of the Executive Council and appointed committee chairs. The Representative Council is responsible for serving as a check to ensure the Executive Council leadership is representative of the Union as a whole.
- b. In general, the membership of the Representative Council shall be no less than 5% of the total dues paying membership. The majority of these members should be representatives from their departments, however, the Union also encourages affinity groups to nominate members to represent their unique interests. The role has a term length of 1 year and no term limits.
- c. These representatives are elected yearly by their academic departments/organization or appointed by the Executive Council in situations where a group is not represented at the

beginning of the academic year. Should a department be dissatisfied with their Representative Council member, they are encouraged to work with the Union Mediator to develop internal procedures for addressing grievances up to and including removal of the representative from office.

Article VI — Committees and Duties

Section 1. Types of Committees

Committees are the primary site for action within the Union. Committees are responsible for operating within their assigned purview and bringing matters to the Representative Council for consideration and deliberation. There are two categories of committees: **standing committees** and **ad-hoc committees**.

- a. A **standing committee** is an established committee. The standing committee chairs can serve for one or two year terms. The chair of each standing committee will serve on the Executive Council (**Article V**). Standing committees are outlined in Section 2.
- b. **Ad-hoc committees** can be formed as needed. To form an ad-hoc committee, a vote is carried out by the Representative Council where a simple majority approves the charge and composition of the ad-hoc committee. Ad-hoc committee chairs are invited to attend Executive Council meetings but do not have a vote. The committee chair serves until the ad-hoc committee fulfills its charge. At that point, the committee is dissolved.

Section 2. The standing committees and their duties are as follows:

- a. **Budget and Fiscal.** This committee, chaired by the Treasurer, is responsible for the financial activities of the Union. The committee will produce a yearly budget report, ensure the swift allocation of funds for vital Union services, develop financial assistance programs, and work with the Communications Committee to create an avenue for fundraising and strike funds, should they be necessary.
- b. **Research and Policy.** This committee, chaired by the Parliamentarian, is responsible for researching and advocating for policy change at the University. The committee will strive to understand the intricacies and complexities of University operations and priorities in order to facilitate Union decision-making. This committee will also serve an advisory role to other committees as needed when any investigative research or policy creation is needed.
- c. **Communications.** This committee, chaired by the Communications Director, is responsible for organizing communication activities for and maintaining the public face of the Union. The committee is responsible for communicating to the public via social media, traditional media, and public statements. Additionally, the Communications Committee will ensure transparency of the Union's activities among membership and within the Virginia Tech community. The committee will seek out the approval of the Representative Council as needed for major communication endeavors or responses to notable events. Otherwise, they will be empowered to have consistent outreach and engagement with the public to strengthen the reputation of the Union.

- d. ***Elections.*** This committee, chaired by the Elections Administrator, will facilitate fair and democratic elections and encourage as many Union members to participate as is feasible. The function of this committee is outlined in **Article VIII**.
- e. ***Organizing and Membership.*** This committee, chaired by the Organizing and Membership Director, is responsible for recruiting and retaining members. The committee will work closely with all members of the Board of Directors to create and maintain a broad and active membership base. In addition to facilitating the orientation and onboarding of new members, the committee will ensure that the Representative Council has robust representation across the different colleges and departments of the University so that the Union may work to support the needs of the general membership.
- f. ***Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice.*** This committee, chaired by the Inclusion, Belonging, and Justice Director, is responsible for maintaining the social equity integrity of the Union. The committee will advance representation and inclusion of oppressed groups at the policy and administrative levels within the Union. This committee is responsible for communicating across committees and members to ensure that the direction of the Union is in line with the needs of its underrepresented members.

Section 3. Member Participation

- a. Any member in good standing can be a member of any and all committees unless the Representative Council formally approves, by simple majority, an exception for particularly sensitive material such as internal conflict.
- b. Representative Council members are encouraged to serve on at least one committee.
- c. The day-to-day operations of committees should be managed through unanimous consensus. When putting forward a resolution, document, or initiative, a formal vote may be requested to demonstrate support with committee members' names attached to their vote. If a committee member feels as though a formal vote within a committee was conducted unfairly they may contact the Union Mediator.

Article VII Meetings

Section 1. General Membership

General Membership meetings will be scheduled at least once per year. These meetings will be announced at least one month in advance, unless the meeting is in response to a specific crisis or emergency situation. All members in attendance will be allowed to vote.

Section 2. The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors will meet a minimum of 6 times per year. Each member of the Board of Directors will be allowed to vote.

Section 3. The Executive Council

The Executive Council will meet as needed.

Section 4. Notification

Meeting announcements will be sent out to all members via email and/or text communication at least 5 days in advance.

Section 5. Any Active Member may attend Board of Directors and Executive Council meetings but shall not be allowed to vote.

Section 6. Committees shall meet a minimum of 6 times per year. Any Active Member may vote in a committee meeting they attend.

Article VIII — Nominations and Elections

Section 1. All Union elections shall be facilitated by the Elections Committee and overseen by the Elections Chair. The Elections Committee shall be responsible for the publication of notice for nominations and elections, the verification of eligibility for candidates, the organization and supervision of election proceedings, and the counting of ballots.

Section 2. The Elections Committee shall consist of the Elections Chair and four (4) general members in good standing. General members may not run for office while they are serving on the Elections Committee. The term of office for the Elections Committee shall be one (1) year. The members of the Elections Committee are elected by the Representative Council according to **Article VI, Section 3.**

Section 3. Regular election of officers shall take place within the first two (2) weeks of March. A special election for one or more offices may be held if determined by a majority vote of the Representative Council.

Section 4. Candidates for elected offices may be nominated for office by another active member starting February 1. Nominations shall be taken by the Elections Committee. Nominees may decline a nomination.

Section 5. Union members shall be notified for nomination and election of the Executive Council and the Representative Council. The notice shall be announced at a membership meeting and distributed by e-mail. The notice shall include the dates and times of the election and possible run-off elections, the date and time of the close of the nomination period, and instructions for accepting nomination as described in this Article.

Section 6. Any member may accept nomination by submitting in writing a statement of acceptance to the Elections Committee. Members may only accept a nomination for one (1) position. Each member accepting a nomination may also submit a candidate statement. Statements of acceptance and candidate statements must be received no later than fourteen (14) days after the notice for nomination. After the deadline for accepting nominations has passed, no election of write-in candidates shall be accepted. Candidate statements shall be distributed simultaneously at least seven (7) days before the election by email.

Section 7. All Executive Council officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the general Union membership, for one (1) year terms. All Representative Council officers shall be elected by a majority vote of members within their respective unit for one (1) year terms.

Section 8. The election shall be conducted electronically by secret ballot, and balloting shall be conducted so as to afford all members a reasonable opportunity to vote. Every voting member must cast their vote individually. The Elections Committee shall count the ballots.

Section 9. Following each election, the Elections Committee shall report in writing the results of the election to the Board of Directors and general members. The report shall be announced at the next membership meeting and distributed by e-mail.

Article IX — Delegates and Conventions

Section 1. Election of Delegates

- a. All prospective delegates to conventions of the VEA and/or NEA may submit nomination forms or acceptance of nomination to the Elections Committee by October 1st.
- b. Elections for Delegates shall be completed by October 31st.
- c. The Elections Committee will certify candidates according to the number of delegates allocated by VEA and NEA as well as the same number of alternate delegates.
- d. Certification of election of delegates and shall be ratified by the Representative Council by December 1, annually.
- e. The Chair of the Executive Council will submit lists of delegates by December 1st to VEA and NEA.

Section 2. The Representative Council shall determine allocation of local funds for incurred expenses of delegates attending VEA and/or NEA Delegate Assemblies.

Article X — Terms, Succession and Filing Vacancies

Section 1. Executive Council

- a. Each Executive Council member will serve 1-year terms.
- b. These positions may be repeated once but then there must be a nonconsecutive period of one year before they may serve on the Executive Council in the same role again.
- c. A shorter term is appropriate when a past Executive Council member or new Executive Council member is filling in for a member who was unable to serve their full term. In this case, that role should not be considered part of the nonconsecutive terms for either party meaning that a past member can serve immediately after leaving office and a new Executive Council member can run in the subsequent election cycle for the position.
- d. All Executive Council member positions must be voted on and approved by a simple majority of the membership according to the one member, one vote principle.
- e. Any member of the Union in good standing is allowed to be nominated for an Executive Council position that has been vacated prior to the end of the term and it is the responsibility of the Representative Council to confirm the appointment through a simple majority vote.

Section 2. Representative Council

- a. The Representative Council members will also serve 1-year terms and are allowed to repeat their service indefinitely as long as their department or academic unit is willing to nominate them for the position.
- b. It is highly encouraged for departments to send additional members of the delegation to act as apprentices to the voting member such that there is continuity in the role. In the event that a representative council member cannot serve out their full term, their department will be responsible for providing a replacement member so that their interests can be fully represented. The process for nominating the replacement member is dictated by the department and the Executive Council can choose to either formalize this replacement by fiat or through a vote among the Representative Council. The latter situation should only be exercised in situations where there has been an impeachment to ensure the smooth transition of responsibilities.
- c. The Executive Council is responsible for communicating changes in Representative Council membership to the department of the member to facilitate a smooth transition of representation.

Section 3. Beginning of Term

Because we operate under the academic calendar, both Executive Council members and Representative Council members begin their term during the first week of the academic year.

Article XI — Impeachment of Officers

Section 1. Process for Executive Council

- a. Impeachment of Executive Council members falls under the purview of the Representative Council and should be reserved for cases of major ethical breaches and/or misuse of funds.
- b. Any Representative Council member may move to impeach an officer at any Representative Council meeting and begin the investigatory process through a simple majority vote.
- c. The Vice-Chair shall propose a plan and membership list for an ad-hoc Investigatory Committee to be approved by the Representative Council.
- d. Should the Vice-Chair's plan be voted down, or in the case of the Vice-Chair being implicated in the ethical violation, then the Chair will handle the development of an investigatory plan.
- e. Should the Chair's plan be voted down, or in the case where the Chair is implicated in the ethical violation, then the Representative Council will work with a VEA representative to nominate 5 members from among its body to serve as the Investigatory Committee.

Section 2. Process for Representative Council

- a. Impeachment of Representative Council members falls under the purview of the Board of Directors and should be reserved for cases of major ethical breaches and/or misuse of funds.

- b. Any member of the Board of Directors may move to impeach an officer at any Board of Directors meeting and begin the process by simple majority of the Representative Council.
- c. Impeachment of Representative Council members will follow the process pursuant to **Article XI, Section 1, paragraphs C, D, and E.**

Section 3. Investigatory Committee

- a. The Investigatory Committee will be responsible for updating the Representative Council on the investigation and will determine whether the Executive Council member needs to be temporarily relieved of their duties while under investigation.
- b. Both the accused and the accuser(s) will have an opportunity to speak directly with the Representative Council and answer questions when requested by the Representative Council or during the proceedings of the final report. Because impeachment can come after personal harm, either party may request that the other leaves the room temporarily while they provide their case.
- c. When the committee completes its investigation it will make its final report to the full Representative Council and the group will proceed with a vote on whether to impeach an Executive Council member. This vote will have a 2/3rds threshold for success, upon achieving this threshold the Executive Council member will be removed from office and disbarred from serving as either an Executive Council member or Representative Council member for the duration of their tenure.
- d. Should the vote fail, the Representative Council can then decide whether to request that the investigatory committee continue their investigation for further information or whether the case should be closed by a simple majority vote.
- e. Any further appeals must go through either a session of the Board of Directors or the VEA Board of Directors, who can vote to reopen an investigatory committee to reconsider the case if they believe the appeal to be with merit.
- f. It is expected that members recuse themselves if there is a conflict of interest with the investigation. Ultimately, the representative council may vote to remove a committee member individually if they feel as though they have a conflict of interest.

Section 4. Early Intervention

Prior to the initiation of an impeachment process, the Executive Council shall follow a series of escalating actions to correct any wrongdoing or disruptive behavior.

- a. Facilitated by the Union Mediator, a conversation should be had with the Representative Council member about their actions or behavior in an attempt to prevent it from becoming a pattern. This can include bringing in another representative from their department to help mediate the conflict or a member of the VEA/NEA.
- b. When the situation involves a severe ethical breach or repeated misconduct then the Executive Council member should inform the home department and formally request the resignation of the representative council member from the Union.
- c. If the member does not resign or protest the decision with the support of their department, the formal impeachment process may begin.

Section 5. Mediation

At any stage in this process the representative council member or the executive council member can request that the VEA provide an intermediary to facilitate discussion prior to reaching the impeachment stage. All conflicts should be handled internally to the best of the Union's abilities and when possible, mediated amicably. Impeachment should be reserved for situations with severe ethical breaches or misconduct and not interpersonal disputes.

Article XII — Quorum

Section 1. Quorum shall be determined by those present in scheduled or special meetings as long as proper notification of date and meeting agenda was provided to the members.

Article XIII — Budget

Section 1. First Reading of the Budget

The Budget and Finance committee shall present at the first reading of the budget for the next calendar year to the Representative Council Meeting for approval by the March meeting.

The second reading of the budget shall be voted on at the April meeting.

Section 2. Second Reading and Vote

Any proposed changes to the budget during the budget year shall be approved by the Executive Council.

Article XIV — Amendments

Section 1. Proposal of Amendments

- a. Amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws may be presented by any Active Member(s) at a Representative Council, General Membership or Specially Called Meeting.
- b. The Executive Council shall not be the sole governing body to propose and vote on amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws.

Section 2. Amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws require two meetings.

- a. At the first meeting, members present and discuss the proposed amendment.
- b. At the second meeting, Representative Council members vote on the amendment.

Amendments require a simple majority to pass.

Article XV — Parliamentary Authority

All Union general meetings and Board of Directors meetings shall be conducted according to a modification of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th edition*.