

**VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY BOARD OF VISITORS
NEW BOARD ORIENTATION & ANNUAL RETREAT**

Virginia War Memorial Foundation

621 S. Belvidere Street

Richmond, Virginia 23220

August 6, 2026

DRAFT AGENDA

Theme: Aligning Strategy, Leadership, and Board Action

Presiding: Mr. Victor K. Branch, Rector

9:30 – 9:45 AM WelcomeMr. Victor K. Branch, Rector
Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, President

9:45 – 10:30 AM Session I

Topic: Board Chair – President Partnership.....Rector Branch
President Abdullah

10:30 – 10:45 AM Break

10:45 AM– 11:45 AM Session II

Topic: How the Board Creates Impact Through Committees.....Rector Branch
Facilitator

Panelists:

- Mr. Jon Moore, Chair, Audit & Compliance Committee
- Mr. Thomas Cosgrove, Chair, Academic & Student Affairs Committee
Vice-Chair, Facilities & Finance Committee
- Mr. Robert Thompson, Chair, Institutional Advancement Committee
- Mr. M. Peter McPherson, Personnel, Compensation & Governance Committee

11:45 – 12:45 PM | Lunch

12:45 – 2:00 PM | Fireside Chat

- Introduction of Guest Presenter: President Abdullah
- Guest Presenter: Dr. Harry Williams, President/CEO, Thurgood Marshall College
Fund

2:00 – 2:10 PM | Break (*optional*)

2:15 – 2:45 PM | Guided Board Discussion: Implications for VSU.....President Abdullah

2:45 - 3:15 PM Wrap-Up.....

**VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY BOARD OF VISITORS
NEW BOARD ORIENTATION & ANNUAL RETREAT
9:30 A.M.; THURSDAY, August 6, 2026**

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Victor K. Branch, Rector, called the meeting of the Virginia State University (VSU) Board of Visitors to order in the Virginia War Memorial Foundation, 621 S. Belvidere Street, Richmond, VA 23220, at approximately 9:30 a.m.

ROLL CALL

A quorum was present.

Board Members Present:

Mr. Victor K. Branch, Rector
Mrs. Verndell Robinson (Secretary)
Mr. Thomas Cosgrove
Dr. Robert Denton, Jr.
Mr. M. Peter McPherson
Mrs. Morenike Miles
Mr. Robert Thompson
Mr. Kishore Thota
Mr. Jon Moore
Mr. Baron Braswell
Mrs. Clarice Torian
Dr. William Murray
Dr. Joseph A.F. Chase, Jr.

Board Members Absent:

General Dennis Via, Vice Rector
Ms. Daphne Meeks

Board Appointees:

Dr. Kenneth Lewis, Faculty Representative
Mr. Zin Cambridge, Student Representative

Administration Present:

Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, President
Dr. Tia A. Minnis, Provost/ Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Ms. Joyce Wilkins, Interim CFO/Associate VP Budget & Finance
Dr. Willis Walter, Vice President for External Relations/ Institutional Advancement
Dr. Alexis Brooks-Walter, COO/Senior VP for Student Success & Administration
Dr. Annie C. Redd, Chief of Staff/Director, Board of Operations & Relations

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WELCOME

Rector Branch welcomed all attendees and expressed appreciation for their participation in the Board of Visitors (BOV) orientation and retreat. He provided an overview of the retreat's goals and structure, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, engagement, and strategic planning for the upcoming term. The orientation aims to familiarize new members with university governance, policies, and key initiatives, while the retreat offers an opportunity for deeper discussion and alignment on institutional priorities. Rector Branch gave a brief history of the War Memorial Foundation, where the retreat was being held. He highlighted the Memorial's significance in preserving and showcasing Virginia's rich historical heritage. His remarks provided context for the choice of venue, underscoring its alignment with the university's mission to honor and reflect on the past while planning for the future.

INVOCATION

Rector Branch invited Dr. Joseph A.F. Chase, Jr. to offer the invocation.

INTRODUCTIONS

Rector Branch invited the continuing and returning Board members to introduce themselves, followed by the newly appointed Board members, including the Student Government Association (SGA) and Faculty representatives. Each member provided an overview of their background, professional experience, and expectations for service on the Board. Rector Branch then introduced President Makola Abdullah, who welcomed both new and returning Board members and introduced the members of the President's Cabinet.

Session 1: Topic: Board Chair – President Partnership

The Board discussed the importance of the partnership between the Board Chair and the President in advancing Virginia State University's mission and strategic priorities. The Chair provides leadership to the Board, facilitates effective governance, and serves as the primary liaison between the Board and the President. The President is responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of the University, including implementing Board policies and strategic initiatives. Together, the Chair and President maintain open communication, align institutional priorities, support shared governance, and work collaboratively to ensure the University's continued success and accountability.

Key Points:

- Clear distinction between governance (Board) and management (President).
- Regular communication between the Chair and President to address institutional priorities and emerging issues.
- Collaborative leadership in support of strategic planning, student success, and stakeholder engagement.
- Mutual commitment to transparency, trust, and effective decision-making.

Session 2: Topic: How the Board Creates Impact Through Committees

Panelists:

- Mr. Jon Moore, Chair, Audit & Compliance Committee
- Mr. Thomas Cosgrove, Chair, Academic & Student Affairs Committee
Vice-Chair, Facilities & Finance Committee
- Mr. Robert Thompson, Chair, Institutional Advancement Committee
- Mr. M. Peter McPherson, Personnel, Compensation & Governance Committee

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The Board discussed the critical role of standing committees in advancing the work of the Virginia State University Board of Visitors. Committees provide focused oversight, conduct detailed reviews of issues within their areas of responsibility, and develop recommendations for Board consideration. Through committee work, Board members can engage more deeply in matters related to academic affairs, finance and facilities, student affairs, governance, and institutional advancement.

Discussion emphasized that committees serve as an effective mechanism for examining complex issues, monitoring strategic priorities, ensuring accountability, and supporting informed decision-making. Committee recommendations help the full Board fulfill its governance responsibilities while advancing the University's mission, strategic goals, and long-term success.

Key Takeaways:

Committees allow for in-depth review and analysis of key University matters.

Committee work supports effective governance and informed Board decision-making.

Committees provide oversight and accountability in their respective areas.

Recommendations from committees guide Board actions and policy decisions.

Committee engagement strengthens the Board's overall impact on institutional success and student outcomes.

FIRESIDE CHAT

President Abdullah introduced Dr. Harry L. Williams, former President of Delaware State University, as the featured presenter. Dr. Williams served as President of Delaware State University for eight years before assuming leadership of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund as President and Chief Executive Officer. President Abdullah highlighted Dr. Williams' extensive experience in higher education leadership and his contributions to advancing the mission of historically Black colleges and universities.

Dr. Williams addressed the Board regarding his extensive experience in higher education leadership and highlighted his contributions to advancing the mission and strategic priorities of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). He discussed his commitment to academic excellence, student success, institutional growth, and community engagement, emphasizing the impact of his leadership in supporting and strengthening HBCU institutions.

GUIDED BOARD DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR VSU: PRESIDENT ABDULLAH

President Abdullah noted that Virginia State University is currently in a strong position, with enrollment potentially reaching an all-time high, finances at their strongest in university history, and the recent achievement of R2 research designation. However, he emphasized that higher education now faces increased accountability measures and performance expectations, including continued efforts to improve graduation rates. The university must navigate a changing higher education landscape shaped by financial aid reforms, student debt challenges, technological disruption, increasing market competition, and potential funding constraints.

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President Abdullah stated that while VSU remains well-positioned due to its strong leadership, enrollment, and financial reserves, the university must prepare proactively for these external headwinds and keep the Board informed as conditions evolve.

CLOSING REMARKS/WRAP UP

Rector Branch announced that Pam C., President and Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation, would lead Board members on a guided tour of the memorial.

There being no further business, Rector Branch called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was received, properly seconded. The Rector adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:20 pm.

APPROVED:

Mr. Victor K. Branch, Rector

Date