WHEREAS, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS), Virginia Tech serves as the governing body of approximately 7100 graduate and professional students, ~37% of which are international students. The largest portion of international students hail from India, accounting for almost a third of all international graduate students, and an additional ~11% come from other South Asia countries where caste has historically been practiced for centuries as of 2023.

WHEREAS, caste is a structure of work and descent-based discriminatory framework\(^1\) that affects over 1 billion people across the world. Caste is based on birth, and determines social status, material privileges, and legal rights;\(^2\)

WHEREAS, because of its hierarchical relationship to social, material, and legal privileges, caste is a source of discrimination. Caste-oppressed groups (and individuals) continue to experience profound injustices including socio-economic inequalities in education, jobs, and housing, usurpation of their land, rights, and brutal violence at the hands of the “upper”/dominant/oppressor Castes; and

WHEREAS, one in three Dalit (caste-oppressed) students report being discriminated against during their time acquiring education in the United States, two out of three Dalits surveyed reported being treated unfairly at their workplace in the United States, 60 percent of Dalits report experiencing caste-based derogatory jokes or comments in the United States, and 20 percent of Dalit respondents report feeling discriminated at a place of business because of their caste in the United States;\(^3\) and

WHEREAS, caste discrimination has long been overlooked by American institutions, with many institutions in the United States failing to protect caste-oppressed people, highlighted by the
 caste-based discrimination at Cisco.

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has a large and growing body of international students, specifically from South Asia, making caste a global issue that impacts sites of higher education such as Virginia Tech; and

WHEREAS, Some leading universities, such as Brandeis University and California State University, have already recognized the importance of adding caste to their anti-discrimination policy tackling the issue thus offering members of South-Asian descent a fair and welcoming community, and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has a large and growing body of international students, specifically from South Asia, making caste a global issue that impacts sites of higher education such as Virginia Tech; and

WHEREAS, Policy 1025 prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of “employees, students, or applicants on the basis of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or military status” and

WHEREAS, the addition of caste within the anti-discrimination policy will foster a vibrant and inclusive environment for a large portion of VT students and will highlight Virginia Tech’s role in pioneering and championing the rights of caste-marginalized students. Thus, reaffirming Virginia Tech’s commitment to equity and accessibility for those most systematically marginalized; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Policy No. 1025 be updated to include protection against caste-based discrimination by updating the language or amending the following Sections: Section 2.1 University Statement on Non-Discrimination (page 1) to include the following “(including caste)” and 5.0 Definitions (page 4).

Appendix:

There are four main caste groups: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The Shudra is not only placed at the bottom of the gradation but they are subjected to innumerable ignominies and disabilities to prevent them from rising above the condition fixed for them by the Chaturvarnya system. Besides the Shudras, the caste system has produced three social classes whose existence has not received the attention it deserves. The three classes are: (i) The Criminal Tribes; (ii) The Aboriginal Tribe; and (iii) The Untouchables. These are now called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs & STs). There are also designations for those outside the four caste groups, with lowered caste Shudras and those completely outside the caste system, known as Dalits meaning “broken but resilient” and formerly known as “untouchables”, considered oppressed by caste;

Meaning of the term Dalit: In legal and constitutional terms, Dalits are known in India as scheduled
castes, and there are currently some 166.6 million Dalits in India. The term "Dalit" has been adopted by people otherwise referred to as ‘Untouchables’ and has come to symbolize a movement for change and the eradication of centuries-old oppression.²

Proposed Changes to Policy No. 1025:

Section 2.1 University Statement on Non-Discrimination:
Existing:
Virginia Tech does not discriminate against employees, students, or applicants on the basis of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or military status, or otherwise discriminate against employees or applicants who inquire about, discuss, or disclose their compensation or the compensation of other employees or applicants, or on any other basis protected by law.

Proposed:
Virginia Tech does not discriminate against employees, students, or applicants on the basis of age, color, disability, sex (including pregnancy), gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, caste, religion, sexual orientation, or military status, or otherwise discriminate against employees or applicants who inquire about, discuss, or disclose their compensation or the compensation of other employees or applicants, or on any other basis protected by law.

Section 5.0 Definitions:
Proposed addition:
Caste: caste is a structure of work and descent-based discriminatory framework⁴ that affects over 1 billion people across the world. Caste is based on birth, and determines social status, material privileges, and legal rights;⁴

References:


Email from Akhil Kang to all Councilmembers, An end to caste discrimination, 2/16/2023.

“Petition Calling for the Inclusion of Caste in Cal Poly’s Anti-Discrimination Policy,”
Google Docs,
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScgIP-uS3M2VBVDNyKD8jVU8CiuhRdLoIrsUHkQYx7s8bkiDg/viewform

References

1. In June 2011, The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance Githu Muigai introduced a contemporary terminology that refers to caste discrimination as discrimination based on work and descent.
4. CISCO caste-discrimination, CNN's Report
5. VT is a popular destination/choice for International Students, especially among South Asian Students, it will be in VT's interest to offer an equitable environment for students of South Asian descent. https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/virginia-polytechnic-institute-and-state-university/student-life/international/
6. In the light of Strategic Priority 2 under the Strategic Plan wherein it is aimed to achieve/increase underrepresented minority students and faculty, it will be of significance to recruit and retain students and faculty of caste-oppressed backgrounds. https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/about/dsp.html
7. https://minorityrights.org/minorities/dalits/
8. In June 2011, The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance Githu Muigai introduced a contemporary terminology that refers to caste discrimination as discrimination based on work and descent.