

Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs
CGPSA Resolution 2023-2024A
Resolution to Protect Against Caste & Caste-based Discrimination

First Reading by GPSS:	February 15, 2024
Second Reading by GPSS:	March 14, 2024
CGPSA First reading:	February 14, 2024
Staff Senate Waived Right to Comment:	April 1, 2024
Faculty Senate Waived Right to Comment:	April 1, 2024
Undergraduate Student Senate Waived Right to Comment:	April 1, 2024
A/P Faculty Senate Comment:	February 28, 2024
CGPSA Second reading:	March 13, 2024
First Reading by University Council:	April 1, 2024
Approved by University Council:	
Approval by University President:	
Effective:	Upon Approval

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 framework¹ 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% of Dalits report experiencing caste-based derogatory jokes or comments in the United States, and 20% 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.⁴

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has a large and growing body of international students, specifically from South Asia,⁵ making caste a global issue that impacts sites of higher education such as Virginia Tech;^{3,6} 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;³ and

WHEREAS, individuals of South Asian descent are often associated with perpetuating caste discrimination, it is important to acknowledge that individuals of non-South Asian origin may also engage in such behavior.

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”⁸ 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: Brahmins, 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;¹

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.⁷

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 framework⁸ that affects over 1 billion people across the world. Caste is based on birth, and determines social status, material privileges, and legal rights;⁹

References:

“Graduate Student Enrollment,” Graduate School | Virginia Tech,
<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/numbers/gradenroll.html>.

Email from Akhil Kang to all Councilmembers, An end to caste discrimination, 2/16/2023.
http://clerk.seattle.gov/~cfpics/cf_322573bb.pdf

“Petition Calling for the Inclusion of Caste in Cal Poly’s Anti-Discrimination Policy,”

Google Docs, <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScglP->

[uS3M2VBVDNyKD8jVU8CiuhRdLoIrsUHkQYx7s8bkiDg/viewform](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-01-20/csu-adds-caste-to-its-anti-discrimination-policy)

Nani Walker, "CSU Adds Caste to Its Anti-Discrimination Policy - Los Angeles Times," *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2022,

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-01-20/csu-adds-caste-to-its-anti-discrimination-policy>.

Greta Anderson, "University Adds Caste to Nondiscrimination Policy," *Inside Higher Ed* | Higher Education News, Events and Jobs, December 20, 2019,

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/12/20/university-adds-caste-nondiscrimination-policy>.

Virginia Tech. Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault, by Kelly Oaks, Kim O' Rourke. Blacksburg, VA,

<https://policies.vt.edu/1025.pdf>. (accessed December 15, 2023).

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.
2. CASTE DISCRIMINATION: A Global Concern. A Report by Human Rights Watch for the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Durban, South Africa, September 2001.
3. Equality Labs Caste in the US Survey : <https://www.equalitylabs.org/castesurvey>
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.
9. CASTE DISCRIMINATION: A Global Concern. A Report by Human Rights Watch for the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Durban, South Africa, September 2001.



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<https://governance.vt.edu/ap-faculty-senate.php>

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February 28, 2023

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

From: A/P Faculty Senate Polices and Issues Committee

The A/P Faculty Senate Polices and Issues Committee has reviewed and approves/endorsees the Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs Resolution 2023-24A to Protect Against Caste & Caste-based Discrimination.

We received the following feedback from senators for your consideration:

Has CEOD been involved/consulted in the drafting of this resolution? Their position on/support of this resolution should be received before proceeding.

Enforceability

While I have voted to approve, I am in a favor of a more simple statement that does not require changes: "Virginia Tech does not discriminate."

We have no further comment.