



COMMENCEMENT

SPRING 2024



GRADUATE COMMENCEMENT

10 A.M., WEDNESDAY, MAY 8

ACADEMIC PROCESSIONAL

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Mary Wright

B.A. Candidate in Music, Class of 2024

GREETINGS

Timothy D. Sands

University President

Cyril R. Clarke

Executive Vice President and Provost

SPEAKER INTRODUCTIONS

Aimée Surprenant

Graduate School Dean

GRADUATE STUDENT REMARKS

Mohannad Ismail

Ph.D. in Computer Engineering

Manal Almutlaq

Ph.D. in Architecture and Design
Research

REFLECTIONS

Aimée Surprenant

PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES
AND CONFERRAL OF DEGREES

**Aimée Surprenant
and Timothy D. Sands**

READING OF NAMES

Joseph Merola

CLOSING REMARKS

Aimée Surprenant

RECESSIONAL





UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT

8:30 A.M., FRIDAY, MAY 10

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Mary Wright

B.A. Candidate in Music, Class of 2024

ALUMNI DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS

James E. Pearman Jr. '70

Greta J. Harris '83

POSTING OF COLORS

**Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets
Color Guard**

INTRODUCTION OF COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER

Timothy D. Sands

GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTION OF STUDENT SPEAKERS

Timothy D. Sands

University President

GRADUATION ADDRESS

Mehul Sanghani '98

CEO, Octo

MESSAGE FROM THE UNDERGRADUATE CLASS PRESIDENT

Colin Roberts

President, Class of 2024

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD AND *UT PROSIM* MEDAL

Timothy D. Sands

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ALUMNI DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENTS

Nathan Lavinka '11

President, Virginia Tech Alumni
Association Board of Directors

Dr. Gladys B. West '00

University Distinguished Achievement
Award Recipient

Willis P. Blackwood '72

Mary Nolen Blackwood '73

Ut Prosim Medal Recipients





PRESENTATION OF UNDERGRADUATE
DEGREE CANDIDATES

Cyril R. Clarke

Executive Vice President
and Provost

College Deans

CONFERRAL OF DEGREES

Timothy D. Sands

CLOSING REMARKS

Chris Hall

Cadet Member-at-Large,
Class of 2024

GREETINGS FROM THE
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Nathan Lavinka '11

President, Virginia Tech Alumni
Association Board of Directors

RECESSIONAL





UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT

SPEAKER AND AWARD RECIPIENTS

COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER

MEHUL SANGHANI '98

Mehul Sanghani is chief executive officer and founder of Octo, a technology firm focused on solving national security's most complex problems. In the last decade, Sanghani built and grew the company around the foundational belief of meeting, exceeding, and advancing customer missions.

Sanghani took a leap of faith founding Octo at the age of 30 with encouragement from his family and others. Since its inception in 2006, the company has experienced exponential success under his leadership.

Octo repeatedly has been recognized, catching the attention of a number of Fortune 100 companies as an acquisition target. In January 2023, IBM announced it was acquiring the company for just under \$1.3 billion.

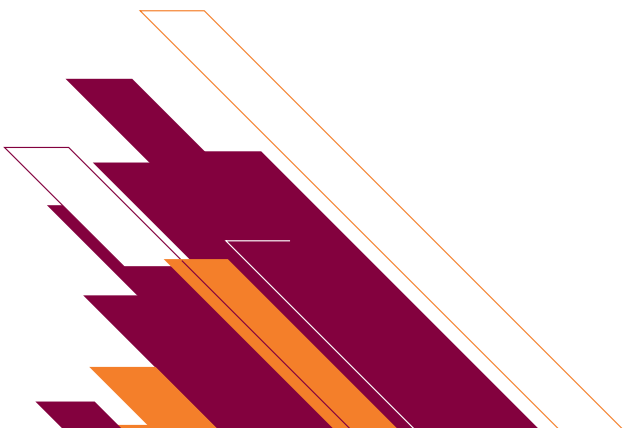
Sanghani graduated from Virginia Tech with bachelor's degrees in industrial and systems engineering as well as psychology. He is a Blacksburg native. His family immigrated to the United States from India in 1979 when he was only 3 years old. As owners of the Red Carpet Inn on

South Main Street, his parents instilled in him a fierce work ethic and appreciation for opportunity.

Sanghani's dedication and hard work has provided him with the opportunity to impact many others through philanthropy and volunteer service.

In 2021, Mehul and his wife, Hema Sanghani, also a Virginia Tech graduate, made a historic \$10 million gift to their alma mater; \$1.5 million of the gift was allocated to establish The Market of Virginia Tech, a first-of-its-kind on-campus food pantry to students facing food insecurity.

The Sanghanis' gift also endowed the Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics and established the Sanghani Player Lounge to support the Virginia Tech football team.





UT PROSIM MEDAL

WILLIS P. BLACKWOOD '72 AND MARY NOLEN BLACKWOOD '73

Mary and Willis Blackwood met at Virginia Tech. They went on to generously support their alma mater and send two children to Virginia Tech - Morgan Blackwood Patel, a 2003 graduate of the College of Engineering, and Nolen, a graduate of the Pamplin College of Business.

The Blackwoods have both served on the Virginia Tech Foundation Board, and the Blackwood Department of Real Estate is named for them.

Mary earned a degree in psychology at Virginia Tech, and a master's degree in hospital and health administration in 1979 from the Medical College of Virginia, now Virginia Commonwealth University.

She would go on to spend her career with the Commonwealth of Virginia. She worked as a health planner in the Office of Aging and the chief of staff for what was formerly the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services.

She has served on the College of Science Roundtable since its inception in 1986, serving as its second chair and first woman to chair the position.

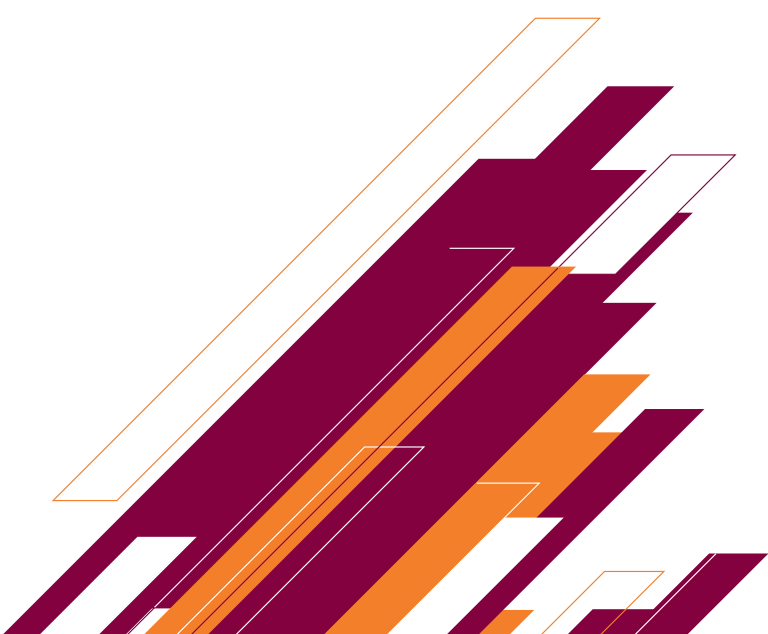
Mary was also the first inductee into the College of Science Hall of Distinction and was a recipient of the University's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2019.

Willis earned a bachelor's degree in business management at Virginia Tech before serving in the Navy. After his honorable discharge, he worked in the Richmond Division of Safeway Stores in the Real Estate Department.

There, he found a passion for real estate and would go on to earn his MBA at VCU. In 1981, he opened the Richmond office for S.L. Nusbaum Realty, a Norfolk-based regional real estate company, and became a partner in the firm.

In 1988, Willis founded Blackwood Development Company, which has developed and redeveloped shopping centers across the state.

The Blackwoods split their time between Richmond, Virginia, and Bonita Springs, Florida. Willis has served on the boards of Metro Richmond Chamber, Chesterfield Business Council, Richmond Real Estate Group, several country clubs, the Virginia Tech Foundation, and Pamplin Advisory Council. Mary and Willis generously support the Pamplin College of Business, the College of Science, and Virginia Tech athletics, to name a few.





UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

DR. GLADYS B. WEST '00

Dr. Gladys West is a pioneer in mathematics and “hidden figure” who paved the way for the Global Positioning System that revolutionized navigation worldwide.

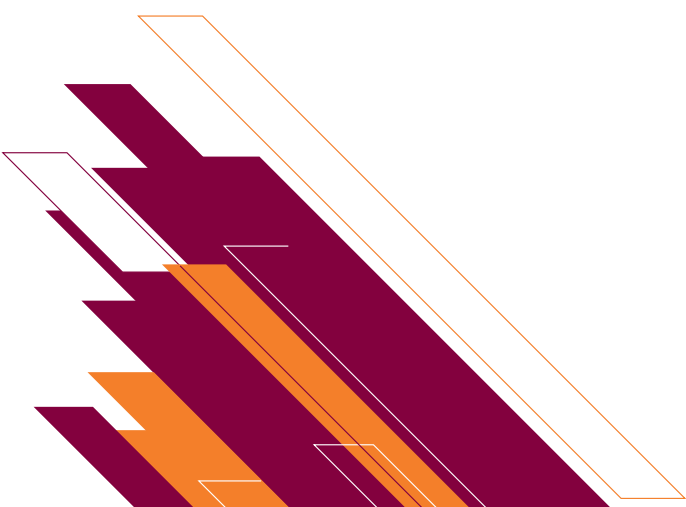
Dr. West has been a trailblazer and lifelong learner, from her childhood on a rural Virginia farm to the U.S. Air Force Hall of Fame and to Virginia Tech, where she earned her Ph.D. at 70.

She graduated first in her high school class and went on to Virginia State College (later Virginia State University), where she earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics in 1952.

She went on to the Naval Surface Warfare Center, where she was only the second African American woman hired and among only four African American employees total.

Dr. West was an integral part of the team that developed the modern Global Positioning System. She would later go on to serve as project manager for Seasat, the first satellite designed for remote sensing of Earth’s oceans.

Dr. West retired in 1998 but continued her education throughout her career and post-retirement. In 2000, she earned a Ph.D. in public administration and policy affairs from Virginia Tech. In 2018, the Virginia General Assembly passed a joint resolution honoring West.





ALUMNI DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

JAMES E. “JIM” PEARMAN JR. ’70

Jim Pearman is a proud Virginia Tech alumnus and founder of Partners in Financial Planning in Salem, Virginia.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in accounting from the Pamplin College of Business and currently serves on the Virginia Tech Program in Real Estate Industry Advisory Board, the Pamplin Accounting and Information Systems Advisory Board, and the Virginia Tech Athletic Fund Board of Directors. He is an emeritus member of the Pamplin Advisory Council.

In addition to his service to Virginia Tech, Pearman also sits on several area boards and is active in the financial planning community.

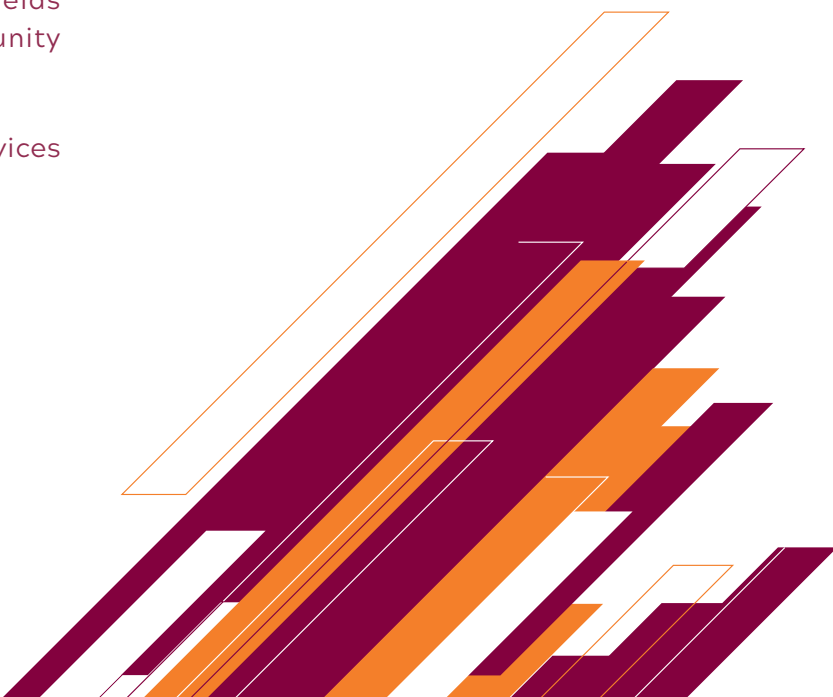
He chairs the board of Feeding Southwest Virginia and Alta Mons Inc.; is treasurer and board member of The Hokie Way; and holds board memberships with the Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, and the Eastmont Community Foundation.

Pearman has served in the financial services industry for over 50 years.

He is active with the National Association of Personal Financial Advisors and previously served on the Board of NAPFA Consumer Education Foundation. Pearman also has served as an industry expert for the North American Securities Administrators Association Exams Advisory Project Group.

In addition, he has authored the book “Financial Planning for the Older Client” and has been quoted on financial planning topics in a variety of local and national publications.

Pearman and his wife, Brenda, live in Salem, Virginia, and are generous supporters of numerous areas at Virginia Tech including athletics, WVTF, and the Pamplin College of Business. They are members of the Ut Prosim Society President’s Circle and the 1872 and Legacy societies.





ALUMNI DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

GRETA J. HARRIS '83

Greta J. Harris is a member of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors and president and CEO of the Better Housing Coalition, the Richmond area's largest nonprofit community development corporation. During her career, she has been involved in more than \$750 million of investments in affordable housing that has provided good places to call home for more than 20,000 modest-income individuals.

Prior to leading BHC, Greta was vice president for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a national nonprofit community and economic development organization, where she led local offices in southern and midwestern regions.

She earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from Virginia Tech and a master's degree in architecture and urban design from Columbia University.

In addition to serving her alma mater on the Board of Visitors, Harris has been a member of the College of Architecture, Arts, and Design Dean's Advisory Board and past member of the Virginia Tech Foundation Board. In 2016, she was named the Virginia Tech Black Alumni Philanthropist of the Year.

Harris is active in her community and serves on the boards of the Markel Group, the Greater Washington Partnership, Housing Partnership Network, and ChamberRVA, and co-chairs the Virginia Redistricting Commission.

Among her many accolades, Harris was a 2023 Virginia Business Magazine Women in Leadership Award winner. She received the National NeighborWorks Association's 2021 Practitioner of the Year Award, the Ruth Coles Harris Leadership Institute 2021 Leadership Award, was a Bold Women of 2020 honoree by Richmond Magazine, a 2019 YWCA Outstanding Women Award winner, a 2019 Style Weekly Executive Women in Business honoree, and a 2018 Richmond Times-Dispatch Person of the Year honoree. She also was recognized as a 2014 Outstanding Virginian by Equality Virginia.

Harris generously supports Virginia Tech's diversity and inclusion efforts, including the InclusiveVT Scholarship Fund. She is a member of the 1872 and Legacy societies.





THE ACADEMIC PROCESSION

The following information, digested from “An Academic Costume Code and Ceremony Guide” prepared by the American Council on Education, may prove helpful in identifying the costumes you will see in the Commencement Procession.

When American colleges and universities desired to adopt some suitable system of academic apparel many years ago, a conference held at Columbia University in 1895 made up of representatives from various institutions drew up a “By-Law Regulation, or Statute” for the establishment of a suitable code of academic dress for colleges and universities in the United States. This code, with modifications made in 1959, is still in force; the costumes and colors, trimmings, and patterns you will see are all traditional and interpret both degree and the field of learning. The bachelor’s gown, designed to be worn closed, has pointed sleeves; the master’s gown, which may be worn open or closed, has an oblong sleeve open at the wrist which hangs down in traditional manner. The rear part of its oblong shape is square cut and the front part has the arc cut away. The doctor’s gown has bell-shaped sleeves. It may be worn open or closed. Bachelor’s and master’s gowns are untrimmed. Doctor’s gowns are faced with black velvet with three bars across the sleeves; or the color of velvet may be that which is distinctive of the degree, agreeing with that of the edging of the hood. The colors you will see in the hoods and gowns of our faculty represent the various fields in which the degrees were taken. A few are:

ACCOUNTANCY, COMMERCE,

BUSINESS: Drab (Yellow-Brown)

AGRICULTURE: Maize (Pale Yellow)

ARCHITECTURE: Blue-Violet (Purple)

ARTS, LETTERS, HUMANITIES: White

ECONOMICS: Copper

EDUCATION: Light Blue

ENGINEERING: Orange Natural

RESOURCES: Russet (Rust)

PHILOSOPHY: Dark Blue

VETERINARY MEDICINE: Gray

SCIENCE: Bright Gold (Golden Yellow)

The hoods, differing in length for the three degrees (bachelor’s, master’s, and doctor’s), are lined with the official colors of the university or college conferring the degree, usually with one color forming a chevron pattern over the other (for example, orange and maroon for Virginia Tech). Hoods are edged and bound with velvet of the color appropriate for the degree. You will see in our procession many edged with dark blue for doctor of philosophy. Mortarboards are the approved headgear. Tassels are worn on the right side prior to receiving a degree and on the left side after the degree has been conferred. The tassel may be of gold if the holder has a doctor’s degree.

Among the bachelor’s candidates, honor students are distinguished by special sashes in white.



BOARD OF VISITORS

Mr. Edward Baine, Rector
Mr. David Calhoun, Vice Rector
Ms. Carrie H. Chenery
Ms. Sandy Davis
Dr. Nancy Dye
Ms. Greta J. Harris
Mr. Brad Hobbs
Mr. William Holtzman
Mr. Donald Horsley
Ms. Anna L. James
Ms. Letitia Long
Mr. Chris Petersen
Mr. John Rocovich
Mr. Jeff E. Veatch
Dr. Joseph Merola, Faculty Representative
Dr. Janice Austin, A/P Faculty Representative
Ms. LaTawnya Burleson, Staff Representative
Ms. Emily Tirrell, Graduate Student Representative
Mr. William Storey, Undergraduate Student Representative

CLASS OF 2024 LOGO AND MOTTO

2024 MOTTO

Incepto Ne Desistam (May I Not Shrink From My Purpose)



CLASS OF 2024 OFFICERS

President: **Colin Roberts**
Vice President: **Divya Singh**
Secretary: **Mikayla Dolo-Pittman**
Treasurer: **Stratis Bohle**
Historian: **Elle Smith**
Cadet Member-At-Large: **Chris Hall**
Female Member-At-Large: **Madison Fleming**
Male Member-At-Large: **Jason Brown**

CLASS OF 2024 CLASS RING



