



VIRGINIA  
WESLEYAN  
UNIVERSITY

*Office of the President*

December 19, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am delighted to offer my support of Virginia Wesleyan University's AASHE STARS application. Our location in Virginia Beach, Virginia, not only makes the study of the environment interesting and accessible, but it also makes that study imperative as rising sea levels threaten our own viability.

We extend our commitment to sustainability through active engagement at two levels: (1) operating the University in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner, and (2) educating our students to be global thinkers and leaders for the betterment of the environment. We have done this through a variety of operational and academic initiatives, outlined below.

Virginia Wesleyan University is situated on a 300-acre park-like campus, boasting a spacious living instructional landscape with 25,000 native plants maintained through a partnership with nearby Norfolk Botanical Garden. The 18-acre Wilson Arboretum was established in 1995. The 12-acre Beech Forest is a rare regional example of an old-growth stand of beech trees. The campus features over 13 miles of biking and hiking paths and trails. Through private funding, the University has completed a comprehensive stormwater management system including nearly three miles of underground distribution chambers and four new ponds.

In 2015, the year of my arrival, a donor made a major commitment to fund a world-class center for environmental sciences. The center features sophisticated indoor and outdoor learning spaces that embody "science on display" and promote hands-on experiences, interactive learning and interdisciplinary research. There are four large teaching labs, dedicated research labs, and strategically placed sustainable features, like a geothermal system for heating, cooling and domestic hot water and an extensive green roof, among others, that are accessible to students and provide versatile teaching and learning spaces.

While the Center is a major benefit to students studying the environmental sciences, all students from all majors benefit from this magnificent facility. Our recognition as National Conservationist of the Year by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation created widespread visibility and niche-building opportunities. It expanded our relationship with 11 regional environmental organizations and provided unmatched opportunities for students wanting to study in Coastal Virginia.

About halfway through the two-year process of constructing the environmental sciences center, we entered discussions with a donor about an academic program that might complement this soon-to-be-completed state of the art facility. The donor suggested that an honors college with a focus on the environment in a location like ours would develop into a national niche program for the University.

The Batten Honors College, composed of a total of 160 high-achieving students, explores diverse disciplines from the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences through an interdisciplinary and thematic curriculum that educates and graduates lifelong learners interested

in shaping the future and taking action to improve the world. Its curriculum encourages independent thinking and self-discovery while challenging students to view the world from multiple perspectives and to integrate theory and practice. Students gain a broader perspective and think critically about the problems we face today, recognizing that solutions to contemporary issues require disciplinary expertise as well as innovation, collaboration, and an interdisciplinary framework.

In 2018, we became one of the early members of the Intentional Endowments Network. The Intentional Endowments Network is a peer-learning network that encourages and supports higher education institutions to adopt investment strategies that create an equitable, low-carbon, and regenerative economy. Today, 60 higher educational institutions nationwide partner with over 200 financial institutions committed to environmentally friendly investing.

Starting in Spring 2023, Batten Honors College scholars will apply to compete in the VWU Louis and Prudence Ryan Research Symposium for the Ryan Prize for Excellence in Research. Under the mentorship of VWU faculty and community leaders, student scholarship presented in the Ryan Research Symposium will explore complex environmental challenges in a global context.

In 2019, with the guidance from our friends at Allegheny College, Virginia Wesleyan established its version of the Environmental Guiding Principles, which are embedded in all policy and operational activities at the University and withstand the test of time. Our Environmental Guiding Principles were approved by the Virginia Wesleyan Board of Trustees in early 2020.

In 2021, we changed our outsourced Chief Investment Officer to Brown Advisory of Baltimore, Maryland, another member of the Intentional Endowments Network, and agreed to invest our funds utilizing the Network's checklist to align investment practices with institutional mission through sustainable investing.

Virginia Wesleyan will continue to advance its efforts in sustainability, reflecting our larger commitment to ethical conduct and social responsibility through environmental stewardship and education. We believe our efforts merit consideration by the AASHE STARS program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott D. Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Scott D. Miller, Ph.D.  
President of the University  
president@vwu.edu