

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BRANDON CARROLL

► Student Government Association President at Virginia Tech

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2009

7:00 am I begin to prep myself for the big presentation scheduled for 8:30 am. I am presenting SGA's strategic plan to the entire academic council, which is made up of the President of the University, his Vice Presidents, and all of the Academic Deans.

7:50 am I pick up Shane McCarty, SGA's Vice President, so that we can run through the plan one more time.

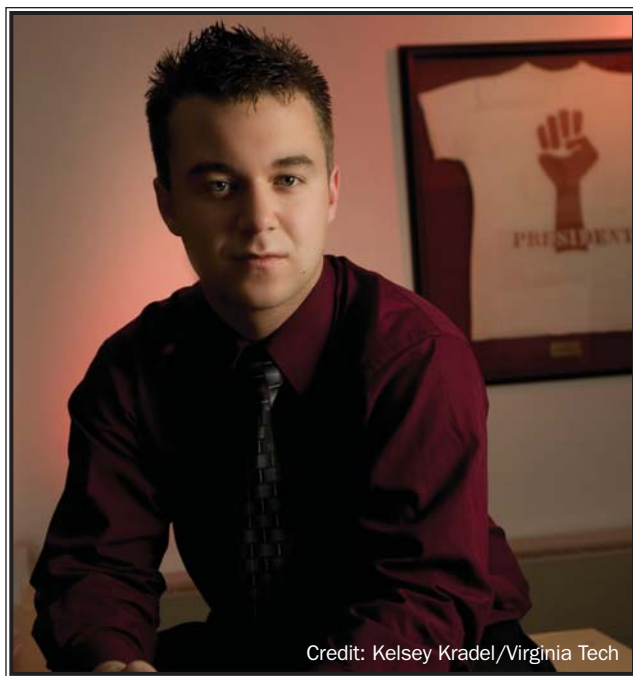
8:00 am I arrive at the Latham Ballroom in the Inn at Virginia Tech, and Shane and I begin to prep. We find ways to create synergy and play off each other's strengths. During the presentation, there are technological errors, so our Powerpoint isn't visible for the audience to see. Fortunately, we have practiced so many times that we don't give it another thought. We give the hard copy of the strategic plan to everyone in attendance and answer their questions.

Because SGA represents the official voice of the students at Virginia Tech, some administrators wanted to gauge my opinion about a variety of issues. A major source of concern for professors and students is the evaluation process.

I explain the importance of evaluations occurring mid-semester to provide professors with feedback to adjust their class, and lessen the grade dependent responses as they relate to the actual performance of the teacher.

9:30 am I have my business writing class, where we talk about writing a business plan and how to structure a formal report. My report discusses my ideal non-profit called Actively Caring for People.

11:00 am I have a conference call after class with Tatango, a group text messaging company. I sit as a member of their user advisory board. Derek Johnson, their CEO, was just named a top 30 CEO under 30 by Business Week. I try to guide him in terms of the overall user experience, which is essential because his biggest market is college students.



Credit: Kelsey Kradel/Virginia Tech

11:45 am My mom is calling me about my plans for Thanksgiving. Every year, I usually go to see my grandmother (on my dad's side), but this year she is sick. We talk briefly about school and other things, but I have a meeting at 12:30 pm with the Provost, and I like to be very prepared for each meeting.

12:30 pm I have a meeting with Provost McNamee to talk about ways to actively engage students inside a classroom. The size of a classroom is expanding, and our quality of education is diminishing. I suggest that we look into near-peer learning environments like Berkeley and Emory. In my opinion, teaching is the greatest opportunity to learn and remember, so I suggest implementing a program where students teach other students. I feel like it is important for the upper-administration to hear tangible ways to empower students. We need to do more to let students be creative and innovative.

1:30 pm I grab lunch at the Au Bon Pan kiosk, which is a “grab and go” kind of place in our Squires Student Center, where the SGA office is located. I go to the office to relax for a bit, but people need to book reservations and have general questions, among other things. After taking care of some mundane tasks, I call Austin Gage, a Delta Sig pledge and a sophomore from Alexandria, Virginia. We had a really good conversation about why he was interested in Delta Sig, why he chose Virginia Tech, what he can add to our brotherhood, and many other interesting topics. I really like this pledge class a lot – they all add something to our brotherhood.

2:45 pm I go back to the SGA office to try to tackle some e-mails. I usually average around 80-90 a day that I need to either read or respond to. I will always respond to e-mails within 48 hours, but I usually have to block off around 3-4 hours. One e-mail sticks out to me. I find out that a Delta Sig, Bob Veazie, and my mentor, Dr. Geller, are dedicating their latest book, *When No One's Watching*, to the SGA at Virginia Tech and they even included me as a character in the book.

3:45 pm I am about to head over to my final meeting with an administrator. After this meeting, I can finally take off my suit!

4:00 pm My last meeting for the day with administrators is with another mentor Dr. Anne Moore. I meet with her weekly to discuss how to break down the separate silo and improve collaboration. Dr. Moore used to work with the State Council for Higher Education, has been a public sector lobbyist, and now she serves as the VP of Information Technology and acts as the head of Learning Technologies. She knows how to make change within a University, and she has a very different way of thinking. I usually tell her all of the issues, and she helps me evaluate my priorities. The meeting is extremely productive, as we talk about how to make Torgersen a 24/7 study facility. As I am leaving, she hands me a book called *The Innovator's Dilemma*, which talks about why mature companies (like a college institution) fail. The analogy I will use is that it's like we are a train on a track and if we keep just doing barely enough to keep the train afloat, we will eventually run ourselves to the ground. Although it is not foreseeable in the near future, we have to look at reinventing our processes, building a “new train” before it is too late.

5:30 pm I make my to-do list for the night. This includes sending follow-up e-mails, doing some homework, preparing for meetings tomorrow, and organizing my binders for the final stretch in the semester.

6:00 pm I go to dinner with the Vice President, Shane McCarty, the Chief of Staff, Bo Hart, and the Director of

Transportation, Brianna Farr. We've been working on getting real-time tracking on the Blacksburg Transit all semester, which has been an uphill battle. We are trying to make sure we are all on the same page, discuss some issues we have been having with their IT department, and the best way to approach this moving forward.

7:30 pm I finally make it home and begin on my homework (or try to). I try to get all of my homework done on Thursday and Friday, so I can have the weekend free. My hardest class is called Financial Planning for Professionals, where my professor assigns around 3-4 hours of homework per class. Thankfully, we only have class on Mondays and Wednesdays, but I do have to be very disciplined in order to maintain that balance between school, SGA, and a social life.

9:00 pm My goal is to clear my inbox by 10:00 pm. My pet peeve is having any e-mails in my inbox when I go to bed. I have an e-mail from the VP and Dean for Undergraduate Education, and he wants me to appoint two people (a sophomore and a senior) to sit on a strategic planning committee for undergraduate education. Talk about an opportunity. The University can do a lot in terms of academic advising, near-peer learning, and I am privileged in this opportunity to choose two students to help the University with the future of undergraduate education.

10:30 pm I am just finishing up with e-mail and trying to prepare for tomorrow. E-mailing really tires me out. A lot of times, they require long thought-out responses. I head over to the living room and watch a little bit of the 49ers vs. Bears game, but it is boring. I am still contemplating if I am going to go to the Virginia Tech vs. Maryland game this weekend. I am from Maryland, and I would be able to see my mom, but I still have to remind myself that I am a broke college student.

11:30 pm It is my brother's birthday tomorrow, so I call to wish him a happy birthday, and then head to bed.

Reflection: It's been an eventful day, and I am feeling beyond privileged and humbled to be the SGA President at the best University in the world. As SGA President, I have learned the importance of surrounding yourself with people passionate about the mission; experience is not necessary (although it helps). Higher Education should be about raising the bar for students and meeting their needs. However, this isn't always the case. Next semester, I plan on tackling the major issues at this University and making carefully crafted recommendations to the University that will ultimately shift the focus to the students.