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Event Story Rewrite  
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### **Three female Virginia Tech professors give TED Talks in honor of Women's History Month**

The Virginia Tech Union held a Women's History Month TED Talk event March 15 in Squires Colonial Hall that featured female professors to encourage and inspire female students.

"I loved hearing what each speaker has gone through in their professional career and how they continue to be empowered as women," said Lisbeth Guevara, a female student in the audience.

Around 40 people, including female and male students along with faculty members, gathered to hear these three professors deliver their speeches.

Donna Wortalik, a marketing professor in Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business and founder of PRISM, a student-run advertising agency, stepped up to the mic first. Next to speak was Sally Hamouda, associate professor in the Virginia Tech Department of Computer Science. Claire White, an assistant professor of practice in the Virginia Tech Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and assistant coordinator of the Land Development Design Initiative, gave the final talk of the event.

"We like to put on events that are relevant to the student body and make sure we take note that we represent all of our students," said Abby Jordan, VTU Director of Speakers. "This event allowed voices to be heard in ways that they might not be otherwise."

The audience appeared engaged with the speakers. The audience responded to the speakers with nods and pensive facial expressions.

“This event allowed students to get a glimpse of what life will be like in the future to help them be better prepared for similar conflicts or situations they might face,” Jordan said. “I believe that their presentations provided students with great advice for keeping a work-life balance.”

The speakers shared stories about their experiences in male-dominated industries. Although White expressed that she did not perceive her treatment as different from her male colleagues in the workplace, she stated that she receives daily reminders that she works in a male-dominated field. She added that her supportive and inclusive mentors and colleagues enhance her positive work experience.

“When you walk out on a construction site, you will have two strikes against you. The first strike will be that you are young. Your second strike will be that you are female,” White said, reiterating what her male mentor told her during her first week of work.

White said she appreciated this preparation for a situation she might face. He also warned her not to get the third strike — displaying a lack of knowledge.

Wertalik shared the challenges of completing her graduate degree while raising two young children and teaching at Virginia Tech. Hamouda described feeling overwhelmed finishing her graduate degree with three young children at home and grieving the unexpected death of her parents in Egypt.

Hamouda described the feeling of handling multiple stressors at once as “Eating the Elephant,” a story that hinges on the phrase, “one bite at a time.” She shared 12 pieces of advice for “Eating the Elephant,” including engaging in a minimalistic lifestyle, arranging priorities,

weekly planning, organizing and decluttering, and being mindful of time and money management.

Hamouda spoke on how to “shelf cook your happiness,” which means using items on hand to achieve happiness instead of amassing more. Hamouda ended her talk by urging the audience to learn from everyone they meet and find an accountability partner to reach their goals.

Wertalik advised students to “own your name” while sharing her own personal website and portfolio. She especially urged female students to negotiate for their salaries in their future careers which she noted women often avoid in the workplace.

“We came to this event to support Claire,” said Johanna Dobek and Kate Markell, two of White’s female civil engineering students. “We are proud of her and look up to her and her accomplishments as a female in civil engineering.”

White shared statistics on the growing number of female engineering students at Virginia Tech which increased from 15% to 21.5% from 2006 to 2023. She noted that while women receive 25-36% of all degrees in civil engineering, only 14% of the civil engineering workforce is female.

“While we’re making great advances in recruitment, we have work to do with retention,” White said.

All three speakers ended their talks with advice for the students in the audience. White reminded the audience to hold their values close, set personal and professional goals, follow their own path, and celebrate their milestones. Wertalik urged the audience to remain open to opportunities because they might lead them to places they never thought possible.



Donna Wertalik shows the audience her personal website to encourage self-advocacy. (Paragraph 13)



Sally Hamouda shares tips on how to “Eat the Elephant.” (Paragraph 11)

Target audience: Virginia Tech students

- Females in male-dominated fields including business, computer science, and engineering