

November 7, 2024 via email

Mr. Prasnicki,

In recent days, VMI has faced stinging media criticism for hiring a visiting scholar under the auspices of the Peay Endowment. The scholar, Phillip Crane, VMI'2016 and a recent graduate of Columbia University, was a prominent leader in the now notorious campus movement at Columbia that endorsed Hamas and its October 7, 2023 surprise dawn attack on Israel that resulted in the horrific slaughter of over 1200 Israeli citizens including children and infants, mutilation of corpses, the brutal rape of Israeli women and the abduction of over 200 hostages, including women and children, who have been held under cruel confinement.

The details of this appalling attack are well known and not even disputed by Hamas. The implications of Crane's employment to teach "International Politics" in these circumstances are particularly alarming because he now has a platform to promote a narrative at VMI that endorses the righteousness of the campaign against Israel supported by Iran and its affiliates without an effective counterbalance to that narrative.

The Mission statement of the Alumni Agencies insists that it exists "to inform, engage, and inspire support for VMI." If that statement is more than just a slogan to impress potential supporters of the nobility of the Agencies' activities, this is a critical moment that calls for the Agencies to inform the broad base of alumni concerning the details of the appointment so that we are all on the same page about it. We personally are concerned it will cause significant damage to the image of VMI and the Peay Endowment if the details are as reported in the press unless someone speaks out.

We think it particularly suitable that the Agencies promptly perform this mission because alumni have been encouraged to believe that appointments of scholars using funds of the Endowment are scrupulously vetted by the Agencies and VMI as an inducement to contribute. Individual alumni lack the resources to independently inform themselves surrounding Crane's appointment by VMI. The Agencies, on the other hand, is uniquely qualified to be a bridge between our members and the Institute. The Agencies has the ear of the administration, supported Crane's selection and persons nominated by the Agencies participated in the decision to employ Crane. Among the questions the Agencies should, therefore, address is whether VMI hired Mr. Crane with knowledge of his actions at Columbia or was knowledge of his actions on behalf of Hamas withheld? What latitude has he been given as an instructor to support Hamas in his classes and will the Institute balance his voice with one supportive of Israel, a view I expect is held by the vast majority of VMI alumni? (We have set out below a link to an example of the attention the media is giving to VMI's role in this matter). There also remains the question as to whether there is another", as yet unpublished, side of the story.

We urge the Agencies to swiftly, transparently and publicly address these concerns and with alumni. Also, we would very much like you to inform us promptly how you intend to act on our request.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and we look forward to your response.

Yours very truly,

Salvatore J. Vitale, Jr, Class of VMI '61

William "Larry" Respass, Class of 1961

[VMI visiting professor led Columbia University group that blamed Israel for Oct. 7 \(cbsaustin.com\)](https://www.cbsaustin.com)

On Monday, November 11, 2024 at 04:28:07 PM EST, David L. Prasnicki <dpras@vmiaa.org> wrote:

Sal,

Thank you for your email. You raised concerns shared by others in their desire to support VMI. Like all VMI personnel matters, we refer alumni questions to the Institute, given their sensitivity and issues related to public disclosure. On your behalf, we have forwarded your concerns to Lt. Col. Sherry Wallace, VMI director of communications and marketing for the Institute.

Feel free to follow-up with her at wallacesl@vmiaa.org.

Thanks again.

David Prasnicki